

April 4: Easter Sunday

from Rev. Thaddeus B. Allen, Regional Minister

Read Luke 24:1-12

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen, Indeed!

This ancient cry of the church is close on our lips this day as we celebrate the defining moment of the world and of our lives. God has chosen to grant us life and life eternal through Jesus Christ who lives.

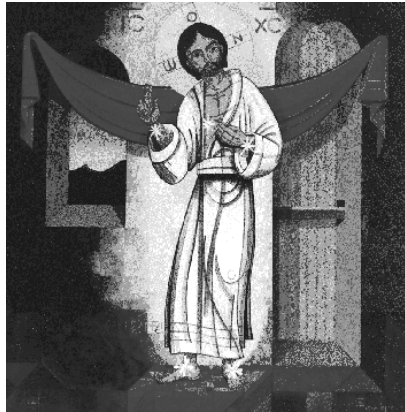
This is no idle tale! Run quickly towards this gift and be amazed. Live and live joyously! On this most holy of days, the church and the faithful have something important to say. Darkness and pain will not carry the day. God has declared and insured that light and life win. So, today, let us sing with all of creation that Christ is Risen! And may our lives be a reflection of this risen life.

*Almighty God, on this precious Easter morning,
we live with you and sing your praises.*

May we unleash all the life that you have put within us, and may we live for you.

We are yours, and we love you.

Amen.



Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
in West Virginia presents:



*Reflections and Prayers
from
The Order of Ministry*

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Feb. 17: Ash Wednesday **Read Isaiah 58:1-12**
from Rev. Thaddeus B. Allen, Regional Minister

As enter into this holy season of Lent, may we do so honestly. A holy time set aside for God is a gift of grace. A holy time to reveal ourselves honestly to God and to ourselves is a gift of grace. A holy time to be made new and tidied up by the one who desires sincerity and not empty public practice is grace.

As we explore these days that lead to Easter, may we devote ourselves daily to the lessons and revelations of God. As we give ourselves to this season, may we give ourselves to God and to each other. Let us shed the unnecessary baggage that we have taken on, and let us hold fast to the mysteries and gifts of the faith. May we let injustices and oppressions go, and may we break them down when we encounter them. May our light shine forth to those who need warmth and direction. As we enter this holy season of Lent, may we do so with our whole selves turned towards God.

*As we hear you calling to us, O Lord, help us to turn to you,
and in turning find healing, forgiveness and peace.*

Feb. 18 - Thursday **Read Matthew 6:1-6**
from Rev. Aaron Watkins, First Christian Church, Bluefield

Jesus did not want his disciples to do good works in order to bring attention to themselves. He wanted them to give out of the goodness of their own hearts. Is it not right to think that, more often than not, we are more blessed in the giving of a gift than in receiving?

In ancient Jewish times almsgiving was the practice of giving charitable gifts. Because Jewish law did not require almsgiving, it was considered especially praiseworthy. “Sounding the trumpet” was a figurative way of saying that the people of Jesus’ day found ways of calling others’ attention to what they were doing. When we give a gift to gain recognition for ourselves, is that truly giving from our own hearts? Not really. God calls us to be humble. When we do so, are we not becoming more like Christ? Let us daily seek to be more Christ-like.

*May I grow in Christ’s likeness, O God,
by giving from the fullness of my heart and not for selfish gain.*

Feb. 19 - Friday **Read Matthew 6:16-18**
from Rev. Darrell Pierce, Clarksburg, WV

Jesus is not nearly as concerned about what we do as he is about why we do it. The hypocritical religious leaders were interested in the praise of people, so they fasted in a way most likely to bring them that praise. They did not fast because of sorrow for sins nor to strengthen themselves against temptation.

The modern Christian’s fast, therefore, is not about methods but about attitudes and motives. Does he fast desserts more as a method of losing weight

demanding “Crucify him!” got their wish. And they went home, proud of themselves.

Standing “at a distance,” likely in silence and grief, were the losers, many of Jesus’ disciples and loved ones, who witnessed not only the brutal execution of their friend and teacher, but the violent self-satisfaction of the crowd.

You and I watch this unfold at a greater distance across the centuries. In that time, we’ve managed to neaten the scene into basic categories: Christ’s noble suffering and demeanor, the horror of sin and violence, the ultimate meaning of Christ’s death. Brashly, the symbol of horror – the cross – has become the positive representation of our faith, in our art, our architecture, and even our fashion.

Harder to admit, given nearly 2000 years since that awful Friday, is that we sometimes bear more in common with the smug chest-beaters who demanded, and then cheered, Jesus’ death. We seek violence and call it justice; we blame our problems on others and scapegoat them. In actions large and small, we have cried out for blood, “Crucify him!” Proudly, we thump our chests. Christ bore it then, and bears it still – the scorn, the condescension, the blood thirst, the sins. He suffered, bled and died. But he forgave them. And he forgives us.

