

I love watching toddlers get around. As they grow and learn about their abilities, their bodies, and their surroundings, more often than not they run! They also seem to be joy-filled as they journey forward in life.

To be so full of good news that we run joyfully forward in life is one of the nicest parts of Easter. Christ is Risen and we run (metaphorically perhaps) into the places and people of our lives. We cannot help but share and embody the Good News that Jesus Christ is alive, well, and present in us and in the Church.

Because of the Resurrection, we have life and we have it abundantly. We are not wrapped in grave-cloths and entombed. We are alive. So live – rejoice – proclaim the Gospel – he lives! This is the defining truth in our lives and in the world.

*Life-giving God, with joy we celebrate the fullness
of the mystery of your love and redemption.*

We give thanks for life made new in Jesus Christ.

*Impel us into our world with renewed vigor and joy,
that we may gladly tell—in word, and in deed—the story
of Christ's resurrection, and of our own!*

Alleluia! Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!



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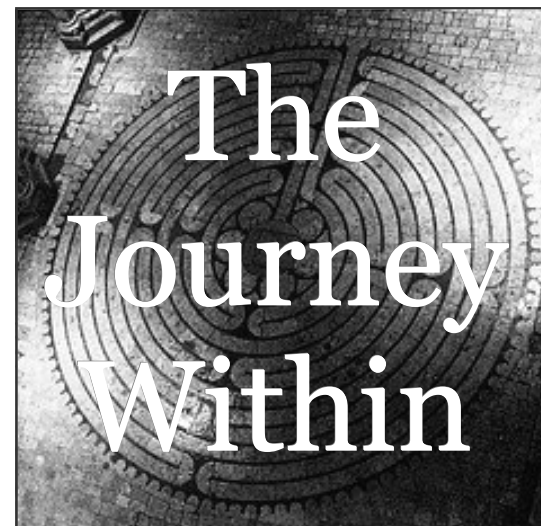
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For more information, contact Rev. David T. Chafin, Editor: dchafin@wvdisciples.org

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in West Virginia
1402 Washington Avenue - Parkersburg, WV 26101

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Lenten Prayerscapes:



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Yes, they laughed at his absurd presence—the crown of thorns, the sign nailed above his head. Quite a kingly presence he was. Ha! Ha! Ha! His lips were dry and his throat too. He felt the sour sponge on his lips. It was enough to let words fly. Last words: “Into your hands I commend my Spirit.”

Later, when the curtain descended, it was nearly torn in two.

Someone said, “Well, he certainly didn’t break a leg out there.” But he did break the open the heavens, break loose from the tomb, and break us free to love and live, even as he lived and loved, in this life and in the life to come.

*In this awful day of memories, we await your assurance, O God.
Help us to find hope beyond death, but also hope within this life,
that we may live and love as Christ has loved,
and give as he has given.*

Holy Saturday: Apr. 11

—from Rev. David Chafin
Deputy Regional Minister

Read Romans 8:1-11

“Death cannot keep his prey...He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!” The words of the hymn may seem a vague fantasy to the rational minds of many of us, who see the signs of death all around.

Yet even in this day of grave silence, we see the glimmer of the resurrection just beyond the night’s horizon. It will not be for nothing that we watch and wait this night. The promise of the empty tomb will be fulfilled. Let us trust in the One who gives the promise!

*You are utterly trustworthy, O God. You do not leave your
chosen one in the dust. Help us to be open to your surprising
possibilities as we watch and wait through this long night ahead.*

Destination: Empty Tomb

*Our Lenten journey has come to a joyous close.
Our Savior is victorious over death,
and through Christ we know forgiveness, healing, and life eternal.
While our Lenten journey is over, our spiritual journey continues.*

Easter Sunday: Apr. 12

—from Rev. Thaddaeus B. Allen
Regional Minister

Read John 20:1-18

Have you ever been so full of life that you simply had no choice but to run?

suspect, must always withhold trust, must ever be wary of the “other”?

As we place ourselves at this table with Christ, let us question in these coming hours just whose part we will play—for our roles in the story may be many.

*Help me to see my place at the table with you, Lord.
May I find godly sorrow in my failures,
repentance for my own treachery,
and peace in your loving hand which feeds me still.*

Maunder Thursday: Apr. 9 —from Rev. Bonnie Thurston
Wheeling, WV

Read Exodus 12:1-14

It's easy to get lost in the richness of the details. In the profound symbolism Christians borrowed from Judaism, the drama of Exodus 12:1-14, we can miss the *reason* for the community meal (v. 3-4, 6), the spotless lamb (v. 5), the blood (v. 7, 13), the unleavened bread and bitter herbs (v. 8), all to be eaten dressed for travel (v. 11) because this is *the* feast of liberation. At great cost to the Egyptians (v. 12), God provided a way out of bondage. At great cost to himself, God still does—in the slaughter of His *own* firstborn. The Passover images the meaning of Christ's Passion: from Table to Garden to Cross to Empty Tomb, this is *our* story of liberation. Tonight we feast because “For freedom Christ has set us free, (Galatians 5:1; 5:13-14.) through body broken, blood spilled. “Do this in remembrance.” “Observe it as a perpetual ordinance.”

*As we approach your common table, O God,
we find there uncommon things amid the common:
Life and forgiveness, hope and comfort,
a new family and a new mission, bread and wine.
Thanks be to you, O God, for your marvelous gifts!*

Good Friday: Apr. 10 —from Rev. Larry Grimes
Community Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Beech Bottom
Read John 19:31-37

“Break a leg,” someone said as the curtain rose and he was shoved to center stage.

