

# Hope from Ashes



A DAILY GUIDE FOR LENT

ASH WEDNESDAY TO  
EASTER SUNDAY

PRODUCED BY  
HUNTINGDON COLLEGE 

Welcome to *Hope from Ashes*, a Lenten journey!

This collection of daily devotionals is intended to deepen your experience of the season of Lent. *Hope from Ashes* will be used as personal devotional reading, small group content, and as church-wide Lenten experience. However you use this guide, may it inspire you and enhance your understanding of the cross and the sacrifice of Christ.

The daily readings are provided by the Revised Common Lectionary. These Scriptures provide the backbone of *Hope from Ashes*. The devotional materials deal with one or more of the day's readings.

We are grateful to all who provided devotional material. The writers are students, ministers, faculty members, bishops, and lay persons. All of them have connection to Huntingdon College.

On July 1, 2024, Dr. Anthony J. Leigh became the 15th president of Huntingdon College. Nearly a year into his presidency, student centeredness and being responsible leaders continues to emanate from President Leigh's leadership. An already thriving church-related college is continuing to take steps forward.

Huntingdon has been named to three lists by the 2025 U.S. News Best Colleges Rankings. Huntingdon has been ranked number 3 of the Best Values in Regional Colleges-South, number 8 in the overall list of Regional Colleges-South; and 18 for Regional Colleges-South for Social Mobility. Huntingdon has also been included in the Princeton Review "2025 Best Colleges: Region by Region."

President Leigh celebrated this report. "These rankings are further validation that Huntingdon is increasingly recognized as one of the south's premier pre-professional colleges. As I travel across Alabama and around the southeast, there is growing awareness that Huntingdon provides a vibrant campus experience."

Thank you for joining us on the journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter. If you would prefer a digital experience, *Hope from Ashes* is available at [huntingdon.edu/church\\_relations](http://huntingdon.edu/church_relations).

May your fast be easy and your celebration life-giving.

Peace,



Rev. Dr. Brian V. Miller  
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## Ash Wednesday

March 5, 2025

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

### The Danger of a Faithful Lent

Before you step onto this Lenten journey—on this holy day of Ash Wednesday—I must ask you to pause. Consider carefully whether this is something you truly want to undertake. The Lectionary texts for today are filled with stark warnings from the Lord.

*"Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?" —Isaiah 58:5*

*"Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven." —Matthew 6:1*

**Beware.** That is Jesus' word for a day like Ash Wednesday. There is a danger here, perhaps more than ever for the modern Christian. It is easy to bear the ashen cross on your forehead and feel the fleeting satisfaction of public devotion—maybe even post a picture, enjoying the rush of likes and affirmations. But is that the fast God desires? Is that the Lenten season God calls us to?

Lent has always been a journey with consequences. To step into this season with sincerity is to enter a wilderness, one where the Spirit leads and transformation awaits—but not without struggle. In *Inferno*, the first part of *The Divine Comedy*, Dante describes a terrifying threshold: the gates of hell, inscribed with the words:

*"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."*

It is a warning that beyond this point, everything changes. And in its own way, Lent should bear a similar caution:

*"Proceed with intention, all ye who enter here."*

Because if you take this season seriously—if you take up the fast that God desires—you may not leave Lent the same person who entered it.

So, what is the fast that God expects? Isaiah makes it clear:

*"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them and not to hide yourself from your own kin?" —Isaiah 58:6-7*

God asks nothing of us that God does not already live, breathe, and practice. The fast God chooses for you this Lent is the fast God embodies—compassion, justice, holiness, the breaking in of God's kingdom where the world's broken systems reign.

Beware of practicing Lent, my friends, because in doing so, you will be practicing being like the God you worship. And if you take that seriously, prepare to see things change. You might witness the bonds of injustice breaking. You might see the hungry fed, the naked clothed, your enemies forgiven. You may think it outrageous that such things could happen simply because you choose to fast, but our God delights in outrageous, unexpected miracles.

A sea split open with nothing but a staff and a word. Thousands fed from a humble offering of fish and bread. Lepers healed, not by medicine, but by a touch of compassion.

**The danger of a faithful Lent is that you might witness miracles.**

But for all its warnings, Lent is not a journey into darkness. It is a journey toward resurrection.

If the gates of hell read *“Abandon hope, all ye who enter here,”* then perhaps the gates of heaven bear another sign:

**“Receive hope, all ye who enter here.”**

So again, I ask: Is this journey one you are ready to take?

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

Thursday, March 6

Read: Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Exodus 5:10-23; Acts 7:30-34

Have you ever noticed something out of the corner of your eye that caused you to do a double take? Maybe it was something that moved out of its normal spot, an unexpected friend at the grocery, or a strange figure in the distance. What do you do? Do you move closer to see what it is?

As I read through our passage for today, the phrase "...he went over to get a closer look..." resonated with me. Often our heart will notice something that may cause us to think that we are being given a nudge from the Holy Spirit. What do we do? Do we slow down to take a closer look? Moses does. I can imagine him rubbing his eyes after he sees it, a burning bush that is not consumed in the fire, unsure if his eyes are playing tricks on him. So, Moses moves closer to get a better look, and that is when he encounters God.

During this Lenten season I encourage you to stop in the moment and take a closer look. When your heart is stirred — when you feel that gentle nudge of the Holy Spirit, when something causes you to do that double take.

At the end of each day, you might also consider asking God, "Was there something that you were trying to show me today? Is there something that I need to take time to look at more closely tomorrow?"

I find it interesting that after Moses draws near to look at the burning bush then God also draws near to look upon the affliction of the Israelites (v 34). The text seems to tell us that it matters where we look. And, where does our God most often look? If we follow the gaze of the God of Moses, then we will also notice those afflicted and in need.

We serve a God who has looked upon us with love and compassion and calls us to do the same for others. So... let's stop from the business of our lives and take a moment to turn aside for a closer look.

Prayer: Holy God, we confess that sometimes we get in such a hurry that we miss the burning bushes that you set right in front of us. Help us to look closer when your Spirit tugs on our hearts. Give us the opportunity to kick off our shoes and celebrate the Good News, that you have seen us, and you have shown us your glory.  
Amen

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

Friday, March 7

Read: Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Exodus 6:1-13; Acts 7:35-42

The season of Lent has always been a contrast of many biblical themes. A major focus has been the cross of Christ and the meaning of the crucifixion. Another theme that has echoed throughout the ages is the narrative of God's Law and commandments. I especially like the theme revealed in today's Scripture of God's rescue of the children of Israel from the slavery of Pharaoh.

This is a theme that binds us together as Christians with our Jewish ancestors.

Lent is a season of deliverance for us as God's people. It is a deliverance from sin and death. It is a deliverance from our enemies. It is a deliverance from our lives of complacency and lack of response. Lent is a time of deliverance from our past and into a future with Christ whose resurrection we will celebrate at Easter.

A few things are clear in the passage from Exodus: It is God who is doing the deliverance, and not something we are doing ourselves. God makes it known that it is the Lord that will direct Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.

It is clear that this was a promise that God made to the great patriarchs, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This deliverance is something that was promised from the beginning. God is faithful and keeps the covenants made.

The children of Israel are being sent to the land of Canaan, the land where they resided before being enslaved by Egypt. The Israelites will be going to the Promised Land, and they will find their lives renewed and restored.

So, how can this Lent be different for us nearly 3500 years after the Exodus out of Egypt?

I invite us to consider the deliverance that God offers us this season. What do you need to be delivered from? What do you need to be delivered to? I assure you that God is still in the deliverance business and has the power to make your life new.

I invite us to consider the great company of witnesses that have gone before us. As the Israelites could remember the stories of the patriarchs, we can remember ours. Think of our Methodist heritage. Think of all those connected to Huntingdon College or your local church. Think of folks from your own family and relations. God promised us all deliverance. God is always faithful.

Think of the Promised Land. God has promised us a place in God's Kingdom and sent Jesus to show us the way. May this Lent be one of restoration and renewal for all of us. May we find ourselves strengthened during this season of 40 days, and may we find ourselves closer to Jesus and closer to each other.

Prayer: O God of deliverance, prepare us this season for the renewal and restoration that you promised the children of Israel. Help us to receive the deliverance that you offer us. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

*The Reverend Michael Rich '82 served 37 years in the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. In retirement, he resides in Mooresville, North Carolina.*

Saturday, March 8

Read: Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; John 12:27-36

In a 2002 documentary entitle *Comedian*, Jerry Seinfeld talks with a comedian who isn't happy with his career, including the ups and downs of the stand-up business. After going back and forth with his friend a bit, Seinfeld finally says, "THIS IS BEAUTIFUL!" The unevenness. The nights you kill and the nights you flop. The days on the road performing and the days at home writing. All of it is beautiful.

As a teenager, I remember reading Ecclesiastes 3 for the first time. I listened to a lot of '60s music. So, when I realized that The Byrds song, "Turn, Turn, Turn," referenced Scripture, I had to read it for myself. I remember finding the passage almost depressing. War is as likely as peace. Death is as likely as life. Weeping is as likely as laughing. Is this all life amounts to?

Read in context, however, we get a slightly different perspective on Ecclesiastes 3. In the previous chapter, the writer alludes to the presence of God. It is this God who is able to give "wisdom and knowledge and joy" (Ecc. 2:8).

So, we're left with two pieces of truth that are important for any Lenten journey. We are not in control of so much that affects our lives. AND God is present and good.

God is present and good in a time to plant. God is present and good in a time to pluck up what is planted.

God is present and good in a time to break down. God is present and good in a time to build up.

God is present and good in a time to mourn. God is present and good in a time to dance.

In the words of Jerry Seinfeld, "THIS IS BEAUTIFUL!"

Your life is beautiful. And all of it matters. Yes, the big things matter. Every birthday, graduation, wedding day, and baptism matter. But even the most mundane things matter. Every morning drive to work or school. Every second waiting at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Every moment trying to return the online order that wasn't exactly right.

All of them are opportunities to see the goodness of God.

Prayer: O God, who is ever present and good, give to us wisdom to replace our fear, that we may walk every day in faith that this good life you have given us beautiful. Amen.

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

## The First Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 9

Read: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

### **Lead Us Not into Temptation**

A true gift to a pastor in a new assignment comes in the form of an invitation. An invitation to join a member of the church in visiting those persons who are sick or unable to leave their own homes. The invitation is to build relationships with the people of God together.

Mrs. Helen Kite was a woman ahead of her time. The spouse of a retired military pilot, she too obtained her pilot's license and flew on her own. She was kind and supportive, active in many ministries and Bible study groups. And when I arrived as the new pastor of the congregation where Mrs. Kite worshiped, she offered me the gift of an invitation to accompany her on visits to homebound church members.

Reflecting on a sermon she had heard once, Mrs. Helen shared the words of the pastor; namely, "The first thing that I do every morning when I get up is clean my glasses. I do not want to see today's world through yesterday's dirt."

She went on to dig a little deeper into the importance of personal renewal and spiritual cleanliness, saying, "even with clear eyesight we often have not cleansed our hearts. We have a tendency to hold on to things of the past that need to be discarded. Our 'mental baggage' can get very heavy when we continue to carry hurts and grievances that need to be forgiven and forgotten. They hold us back and need to be thrown away. We can, with God's help, start each day with a clean heart and a renewed spirit and have a far brighter view of today's world if we lay those things aside. God forgives and gives us a new day and a fresh start every day that we live. Accept this and be renewed."

As we begin this journey to the cross in the season of Lent, we are given the opportunity to reflect on the struggles endured by Christ as he was tempted in the wilderness even as we reflect on our own struggles and hurts.

Lent is a time for us to reflect on our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. At times, we speed through life, keeping busy, losing track of time, barely ever getting a chance to rest and we miss out on the critical times to check-in with ourselves. To take stock of our own spiritual condition is to dig into "who you are and whose you are" so that you can live on purpose for the sake of Christ in this world.

And yet, regardless of the amount of dirt on our glasses or the mental baggage we carry, we are representatives of Jesus Christ. I believe our greatest temptation is to turn away from ourselves and settle for a shallow life and sleepwalk our way through this world. But, when our hearts are clean and our spirits renewed, the joy of the Lord flows through us.

Friends, making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world requires of us to be transformed by God's love ourselves. No matter what is going on around us, we've got to show up for God to work within us. The good news is that we don't have to show up alone. Blessings for the journey.

Prayer:

Lord, listen to your children praying.

Lord, send your spirit in this place.



Lord, listen to your children praying.

Send us love, send us power, send us grace. Gracious Lord, thank you for this day.

We are grateful that your compassion is renewed every morning and your steadfast love is enduring.

Grant us your strength and courage to face the day that is before us.

Let us lean on you with all of our heart instead of relying on our on imperfect understanding.

Guide us and teach us in the way that we should go and the paths that we should take this day and beyond.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.

*Bishop L. Jonathan Holston became resident bishop of the Alabama-West Florida and North Alabama Conferences, the newly named Alabama Panhandle Episcopal Area on September 1, 2024. Bishop Holston is married to the former Felecia Brown. He and Felecia have two adult children, son Karlton and daughter Brittany.*

Monday, March 10

Psalm 17; 1 Chronicles 21:1–17; 1 John 2:1–6

David is well-known as a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 16). God chose David to lead God’s people because God examined David’s heart (Psalm 17:3) and saw a moral character that would equip him to lead God’s people faithfully. Many of the Psalms give us a glimpse of David’s heart and his deep trust in God. Indeed, David shows great faithfulness as he begins to lead God’s people—his steps follow God’s path, and his actions heed God’s instructions (Psalm 17:5).