*As we have seen the cross of Jesus once again, O God,
help us to receive your boundless mercy which it depicts,
and which it delivers to our lives and to our world.*

April 3 – Holy Saturday **Read John 19:38-42**
from Rev. David Chafin, Deputy Regional Minister

For a gospel that focuses on the calling of Christ to live in broad daylight that which might only be dimly believed in the privacy of the heart, John tells a rather strange story of the burial of Jesus by two secretive disciples. These two men, followers at a distance who had a certain stature in the community, have taken on the intimate work of caring for one whose death was that of a criminal – an act that made them ritually unclean among their people.

Perhaps it’s helpful for us to ask ourselves how others who are “not one of us” might well be doing the good work of God in our midst, and lifting up their names as people of faith. It may be no coincidence that these “hidden disciples” are well known in the near east and are honored by numerous monuments and chapels built in their memory. God’s work is often done by those we would least suspect.

*May my eyes be open to your work in our world,
even in the dim places – even in the grave.
Point us toward the resurrection truth of your Son our Savior.*

foremost, He is the God who gave us a Savior in Jesus Christ. He is the Almighty who calls us to live right and well. Despite our sins, God continues to take our side and backs us up. Wow! There is nothing more powerful than the name of God!

Holy God, may my lips and my life proclaim praise to your Name!

Mar. 31 – Holy Wednesday **Read Isaiah 52:12 – 53:12**
from Rev. David Chafin, Deputy Regional Minister

It may be difficult to find any redeeming virtue in times of unjust or unwarranted suffering. None of us want to imagine those we love being treated with the cruelty suffered by the Servant described in this text. Yet beyond what the eye can see or the imagination can embrace, is the redeeming word of hope to all who are afflicted, to all who suffer: “*Out of his anguish shall he see light ... the righteous one shall make many righteous.*” God can bring out of the darkest night a new day. Let us claim this day with gratitude to the One who redeems them all.

*Gracious giver of all our days, grant us open spirits
to see your redeeming grace at work in the dark places of our world,
and in the hard places of our lives.*

April 1 – Maundy Thursday **Read John 13:1-17, 31b-35**
from Rev. Thaddeus B. Allen, Regional Minister

Tonight is a sacred time as we enter into the Easter Triduum. As we prepare the events that will unfold, we hear again, that Jesus gives his people a New Commandment (13:34). In his service and in the foreshadowing of his saving work, our Lord asks us to love one another.

Some will experience foot washing this night. Most will participate in the Lord’s Supper this night. In all of our worship we will be called to a renewed sense of service and being. God, through Jesus, is calling us to a sacrificial way of life. This life is laid out for us in Jesus. And as participants in life with Jesus, he simply calls us to love. On this day, there can be no doubt, of our Lord’s love for us always.

*Giver of every good and perfect gift, we humbly bow before you this day.
We ask that you might give us the strength to love in new and powerful ways.
You call us to a new way of being,
and we yield ourselves to you and to your church. In Christ, we pray.*

April 2 – Good Friday **Read Luke 23:33-49**
from Rev. Joshua Patty, Central Christian Church, Fairmont

In the end, Luke reminds us as he tells of Christ’s crucifixion, there were winners and losers. The crowd witnessed the entire spectacle, then returned home “beating their breasts.” The same people who had cried out for blood, who had embraced the murderer Barabbas instead of Jesus, who

than for sorrow for sin or desire to become more one with Jesus? Does she fast because all her friends are fasting?

It is fine if someone finds out that a Christian is fasting as long as that is not an object of the fast. If the reason for fasting is Godly, the method of fasting won’t matter much.

*Most Perfect God, may our fasts be pleasing to you
and improve our intimacy with you.*

Feb. 20 - Saturday **Read Matthew 6:19-21**
from Rev. Magdalyn Sebastian, First Christian Church, Wheeling

“*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*” American media, business, and the church are all good at coming up with snappy one-liners. *Put your money where your mouth is. Money follows Mission. What’s in your wallet?* Our passage today reminds us in straight forward words to make sure we have our priorities straight. Our culture makes it too easy to fall prey to **its** measures of success and security: the influential job, the to-die-for car, the trophy spouse. Jesus warns us to readjust our priorities to focus on God. When our focus is on God, our lives may be lived authentically, faithfully. Stock markets crash. Cars rust. Friends become fickle. Old age comes despite creams and potions. Unlike these earthly treasures, our forgiving God is always there welcoming us with open arms, loving us no matter what. The most sound investment advice: love God with all your heart, soul, and mind.