They cheered when he walked into the light. They shouted, like he was the Messiah or something.

Then it was clear. His legs would not be broken, but sides would split with mocking laughter. In the midst of all the laughter a scream welled up from his lungs. His lips said, “Father, why have you forsaken me? “

At the Beginning

*Our Lenten journey begins at the beginning—
examination of ourselves, an assessment of our spiritual being,
and an acknowledgement of where we are.*

We begin there and move through confession of sin toward where God calls us.

Ash Wednesday: Feb. 25 —from Rev. Joshua Patty
Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Fairmont
Read Hebrews 12:1-13

*“Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time,
but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness
to those who have been trained by it.” v.11*

It begins with a confession, “Create in me a clean heart,” and ashes smudged on our bodies. For most, it is easy to realize we've made mistakes, we've not lived our lives as God intended. A noble and necessary confession, but where does it lead us?

Some will withhold pleasures. No chocolate or sugar. No meat. No video games. No alleluias. Some will attend extra Bible studies, book groups, service projects, prayer meetings. Some will read devotionals.

Where do you want to go this Lent? After the smudged ashes are washed away, what will you do? Will you focus on what you're giving up for six weeks? Will you just add a few more things to your weekly to-do list? Do these things get to the heart of the matter?

Or will you take the challenge offered in Hebrews? Will you seek the Lord's discipline in your life? Will you ask God to scold you when you make mistakes and then to guide you toward living a better life – more honest, more caring, more loving, more giving, more faithful? Will you accept God's discipline to pray not only more often, but more openly – giving of yourself and receiving of God? Will you accept God's discipline to strengthen your spiritual legs, that you might walk more faithfully on God's path, rather than staggering down your own?

You must decide how you will spend these forty days. The promise is clear. By the time you celebrate again the glorious resurrection of Jesus, you can be well on your way toward experiencing the peaceful fruit of righteousness that God wants you to enjoy.

But you've got to make the trip; you've got to do the work. Step by step, day by day, with God by your side. Godspeed on this Lenten journey.

*Gracious God, walk with me these next days and discipline my heart
and spirit so that I may more faithfully follow your way.*

Thursday: Feb. 26

—from Pastor Judy Bennett

Island Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Wheeling

Read John 1:29-34

Behold! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

What does this mean to us as we begin the long, spiritual journey within that takes us down that lonesome road and up the hill of Calvary with our Savior? Most importantly is the knowledge that there is enough saving power in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the entire world. There is enough saving power for each of us who confess honestly that we sin and fall short of claiming all that God wants for our lives.

As we journey toward the cross, Jesus invites us to look straight into His eyes and become totally open to the abundance of the grace that is offered. Stop the denial! Shed the excess baggage of the sin that stunts our spiritual growth. Behold Jesus who takes away our sin!

*God of abundant mercy, may we behold you anew
as we journey together in this Lenten season.*

Friday: Feb. 27

—from Pastor Rae Browning

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Cumberland, MD

Read Psalm 22

This Psalm begins with the same words that Jesus cried to His Heavenly Father: “My God, My God why have you forsaken me,” a cry that holds agony in the desire of God, assuring us that we too must cry out to God acknowledging our need for Him, putting God first in all.

We will have pain, suffering, trials, desolation, hostility and even death. We will never experience what Jesus chose to do for us, but God knows we are here. God’s promise to eternity through Jesus will carry us through this transitional journey.

Let us live our lives as Jesus lived, knowing that Jesus’ faith in God’s promise prevailed. Though he cried out, “My God, my God,” his faith was maintained in that the Lord was still “my” God. We are chosen by Jesus to be saved. Though at times we might feel His absence, let us continue to pray, “My God, My God.” He is with us.

*God, give us patience, courage and strength
to allow your wonderful works to prevail.*

May all generations be brought unto You through Jesus Christ.

Saturday: Feb. 28

—from Rev. Robert Brooks

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), New Martinsville

Read Titus 3:1-8

of one of their own from the dead, threatened religious leaders plotted to take the life of Jesus and Lazarus, the recipient of the “sign”.

On Palm Sunday, John’s gospel reminds us, the joy of waving palm branches and shouting “Hosanna” is meshed in conflict. At what point will each of us decide the conflict surrounding our faith is too challenging? At first, the crowd stood steadfast and “testified” for Jesus. Days later (John 18:41), the crowd traded Jesus for a bandit. John reminds us, the disciples did not understand these things until the glory of Jesus came as the sign of God’s hope.

We often do not understand, O Lord.

Give us an open spirit, that we may find hope in these days.

Holy Tuesday: Apr. 7

—from Rev. Gary Patton

Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Huntington

Read Isaiah 49:1-7

A general truth about humans is that we may choose to be by ourselves, but we hate to be left out. Memories of not being invited to a party, or being overlooked when the teams were being chosen for a game, can sting for years.

Isaiah has spoken a profound and reassuring truth. We have been called by God from the beginning of our existence. In the Father’s view, you are not an afterthought or just added in after everyone else has been invited. From the beginning, God knew your name. (vs. 1) In a world where everyone sooner or later gets despised or shunned (vs. 7), the Holy One, the Redeemer has chosen you and will show His strength through you.

*I rejoice in you, O God, for you have always known me,
always chosen me, and always been nearer than my closest breath.*

*Now let me find your strength in the midst of my weakness,
and rejoice in you.*

Holy Wednesday: Apr. 8

Read John 13:21-32

How naïve we mortals can be! Those closest to Jesus seem to not know the treachery at work in this twisted plot. And as much as we who think we know “the whole story” want to yell to those pictured in this scene the name of the traitor, we might well have been as flummoxed by the experience as they were, had we been present.