And, yet something changes from the day God calls David to leave his sheep to the day when David counts the Israelites (1 Chronicles 21:1). In ancient Israel, censuses have a specific purpose: assessing human resources for military preparations. They count only men old enough and capable enough to fight in military endeavors. When David counts the Israelites, God is displeased (1 Chronicles 21:7). Why? God sees this as a departure from the trust David showed in God when he faced Goliath (1 Samuel 17). While Saul and the Israelites feared the Philistines’ military prowess, David says “the LORD does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD’s” (1 Samuel 17:47 NRSV). David knows that the success of a battle lies, not in the strength of weapons, but in God’s hands. So, when David orders the census, he is calculating his military strength as if that would determine the outcome of a battle—David’s trust in God has faltered.

How could David turn away from his trust in God? He has repeatedly shown steadfast faith, but even he can stumble. In 1 Chronicles 21:1, Satan persuades David away from his trust in God. Every human heart can falter—even David’s heart in which God saw exemplary character and faithfulness is not immune to the challenges of continuing to trust God.

In 1 Chronicles 21:8, David shows another aspect of his exceptional character: he admits he has sinned. God hears David, but that does not mean that David will suffer no consequences for his actions. Many Israelites become sick as a result of David’s sin, but God’s mercy stops the disease before it reaches Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 21:13–15). When David looks up, he sees the angel of the LORD standing between earth and heaven with a drawn sword. When seeing the power that lies with God, perhaps David remembers, like Joshua before him, that he should not ask if God is on his side, but if he is on God’s side (1 Chronicles 21:16; Joshua 5:13–15).

Prayer:

O Lord, You search and know every human heart. Help us look to You when we count our resources. Help us turn to You when we take stock of our strengths. Help us trust You when we are tempted to think our own power will bring us success. The success of our endeavors lies in Your hands. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Diana Abernethy is Associate Professor of Religion at Huntingdon College and an ordained elder in the North Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.*

Tuesday, March 11

Read: Psalm 17; Zechariah 3:1-10; 2 Peter 2:4-21

### **A Little Humility Goes a Long Way**

“If you try my heart, if you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress. As for what others do, by the word of your lips, I have avoided the ways of the violent.

My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped.” (Psalm 17:3-5, NRSVue)

Time alone with God can be comforting and challenging. In my quiet time, God expects me to open myself, allowing God to evaluate my heart, test my motivations, and examine my thoughts. Overall, I think I’m pretty decent, and I wouldn’t be surprised to discover you feel the same about yourself. Still, like the Psalmist in the passage above, I’ve had times when my fear and insecurity have left me feeling defensive about my convictions and commitment. My insecurity gets in the way, convincing me that I’m spiritually superior to others—especially those who see things differently than I do.

I recall one night tossing and turning because I couldn’t quiet my mind after a contentious committee meeting. I was at odds with a church leader, a dear friend and mentor, about whether we should proceed with a much-needed capital campaign. I was convinced the church was spiritually ready; however, she thought we needed more time to develop the faith of our members before asking the congregation for more money. In the restlessness of that night, God’s gentle prompting pointed out how my self-righteousness was clouded by pride—and even more by fear. I previously had publicly spoken about the need to proceed with a capital campaign and feared that backtracking would undermine my leadership. God named the pride and fear in those reckoning hours and challenged me to submit to his timing and leadership. I had to admit I was wrong. My friend was right. It hurt, but it was for the best.

The beauty of Psalm 17 lies not in the Psalmist’s self-proclaimed righteousness but in the willingness to allow God to examine his life. While the writer speaks of his clean lips and steady path, we know that he had moments of failure like all of us. His saving grace was maintaining an active, vital relationship with God, characterized by humility, vulnerability, and honest communication.

When we clothe ourselves in humility, something remarkable happens. Instead of seeing others as opponents, we recognize them as fellow travelers on life’s journey. True humility doesn’t mean denying when others wrong us, but it does mean approaching conflict with the awareness that we, too, are imperfect vessels. Ultimately, it’s not about whether we win; it’s about discovering God’s will and fulfilling it together.

When surrendered to God, the ashes of our pride become the fertile soil that nurtures spiritual growth. In my ministry, I’ve learned that the moments I’m most certain of my superiority are often the moments I most need to pause and examine my heart.

Prayer:

Lord, examine our hearts as you examined the Psalmist’s heart. Help us to see others through your eyes of grace, recognizing that we all need your mercy. Transform the ashes of our pride into the fertile soil of your love. In humility, may we submit to your perfect will. Amen.

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

Wednesday, March 12

Read: Psalm 17; Job 1:1-22; Luke 21:34-22:6; John 1:5

*“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” – John 1:5*

On January 27th, 1945, the gates of Auschwitz were thrown open, and prisoners, barely clinging to life, stepped into freedom. This moment, forever etched in history, was a flicker of hope in one of the darkest chapters of humanity. The liberation didn't erase the horror they had endured, but it brought light to a place shrouded in unimaginable darkness.

This story of liberation echoes a truth that we hold onto as believers: no matter how deep the darkness may seem, light will always prevail. John 1:5 reminds us that Jesus, the Light of the World, shines into our darkest places, and no darkness can extinguish Him.

A story from the same war offers another powerful image of hope. In the chaos of a London bombing raid, a father and son found themselves trapped in a crater. Flames and destruction raged around them. The father jumped into the pit for safety and called out to his son, “Jump! I'll catch you!” The boy hesitated, crying out, “But I can't see you!” The father replied, “But I can see you. That's all that matters.”

Isn't that a picture of our faith? Life's circumstances may feel like a deep crater, surrounded by darkness. Fear can paralyze us, and anxiety may scream, “You can't see the way out!” But faith reminds us that while we can't always see God's hand, He always sees us. His invitation to trust Him remains constant: “Jump! I'll catch you!”

Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, addresses the struggles we face: anxiety, worry, fear. He calls us to a higher perspective, reminding us of our Father's care (Matthew 6:25–34). Just as He provides for the sparrows, He provides for us. Just as He sees the lilies of the field, He sees us.

The liberation of Auschwitz and the father in the crater both point to the same truth: God's light breaks through even the deepest despair. We may feel like prisoners of our circumstances or stuck in the darkness of fear, but God's grace offers freedom. In Christ, hope rises from ashes, and life emerges from death.

If you're feeling overwhelmed today, remember: the Light of the World shines for you. Jump into His arms. He sees you, and His promises will hold you.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for being the Light in our darkness. When fear, anxiety, or despair surround us, help us trust Your promise to catch us. Open our eyes to Your faithfulness, and may Your light shine brightly in our lives, bringing hope to others. Amen.

*The Reverend Stuart Davidson is Senior Pastor of Eastern Shore Baptist Church in Daphne, Alabama and father to a first-year student at Huntingdon College.*

Thursday, March 13

Read: Psalm 27; Genesis 13:1-7, 14-18; Philippians 3:2-12

Growing up, I never had to move states, cities, or even houses. Although my mother says we moved into my childhood home when I was almost four, I have no recollection of the old duplex we used to live in. Instead, I only remember my house. My room that had Tinker Bell stickers and light purple walls until I graduated high school. My living room with the couch that I would sleep on every time that I got sick. My foyer where we put the Christmas tree up every year, where I decorated it with homey, mismatched ornaments that my mother had collected over the years.

I stayed in that house - my house - until the day I left for college, when I entered into a completely new world. Light purple walls and Tinker Bell stickers became white brick, with remnants of Command strips scattered by former tenants. My couch, that once held me as I was sickly and weak, was replaced with the same bed I slept on every night. The foyer with the Christmas tree ceased to exist, and MY room became... my roommate and I's room.

I had always felt comfortable in my house, but when I left for college, it felt as though I had no home. When I came back home over the break, everything felt foreign. I had clothes overflowing my dresser (new things I had got from my first semester), my mom painted my room while I was gone, and for some reason, the only thing in the refrigerator was a jar of pickles and a case of Dr. Pepper.

Even though my home had changed, I soon realized that I didn't need to worry about my physical dwelling. As we see in the Scripture for today, David is intent on dwelling in the house of the Lord, so that he can "gaze on the beauty of the Lord" (v. 4). How do we dwell in the house of the Lord, though? We know that God calls us to love God and love people, and we know that we find the beauty of creation in others. For us to truly dwell in the house of the Lord, we can find community in our fellow man. Our "dwelling place" is not a place at all, but instead a people who love God and seek to love God more.

How do we know that community is what the dwelling of the Lord is? Well, Jesus found community with his disciples, his friends. As we strive to be "little Christs" in our walk with God, we can also find our dwelling in the relationships we make with each other. As we remember Jesus' time of solitude in the desert during this time of Lent, I can imagine how much Jesus was missing his friends. As you continue through this Lenten season, rejoice in your community, and take time to reflect on your dwelling in the Lord.

Prayer:

Almighty God, thank You for our homes, both physical and spiritual. Memories from all parts of life draw us closer to You, and we could not be more appreciative. Thank You for the community You have placed in our lives. We are grateful that You allow us to dwell with You through our relationships with others. As always, we thank You for Your son, Jesus Christ. His time on Earth showed us how to be in true community with one another, and we strive to maintain that connection every day. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Ms. Eva Ellenberg is a senior Religion student at Huntingdon College from Lindale, Georgia. A candidate for ministry in the United Methodist Church, Eva seeks to continue her education through graduate theological studies.*

Friday, March 14

Read: Psalm 27; Genesis 14:17-24; Philippians 3:17-20

When the Psalmist David penned the words of Psalm 27:13-14, the circumstances of his life were anything but confident. Most scholars agree that he wrote these words as he hid from King Saul, who was seeking to take his life. The events swirling around him could evoke emotions of fear, doubt and uncertainty. Yet David writes, "I remain confident of this. I will seek the goodness of the Lord and the land of the living."

David's unwavering confidence in God's goodness, despite the challenges and fear he faced, reminds us that faith doesn't have to rely on our ever-changing circumstances. The Psalmist says, He will see this goodness and the land of the living, not some day, an eternity when this life is over.

But right now, in the middle of his darkest moment, David declares where his light comes from. He is expecting and looking for the light of God's goodness to break through and the darkness of his present reality. His confidence doesn't come from the shifting sands of what is happening around him, but rather the bedrock unchanging nature of God's goodness. No matter how difficult the present may seem, God's presence is there moving and working.

The Apostle Paul expresses a similar theme. In Romans 8:28, he says this, "and we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. for those who are called according to his purpose." This is one of the bedrock precepts of both the Old and New Testament. God is good. And even in the most difficult things in life, God is working to restore the goodness of creation.

Someone once said, "if it's not good, God's not done." This idea is such a powerful perspective, especially when facing hardships. It shifts our view from despair to anticipation of God's ultimate restoration work.

Then David goes on to write in verse 14, "Wait for the Lord. Be strong and take heart. Wait for the Lord. In the words of the prophet Tom Petty, "The waiting is the hardest part."

We live in an instant society. We want what we want, and we want it when we want it. Flip a switch and get a light. Google a question, get an answer. Text a friend, get a response.

The reality of God's timing is far different from our chronology. God does not move at a frenetic pace, but in the fullness of God's timing goodness.

So, we wait. Lent is a season of waiting. It's a time of intentional stillness. When we relinquish our timing to God, a season to sit in the tension between the longing and the fulfillment. We wait with confidence that God is not finished with us or our world. We wait knowing that God's goodness cannot be stopped. Even in seasons of pain and loss, God is in the business of transforming crucifixions into resurrections. And so, we wait.

Prayer:

God, who is faithful, give us eyes to see the beauty that you are working in this world and the peaceful heart to take comfort in your timing that we might fully know your love through Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

*The Reverend Allen Newton '83 is Lead Pastor of Destin Methodist Church as well as a Presiding Elder in the Alabama Emerald Coast Conference of the Global Methodist Church.*

Saturday, March 15

Read: Psalm 27, Psalm 118:26-29, Matthew 23:37-39

### **How Can I Say, Hallelujah?**

There is a contemporary folk-rock band from Northern Ireland called Rend Collective. Drummer Gareth Gikeson describes the band as “a bunch of us trying to figure out life.” They have a song popular on Christian radio called, “Hallelujah Anyway.” The song addressed the struggle between the dark, hard days of life with the desire to live by faith with hope. The chorus goes like this:

Even if, my daylight never dawns.  
Even if, my breakthrough never comes.  
Even if, I'll fight to bring You praise.  
Even if, my dreams fall to the ground,  
Even if, I'm lost. I know I'm found.  
Even if! My heart will somehow say,  
“Hallelujah, anyway!”

The psalmist in Psalm 27 knows the stress and the dilemma of the proclamations of faith and the reality of the difficulties that life brings. The poet knows the presence of God overwhelms the wickedness of his enemies. He knows that the strength of his enemies is not to be minimized. He is not a stranger to the feelings of abandonment by God. He knows the isolation of family brokenness and hurt cause by those who tell lies about him.

Nevertheless, the psalmist never gives into the troubles around him. He begs God not to “turn his face from him.” The Psalmist knows that his hope, his victory, his confidence, his security his strength, lies in God in whom he puts his trust. No matter how difficult life gets, he refuses to give into despair. His “heart will somehow say, “Hallelujah, anyway!”

Prayer: Oh God, keep my hope of faith grounded in You! Do not let my heartache, my brokenness, my disappointments, my failures keep me from being open to Your redemptive, restorative, healing grace. Hallelujah! Amen!