In John’s telling, Jesus knows the details. We might secretly chide him for bringing close to his side someone who could commit such a heinous act. But what value is there in living a life that must always

may be difficult to love. God's Spirit will move between you, and you will feel found. That is a "foundation" upon which you can reset your spiritual compass.

*God who forgives and loves even me,
crumble my illusions of who I am
that I may love another.*

Holy Week: Are We There Yet?

*Impatience. In our 24/7 culture,
we have come to expect everything instantaneously.
However, our walk with God cannot be hurried.
Our journey into Jerusalem must take its course.*

Palm/Passion Sunday: Apr. 5

—from Rev. William B. Allen
Regional Minister Emeritus

Read Mark 11:1-10

We always come to Palm Sunday with a sense of puzzlement.

There is this parade that evidently has only one unit, Jesus on a colt. And however they portray it, even in the most complementary films, it looks a little awkward with our Lord's feet dusting the road while the little creature struggles under the load. Hardly a parade at all.

Then there is the brooding awareness that this week will unfold with the most terrible events in human history, the torture and death of the Son of God.

And yet, in spite of these puzzles, we are drawn to the scene of the borrowing of the little donkey, and the spreading of clothes and branches before the Savior, and we join the shouts of "Hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord... Hosanna in the highest heaven."

The best I can figure out is that somewhere in our hearts and minds there lurks the conviction that God takes small things, and even evil things, and turns them to God's own redemptive purposes.

*As I stand in wonder before the passion of the Christ,
help me to find your redeeming story within it,
and within my own story.*

Holy Monday: Apr. 6

—from Rev. Dennis Sparks
West Virginia Council of Churches

Read John 12:9-19

Sometimes good news comes in an entangled mess and flurry of dangerous conflict. As the crowd followed Jesus, celebrating His raising

As we begin our Lenten journey it is healthy for us to "take stock" of where we are in our walk with God and where God wants us to be. What motivates us?

Our first reading says that ambition in life motivated by envy is a destructive characteristic (Titus 3:3). It drives people to perform in ways that do not bless God or demonstrate that they are loving their neighbor as themselves. For instance Saul envied David and focused on himself to his own demise. David envied Uriah and coveted Uriah's wife Bathsheba. That ended in Uriah's death and eventually David's own fall.

Ambition like that of Jesus, which moves you to see what you can do to better serve God and bless others in the process is the better choice. So, If you notice that you feel intense reactions to others' success -- make note of it and spend time in honest self-reflection asking God to help show you the basis of your heart. As our text tells us "...these things are excellent and profitable for everyone."

*Loving God, show me the basis of my heart and lead me to a life
of using my ambition to bless others as you have blessed me.*

Week 1: God's Loving Paths

*It is never easy to look into ourselves and acknowledge and own what we find.
While the path may have some difficult turns, it is paved with God's love.
Our journey is sure.*

First Sunday in Lent: Mar. 1

—from Rev. Donald Snyder
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Beckley

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

There is an apocryphal story told about St. Augustine. It seems that the famed teacher was confronted one day by a man who asked, "If God is eternal, what was He doing before he began creation?" Quickly Augustine replied, "Creating hell for people who ask questions like that!"

The world wants easy answers to tough questions. Paul is confronting a conflicted church that has divided the body of Christ according to baptismal tradition. The cross has lost its meaning for those who think that it is not the one in whom you believe that is important, but rather who has dunked you.

The meaning of the cross is based upon the perspective of position: On this side of the cross we see the foolishness of rejection; on the other side we see the wisdom of God's salvation.

*Open our eyes and our hearts, O God,
that in the wisdom of this world we may find its folly,
and in the foolishness of the gospel, eternal life.*

Monday: Mar. 2

—from Rev. Aaron Watkins

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Bluefield

Read Deuteronomy 8:1-20

Too often, when things don't go quite our way, when times get tough like they are now, we—as we should—turn our hearts and minds toward God. But when the recession ends, when the jobs come back and our bank accounts overflow again, who will get the praise? Will it be our own individual portfolio managers? Will it be the Secretary of Treasury or will it be President Obama? Or will we turn inward and praise ourselves?

The Israelites did that too often when their bellies were full, when the manna was plenty, and when the water in their wells overflowed. But Deuteronomy 8:10 tells us exactly how we should respond in times like this: "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land He has given you." God blesses us because God loves us indeed.

*Praise to you, O God, for you have blessed us with more
than we could ever need, so that we may overflow with thanksgiving.*

Tuesday: Mar. 3

—from Rev. Steven Smith

United Disciples of Christ Church, Charleston

Read Psalm 25

What are you most in need of today—protection, forgiveness or guidance? My sense is that the majority of us would say that we are most in need of guidance. When we push our understanding of the whole Christ event—from birth through life and ministry, to death, his resurrection and the current outpouring of the Holy Spirit—we come to know that we are both protected and forgiven.

Our protection is not a physical protection from all harm but rather an eternal protection. In Christ we have been promised eternal life. I believe that this eternal life begins now and not at some future event. Though we live in the present with all its realities, we were created for eternity. This passage begins with the Psalmist acknowledging this protection and—through a confession of faith and trust—calls upon God to remember it.

The psalmist calls upon God's goodness in this psalm as he asks for forgiveness on three separate occasions. Our forgiveness was

path, and who will not reject us when our knee-jerk reaction is to get angry.