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

## The Second Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 16

Read: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35

I've been talking to chicken farmers. They tell me Jesus got it right in his description of a mother hen and her chicks. The two are deeply connected. Chicks know the distinctive clucking sound of their own mother. They even know the "warning cluck" that she uses when danger is present. At that point, she fluffs up her feathers and extends them to create a safe space for the chicks under her wings. Through her vigorous clucking and her expanded physical presence, the mother hen is sending a message: Don't mess with my brood. Even if a predator attacks anyway, the mother hen is prepared to fight to the death for her chicks.

And death is exactly what Jesus has on his mind. He is on a journey to Jerusalem and to the Cross. The journey began in Luke 9 when he "set his face to go to Jerusalem." He will reach that destination in Luke 19. All along the way, Jesus is preaching, teaching, and healing. But suddenly he is interrupted by a warning from some Pharisees: "Herod wants to kill you; run!"

Jesus' response to this ominous threat reveals the nature and mission of his life. He will not run away in fear. Rather, Jesus has a message for Herod. *Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.'*

Herod's murderous threat is no surprise to Jesus. He knows Herod killed John the Baptist. And he knows full well what awaits him in Jerusalem. But he also knows that his death is not a diversion from his mission. The mission of announcing the Kingdom of God, by casting out demons and performing cures, will find its dramatic completion on the Cross and in the Resurrection.

Not only does Jesus have a message for Herod, he also has a message for Jerusalem.

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*

Like the prophets before him, Jesus is on a mission from God to gather us all under the safety of his wings. He stretches out his arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of his saving embrace. Like a mother hen, Jesus continues his mission of gathering us to himself. Are we willing? And will we become the kind of disciples who open wide our lives and our churches so that all may come into that saving embrace? Are we willing?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. *Amen.*

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



Monday, March 17

Read: Psalm 105:1-42; Exodus 33:1-6; Romans 4:1-12

The Lenten journey is a long one. Forty days doesn't sound like a long time at the beginning of it, but if you've adopted any kind of spiritual or ascetic discipline for Lent, now's about the time you start wondering if you made a mistake.

I wonder how many times Abraham wondered if he made a mistake.

His story starts in Genesis 12 with a call and a promise from God: a call to "go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you," and in return, God promises, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you." Abraham answers God's call and begins his journey to the Promised Land in faith that God will give him children, even though his wife, Sarah, was unable to have children.

Paul says in our passage from Romans that this faith, this trust in God, this willingness to pick up and move, not even knowing where he's moving to, is what made Abraham the father of all his children—his literal descendants, who honor Abraham as their father by circumcising their children as he did, and his children in the faith, who honor Abraham as their father by trusting in the same God he did. "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." So straightforward! So easy! Just believe!

But it's pretty obvious from all the chapters from Genesis 12, when God calls Abraham, to Genesis 21, when the promised son is finally born, that Abraham's journey of faith was not a straightforward or easy one. It was full of missteps, confusion, loss, grief, pain, and doubt.

There's some comfort in that, isn't there? Abraham is not only a model of faith when he trustingly picks up and leaves his home without knowing where God was sending him. He is also a model of faith when he doubts God—or, rather, when he trusts God with his doubts about God. Abraham asks God for reassurance, complains that God hasn't yet given him a child, even laughs at the idea of his 90-year-old wife bearing him a son. God is not fazed by Abraham's doubts. God doesn't say, "Well, picking Abraham was obviously a mistake; let's drop him and find someone more trusting." God was faithful, even when Abraham doubted. Abraham was not blessed because he was perfectly faithful, but because God was.

Prayer:

Almighty God, in whom our father Abraham trusted, you keep faith with your people even when they fail. Forgive our shortcomings, assuage our fears, answer our doubts, assure us of your loving presence, and grant us a vision of the hope you have promised us. We ask these things through Jesus Christ, our righteousness and peace. Amen.

*Dr. Sarah Sours is Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean for Faculty, and Professor of Theological Ethics at Huntingdon College.*

Tuesday, March 18

Read: Psalm 105:1-42; Numbers 14:10b-24; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

### **Remembering Because God Remembers**

In Psalm 105, the Psalmist calls us to remember: “Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced (Psalm 105:5).” Psalm 105 is one of the few “historical psalms” that recount God’s faithfulness to His people throughout history. The psalm recalls God’s covenant with Abraham, the deliverance from Egypt, and the provision in the wilderness. These stories were not just history lessons—they were meant to strengthen the people in the present. All of this is grounded in the powerful closing line, “For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham (Psalm 105:42).”

We are called to remember because God remembers.

This call to remember is not just for ancient Israel—it continues in the ways we keep faith alive today. One example that struck me deeply was a tradition in the small town of Oberammergau, Germany. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to visit that town, which is famous for its Passion Play. I was supposed to go in 2020, but like so many things that year, the event was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The origins of the Passion Play go back nearly 400 years. In 1633, as the plague swept through Europe, the people of Oberammergau made a vow: if God spared them, they would stage a reenactment of Christ’s Passion every ten years as an act of gratitude and remembrance. God was faithful, and they kept their promise. The entire town participates, with as many as 400 people on stage at once, sharing the story of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection.

When the pandemic of our time disrupted their tradition, the people of Oberammergau faced a difficult choice. Could they postpone it? Should they wait another decade? But one of the leaders explained to me why they had to move forward: If we wait 20 years, the children won’t know how to do it. They won’t remember the story, and we will lose it.

That struck me deeply. If they did not pass on the story, it could be lost to the next generation. But by remembering, they found strength to keep their promise. When I visited Oberammergau again in 2023, the town was full of life, their tradition alive and well.

Memory is essential to faith. When we remember what God has done for us, we find the strength to face today’s challenges. When we tell the stories of God’s faithfulness, we remind ourselves—and each other—who we are and whose we are.

Psalm 105 invites us into this sacred work of remembering. It calls us to recall God’s wonders, miracles, and promises. And it reassures us that while we remember, God remembers too. The Lord has not forgotten the covenant. God has not forgotten His people. The Lord has not forgotten you.

Reflection Questions:

What are the moments in your life where you have seen God’s faithfulness?

How do you practice remembering what God has done?

Who in your life needs to hear a story of God's goodness today?

May we be a people who remember—because God remembers.

Prayer:

Gracious God, thank You for Your faithfulness throughout history and in my life. Help me to remember Your goodness, to trust in Your promises, and to share Your story with the next generation. Amen.

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

Wednesday, March 19

Read: Psalm 105:1-42; 2 Chronicles 20:1-22; Luke 13:22-31

When have you found yourself facing a tough challenge, one you didn't think you'd be able to overcome? Were you able to succeed? Did you figure it out yourself or with help?

After my senior season playing football at Huntingdon College, I had to have shoulder and knee surgery... at the same time. You want to talk about a challenge (though I'm sure my wife had the bigger challenge taking care of me for two weeks until I recovered enough to function on my own). It's a common theme in scripture, allowing us to remember – sometimes painfully or reluctantly – our reliance on God and his divine mercy and grace.

Psalm 105 recounts almost all of the books of Genesis and Exodus, telling the story of how the Israelites faced seemingly insurmountable odds on the journey to becoming a nation. 2 Chronicles 20 shows us that same nation crippled by fear before facing a vast army mobilized against them. We see a king and a people terrified, begging God to save them from their foe. The end of Luke 13 shows us our own present battle: a most formidable enemy called death, waiting to take us to a place of loneliness and despair. This enemy is relentless, crouching at our doorstep, ready to pounce on us the moment we slip up.

These scriptures seem to be about different things. However, upon further examination, we can see there is one common thread between all of them: God's deliverance. When I think of deliverance, I think of things like packages I've been waiting on for forever (okay, maybe like a week), or a big barbecue chicken pizza being brought to my door. It is the displacement of something from where it was – or may currently be – to where it needs to be, where it belongs. When I purchase strings for my guitar, they no longer belong at the store. Rather, they belong on my guitar. When I purchase a pizza, that pizza no longer belongs at the pizzeria, but in my stomach. There's an important part about deliverance I've been purposefully leaving out, though, possibly the most important part: we don't have to do anything. The goods, mail, or service is brought to us, right to our front door. We don't even have to pick our feet up off the coffee table.

God delivered the Israelites from destruction at the hands of many kinds of enemies many different times. He delivered Abraham, Jacob, Isaac and Joseph. He delivered his entire people from Egypt through Moses. Friends, God has delivered us from sin and hell and death. He is the cosmic mailman. We were lost, broken, going nowhere fast. Fortunately for us, God knows we belong with Him, and He sent His Son to deliver us to Him. We were in God's Amazon cart before the world even began, and Jesus came and died in our place to put us on His Prime membership, to reconcile (or deliver) us to the Father. He took us from where we were, and placed us where we belong, right in the arms of our Creator. From then on, it was a done deal. Signed, sealed, delivered, to echo the words of Stevie Wonder.

Prayer:

God, we face a great and powerful enemy, far more powerful than us. You knew that, so you stepped in and rescued us from its hands. As we have our groceries or packages delivered to us, remind us about how you delivered us from the grave. Let us live our lives knowing we've been bought at a high price, which means the One who purchased us must know us to be that valuable. In your redeeming name, amen.

*Mr. Conner Bradford '24 teaches Mathematics and coaches at Billingsley High School. He also serves as youth pastor at Bethsalem Baptist Church.*

Thursday, March 20

Read: Psalm 63:1-8; Daniel 3:19-30; Revelation 2:8-11

Daniel, a writer known for glorious apocalyptic imagery, presents us with a colorful illustration of the power of God to intercede on our behalf. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were characters I was all too familiar with growing up in a church where it was known that miracle working was something God did! The popularity of the fiery furnace story permeated the Christian culture that shaped me. In songs by Gospel artists and Tyler Perry's infamous "Madea" plays, those "three Hebrew boys" were an embodiment of the phrase, "Won't He do it?!" This story provided an assurance of rescue to those of us stuck in impossible situations, bound for the fires that nobody BUT God could subdue. This story provided our proof that the phrase "It ain't over until God says it's over," was indeed true.

It's easy to take that assurance for granted when you grow up seeing miracles taking place every day. Water that still flowed even when the bill was weeks overdue. Lights that stayed on because of kind and generous strangers behind the service counter. But as I grew older, the otherworldliness of God's actions in the lives of my family and my community began to give way to cynicism about these fantastical Bible stories and their seeming inability to convey the deeper truths of a profoundly complex and unknowable God.

When you hear the world tell you that some things just aren't possible, you start to lose faith in the power of incredible stories like this one. That is until you're brought back to a place where the only way you can hope to survive is through a miracle. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remind us that miracles are just that. They're nonsensical, inconceivable, and timely manifestations of the power of God to do more than we could ever ask or imagine. They are the stories and scenarios that force us to admit to ourselves that we cannot anticipate everything. The moments that emphasize that we are human and God is God.

In all our attempts to be smarter, to be stronger, and to be more enlightened, miracles strip us of the illusion that all things are within our control. Miracles signal to us our need to give in to the whimsy of the story of Christ. In all its fantastical, colorful, impossibility, the story of God's walk among us beckons us to have a little faith, a little trust, and a little hope that even in the fire God will indeed deliver us.

Prayer:

God of miracles seen and unseen, invite us into the absurd truth that nothing is impossible with you. Guide us as we change and grow, reminding us all along the way that our faith in you is our strength. Amen.

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

Thursday, March 21

Read: Psalm 63:1-8; Daniel 12:1-4; Revelation 3:1-6

Many years ago on a family vacation, my youngest sister had a sleepwalking incident at a hotel. Sometime during the night she left her bed, exited the room, and ended up locked out in the hallway. I don't know if any of us would have even known it had happened if we hadn't all been awakened by her knocking on the door to get back in. Had she been down to the lobby, walked by the pool, or grabbed a snack? We'll never know. All that mattered was that she was safely back home in our room. Once she was back inside, we were able to wake her fully, get her reoriented and recalibrated.

One of the gifts of Lent is the opportunity to recalibrate ourselves to faithful living. The season begins in a sobering way by asking us to consider our mortality on Ash Wednesday. Six weeks later it concludes with the gut punch of Good Friday and the raw emotion of Holy Saturday. If we're not experiencing those kinds of emotions, we're not doing it right. Lent, therefore, shouldn't permit any of us to stay on the sidelines.

Chapters two and three of Revelation offer decrees to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Today's text is the one directed at the church in Sardis where the congregation is in danger. John notes that they have a solid reputation, at least to outside observers (3:1), but inside the people are spiritually dead. They haven't been evil, per se, nor have they purposefully been disobedient. Rather, it's as if the church in Sardis has been spiritually sleepwalking.

To be clear, their problem isn't apathy, it's their comfort with the status quo. To them, things are fine. They have what they need, they are keeping their heads down, and they have a good name, but that is not what Christian witness looks like. Faithful discipleship isn't about going through the motions, and that's the problem. The church in Sardis seems destined for a painful future.

Still, while John's decree is ominous, it's not without hope. Like the other decrees to the struggling churches, there is an opportunity for change – the chance to repent. “Wake up, and strengthen what remains” (3:2) says the messenger. There is still time to turn from your blasé faith and your spiritual water-treading. The time for sleepwalking is over.

Lent is the shakeup that many of us need. It's a season built into the church year for repentance and examination. This is a season of recommitment to Christ-following, not only in name, but in action as well. It's forty days of holy wakefulness, in God-seeking, soul-thirsting, and faith-parched purpose, as the psalmist says (Ps 63:1). This season may not be easy, but if we do it right, it promises to be just what we sleepwalkers need.