*Giver of All Things, we thank you for loving truth-tellers.
We ask that you help us to listen and remember that the messenger
may be the very person you sent to help us obey your voice.*

Friday: Apr. 3

—from Rev. Aaron Watkins

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Bluefield

Read John 12:1-10

I'm a huge believer that life is about the choices we make. I've shared this belief with others. Some have agreed with me; some have not. Sometimes it's easy to make good choices; sometimes it's easy to make bad ones. I've made plenty of the latter, all the while complicating my life.

Judas Iscariot made the choice in his faith journey to turn his back on Jesus and betray him for money. He did not care for his fellow man, but only for himself, as today's passage clearly points out. We all need each other in this life. The poor need the rich; the rich need the poor. No matter what economic class, race, gender we belong to, no matter what our nationality, we all need each other. And that applies to our spiritual journey as well. We worship God as a community and not in isolation of each other.

*Lord of life, help us to make the conscious choice
to see the "other" in our world this day,
and so seeing, be turned toward you.*

Saturday: Apr. 4

—from Rev. Mark Mills, Pastor-Elect

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Moundsville

Read Romans 11:25-36

When listening to a woman who was suicidal, she told me that she couldn't feel God anymore. She felt lost, as if God had abandoned her. I learned then that no amount of talking could change what she felt. In my training as a counselor, I learned that feeling can only be changed by doing or thinking differently.

Jesus taught his disciples to obey his commandments, which were about loving unconditionally. We should view Paul's admonitions about obedience in the context of obeying Jesus' commandments. You cannot be conceited when you love unconditionally. It's also a practice that redeems the effects of bad decisions along the journey.

When you feel lost, try unconditionally loving someone who

backgrounds, but one thing remains: the same Lord is Lord of all. In this Lenten season let us not forget that if we confess with our mouth what we believe in our heart, everything else will fall into place on its own.

*God, Lord of all, give us the courage
to proclaim what we believe in our hearts.*

Wednesday: Apr. 1 —from Pastor Judy Bennett
Island Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Wheeling

Read John 10:1-18

He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out....

There is nothing in all of scripture that affects me more powerfully than the knowledge that Jesus knows me by my name. And I take great comfort in the fact that He calls my name when I am being as *dumb* as a wayward sheep – going off on some tangent of my own – suddenly finding myself lost among the clutter of my own wrong decisions and childish actions. But then deep in my self-imposed stillness comes that still, small voice that calls my name and gently leads me back to where I need be in order to continue my journey of life.

As we move ever closer to the cross, may we listen for His voice as He calls us each by name.

*Shepherding God, open our ears that we may hear you call our name
and then lead us in the way you would have us go.*

Thursday: Apr. 2 —from Rev. Magdalyn Sebastian
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Moundsville

Read Jeremiah 26:1-16

*"Now therefore mend your ways and your doings,
and obey the voice of the Lord your God."*

Why is it that bad habits are hard to break and good habits are easy to forget? Our behaviors, good and bad need constant attention. Constant discipline to keep the good habits and to forego the bad. And people in our lives who will tell the truth on us. Jeremiah tells the truth on the people in the temple, and they react much as we do: they get angry.

But we so need fellow travelers on our journey of faith to tell the truth on us. Not people who criticize for the sake of being critical, but people who love us, will tell us when we have wandered off the

offered by Christ on the cross, once and for all. We know that all we need to do is ask for it and forgiveness will be given. I am reminded in the reading of this psalm how often the forgiveness Christ offers is taken for granted. Knowing that it has been offered, once and for all, leads some to not ask for it as often as we can. We get hung up on the fact that in order to ask for forgiveness we must acknowledge sin. Forgiveness was offered not to make us feel bad, but to reveal God's goodness. It is only after we acknowledge God's eternal protection, and ourselves as forgiven, that we can begin to receive the guidance God offers us. If guidance is what we need the most, let's get started!

*To you O Lord, I lift up my soul and trust you with my life.
I recognize my need, and ask for the forgiveness that only you can offer.
Guide me in your ways of goodness and grace this day.*

Wednesday: Mar. 4 —from Rev. David Chafin
Deputy Regional Minister

Read Hebrews 3:12-19

Most of us are not excited by hearing the advice—however good it may be—of a fellow-traveler. When it comes to seeking directions on the journey, I want to trust my “gut.” Problem is, my gut is not a sound compass.

I need to be reminded that I do not journey alone, but in partnership with Christ, and in companionship with fellow-travelers—people who may have insights into how best to walk the path which I have never dreamed of.

Let us listen to the voices around us, and compare them to what we know of the Christ made known in the gospels, and then make wiser choices than our “gut” may suggest. In this is faithfulness.

*Help me to trust myself much less,
to hear the voices of my faith companions,
and to follow ultimately the Christ I love and profess, O God.*

Thursday: Mar. 5 —from Rev. Richard Flowers
Shady Spring, WV

Read Psalm 27

Get ready. Get set. Go.

The “Go” part we do well. The “Get Set,” not too bad. It's the “Get Ready” part we don't do. We're in too big a hurry.

Psalm 27 would have us slow down and concentrate on God. “The Lord,” begins the Psalm and ends it. The Psalmist begins

by talking *about* the Lord - glory, strength, beauty. Then the Psalmist transitions to talking *to* the Lord—about need, searching, weakness.

In Lent we prepare for Passion and Easter. Psalm 27 helps us recognize our great need for the powerful grace of God. "Even God can do nothing with someone who can stand before the great holiness and perfection of God and not see their own sinfulness."

Get ready by actively "waiting" for the Lord.

Help us to gain patience, O Lord, in our search for resurrection life.

Give us the grace to slow down, and to grow closer to you.

Friday: Mar. 6

—from Rev. Sanford Downs

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Parkersburg

Read Deuteronomy 10:12-22

"So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you?

Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all heart and with all your soul." v.12

What does God want from me? The question is as old as humanity and is as fresh today as ever. Deuteronomy 10:12-22 gives us some guidance on that question. We are to love God, keep God's commandments, love the stranger, be as impartial and fair as God is, and praise the Lord. Jesus summed all this up with two commandments: Love the LORD your God with all your heart, mind, body, and soul; and love your neighbor as yourself (or as John recorded it, to love others the same way Jesus loves us).

The greatest devotion we can give to God this Lenten season is to consciously make an effort every day to put these two commands into practice. Like any exercise, the more we do it, the easier it becomes; but we have to start by making a very conscious, serious effort to live these principles out. This is our worship, holy and acceptable to God.

Enliven our Spirits, O God, that we might not only know your will, but that in the simplicity of obedience we may do it.

Saturday: Mar. 7

—from Rev. Mark Mills, Pastor-Elect

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Moundsville

Read John 4:1-26

A teenager came to church with her grandmother only every once in a while at my first church. Years later, she dropped by with a friend at the church I was then serving only to say that, because of one sermon I'd preached, she was volunteering with a church and was

We started a new journey together.

We discovered love and nurturing of family with each other.

Our journey continues as we find our way loving and nurturing each other as family.

One day our children will explore their place and discover it in their own families.

If we could take a look at each day as spending "one Day in God's (family) house" maybe we won't get so lost along our journey.

Call us toward your self, O God. Knowing that you are our home, we can take another step today.

Monday: Mar. 30

Read Jeremiah 24:1-10

Harsh judgment in two baskets of figs? It may be hard, indeed, to read the language of the prophet, yet it sounds a promise to those who experience exile: God has not finished with us yet. We are to be given new hearts, and a new openness to God.

Despite the pain of our personal experience of exile—whether real or imagined, voluntary or compulsory—there can be redemption and new life in it.

When I am far from you—even when exile is only in my mind—turn me, O Lord, to the joyful promise of your word, and make my heart rejoice in you, for you are my redeemer.

Tuesday: Mar. 31

—from Rev. Andrea Brownlee

Big Run Christian Church & Fork Ridge Christian Church

Read Romans 10:1-13

(Disciples of Christ), Cameron

"Justified" and "saved" are words we often hear in Christian circles. Depending upon where you live, you might hear them more or less often than others. When I began seminary many people asked me to share my faith journey, not much salvation talk. When I received the call for my first church many people asked me to tell them my story of salvation.

Some people have stories of great struggle, which eventually lead to great triumph, realizing that Jesus is Lord. Others have grown up in the faith. In either case, the fact remains that when we believe in our heart and confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, we are truly ready for something to happen.

We all have different stories, we all have different

Saturday: Mar. 28

—from Rev. Larry Grimes

Community Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Beech Bottom
Read John 6:60-71

Did you listen to the news this noon? In no uncertain terms it was reported: “Flesh is useful. Studies show that flesh gives life. Flesh is life. Polls confirm that most Americans find flesh most useful and are most fleshy themselves.”

A minority insists that we are spirit and life. When asked if they wanted to go away, to leave the flesh, the majority said, “Like the devil we do!”

Judas spoke for the majority. He bet hard silver, thirty pieces of it, that flesh would trump over spirit any day, in this the only life we’ll ever have.

That’s Friday’s noon news—I can’t wait to see what they’ll have to say come Sunday!

*Help us to look beyond the hard evidence of what our eyes can see,
and know what is unsearchable truth:
All of life belongs to you, O God, the one true Giver.*

Week 5: Don’t Get Lost

It is very easy to get lost on a long journey.

One wrong turn. One bad decision.

*One moment of futile thought. Our spiritual journey is one that requires
our constant attention as well as the aid of fellow travelers.*

Fifth Sunday in Lent: Mar. 29

—from Rev. Dawna Watkins
Bluefield, WV

Read Psalm 84

When traveling to new places, I like to have a map. This goes for trying new things like recipes, craft project, or home improvements. When I started thinking about marriage, I sat down and penned this to the one who would later be my husband:

We started life in caring, nurturing families.

Then one day we set out to understand our place in life.

We discovered many people and things through pain and confusion and separation from family.

A year ago today we discovered that together we make continuing to explore on your own less lonely.

planning to go into ministry. She had come by to say thanks. I was reluctant to believe I could’ve done this, but it wasn’t me; it was the Spirit in me.

Never take for granted the living water in your spirit. The people who’ve needed me most seem to appear when my life is the most challenging, and are often people on the margins of society. Give a drink from your soul to someone, even if that person is one you consider unacceptable. Or, give it to everyone, because the person who most needs it may never cross your radar.

*As I prepare to receive from your table,
and feast upon your abundant love and grace,
make me more able, O God, to see my neighbor,
and in their very human presence
to see my Savior face to face.*

Week 2: Always Close

*As we continue deeper and deeper into our journey, it can be a little scary
—just not acknowledging where we are,
but making a commitment to grow and change.
We can be pretty comfortable just where we are,
even knowing that God is calling us to more.
The reassurance that our God is present during our journey—always close—
helps calm our fears.*

Second Sunday in Lent: Mar. 8

—from Rev. Del Parris
Lost Creek, WV

Read Jeremiah 1:1-10

In this delightful passage relating the call of Jeremiah, we see what can be regarded as the misuse of “confessions.” Jeremiah certainly admitted that he was an inadequate and a sinful creature as he came into the presence of God. However, he attempts to use his failures to excuse himself from the life to which God is calling him.