Prayer:

God, help all of us hear your wakeup call and may the grace of Jesus Christ guide us safely home. Amen.

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

Saturday, March 22

Read: Psalm 63:1-8; Isaiah 5:1-7; Luke 6:43-45

Personally, I am a fan of posting positive quotes and scriptures on social media – to inspire others, and also for gentle reminders when these posts pop up each year on my daily memories, as they are often just the motivation I might need that day. One of my favorite quotes says that “The secret to a happy life is giving God the first part of your day, the first priority to every decision and the first place in your heart” (Marcus Lamb). This quote to me encompasses so much of what David writes in Psalm 63:1-8 as he praises God despite the struggles and trials he faces as he wanders in the desert – likely fleeing for his life. And David begins his writing in verse 1 by saying God “earnestly I seek you,” which when translated in Hebrew earnestly means “first thing” ~ that early in the morning the first thing he does is reach out to God and praise God. Just as in my favorite quote, David gives the VERY first part of his day to God. Lamentation 3:22-23 says that “Scripture promises His mercies are new in the morning.” When David is struggling and running for his life, instead of complaining and grumbling, David knows that His God is there and the VERY FIRST THING he does with his morning is praise God for his faithfulness as he knows that God will provide for him.

I try throughout all hours of the day to live a life worthy of God’s grace for me, but admittedly I often fall short. I do make every effort to give God the first part and the last part of everyday, free from distractions, but I often fall short. I wish I were more vocal about my faith. I am a more private person when it comes to my faith and my prayer time. However, this is an area where I want to work and grow – I want to be more comfortable with being vocal and LOUD about my faith and calling out to God both in praise and in prayer when in need. Not only does David give his first waking moments to HIS GOD, he also does not appear to be sitting in silent prayer. He writes that he will lift up his hands and will praise God with singing lips! We see this in other passages in Psalm 77:1, where Asaph writes that “I yell out to my God, I yell with all my might, I yell at the top of my lungs. He listens.” God wants us to call out to him in times of need, and to cling to him and know that he will uphold us as David writes in Psalm 63:8.

In all of his different ways of glorifying God in Psalm 63, David is declaring LOUDLY, throughout his waking hours and during his hours before sleep, that God is HIS GOD and that he longs for a relationship with God and loves God more than he loves his own life. He desires this oneness with God even more than he longs for life-sustaining water as he wanders through the dry desert. He says that God’s love is better than life itself and he knows that God’s love will hold him up in times of need.

God is indeed MY GOD, and he is the life-sustaining water that we need in times of thirst. But can I honestly say that I hold God above absolutely all else in my life 100% of the time? Can I say honestly that I never long for financial security and the creature comforts of life more than I thirst for God? Can I say truthfully that my need to behold My GOD is always my first focus of the day? I truly cannot say that. And I am sure that I am not alone. I am sure that so many of us go to sleep and wake up worrying about our children, our retirement, our finances, the health of a loved one and other worries. But I know that MY GOD sees and understands that. He knows me and knows that while I love him and thirst for him, that I am also human and that is okay. God tells the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9 that “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” God knows my shortcomings; and he knows my desire to overcome them and walk a path more focused on MY GOD, on OUR GOD.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for your unfailing love, even when we do not always feel worthy. Forgive us for the times we sit quietly in our faith when you ask us to exalt you out loud. Help us to find the courage to

worship you and praise you, shouting from the rooftops with no fear of judgement or embarrassment. Forgive us for the times that we focus more on worldly things and help us to give our worries to you and let our focus instead be on you and your life-sustaining love for us. Help us to wake with our hands lifted in praise to you, to end our days in prayer and thanksgiving with our thoughts on you as we sleep rather than on the worries that often consume us. Help us to walk more closely with you, knowing that you will sustain us and uphold us in times of need – we just need focus on you and call out to you both in times of need and in times of thanksgiving and tribulation. In your name we pray, Amen.

*Mrs. Cathy Wolfe is Assistant Vice President for Development Operations at Huntingdon College and a member of the First United Methodist Church of Montgomery.*



## The Third Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 23

Read: Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

### **Better-Than-Life Love**

*Because your (God's) steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you (God).*

*Psalm 63:3 (NRSVUE)*

I was blessed to be born into a wonderful Christian family who loved me and taught me how much God loves me; therefore, my life has been good from the very beginning. Like King David, who wrote Psalm 63 when he was in the Judean desert, I know how good life can be even through difficult times.

My older sister, Judy, a Huntingdon College graduate, helped me to understand how love makes life better. I remember so many times when I misbehaved as a little boy and had to go before my loving parents to be held accountable as they tried to raise me to know the difference between right and wrong and between good and bad behavior. However, I also vividly remember the many times my sister would plead for me to receive mercy as she stood by my side. My sister taught me how valuable a loving advocate can be. I also remember how sorry I was to see her go away to college leaving me to struggle through without her advocacy!

Yes, life is good, but receiving God's steadfast, faithful, and merciful love always makes life even better! Jesus, God incarnate, came to show us God's graceful love embodied in human form. Jesus, God's beloved Son and our perfect advocate, pleads for us in spite of our sinful condition. On the cross, with arms outstretched while being horribly crucified by sinful people, Jesus lovingly prays, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34 NRSVUE)

On Ash Wednesday we began this Christian Holy Season of Lent by humbly acknowledging our human frailty, our need to repent, and our dependence on God's graceful love. We continue our pilgrimage throughout Lent in order to celebrate Easter morning fully because we have prepared our hearts, souls, and minds to accept Jesus as our loving, merciful, and redeeming Savior.

Yes, indeed, life is given to us by God and is good; and even better than life itself is God's steadfast love! Therefore, let us praise God with our hearts, our souls, our voices, and our actions both now and forever more!

Prayer:

Loving God, we do praise your Holy name in gratitude for both our very lives and the wonderful love, mercy, and grace you offer us through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Help us to accept your forgiveness and to love and forgive others as you love and mercifully forgive us. In Christ's name, Amen.

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

Monday, March 24

Read: Psalm 39; Jeremiah 11:1-17; Romans 2:1-11

For today's reflection, I am reminded that **God is God, and we are not!** I know it seems so simplistic, yet we struggle with this every day of our lives. I believe that today's readings will show us how this plays out.

First, in **Jeremiah** we see how God is fed up with the people of Israel for their constant return to sin and worship of the alien god, Baal. They had been ignoring God's Prophet, Jeremiah, and even worse, they plotted to kill him. The Houses of Israel and Judah sought to drown out his voice because they no longer wished to honor God's covenant. Of course, God saves Jeremiah from their plans. Unfortunately, for them, by not honoring God's covenant, they cursed themselves.

As **Jeremiah 11:3-4** says...

"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not observe the words of this covenant, which I commanded your ancestors the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that iron furnace, saying: Listen to my voice and do all that I command you. Then you shall be my people, and I will be your God."

Think about our own lives, how do we react to God's commands?

All too often, in our secular society we are bombarded by the allure of power, prestige, and possessions. Sometimes these can become so influential that they become idols to us. Lent is a time to return to God whose only son, Jesus, shows us how we should live. And, even when we fail to follow his example, HE gives himself as the expiation of ALL of our sins.

In the reading from **Romans**, we see the example of the sin of passing judgement on others. Once again, **God is God, and we are not**. HE is the just judge and as much as we try to avoid judging our brothers and sisters, we certainly fail at this more than we think we do.

Recall the first verse of the reading from **Romans**...

"Therefore, you are without excuse, every one of you who passes judgment. For by the standard by which you judge another you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the very same things."

And later in the passage...

"God will repay each person according to what they have done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, HE will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger."

As we continue our Lenten journey, let's remember that we have a God who keeps HIS promises and respond to HIM and to others in love. Even if it feels like a sacrifice to do the right thing, remember that HE sacrificed more by giving up HIS only Son, Jesus Christ. This isn't a license to sin knowing that all will be forgiven, but a lifeline to save us when we do.

Prayer:

Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for keeping your promises even when we fail to follow your example. We ask that you help us to glorify you by following Jesus' commandment... **to Love you and to**

**serve our neighbors** even when that may be difficult. We know that you see each one of us as a glorious creation and that you love us without limits. We ask that you give us the grace to do the same for one another. We pray through Christ, our Lord. **AMEN!**

*Deacon G. Mathew Pope '88 is ordained to the Permanent Diaconate through the Archdiocese of Mobile of The Catholic Church. He practices as a Certified Risk Manager and lives in Fairhope, Alabama with his wife, Mrs. Evelyn Pope '90, who served as editor of this contribution.*

Tuesday, March 25

Read: Psalm 39; Ezekiel 17:1-10; Romans 2:12-16

Psalm 39:4-5 “Show me, Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure.”

That is a Lenten text if I’ve ever heard one. In a season focusing on our mortality, accepting limitations, and recognizing our finitude, Psalm 39 is a pretty spot-on selection. It elicits the spirit of the season and helps us fully appreciate the miracle of Easter. I mean, it doesn’t get much more sobering than the reminder, “Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure.”

This scripture reminds me of a Mumford and Sons song called “Below My Feet” — it has a real Ash Wednesday/Lent vibe. It’s about a guy who has just lost someone close to him, and the death caused the subject to wrestle with his understanding of faith and life. Encountering death will do that to a person, won’t it? The song begins, “You were cold as the blood through your bones. And the light which led us from our chosen homes. Well, I was lost.”

I think of that song at some point every Lent because, in addition to mourning loss, the subject comes face to face with his own mortality. This experience of encountering loss, wrestling with faith, and internalizing the inescapable reality that we too will die is an essential part of the Christian journey. Yet it is one we often deny because of its unpleasantness. It is no secret that we all would rather avoid the heavy things in life.

However, there is no Easter Sunday if there was not first Good Friday, and when joy comes in the morning, it is always after the sorrow that lasts for the night. On this side of eternity, heaviness and hardships, loss and grief, they are all part of reality. But the Good News is that they will not have the last word. And we can only truly appreciate our eternal life in Christ if we first recognize that our days are numbered without Him. The gift of God’s mercy becomes even more important when we lose someone we love, for it assures us of their place in the great cloud of witnesses. We need Lent not so we can wallow in our feels and mope around, but because recognizing our mortality makes Easter matter even more.

Our participation in Lent reminds us that while we are here on Earth, we pray that God will “Put us to what thou wilt, rank us with whom thou wilt. Put us to doing, put us to suffering.” In our prayers, we recognize that we will “go through many dangers, toil and snares.” However, we also know that on the other side of the shadow valley, there is a promised land flowing with milk and honey. And that though our mortal bodies will fail us one day, we will still get to spend eternity celebrating God’s grace. And even after we’ve been doing it for ten thousand years, “we will have no less days to sing God’s praise than when we first begun

Prayer:

Gracious God, we give you thanks for a season of honest reflection. We pray you help us recognize our need for You in the acceptance of our limits. May our weakness reveal Your strength. And though we know hardships will inevitably befall us, we ask you help us look toward a future where all is made well in You. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Woods Lisenby '11 is Senior Pastor at Spanish Fort United Methodist Church in Spanish Fort, Alabama.*

## Annunciation of the Lord

Wednesday, March 26

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

We don't seem to design our world the way God would prefer. We pay attention to power; God seems to appreciate weakness. We admire and revere the rich; God seems to like hanging out with the poor. Prestige is our goal; service is God's. God's design for the world doesn't seem to match our own.

Strange that God would choose Mary, don't you think? Minding her own business, a nobody if there ever was one, God's messenger, Gabriel, shows up and says, "Mary, God favors you." God favors her so much that he wants her to assist in nothing less than bringing about the salvation of all. She has no position, no status, no qualification that would merit her for such a task. And yet, God says, "You're the one, Mary."

How God chooses to offer us hope is confusing. How God chooses to help us find wholeness is odd. And how God chooses to love often leaves us with the question that Mary asked long ago: "How can this be?" How can it be that the path to hope leads to a cross? How can it be that if we want to be whole we must lose our very selves? How can it be that if we ever expect to receive God's love, for us, we must love even those who will not love us in return? Like Mary, we wonder, "How can this be?"

The partnership between God and Mary continues a pattern that God began from the very beginning. God's design for the world involves you and me. God is not going to use power, as the world does, to achieve an end. Instead, God comes to Mary, just as God comes to each one of us, and says, "You're the one, and together, we can create a beautiful world."

St. Augustine once said, "Without God, we cannot. Without us, God will not." You are **that** favored by God. You are that important to the salvation of the world. You are the one that God is counting on to be Christ's hands and feet to others. And with God, it's possible.

Mary asked, "How can this be?" and trusted God to lead her on a life-changing journey. May it be so with us.

Prayer:

God, as we seek to be your people in the world, we have many questions. Help us ask them with sincerity and go on to trust authentically, for the sake of the world. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Jason Borders is Professor of Religion at Huntingdon College and serves as Theologian in Residence at First United Methodist Church of Montgomery, Alabama. Dr. Borders is an ordained elder in the Alabama-West Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church.*

## Wednesday, March 26

Read: Psalm 39; Numbers 13:17-27; Luke 13:18-21

The character Fiyero, in the hit musical, *Wicked*, sings, “Dancing through life down at the Ozdust, If only because dust is what we come to; Nothing matters but knowing nothing matters; It's just life; So keep dancing through...” A reminder of our mortality can cause us to either seize the day like Fiyero without care of the future or to despair of all hope. The Christian response to our mortality is something altogether different.

Lent is a season of reflection, repentance, and renewal. Ash Wednesday reminds us that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. But the ashes on our foreheads are not just a sign of mortality; they also point to the hope we have in Christ. Only through death can we find resurrection. Out of the ashes of sin, suffering, and loss, God brings new life.

Psalm 39 is an honest prayer about the brevity of life. The psalmist cries out, realizing how fleeting human existence is: *"Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure"* (39:5). Yet, amid this realization, there is hope: *"But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you"* (39:7). Even when life feels like dust slipping through our fingers, the God who redeems and restores holds us fast, anchoring us through the storms of life.

In Numbers 13, Moses sends spies to explore the Promised Land. They return with a report confirming that the land is indeed good—flowing with milk and honey. However, as the later verses reveal, fear takes hold of most of the spies, leading them to doubt God's promise. Their fear turns to despair, and instead of trusting in God's faithfulness, they see only obstacles. How often do we do the same? We see ashes where God is preparing something beautiful. We focus on the giants instead of the promise. Yet, when we struggle with fear and doubt, we have evidence of faith. Faith cannot exist without doubt, otherwise, it would be certainty.

Jesus, in Luke 13, gives us two short but powerful parables about the kingdom of God. He compares it to a mustard seed—tiny, yet growing into a great tree. He likens it to yeast, spreading unseen but transforming the entire dough. These images remind us that God's work often starts small, even hidden, but it brings growth and renewal. Hope rises from what seems insignificant, even from ashes.

Lent teaches us that from the ashes of repentance, new faith emerges. From the brokenness of our world, God brings His kingdom. Jesus Himself embraced death—becoming dust for us—so that through His resurrection, we might have eternal hope.

As we journey through this season, where do we see only ashes? Where have we let fear overshadow God's promises? May we place our hope not in what we see, but in the One who brings beauty from dust, life from death, and hope from ashes.

Prayer:

God of newness, in our moments of weakness, when all we see are ashes, remind us that You are at work. Help us trust in Your promises and see the hope You bring from the dust of our lives. Grow in us the mustard seed of faith, that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may be like yeast in the dough, causing the whole loaf to rise with hope, for our hope is in you alone. We pray this and the prayers of our hearts in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

Thursday, March 27

Read: Psalm 32; Joshua 4:1-13; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5

Today, we have officially reached the halfway point of the Lenten season. As we reflect on today's scripture, we also reflect on our progress up to this point. Are we still going strong with our fast? Have we cheated once or twice? Have we completely abandoned our fast? Wherever we are on this day, the Lord has a word for us.

In our passage today we read about the frailties of life. We are faced with the fact that we are all wasting away, living a temporary life. Physically, we feel the effects of time, stress, and hardship. Our bodies age, our energy fades, and our trials can feel overwhelming. Even our homes and our workplaces are not immune to death and destruction. We remember the fires out in California, the Hurricanes which plague our American Gulf Coast, even the tornadoes which ravaged the Montgomery community at the end of last year. It seems that even Creation seeks to remind us of the temporary life we live.

Yet Paul, who is no stranger to the suffering of this life, tells us we must "not lose heart." That kind of resilience seems almost impossible. How can we remain hopeful when our bodies are growing weaker, when trials press in, or when the shadow of death looms over us? How can we find peace in this season of turmoil? Paul gives us the answer: Even as our outer self—our physical bodies—declines, our inner self is being renewed *day by day*. This renewal is not something we manufacture on our own. It's not about positive thinking or sheer willpower. It's a work of God in us. Each day, He strengthens our spirit, restores our joy, and fills us with His peace. Just as our bodies need food and rest, our souls need God's presence.

So, as we continue on our treacherous journey of lent, until we join Jesus at the cross, we must lean on God as we walk. We must spend time with Him daily, seek His guidance always, and trust Him with our burdens. If you're feeling worn out today, take heart: God is renewing you. Your trials, though real, are temporary. Your struggles, though difficult, are not without reward. Don't lose heart. Instead, lean into the One who is renewing you from the inside out—day by day, moment by moment.

Reflection Questions:

What areas of your life feel weary or depleted right now?

How can you intentionally seek God's renewal each day?

Have you experienced times when God refreshed your spirit despite outward struggles?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank You that even when I feel weary, You are at work renewing me. Even though I'm sore from the previous day, I awoke today with your breath in my lungs. Help me to rely on You daily, to seek You in prayer and in Your Word, and to trust that You are strengthening me from the inside out. I surrender my worries and burdens to You. Fill me with Your peace, joy, and hope today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Mr. Dillon Bryars is a senior Religion student at Huntingdon College from Bay Minette, Alabama. A candidate for ministry in the Global Methodist Church, Dillon seeks to continue his education through graduate theological studies.*

Friday, March 28

Read: Psalm 32; Joshua 4:14-24; 2 Corinthians 5:6-15

“A Prayer Based on 2 Corinthians 5:6-15”

God of our todays and tomorrows,

We stand in the hope we have in you.

For the love of Christ urges us on...

We seek to honor and do the will of Jesus.

For the love of Christ urges us on...

Our lives are offered as evidence of you.

For the love of Christ urges us on...

We are concerned with our hearts rather than our outward appearance.

For the love of Christ urges us on...

To be a known fool for you would be my greatest accomplishment.

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore, all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for the one who for their sake died and was raised.

Amen.



Saturday, March 29

Read: Psalm 32; Exodus 32:7-14; Luke 15:1-10

### **The Hardest Truth to Speak: Being Honest with Ourselves**

Being completely honest with ourselves is one of life's greatest challenges. It's so easy to notice the flaws in others, yet when it comes to our own shortcomings, we often look the other way. Why do we do this? Perhaps because self-awareness can be uncomfortable. Admitting our weaknesses, acknowledging our mistakes, and recognizing areas in need of growth takes humility and courage—things that don't always come naturally. But as difficult as it may be, embracing the truth about ourselves is essential for real change.

This struggle between self-deception and self-awareness is nothing new. In Psalm 32, David describes the burden of unconfessed sin, likening it to a heavy weight that drained his strength. But when he finally turned to God and acknowledged his faults, he found something unexpected: not shame or condemnation, but relief, forgiveness, and peace. His story reminds us of a simple yet profound truth—freedom begins with honesty. The moment we stop running from our shortcomings and instead bring them before God, we open ourselves up to healing and transformation.

David also offers a beautiful image of God's grace and protection: "You are my secret hideout! You protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of rescue!" This verse reminds us that we don't have to be afraid of facing the truth. While our instinct may be to avoid or deny our faults, true peace isn't found in pretending we have it all together. It's found in bringing our struggles before God and allowing Him to work in us. Though self-reflection isn't always easy, it leads to renewal, growth, and a deeper sense of purpose.

One way I've learned to speak truth to myself is through journaling. Writing down my thoughts, struggles, and prayers helps me process emotions, recognize patterns in my behavior, and see where I need to grow. It's a space where I can be completely honest—without fear of judgment. Over time, looking back on past entries reminds me of how far I've come, how God has worked in my life, and how His grace has been with me every step of the way. Journaling has become a quiet refuge, a place where I meet God in the midst of my imperfections and find encouragement to keep going.

The season of Lent is a perfect time to slow down and reflect—to open our hearts to correction, embrace humility, and lean into the grace that allows us to grow. Being honest with ourselves isn't always easy, but it is one of the most freeing things we can do. The hardest truth to speak may be the one we tell ourselves, but by grace, it is also the truth that leads to healing, renewal, and a deeper relationship with God.

Prayer:

One who is true and good, grant us grace to know that even with our shortcomings, you are our hiding place, so that we might be honest with you, ourselves, one another, and the world, through Christ who redeems our brokenness and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

*The Reverend Dan Morris '79 is Pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Milton, Florida.*

## The Fourth Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 30

Read: Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

### **The Manna Ceased, But God Did Not**

By the time we get to Joshua 5, the wilderness had been the Israelites' home for 40 years. God's daily provision appeared with each sunrise and covered the ground with manna. It was a simple and sufficient sign that they were not forgotten. They lived in liminal space, no longer slaves but not yet home, sustained one day at a time. In the new place they toiled and planted, sustained by bread from heaven but expecting variety.

Then, one day, the crops they planted in the new land sprouted, and they ate from Creation's bounty.

The manna ceased. No more gathering enough for the day, no more searching to find bread like dew upon the soil. Instead, they ate food grown from the land they walked. No more wilderness; the promise had arrived.

Before they took another step, they paused to keep the Passover. The meal that once marked their escape from Egypt was now a feast of fulfillment. The unleavened bread they had eaten in haste was now the bread of arrival. The God who led them out had also led them in.

What do you do when God's provision changes? What happens when the way God sustained you in one season disappears in the next? The Israelites had known nothing but manna for a generation. It had fed them, shaped them, and given them security in an uncertain place. What would life look like now?

Perhaps you have walked through seasons of wilderness, where God's provision came in just enough—just enough strength for the day, just enough hope to keep going. And now, perhaps, you stand on the edge of something new. The season has shifted, and what once sustained you is no longer there. Can you trust that the God who provided for you then will provide for you now?

The manna may cease, but God does not. The provision may change, but the Provider remains. When God told Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt," it was more than a declaration of freedom; it was a promise of renewal. The shame of their past no longer defined them. The wilderness would not last forever. The weight of slavery was lifted, rolled away like a stone from a tomb.

Generations later, another stone would be rolled away. The long wilderness of sin and death would end. The hunger for redemption would be met. The manna of daily survival would give way to the feast of resurrection.

No longer just enough to get by. Now, life in abundance. No longer wandering. Now, a home in the Kingdom.

No more manna. The feast has begun. The wilderness is behind you. The promise is ahead. God has rolled away your disgrace.

Prayer:

God of manna and the harvest, give us this day life abundant that our very lives might bear witness to your generous love, through Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, amen.

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

Monday, March 31

Read: Psalm 53; Leviticus 23:26-41; Revelation 19:1-8

“O Love Divine, What Has Thou Done!”

*(United Methodist Hymnal, 287)*

O Love divine, what has thou done!  
The immortal God hath died for me!  
The Father's coeternal Son  
bore all my sins upon the tree.  
The immortal God hath died for me!  
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

Is crucified for me and you,  
to bring us rebels back to God.  
Believe, believe the record true,  
ye all are bought with Jesus' blood.  
Pardon for all flows from his side:  
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

Behold him, all ye that pass by,  
the bleeding Prince of life and peace!  
Come, sinners, see your Savior die,  
and say, "Was ever grief like his?"  
Come, feel with me his blood applied:  
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

WORDS: Charles Wesley, 1742

MUSIC: Isaac B. Woodbury, 1850

TUNE: SELENA

METER: 88.88.88

Tuesday, April 1

Read: Psalm 53; Leviticus 25:1-19; Revelation 19:9-10

### **The Spirit of Prophecy: A Message of Hope**

One spring evening, my then six-year-old grandson, Ben, declared it was movie night! He always loves movie nights, but this one was extra special because he was the only grandchild with us that evening, which meant he got to choose the movie. And his pick? *Power Rangers*. So, my husband, his parents, and I spent the evening watching him enjoy every moment of it.

The next morning, Ben asked me, “Did you like the movie?”

I smiled and told him, “I loved watching you enjoy it.”

Then he asked, “Was it the sad part? You know, the part where her mother died?”

I nodded. “Well, Ben, some of my favorite stories have sad parts.”

He looked at me with his big brown eyes and said, “Like Jesus?”

That simple question carried so much truth.

We often think of prophecy as bad news—the fiery words of street preachers, the warnings from Old Testament prophets, or John on Patmos telling us to *get our act together or be afraid... be very afraid*.

But John, the same one exiled on Patmos, tells us that the spirit of prophecy is not about fear. It’s about Jesus. The gospel—the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ—is the true spirit of prophecy.

And that means prophecy isn’t doom and gloom. It’s a message of **hope**.

To the early believers who had given up everything—jobs, family, stability—to follow Jesus, John’s words were a reminder to **hold on, to persevere**. Emmanuel, *God with us*, was still with them in their struggles. And the sad parts of life? They never get the final word.

There’s a quote from *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* that says:

**“Everything will be all right in the end. If it’s not all right, it is not yet the end.”**

The best stories have sad parts because they remind us of a greater truth: **With Jesus, sorrow is never the final chapter**. From death comes life. From sadness, joy. From struggle, perseverance. From ashes, hope.

And with Jesus, *everything will be all right in the end*.

And if it’s not all right yet? *Then it’s not the end*.

Prayer:

Redeeming and Restoring God,

We live in an age filled with wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, fires, and storms. Every day, politicians, journalists, and social media shout at us to be afraid—*be very afraid*.

But you have called us to be a people of **hope, not despair**.

You promised to be with us—not just in the good times, but in the struggles too. Help us to persevere. Like Julian of Norwich once said, “**All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.**”

May we live as a people of grace and joy in the midst of division and strife. May we be a resilient people of hope, sharing the good news of Jesus with a lost and hurting world.

Amen.

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

Wednesday, April 2

Read: Psalm 53; II Kings 4:1-7; Luke 9:10-17

God is so great. God can meet any need that we have. With all the perplexities we face in life today, we can know that God is in control, and we can place our hope in Him. We can even find and have *Hope from Ashes*.

II Kings 4:1-7 is a great illustration. Elisha confronted his situation where a woman was faced with the death of her husband, creating a bill she couldn't pay, and placing her sons in jeopardy of becoming slaves. She had nothing—except contact with a prophet who knew how great God is.