Ah! But there is a catch. God reminds Jeremiah, and you and I, that our shortcomings do not excuse us from being all that God intends. God says, “I will use you anyway.”

Confession and forgiveness are steps to our moving forward, to our being a reflection of God in our troubled world. And we don’t have to be perfect to do this. When have you hidden behind your sinfulness, your inadequacy, your failures, in order to keep from being all that God intends you to be?

*Where are you calling me to follow you, O God?
Forgive me when my feeble excuses take the place
of meaningful repentance and faithful action.*

Monday: Mar. 9

—from Rev. Sarah Webb
Wheeling, WV

Read Psalm 119:73-80

It was Ash Wednesday, and the penitent worshipers were patiently waiting their turn in line to receive ashes. Many had their hands folded in front of them. All of them wore somber expressions appropriate for the occasion. Were they rehearsing a litany of sins and asking God's forgiveness?

Then I saw Millie—her smile shone like the sun. She was coming before the God she loved with a heart brimming with joy. It slowly dawned on me that Millie understood a dimension of Lent that I had missed. In this season of preparation, can we bring our regrets and failures to God, so assured of God's love and mercy that we bring these offerings with *joy*? In the expanse of God's love, our shame is redressed. How can we not rejoice?

“Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice because I have hoped in your word . . . Let your mercy come to me that I may live; for your law is my delight.” (*Psalm 119:74, 77*)

I delight in you, my God. Fill me with your joy.

Tuesday: Mar. 10

—from Rev. Gary Patton
Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Huntington

Read Romans 1:16-25

Think about the health scares we encounter. News reports proclaim the frightening symptoms that occur with a virus, and then conclude with the stark reality that there is no cure.

Paul has provided a detailed description of how ungodliness and unrighteousness will be met with the wrath of God. He made it clear that there is no remedy to the problem of sin and the foolishness that infects the souls of all people. How stark are the words, “they are without excuse” (vs. 20).

With a scenario like that, no wonder the Apostle declared with certainty and hope that he was not hesitant to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, “for it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe.”

*What great good news you have given to us, Lord!
Your power is at work in us as we believe.
Help our unbelief.*

but some of the most memorable ones have involved bread. In Jesus Christ, the “living bread that came down from heaven,” believers have received God's ultimate provision for an ultimate kind of life—life which has the quality of the eternal—bread which is meant for the whole world.

Think of all the ways in which you receive this living bread, and the ways in which you share him with the world.

*As we meet a world hungering for life in all it's fullness,
O Christ, help us to share your life-giving self,
for you are more than enough for the whole hungering world.*

Friday: Mar. 27

—from Rev. Richard Howard

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Morgantown

Read Romans 8:28-39

Today's lesson from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Church at Rome is a classic standard used in times of great distress. Specifically, it is one of several I regularly use in funeral services because it offers its hearers such great hope.

It is hard to “read the signs” of God's presence when one has just suffered a great loss. In this passage the Apostle Paul clearly and boldly proclaims the omnipresent sovereignty of God. When we find ourselves in the depths of despair, hope comes to us from these words: “*Who will separate us from the love of Christ?*” To be sure of the totality of God's presence, perhaps we should also ask, “*What can separate us from the love of Christ?*” Paul makes clear that no one and no thing can ever separate us from the Lord.

Anyone who doubts the absolute power of God, after having heard or read these words of Paul, wasn't paying attention! “*Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?*” With a resounding “No,” Paul answers his own question: “*in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*” And he loves us still.

How can we be without hope for long in the face of such convincing evidence? The signs of God's great power and ever-presence are there for us to see, if we but open our eyes. Even in the face of great distress, we are already on the side of victory! Nothing, and no one, will ever be able to take this away from us. We are God's own.

Help us to see how you love us, O God. Help us to see and believe.

stomachs.

We have been shown God's love and grace in so many ways, but often times we aren't interested in the miracle of God's love. We come to God instead as if God were a vending machine to give us all our desires.

Through Christ we are being offered something much greater and better than a vending machine, but still that's how most of us relate to God. In this season of Lent let us reflect on the wonder of grace, mercy and love in our life. Let us come to God in awe and wonder—with praise and thankfulness; not with a wish list of things we want.

*Dear loving God, far too often we come to you wanting things,
but today we come to you in praise and thanksgiving.
Help us to see you as a God of grace, mercy, love and forgiveness.
We know we should come to you with the desires of our heart,
help us place our heart, first and foremost, on You, in Jesus Name.*

Wednesday: Mar. 25

—from Rev. Del Parris
Lost Creek, WV

Read Romans 8:1-11

I have to admit that sometimes I am troubled by Paul's portrait of the flesh and spirit being in mortal combat. I always think that God gave me my body or flesh along with everything else. I also know that some of my greatest sins have been "sins of the spirit" Yet, in my moments of reflection, I recognize that as I walk in the presence of God and in the spirit of Christ I literally am a new creature.

I also couldn't help but notice that Paul sees a healthy connection between flesh and spirit when he says in verse 11, "...He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies..."

As I continue to reflect during this season of Lent, I pray that my flesh, my spirit, my mind, my all will be subject to the spirit of the One who gave His all, that I might "have life and have it more abundantly."

*Everything that you have made sings praise to you, O God.
Awaken my whole being to the song!*

Thursday: Mar. 26

John 6:41-51

In the history of the world, nothing has compared to bread as the ultimate emblem of nourishment. Without it, many have perished.

God has provided resources for God's children in many ways,

Wednesday: Mar. 11

—from Pastor William Pollack

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), St. Albans

Read John 5:1-18

"Do you want to be made well?" The question Jesus asked a 38-year ill veteran continues to resonate in our ears today. Looking deep inside our own hearts, we might try and make excuses for the condition in which we find ourselves. They may even sound good to our own ears. But the question begs us to do something we might find too difficult to accomplish. It may be that we are being called to place our trust completely in the One who asked the question.

If we allow, reflection and repentance can be avenues of our Lenten experience. Nevertheless, these can be treacherous to our own self-assurance and security. So, continuing together in this Lenten season, may we honestly reflect on the words of the One who is the Great Physician. Let us invite Him to take our moments of unfaithfulness and sin, so that through His love for us we will also hear these words: "Rise, take up your mat and walk." Only then will we really be whole. "Do you want to be made well?"

*May my longing to be whole overcome my reluctance
to fully trust in you, O God my Healer.*

Thursday: Mar. 12

—from Rev. Billy Crane

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Grafton

Read Psalm 126

When David speaks of captivity, we cannot be certain that he is referring to the return from Babylonian captivity, or some other change in the fortunes of the people. But whatever the case, the people were like those who were having a wonderful dream that filled them with laughter and singing. They acknowledged that the Lord had done great things for them.

David refers to "the south," the Negeb, a mostly semi-arid part of Israel that received most of its water from streams that only flowed during the winter rains. So David is asking the Lord to restore prosperity to the people, similar to the way the winter rains blessed the dry land.

The final verse is that great promise that many have claimed across the years —we will reap a great harvest if we make the most of God's blessing, by doing our part by sowing the seed!

*Enable us to see beyond our moments of struggle
toward your promised future, O God,
that we may sow the seed of hope in our world.*

Friday: Mar. 13 —from Rev. Magdalyn Sebastian
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Wheeling

Read Psalm 105

“Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually.”

The Psalmist reassures us of God’s steadfast presence in our lives by recounting God’s saving acts in every moment of time. When we remember God’s presence in our own past, how can we not “Give thanks,” “Sing praises to him,” “Glory in his holy name,” and “Seek the Lord and his strength?”

Our individualistic culture sends us the wrong message. No one can “pull themselves up by their own bootstraps” without the ever-present Creator. No matter what we face in our lives, we must seek and embrace our loving God’s presence continually.

*Redeemer God, you have been with your human creatures
through all things. Help us to feel your presence more intimately,
and to draw on your strength and love.*

Saturday: Mar. 14 —from Rev. Donald Snyder
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Beckley

Read Jeremiah 6:9-15

This is both God’s and Jeremiah’s “I told you so” to the people of Israel. Babylon, the grape gleaner, has come, and will ultimately return not once but twice to take what it wants. What makes the situation even worse is the people’s denial of what is happening. They have closed their ears to the prophet’s warning, and sought solace through prophets and priests who apply a bandage when a tourniquet is needed. Moreover, prophets like Jeremiah were ignored because they spoke to people’s sin and the need for repentance.

God’s demand for disciplined living is not easy to preach nor accept. However, ignoring God’s call for righteous living will not make it go away; only turning around to an unchanging God will.

*God of grace and mercy, help me to see the value of letting go
of my own way, for the sake of true life in faith with you.*

been, it is then that we will see and hear what God has put before us. We do not always understand, we often forget the power God has in our lives because we have turned our focus to something else.

In this season of reexamining when we are asked the question like this one from today’s scripture, “Do you not yet understand?” We must be ready to respond; “No, but I’m ready to learn.”

*Loving God, you call us to so many places.
Help us to turn our eyes to you. Give us the strength to do more than
ask for a sign, show us the direction you want us to go.*

Monday: Mar. 23

Read Psalm 121

*I lift up my eyes to the hills-- from where will my help come?
My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.*

Consider for this day:

—how many ways God has given help in your “valley times,”
—how many ways God has been faithful,
giving strength when other resources “slumber,”
—how God attends all of your “going” and “coming,”
even when you lose sight of your goals and your calendar.
Look to the hills, and then beyond them to the Lord who made it all.

*I look to you, O God, for guidance and strength in this day.
Lift me up, show your faithfulness to me,
and help me to trust in your provisions.*

Tuesday: Mar. 24 —from Rev. Kevin Bowers
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Weirton

Read John 6:16-27

This is not a passage many sermons are written about, yet it is an excellent passage for Lent. Jesus had just fed the crowd of 5,000 men—not counting women and children—with five loaves of bread and two fish. And the crowd follows Jesus to the next stop. Jesus tells those following him that they are not interested in anything but their own

*Lord we thank you for your steadfast presence.
Please open us to what you would have us to do.
May we receive your direction with humility and obedience.*

Saturday: Mar. 21 —from Rev. Magdalyn Sebastian
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Wheeling

Read Psalm 43

“O send out your light and truth; let them lead me . . .”

When I read Psalm 43, I wonder if someone might have recorded my thoughts. On those tough days, I tend to cry out to God, “Where are you in all this mess?” Once calmed down, I try to pray for guidance and if I have my senses together, I will remember to praise God for all of God’s blessings. Then there is the self talk: “You are okay. Why are you freaking out? God always takes care of you.”

I confess - I want to *see* that God is with me in the mess.—some sign. If I remember the journey of my own life- all the ups and downs, tragedies and dramas, I *see* that God has always been with me. If God has always been with me, God must be with me now, mess and all.

Loving One who is always close, lead me. Help me to remember your continual presence and guidance. Light my way.

Week 4: Reading the Signs

*Too often, what we need to do on our journey for our relationship with God,
and our relationships with others, we seem to miss.*

*But God is showing us all the time what we must do to draw closer to God’s
own self, if we but look for the signs along the way.*

May we have our “eyes” wide open to see what God has for us.