Elisha gave her specific instructions for taking what she did have in the house and using it. Then she was to watch how God would multiply everything she offered. In fact, she kept filling her jars, and her sons kept getting more jars to contain God's miracle, and then more oil was created. Elisha "The Man of God" told her to sell the olive oil and pay off her debts and she and her sons would live on what is left over.

Hope became reality! If you become so overwhelmed by the circumstances, you can get depressed, disillusioned and defeated. If you place your hope in God, He can make highways out of the desert, fill in the valleys, level the mountains, straighten the curves, and smooth in the rough places. (Isaiah 40:3-4)

Dr. Martin Luther King warned that we must learn "to accept finite disappointment but never lose infinite hope." Current situations are finite—God's hope is infinite. Finite responses will ultimately lead to defeat— infinite responses will ultimately lead to having our cups overflow.

The only hope that is for certain is the hope that we celebrate in what God does through His Son's life, death, and resurrection. Elisha gave the life lesson years before Jesus lived it out.

I heard two songs sung at church recently that give the message of hope. One is a new song "*HOPE*" sung by NewSong:

I can live for 40 days and nights  
Without a single bite to eat  
I can live for hours and hours  
Without a drop to drink  
And I can hold my breath  
For minutes at a time  
But I can't live a second without hope in my life.

The other song is an old gospel hymn which says:

My hope is built on nothing less  
than Jesus' blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame

but wholly lean on Jesus' name.  
On Christ the solid rock I stand,  
all other ground is sinking sand.

Trust in Him and experience abundant **HOPE** emerging from the **ASHES**.

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

Thursday, April 3

Read: Psalm 126; Isaiah 43:1-7; Philippians 2:19-24

Names are important. They are a gift, carefully chosen for us. Parents spend months deliberating, googling baby names, considering family traditions, or seeking inspiration from meaningful words. Some names carry legacies, passed down through generations, while others reflect hopes and dreams parents have for their child's future. No matter the origin, your name is personal—it identifies you, distinguishes you, and is woven into your very being.

Because of this, did you know that hearing your own name triggers a positive chemical response in your brain? Studies show that when someone says our name, our brain releases dopamine and serotonin—the “feel-good” hormones—creating a sense of joy and connection. It's no wonder human behavior expert Dale Carnegie once said, “A person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.”

Now, think about this: the God of the universe—the one who created the heavens and the earth—knows your name. Not only does God know it, but he calls you by name and claims you as his own. Let that sink in. The same God who formed the stars and set the world into motion looks at you with love and says, “You are mine.”

Even still, the hard truth in Isaiah 43 remains: life will not always be easy just because God calls us and knows us by name. This passage reminds us that challenges are inevitable, but for those who love God, there is always hope.

In Isaiah 43, God declares, “*When you pass through the waters... when you walk through fire... I will be with you.*” His presence changes everything. Even when the waters rise and the flames draw near, we can trust that we are never alone. The one who knows our name will sustain and carry us through every trial.

Lent is a season to reflect on this powerful truth. Have you ever faced a moment of deep struggle or felt abandoned, only to later realize that God was with you all along? How did that revelation shift your perspective? As you look back on God's faithfulness, how can those experiences strengthen your trust in him for the future?

Know this: No matter your circumstance, God sees you, God loves you, God calls you by name, and God is always with you. May this assurance fill you with hope today and always.

Prayer:

Gracious God, thank you for calling me by name and claiming me as your own. When the waters rise and the fires burn, remind me that I am never alone, for you are always with me. In this season of Lent, help me to reflect on your faithfulness and see the ways you have carried me all the days of my life. Strengthen my trust in your promises, replace my fear with faith, and fill my heart with the hope of your unshakable love. I surrender my worries to you, knowing that you are my refuge and my strength. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Kristen Wright '16 is Associate Pastor of the Ashland Place United Methodist Church in Mobile, Alabama.*



Friday, April 4

Read: Psalm 126; Isaiah 43:8-15; Philippians 2:25-3:1

When reading Psalm 126, the theme of this song is hard to miss: Joy. However, there is an underlying theme that continues to build as you progress from one sentence to the next: Hope. Psalm 126 is all about our hope in God. It is about how our hope in God will always restore our joy in Him and in life. It is a song of hope, a testimony of God's faithfulness in restoring His people. This Psalm recalls a time when God brought His people back from exile, describing it as something that was like a dream. I can think of many moments in my life when God answered a prayer so powerfully that it felt surreal. I am sure you have experienced that overwhelming joy as well. Perhaps it was a healing, a restored relationship, or an unexpected blessing? The joy you felt then is unlike any other joy you will feel.

In our lives, we often experience seasons of hardship – times of spiritual drought, emotional pain, or uncertainty. Yet, Psalm 126 reminds us that when we need restoration, God is standing by ready to provide it to us. He is faithful to bring joy after sorrow, healing after brokenness, and abundance after lack. There is always hope when God is our restorer.

The second half of the Psalm touches on hope in a different manner: *"Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!"* In short: hard work pays off! God has promised us that our suffering is not in vain. The work we do, even in difficulty, will yield a harvest. If you are in a season of struggle, keep planting seeds of faith. Keep praying, trusting, and walking in obedience. God is at work, even when you don't see it.

Farmers plant their crops with faith, believing the harvest will come. In the same way, our prayers, perseverance, and trust in God will bring forth a season of joy in His perfect timing. All we have to do is place our hope in Him.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Your faithfulness in restoring what is broken. Help me to trust You in seasons of waiting, knowing that You bring joy after sorrow. Strengthen my heart to sow in faith, even when I do not see immediate results. If we place our hope in You, You will bring us joy when we need it most. I believe that joy is coming, and I praise You even now for the great things You will do.

*Mr. Drew Harrell '11 is Director of Legislative Affairs for Alabama Governor Kay Ivey, serves as President of the Huntingdon College Alumni Board, and is a member of the First Baptist Church of Montgomery, Alabama.*

Saturday, April 5

Read: Psalm 126; Exodus 12:21-27; John 11:45-57

When I went to the Holy Land, we were shown what were known as tear ducts. They were these little jars of clay or glass which were used to save tears for funerals. They would be pulled out for either professional mourners to use at funeral processions or to hold onto after an event of mourning.

I was struck by such a process of preserving something which is often dismissed as tied to grief or pain. Yet for our ancient ancestors, tears were seen as holy, something to speak into both the pain and joy to come in human life. Thus, they were to be collected and either used again or held onto as a memory of the ones they loved.

Our psalmist in Psalm 126 speaks to the power of tears being a link to our joy. The psalmist begins by speaking of days gone by when things were good and there was joy and laughter. All could say the Lord was with the people. Then the psalmist cries for God to restore their fortunes like the flowing Negev River. God can take their tears and turn them to joy, bringing an abundance of life.

The psalmist names a profound truth with our tears; God takes these holy droplets of water and transforms them into joy. The tears point to the gifts God has given us and one of those gifts is that of love. When we cry, particularly in the face of death, we are celebrating the gift of life and love which is there.

The season of Lent invites us to face the mortality of those we love and our own. Often during this season, I think of the tears I have shed over those in my life who have died. When my father died on an Ash Wednesday eleven years ago, I learned how tears and grief are the price we pay for love. We cry because who we loved is not with us anymore and there is a profound hole in our hearts. And the tears do not stop after the funeral; they come repeatedly. The tears can come from seeing a show where the scenes of grief are similar, singing a hymn they loved to sing, or going to the spaces they loved.

Yet the psalmist names how these tears are the very thing to connect us to joy and to the Lord. God takes our tears and speaks to us about the things important to us: our faith in Jesus' presence, the gift of love we had from those dearly departed saints, and the opportunity to continue abundant life. We are reminded of how our very human tears are a gift from God pointing back to Jesus who dearly loves us. The season of Lent invites us to see our tears as gifts so our joy may be complete in the one who makes us whole and gives us joy eternal.

Prayer:

Holy God, we thank you for the gift of life. We give you thanks for our tears and the gift of love which speaks through them. Help us in this season of Lent to see our tears as hope from ashes. In Jesus name we pray.  
Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Hunter Pugh is Pastor of the Brantley and Brunson Chapel United Methodist churches. He also serves as adjunct faculty in the Religion Department at Huntingdon College.*

## The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Sunday, April 6

Read: Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8

When my family moved to Montgomery 11 years ago, one of the serendipities of our new home was the number of people whose travels brings them through Montgomery. Friends from Memphis to Ohio to North Carolina drive through Montgomery to get to where they want to be...THE BEACH! The quality of visit depended greatly on whether we visited with them on their excited and hope-filled way down or their exhausted and sand-filled way back home.

The Apostle Paul, in Philippians 3, talks about moving toward a destination. Namely, Paul wished to “attain the resurrection from the dead.” He wanted to be worthy of restoration when the end of days arrives, righteous in the eyes of God and affirmed in his being an heir to life. But how?

Paul is clear that his resume, as impressive as it is, will not get him there. Not his ethnicity. Not his family. Not his physical attributes. Not his knowledge. Not his strict following of the law. What Paul came to understand was that he could not do it on his own. For him to enjoy the “prize of the heavenly call,” Paul had to go THROUGH Jesus. Righteousness was not his to earn; it was Jesus’s to give.

In an age of empowerment and in a culture which highly values what a person earns, going through Jesus to gain life may feel idiosyncratic. What do I do if I can’t attain righteousness by pulling myself up from my bootstraps? What do you mean that I am unable to gain what I want on my own? What does it mean to go “through” Jesus?

Paul puts it succinctly. He wants to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.” In other words, Paul wants to lean into the story of Jesus, including his suffering.

Maybe the story from John can be helpful here. The story of Mary wiping the expensive ointment with her hair onto the feet of Jesus reveals an extravagant act of love and devotion. Through this act, Mary was leaning into the story of Jesus, seeking closeness with Jesus.

We cannot earn righteousness. However, through Jesus, we can reach our destination. So, may our love for Jesus be as extravagant as Mary’s. How does my worship of Jesus reveal extravagant love? How does my bank account, my use of financial resources, reveal extravagant love for Jesus? How does my calendar, my use of time, reveal extravagant love for Jesus?

The journey to righteousness only goes through Jesus.

Prayer:

God of the Apostles, grant me the wisdom to love Jesus more than my own accomplishments so that I might know righteousness that only come through Him, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, amen.

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

Monday, April 7

Read: Psalm 20; Exodus 40:1-15; Hebrews 10:19-25

For some time now, I have dreamt of walking the Camino de Santiago, an ancient pilgrimage with several trails leading to the city of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. The cathedral in the city is said to house the remains of St. James, one of the 12 disciples. The route that I would like to walk first begins in the French town of St. Jean Pied de Port. Each year, nearly 200,000 people walk this section of the Camino which requires you to walk almost 500 miles over the course of about a month. The French route of the Camino requires that pilgrims walk 12-15 miles per day as they stop in small towns along the route. The French Way also starts with a fairly difficult ascent through the Pyrenees mountains.

I should let you know that while I was an athlete in high school and college, I am not yet an avid hiker. I have yet to hike more than a few miles at one time and have certainly not tested very difficult terrain. My experience with the Camino only comes from the stories of friends and watching many hours of YouTube clips on the subject. While I may have no idea what I am getting myself into, this journey through France and Spain calls to me.

I believe this pilgrimage could be a physical enactment of the spiritual journey of life with all of its ups and downs, twists and turns, with the need to spend time in silence, with the need to develop community through shared experience. As in our spiritual journey, often we persevere by continuing to simply put one foot in front of the other. I look forward to the challenge of the Camino soon.

Lent is a season of preparation in the church. It originally helped converts prepare for baptism. During the season, many denominations practice fasting or giving up certain comforts or distractions in order to become closer to Christ as he journeys toward the cross.

In the lesson for today from the Epistle to the Hebrews, we get some pretty solid and straightforward advice on what our next steps or response should be as we follow Jesus on the journey. In the preceding verses, we learn that Jesus has offered the perfect sacrifice. Jesus has in fact become the sacrifice, the curtain, and the priest. He is the temple. His body is the temple. The old system has been transformed into a new and living way. God is in the middle of humanity.

Verses 19-25 suggest the response or next steps for pilgrims along life's journey. As we face uphill climbs and challenges of all sorts, we remember what Christ has done for us, and we are encouraged to persevere. The word "therefore" in the text serves as the transition point letting us know what is ours to do. We are told "let us...". The text tells us to confidently join together to do three things.

We are told "let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith." Jesus has shown us the way to be with God completely now and into eternity.

We are told "let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering." In the hard times, we stand firm. We know who we are because we know the One we follow. We know the formation that comes in the struggle and the ultimate glory we share in at its completion.

We are told "let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deed." In this time in our world today, it seems like most people know a lot about provoking one another. Usually, that means antagonizing others to act out in anger or rage and to hurt one another.

This text and our Christian walk call us to a different kind of provocation. We are to stir others up to love one another and to do all the good they can. That sounds like a pretty fun challenge that might require us to be a little playful and clever as we travel on in this journey.

I can't wait to pester and prod and simply love fellow pilgrims into loving more.

Friends, let us gear up and take the next step in our discipleship journey as we follow Jesus to the cross.

Prayer:

Oh Holy God, as we journey in this season of Lent, as we journey throughout life, there will be mountains, sometimes even just as we get started. There will be twists and turns and valleys. Some days we will be tired and might even consider giving up. This text encourages us to work together to keep our eyes on you, to draw near to you, to hold on to our hope, and encourage one another to love. We thank you for the confidence we find in being your children. We thank you for providing a way in the wilderness. May our journey always take us on the path of truth and life that we find in Jesus. Amen.

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

Tuesday, April 8

Read: Psalm 20; Judges 9:7-15; 1 John 2:18-28

Life often feels like a battlefield. Whether it's personal struggles, relational tensions, health crises, or unexpected losses, we all encounter moments when our plans crumble into ashes. When this happens, it is easy to feel like giving up. As followers of Christ, we are meant to be resilient in these moments. When life feels like it is crumbling around me I find it encouraging to read scriptures that speak of the power of God. One of these is Psalm 20. Psalm 20 speaks powerfully into our lives, offering a beacon of hope rising from the dust of defeat and despair.

Psalm 20 begins with a heartfelt prayer: *"May the Lord answer you when you are in distress"* (v.1). This is not just a distant hope but a confident plea rooted in God's character—the God of Jacob who has a history of rescuing His people. The psalm reminds us that God is not indifferent to our struggles. God listens, God remembers, and God responds.

So often we build up a sense of security around ourselves by investing our hope in human ingenuity and strength. We have a robust insurance industry in our country as we seek to insure ourselves from the possibility of calamity striking, but so often when calamity strikes those of us who are leaning on these human structures of self-reliance find ourselves adrift in the calamity.

Even if our preparations work as planned, we oftentimes find ourselves displaced and facing a season of hardship. Verse 7 of Psalm 20 draws a sharp contrast between the fleeting security of worldly power and the enduring strength found in God: *"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."* Chariots and horses represent human strength, the best that ancient armies could offer. Today, they might symbolize our careers, finances, relationships, or even our own abilities. These things can falter. They can burn to ashes.

However, our hope does not rest on what can be lost. Our hope rises from ashes because it is anchored in the love and provision of God. When everything else falls apart, God remains steady, sovereign, and strong.

The psalm ends with a victorious declaration: *"We rise up and stand firm"* (v.8). This is not because of our own strength but because of God's sustaining grace. Even when life feels like ruins around us, God lifts us up, sets our feet on solid ground, and renews our spirits with hope.

This passage also teaches us the power of communal faith and intercession. The people prayed for their king, recognizing that their leader's success was tied to God's favor. In the same way, we are called to support one another in prayer, lifting each other up when the weight of life becomes overwhelming. Hope grows stronger when shared within a community of faith.

Hope from ashes is not just about surviving hardships; it's about discovering a deeper, more resilient faith that flourishes even in the darkest times. It's about learning to sing songs of victory while the battle still rages, knowing that our God is with us. God sustains us, delivers us, and brings us through the ashes to hope and life.

Reflection Questions:

1. What "chariots and horses" have you been tempted to trust in during difficult times?
2. How have you experienced God's faithfulness when everything else seemed to fall apart?

3. What does it mean for you personally to rise and stand firm in God's strength today?

Prayer:

Lord, when my life feels like ashes, remind me that my hope is not in what I can see or control. My hope is in You—the God who hears, helps, and holds me. Teach me to trust not in fleeting things but in Your eternal name. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. David Morris '09 is Senior Pastor of Navarre United Methodist Church in Navarre, Florida.*

Wednesday, April 9

Read: Psalm 20; Habakkuk 3:2-15; Luke 18:31-34

“Beneath the Cross of Jesus”

*(United Methodist Hymnal, 297)*

Beneath the cross of Jesus  
I fain would take my stand,  
the shadow of a mighty rock  
within a weary land;  
a home within the wilderness,  
a rest upon the way,  
from the burning of the noontide heat,  
and the burden of the day.

Upon that cross of Jesus  
mine eye at times can see  
the very dying form of One  
who suffered there for me;  
and from my stricken heart with tears  
two wonders I confess:  
the wonders of redeeming love  
and my unworthiness.

I take, O cross, thy shadow  
for my abiding place;  
I ask no other sunshine than  
the sunshine of his face;  
content to let the world go by,  
to know no gain nor loss,  
my sinful self my only shame,  
my glory all the cross.

WORDS: Elizabeth C. Clephane, 1872

MUSIC: Frederick C. Maker, 1881

TUNE: ST. CHRISTOPHER

METER: 76.86.86.86



Thursday, April 10

Read: Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 53:10-12; Hebrews 2:1-9

Lent is a season marked by reflection, repentance, and renewal. It is a time when we confront the ashes of our own brokenness and sin, yet it also invites us to discover the hope that rises from those very ashes. The Scriptures for today—Psalm 31:9-16, Isaiah 53:10-12, and Hebrews 2:1-9—offer a glimpse into this journey from death to life.

**Psalm 31:9-16** shares the psalmist's cry for mercy amid suffering. The poet feels abandoned, caught in the weight of sorrow, grief, and oppression. He says, "My eyes grow weak with sorry; my soul and body with grief." (Psalm 31:9). Yet, even in his deepest despair, the psalmist turns to God, finding refuge in His steadfast love. In verse 14, he declares, "But I trust in you, Lord; I say, 'You are my God.'" There is an understanding that even when life crumbles around us, God is present, offering a hope that does not disappoint. From the ashes of our pain, God offers the gift of trust and renewal. Lent invites us to remember that no matter the depth of our sorrow, God's presence can transform and bring hope.

**Isaiah 53:10-12** takes us to the heart of the suffering servant—the prophetic vision of Jesus Christ, who would bear our sins to offer us redemption. Isaiah describes the servant's suffering as the very path to our healing: "It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer." (Isaiah 53:10). This passage teaches us that out of the deepest suffering, hope is birthed. Jesus, who was acquainted with grief, walked through the darkest moments of human experience to redeem them. Through His sacrifice, the ashes of human sin become the soil from which redemption and healing spring forth. The message of Lent, and indeed the message of the cross, is that Jesus' suffering brings us hope—not in spite of our pain, but through it.

**Hebrews 2:1-9** focuses on the glory of Jesus, who, though He shared in our suffering, is exalted above all things. The passage reminds us to pay attention to the gospel we have received, for it speaks of Christ's humanity, His identification with us in our weakness, and His victory over death. Hebrews 2:9 declares, "But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." Through Jesus's suffering, He has opened a pathway for us to experience the fullness of God's glory and grace. The ashes of Christ's death have become the pathway to our hope, as He triumphed over death and freely offers us eternal life.

### Hope from Ashes

Lent is a reminder that our brokenness, suffering, and sins—are not the end of the story. Through the suffering of Christ, we have been invited into a new reality. The cross, though a symbol of death, is also the ultimate symbol of hope. It reminds us that our darkest moments are not wasted. They are moments that God can use to transform us, renew us, and shape us into the image of His Son.

As we continue walking through Lent, may we be reminded that from the ashes of our sins, God can birth a new creation. Just as Christ rose from the ashes of the tomb, so too will we rise, transformed by the power of His love.

Let us embrace that hope together.

Prayer:

Lord,

As we continue in this Lenten season, we come before you with hearts wide open—acknowledging our

brokenness, our sorrow, and our sin. In the ashes of our pain and the weight of our grief, we trust in your steadfast love. Even when life seems to crumble, you remain our refuge and firm foundation.

Thank you Father for the gift of forgiveness and redemption that you offer through your Son Jesus' suffering, for He alone brings us hope. Through His pain, we find our healing, and through His death, we are invited into new life.

Lord, help us to embrace the journey of Lent with open hearts, knowing that even in our suffering, you are at work to transform and renew us. May the ashes of this season give way to the joy of resurrection, as we are transformed by your Holy Spirit and walk more fully in the abundant life you offer us all.

In Jesus' name,  
Amen.

*The Reverend Jagger Eastman '15 is Executive Pastor of Ministries at Crosspoint Church, a Global Methodist congregation in Niceville, Florida.*

Friday, April 11

Read: Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 54:9-10; Hebrews 2:10-18

“By Night when Others Soundly Slept”

Anne Bradstreet, 1612-1672

By night when others soundly slept  
And hath at once both ease and Rest,  
My waking eyes were open kept  
And so to lie I found it best.

I sought him whom my Soul did Love,  
With tears I sought him earnestly.  
He bow'd his ear down from Above.  
In vain I did not seek or cry.

My hungry Soul he fill'd with Good;  
He in his Bottle put my tears,  
My smarting wounds washt in his blood,  
And banisht thence my Doubts and fears.

What to my Saviour shall I give  
Who freely hath done this for me?  
I'll serve him here whilst I shall live  
And Love him to Eternity.

Saturday, April 12

Read: Psalm 31:9-16; Leviticus 23:1-8; Luke 22:1-13

### **Making Room for Jesus**

In our time, we have traditions that invoke memories and the re-telling of stories from days of old. Though we have no laws that dictate these seasons for us, it is in the fabric of our culture that tells us it's time to start preparing. Department stores and ads online clue us into when Christmas, Valentine's Day or Easter are coming usually months in advance. For other occasions, we have reminders on our calendars, or you might have children who won't let you forget how many days there are until their birthday!

As someone who works in the church, there is no forgetting when we are in the liturgical seasons of Advent or Lent. But ironically, as someone who works in the church, I can also easily forget to set aside time to prepare my heart during these busy holy seasons. I can often slip into task mode while forgoing the examination of my heart. Knowing this about our shared human experience, it makes me wonder how Peter and John must have approached Jesus's deliberate directions to "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover" (Luke 22:8)? Were they wondering about the logistics? Were they concerned the meal would be ready in time?

Jesus answers them with detailed instructions that were certainly not haphazard: look for a man carrying a jar of water, follow him and secure the upper room. Every detail was orchestrated for the sacred Jewish feast that had been rehearsed since Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Their obedience and the unfolding of Jesus' instructions remind us that preparation is a vital part of our spiritual journey, especially during the season of Lent.

Lent is a season of intentional preparation for the Christian, calling us to examine our hearts and lives. Just as Peter and John made tangible preparations for the Passover meal, we are invited to make spiritual preparations for the celebration of Christ's resurrection. This may involve fasting, prayer, acts of service, and self-examination.

In our Lenten journey, we too are called to trust in God's plan, even when details seem unclear. Jesus invites us to follow Him, to listen for His voice, and to trust that He is leading us exactly where we need to be. When we surrender our plans to Him, we discover that He has already gone ahead of us, preparing the way. Just like the upper room was furnished and ready, we are called to make room for Jesus in our lives. As we journey toward the cross, let us prepare our hearts with repentance, gratitude and expectation.

Prayer:

Lord, as we walk through this Lenten season, help us to prepare our hearts as Peter and John prepared the upper room. Teach us to trust Your guidance, to make space for Your presence, and to reflect on Your great sacrifice. May our preparation lead us closer to You, so that we may fully embrace the joy of Your resurrection. Amen.

*The Reverend Rebecca Rutherford is Senior Associate Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Marianna, Florida and the founding Pastor of Restoration United Methodist Church in Cottondale, Florida. She is the mother of a second-year student at Huntingdon College.*

## Palm Sunday

April 13

Read: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Luke 19:28-40

For seasoned Christians, the celebratory spirit of Palm Sunday might seem a little odd given our knowledge of the subsequent events that occurred after Jesus's arrival in Jerusalem that will be commemorated in the upcoming days of Holy Week. But let's not get ahead of ourselves!

Palm Sunday celebrates Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem, and it was an occasion met with great excitement. Many believed Him to be the Messiah, and they cheered His arrival. He was a vessel of hope, and He was considered the blessed King who had come in the name of the Lord. The people had an expectation that He was an agent of peace. Joy abounded then in the hope of the Lord, and joy should be abundant today.

The arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem was akin to a celebrity or dignitary arriving at a location today. But unlike the King or Queen of England, there was no horse-drawn ornate chariot that Jesus rode into Jerusalem. He didn't have a presidential motorcade with all of the pomp and circumstance surrounding it. He wasn't Taylor Swift arriving at the Grammy's in a limousine with a red-carpet runway. No, our Jesus made his triumphant arrival in Jerusalem on a colt. He rode in on a meager donkey - a symbol of his humility and modesty. And the crowds that greeted Jesus didn't just wave at Him from behind a rope-line or security barricade. They approached Him and placed their cloaks along His path, an expression of their deep respect, reverence, and admiration for Him. They were exuberant in their welcome.

On this Palm Sunday, let us approach Jesus with the energy and zeal He received from the crowd when He arrived in Jerusalem. Let our hope in Him guide our lives and give us peace as we navigate the complexities of life. May we be Christ-like in our humility, and may we also have a spirit of sacrifice in this last week of the Lenten season as an expression of our love for Jesus and gratitude for Him as we celebrate this Holy Week.

Prayer:

Lord, we enthusiastically celebrate you today! We welcome you into our hearts, into our worship spaces, and into our lives. We praise you for your son, Jesus, who modeled humility for us. Use us in this upcoming Holy Week celebration to point others to you and to share the hope and peace that can only be found in you. Amen.

*Dr. Anthony Leigh is the 15<sup>th</sup> President of Huntingdon College.*

## Monday of Holy Week

April 14

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

Yesterday's palms are lying on sanctuary floors and are conspicuously placed in pew racks by children who could not see over the height of so many adults. The palms have begun drawing, cut off from their life source. Only a stalked stump remains where the palms once thrived. Shouts of "Hosanna" wither as quickly as the dying palms. Few will trek from Palm Sunday to Easter by stepping on the stones of Holy Week, but those who do find an honesty about humanity's relationship with God, especially in the seasons we feel cut off, withered, exiled from God, others, and self.