Fourth Sunday in Lent: Mar. 22 —from Rev. Andrea Brownlee
Big Run Christian Church & Fork Ridge Christian Church
Read Mark 8:11-21 (Disciples of Christ), Cameron

“Do you not yet understand?”

So often we think we have things all figured out then something happens, or nothing happens and we say; “give us a sign God, give us a sign...” Lent is a time for us to reexamine where our faith journey is taking us. It is a time for us to be reminded of the journey Christ made so we wouldn’t have to. Yet we still ask for signs.

When we take the time to remind ourselves where we have

Week 3: Listening for Directions

*Traveling on a journey of faith requires good listening skills.
What is it that God would have us give up? What would God have us cultivate?
Our journey takes a lifetime, beginning and beginning again many times.
Listening to the steadfast voice of God will ensure safe travels.*

Third Sunday in Lent: Mar. 15 —from Rev. Dawna Watkins
Bluefield, WV

Read Jeremiah 6:9-15

It’s hard to listen for directions when you know you’re in trouble. It’s even harder when you think the entire world (even God) is against you. I remember when I was in high school, a teacher had given me the responsibility of leading classmates in a project. I got a little carried away in my frustration at my classmates’ lack of progress, and used anger to try to spur them on. What I failed to realize was that my teacher in turn had to use anger with me in order to wake me up to my short-comings as a leader. Listening.

As a prophet, Jeremiah repeated some harsh words to people who had stopped listening to each other and, worst of all, stopped listening to God. Use this time of Lent to stop and listen. Sometimes we are fighting a losing battle because of the choices we have made, are making, and could be ready to make. I suggest walking a labyrinth.

Amidst the noise of life, O God, help me to listen to you.

Monday: Mar. 16

Read John 7:14-36

Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."

The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying, 'You will search for me and you will not find me' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?" (vs. 33-36)

How often do we misperceive:

—who Christ is and what he is saying?

—who we are and what we are called to be?

—the power of a moment in Christ’s presence?

*Help me to be to be more alive to the moments of this day,
and the presence of Christ in them.*

Tuesday: Mar. 17

—from Pastor Rodney Hubbs
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), McMechen

Read Psalm 34

After reading the 34th Psalm many thoughts came to mind—fear being one of them. Having faced many difficult times and decisions, I realize that my trials do not compare to the events that Jesus faced. Here was a man that never sinned, and yet he was facing execution. I remember how Jesus prayed so hard that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Have we ever prayed that fervently?

I read that “whoever desires to do good and live a good life that the Lord will look with favor towards them.” We all wish to do good, and probably do so. However, this Psalm reminds us that when we face problems and trials of this world, we should pray to our Heavenly Father. I have found—since becoming the Pastor of our church—that I am praying more and more each day. My prayers, like everyone else’s are not always answered the way that I ask, but are answered for my good in ways that I never even imagined. On our Lenten journey, let us pray more fervently each and every day.

Almighty God, hear our prayer as we travel through this Lenten season. Guide us in the path that you would have us travel. Help us remember our Lord and Savior as he made his way to Calvary to face death, and how He died for our sins. Thank you Lord Jesus.

Wednesday: Mar. 18

—from Rev. Jayne Chafin
Parkersburg, WV

Read Romans 5:1-11

When I read these verses from Romans, I find myself pulled back to the beginning, “we have peace with God.” Sometimes, well, actually most of the time, it is hard for us to understand what that means, let alone understand how we live in God’s peace. We may have fleeting moments of peace, but in our busy-ness we don’t often recognize them, let alone feel God’s presence in them.

When I showed a picture of our newest grandson Will to a new friend here in Parkersburg, she replied, “Ah, peace. You need to stamp the word peace all over that picture. What a sign of God’s peace.” I think she’s right, but not just for that picture—for all of us.

We all need to hear God speaking to us, and we need to know that God has stamped peace all over us: God’s peace, God’s love, God’s grace. We are a truly blessed people. God *is* Good.

Gracious God, often we speak of your peace, yet often in the busy-ness of our lives we don’t take time to let it sink in.

May we open our hearts to you more often, may your peace be stamped all over our very lives that others may hear you, see you, and know you; through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thursday: Mar. 19

Read Jeremiah 10:11-24

The subject of human suffering is complicated not only by our experience of it, but by our inability to readily make sense of it. The reflection of suffering in this text does not absolve those who inflict it, nor does it fully “make sense of it” for those who are victims of others.

What it does do is call to account those who have caused pain to others—particularly to those who are charged with the care and oversight of “the flock of God”—God’s shepherds, who have failed to notice and redress the wrongs.

May we be wise and self-giving about the needs of those entrusted to our care—in our families, our friendships, our communities, indeed, our world.

O God, may we be loving and just in our care for those who are most vulnerable, whom you have entrusted to the keeping of your shepherds.

Friday: Mar. 20

—from Rev. Magdalyn Sebastian
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Moundsville
Read John 8:21-32

“...that I do nothing on my own.”

When people compliment us, or shower us with praises for our deeds, it is all too easy to cross the line from positive self-esteem to arrogance, from being thankful to being conceited. As Jesus tried to explain again to his followers about the path to salvation and the necessity of his death in that salvation, he states, “I do nothing on my own.”

We do nothing on our own. God is always there - we but need to listen for God's guidance and care. Our successes and failures are witnessed by the ever-present Divine. We want to take credit for the successes and blame someone else for the failures, when in fact our successes are bolstered by the Divine presence and our failures, more often than not, are because of our “tin ear” where God's direction is concerned.