Isaiah accompanies the totality of Jesus' life, like his own heartbeat. Like a tonic note to which we return to find our pitch. In Second Isaiah, we hear an anonymous voice singing from the Babylonian exile. Jewish interpretation and most Christian scholarship understand this Servant of the Songs to be Israel personified. Christians ascribe the Servant of the Lord to Jesus, the man of sorrows, God's beloved. However, to listen carefully to this ancient hymn from Isaiah reveals colorful nuance for us all. When entering Holy Week, Passover week, or any collective season in which God's people find themselves, one must prepare to enter deeper waters relying on the buoyancy of grace to rescue us from life's ambiguities, chaos, and exile. This text, for the Judeo-Christian experience, invites and dares one/us to step into an unknown future. Isaiah's words are a threshold. Between past and future, pain and healing, exile and freedom, darkness and light, "Hosanna" and "Crucify him," from the edge of uncertainty to the glimmer of hope.

Whether you read this Servant of the Lord as Jesus, Israel, or as yourself the import remains: when God's people stand in the ambiguous and liminal space of our humanity, albeit stumbling home as exiles or prodigals, from celebration to lament, and back, God's Spirit will rest up *us*. The *togetherness* of life, like Holy Week, is where the glory of God will be found, rising anew in the lives of God's people who are the intersection of revelation and commitment.

Prayer:

Holy One, from life's ashes, we rise together by your grace alone, but together with one another, and into the promised hope of becoming a people of justice, righteousness, and servants within our spheres of influence. Thank you for your faithfulness, for never giving up on us, and for the song of hope we sing together from generations past. We stand on the shoulders of many and, together, strengthen our own shoulders for your dream of a brighter, more hope-filled, future. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour as we enter this Holy Week. To you alone we rise and give our praise. Amen.

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

## Tuesday of Holy Week

April 15

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

On Holy Tuesday, Jesus and his disciples return to Jerusalem. When a crowd of people were eager to speak to him, Jesus takes the opportunity to share more with them about his impending death and urge them to “walk in the light.”

The season of Lent is a communal endeavor. It gives us the time to draw closer to God through reflection and repentance. We can, as the Body of Christ, confess the ways that we have failed to be an obedient church. Then together ponder the ways that we can better abide in God’s love, hear the cries of the needy, and love our neighbors.

Lent can also be a personal endeavor—expressing itself in many ways in the hearts and lives of believers. For me, in this year, Lent looks like spending time in prayer and contemplation of what it is God is calling me to now, or as, Paul writes to the church in Corinth, “Consider your own call, siblings in Christ.” Not in a week when my to-do list isn’t so full. Not in a month or two when I finally turn in that project I’ve been working on. To borrow Jesus’s words, how can we “walk in the light” now while we still have it.

Our call as disciples of Jesus Christ is to walk in the light. We do this through clinging to whatever is true, acting in ways of love, speaking in ways of peace, and to continually discern the truth that God is calling us to now.

The truth contradicts the accepted norms of this world. In particular, John alerts his readers to the enchanting powers of the world. There can be no compromise. Jesus is King. The emperor is not. As we walk the final days of Lent through Holy Week, this truth both sustains and challenges us as we contemplate Jesus’ death and glorification.

Prayer:

May we all become children of the light.

*Mrs. Lucy Burch '21 is in chaplain residency at Duke University Hospital in Durham, North Carolina. She has been approved for commissioning as a provisional elder in the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.*

## Wednesday of Holy Week

April 16

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

### At the Table

On this Wednesday of Holy Week, our Gospel text places us at the table where Jesus shares a Passover meal with his disciples. For those gathered, sharing food and fellowship with Jesus would have been a familiar part of their daily lives. However, this meal would soon take a dramatic turn as Jesus declares, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.”

As the disciples exchange uncertain glances, trying to grasp the weight of Jesus’ words, one disciple—the one whom Jesus loved—leans in and asks, “Who is it?” Rather than naming the betrayer outright, Jesus responds, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” He then dips the bread and hands it to Judas Iscariot, saying, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” The Gospel tells us that in that moment, Satan entered Judas, and he immediately left the room, stepping out into the night.

As we journey through Holy Week, this passage presents us with two individuals who make profoundly different choices. On one hand, there is Judas, who betrays his Master for thirty pieces of silver. On the other, there is the disciple whom Jesus loved, reclining as close to the Lord as possible. In reflecting on this scene, Christians may ask themselves: Where would I be at this table? Few would identify with Judas, and some might boldly claim to be right beside Jesus. In reality, most of us would find ourselves somewhere in between—not actively betraying him, but not necessarily as close as we could be.

Yet, this passage is not ultimately about Judas or the beloved disciple—it is about Jesus and his actions. Knowing what would unfold that night, Jesus had already knelt to wash the feet of each disciple, including Judas. In this moment of betrayal, he does not lash out in anger, as many of us might. Instead, he offers Judas a piece of bread, an act of hospitality and grace. Rather than meeting betrayal with bitterness, Jesus responds with love and humility.

Through this passage, Jesus teaches us about grace. He shows that the response to wrongdoing—even from an enemy—is not retaliation or resentment, but love. As you reflect on where you might be at this table, take comfort in this truth: no matter where you stand in the room or in your faith journey, Jesus offers the same love and grace to everyone at the table. Because that is who he is.

Prayer:

Gracious and merciful God, on this Holy Wednesday, we sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples, hearing his words of love even in the face of betrayal. We confess that, like the disciples, we struggle to remain close to you. At times, we fail you; at times, we fall away. Yet, your grace remains. Teach us to respond to hurt not with anger but with love, just as Jesus did. May we always receive and extend the grace you so freely give. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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



## Holy Thursday

April 17

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

At the Last Supper Jesus celebrates a sacrificial meal with his closest disciples. As his last meal with his friends, it is a powerful and intimate setting. The Passover meal is already a sacrificial meal that marks the deliverance of God's people out of slavery (Ex. 12), and now Jesus gives his followers a sacrificial meal that celebrates his self-offering to the Father, a sacrifice for all of humanity that delivers us from "slavery to sin and death" (UMC Great Thanksgiving). Yes, Jesus gives himself to his followers: *take and eat; drink of this*, but first he offers himself to the Father in sacrificial love: *this is my body that is for you; the new covenant in my blood*.

Have you ever reflected on the idea that our Communion liturgy is a reflection—indeed a repetition!—of the Last Supper? At the Supper, Christ took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to the disciples. Our eucharist (thanksgiving) is modeled after Jesus' four-fold action of taking, thanking, breaking, and giving. When we celebrate Communion, we find ourselves in the same place as the disciples at the Last Supper, receiving God's grace and forgiveness through the bread and cup.

The Lord's Supper has a past, present, and future dimension to it. We remember Christ's once-for-all saving work; he is truly present with us here and now; and we pray for unity "until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet." St. Paul speaks of the present, past, and future when he says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Likewise, at each Communion we proclaim: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again."

As Wesley says poetically:

O might the sacred word set forth our dying Lord,  
Point us to thy suffering past, present grace and impart,  
Give our ravished souls a taste, pledge of glory in our heart

When we join in the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit joins us to Christ's saving work on the cross. "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 10:16)? Sharing in the body and blood of Christ means sharing in his sacrificial love to the Father: "we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us." When we respond to God's offer of forgiveness and grace in this holy mystery, we are also committing to imitate the one we love through a life of sacrificial discipleship.

We know what sacrificial discipleship looks like even as we find it challenging to live out. In John's Gospel at Passover, Jesus demonstrates his love for us: "Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him" (13:5). The Lenten season is the time, once again, when we confess our sins and cleanse our hearts and commit to loving God and neighbor: "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (13:15).

Prayer:

Let us pray with Psalm 116:

I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my supplications.

Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live...

I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord...

I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord. Amen.

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

## Good Friday

April 18

Read: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25

Nearing the end of the Lenten season we now arrive at the day considered by Christians to be the darkest in history. The death of our Lord was celebrated and crowds gathered to cheer for his crucifixion. Jesus, a humble carpenter from Nazareth, was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The servant of the Lord flogged, crucified, and mocked for the afflictions of humankind.

The Messiah who sits at the right hand of the throne of God interceding on our behalf is not a distant or apathetic God. Rather Christ is the God that took on servanthood and became acquainted with suffering. The Son of Man's sufferings represent the greatest act of love. Not only do these sufferings make a way for our reconciliation with God, but they give us a perfect picture of a God who stands in solidarity with the broken and hurting. God could have chosen many ways to communicate the love and forgiveness that is offered through Christ to all of humanity with us, but the Lord chose to do it in such a way that the anointed one himself would be brought low.

In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Minister and theologian James Cone writes this of the cross, "The gospel of Jesus is not a rational concept to be explained in a theory of salvation, but a story about God's presence in Jesus' solidarity with the oppressed, which led to his death on the cross. What is redemptive is the faith that God snatches victory out of defeat, life out of death, and hope out of despair." The servant of the Lord who was crushed understands the pains of injustice and oppression far more than we ever can; however, he also loves his fellow brothers and sisters more than we ever can. The sacrificial love of Christ on the cross reconciles a sinful world to the Father.

We currently live in a world riddled with injustice and oppression. Those on the fringes of society are often looked down upon and mocked by the majority. Looking to the darkness of the sufferings of Christ we know that because we have a Lord who by his blood has opened for us a new and living way we are called to provoke one another to love and good deeds (Heb 10:19-24). As members of the community of faith, we are called to walk in the example of Christ and draw near to the oppressed and needy, offering to them the love and acceptance that Christ offers to us all.

Prayer:

Lord, you are the God who is near to us in all things. You are אֱלֹהֵי רָאָה, the God who sees. You are the God that sought out Hagar in her fear and anger and then cared for her. You are the God that took on flesh and humbled yourself to sufferings as a way to show us your love. You are always moving us towards an ultimate redemption. Thank you for revealing yourself to us in Christ and for identifying with us in our sorrows. Through your Spirit make us imitators of Christ and move us to love others. In your Son's holy and matchless name we pray, amen.

*Ms. Savannah Smith is a senior Religion student at Huntingdon College from Mobile, Alabama. Savannah seeks to continue her education through graduate theological studies.*

## Holy Saturday

April 19

Read: Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24; Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16; 1 Peter 4:1-8; John 19:38-42

When I read John's description of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus caring for the body of Jesus, I am touched by their quiet care. Both Joseph and Nicodemus are described as disciples, yet we are also told that they follow Jesus in secret, out of fear. Fear has not kept them from retrieving Jesus's body, though. John tells us of their deliberate and determined efforts: working together to wrap the remains with their own hands and, with great expense, carefully lodging the body of their lord in a safe place.

I have known many disciples like Joseph and Nicodemus. They are quiet. They do not want to preach, or teach, and they often hum along with the hymns if they sing at all. They do not proclaim their faith quickly like Peter or boldly like Paul. Yet the Josephs and Nicodemuses that I have known find ways to serve and show their devotion behind the scenes: mowing the church lawn when no one is around, bringing a casserole to an overwhelmed caregiver, taking the trash can to the road for the family that unexpectedly had to be at the hospital. Most of us have benefited from their care and love at some point in our lives. We didn't have to ask. They knew what "needed doing," and they did it. And, although their actions were straightforward and practical, we felt the trace evidence of their tender, quiet love for us in every gesture.

I'm a professor and a preacher, and I can get pretty wrapped up in words and ideas. I like to understand things and to strive ambitiously towards greater heights of knowledge and faith. Maybe you do, too. But on this Holy Saturday, I think it is a good time to consider those disciples whose faith centers not around complicated ideas or bold spiritual declarations or courageous moral stands, but around quietly and tenderly attending to what is material. In the material world is found, after all, the most fragile and delicate parts of God's beloved creation, the most easily ignored or trampled.

Holy Saturday is a good day for me (and you?) to practice the Joseph and Nicodemus kind of discipleship. Maybe this looks like behind-the-scenes actions such as sitting with someone in the hospital or bringing flowers to a grieving neighbor. Or maybe it can be even smaller, even quieter (and even more tender): brushing my daughter's hair more slowly, more gently; setting aside the kitchen work to pet the hovering dog nearby; holding a loved one's hand a little longer, and with intention; or massaging lotion into my own winter-dry hands with all the attention due to a beloved child of God.

The spiritual aspect of our faith is important, and there will be times when we are called upon to live that faith in bold and brilliant ways. On this Holy Saturday may we join Joseph and Nicodemus in quiet, loving devotion, perhaps without any words at all, knowing that just as we care for—"do unto"—these living bodies around us, we care for the body of our Lord.

Prayer:

Dear God, on days like Holy Saturday we are confronted with so much brokenness. We recognize how delicate physical life is, how easily wounded and trampled. In these moments, lead us toward tender and quiet care for all you have created, in all its fragile beauty. Amen.

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

## Resurrection of the Lord

Sunday, April 20

Read: Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; John 20:1-18

“The Day of Resurrection”

*(United Methodist Hymnal, 303)*

The day of resurrection!  
Earth, tell it out abroad;  
the passover of gladness,  
the passover of God.  
From death to life eternal,  
from earth unto the sky,  
our Christ hath brought us over,  
with hymns of victory.

Our hearts be pure from evil,  
that we may see aright  
the Lord in rays eternal  
of resurrection light;  
and listening to his accents,  
may hear, so calm and plain,  
his own "All hail!" and, hearing,  
may raise the victor strain.

Now let the heavens be joyful!  
Let earth the song begin!  
Let the round world keep triumph,  
and all that is therein!  
Let all things seen and unseen  
their notes in gladness blend,  
for Christ the Lord hath risen,  
our joy that hath no end.

WORDS: John of Demascus, trans. By John Mason Neale, 1862

TUNE: LANCASHIRE

MUSIC: Henry T. Smart, 1835

METER: 76.76 d



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