*Abundant God, help us to appreciate the treasures
you give us through Christ Jesus and your people.
May our hearts and minds be cradled in your loving hands.*

Feb. 21: First Sunday in Lent **Read Luke 4:1-13**
*from Rev. Scott Thayer, Bethany Memorial Church and
Chaplain of Bethany College*

“*Temptation!*” The very word sends a cold shiver down the spines of believers. We know this word, maybe too well. It is a word that was also known to Jesus. All three synoptic Gospels have accounts of Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness.

Our Lord recognized the power and the dangers of temptation. When he taught his disciples to pray, he included a plea that they not be led into temptation. Of course we know that God does not lead us into temptation; we are perfectly capable of doing that ourselves, and the result is always disastrous. Temptation leads us away from God’s purposes; it side-tracks us from the dream that God has for us. According to Luke’s Gospel, Jesus was able to beat his temptations because he relied on the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us seek that power, too.

*O God, temptations are going to come our way.
That is a given. But by your power,
temptation does not have to side-track us from your purposes.*

Feb. 22 – Monday

Read Deuteronomy 26:1-11

from Rev. Dawna Watkins, Bluefield, WV

“A wandering Aramean was my ancestor...” When was the last time you stood before God and offered your testimony as a thanksgiving for all that God has done in your life? Have you ever been brave enough to do so in the presence of your church family, with your pastor, with your friends and relatives? That is what the Deuteronomy text is asking the Israelites to do as they are worshipping God, following their liberation and deliverance. When Christ offers himself as our “first fruits offering” on the Cross; surely, we can be brave enough to tell others our stories of liberation from sin and separation. Surely we can give glory to God for how far God has brought us and how far God can take us.

*Freeing and empowering God,
loosen my tongue to sing your praise and to tell your story.*

Feb. 23 – Tuesday

Read Psalm 91

from Rev. Del Parris, Lost Creek, WV

The 91st Psalm has always been problematic for me. We all know that bad things do happen to good people. No one is protected or sheltered from the illnesses, misfortunes, fears and suffering that are common to human life. Yet, while serving 36 years in hospital chaplaincy, I witnessed many people finding in God a shelter and refuge, even in their suffering and grief. They found that in some way God was there for them. Some found healing and renewal; others found strength for facing their suffering and death. It seems to me this is the Psalmist’s challenge: to so trust God and to have such faith, that we can turn to him in such times ourselves.

*Lord, in this season of reflection, may I discover the trust and faith
that always bring me to you in times of trouble and challenge.*

Feb. 24 – Wednesday

Read Isaiah 55:1-13

*from Rev. Steven Smith,
United Disciples of Christ Church, Charleston*

Can you imagine going to the store, whether it be the grocery, clothing, car, hardware or whatever kind of store you can think of, and walking away with whatever it is the store is selling with no cost to you? What would you take: a month’s worth of groceries, a whole new wardrobe, a shiny Cadillac, or a new set of tools? In hard economic times an invitation like this might very well be a welcomed one! As abundant and as good as this may appear, however, it is only a matter of time before we are once again left unsatisfied.

God speaks through Isaiah a word that the people of God might remember their covenantal relationship. In every day and in every time, life apart from God always proves unsatisfying. The word here is a promise, offered yet again, to take from God’s abundant store, to offer this hope to a world that

trying to get Jesus to quiet them. People throwing cloaks and waving branches. Why, it’s a wonder the poor little donkey didn’t buck and run.

And Jesus calmly declares “...if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” Today, we are called to be loud and noisy in our praise of Jesus. Not to stand complaining with those who would decry his presence. God inhabits the praises of God’s people. And so we shout for the world to hear – “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Praise to you, O God our Savior!

May our lips and our lives proclaim your coming in our lives!

Mar. 29 – Holy Monday

Read Psalm 51:1-13

*from Rev. Dr. Larry Grimes, Community Christian Church,
Beech Bottom, WV and Bethany College Dir. of Church Relations*

Ready or not, here I come!

Before you do, hide your face from my sins

Ready or not, here I come!

Before you do, blot out all my iniquities.

Ready or not, here I come!

Before you do, blot out my transgressions.

Ready or not, here I come!

Before you do, scrub me clean, wash me white

Ready or not, here I come!

Before you do, meet me with your steadfast love

Ready or not here I come

Before you do, greet me with your mighty mercy

Ready or not here I come!

As you do, let me sing with joy and gladness

Ready or not here I come!

As you do, let my crushed bones rejoice

Ready or not here I come!

Mar. 30 – Holy Tuesday

Read Isaiah 42:1-9

from Rev. Aaron Watkins, First Christian Church, Bluefield

“I am God. That’s my name.” These are the words of the Prophet as paraphrased in Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*. What is it that is so significant about a name? We all have them. So what? The thing is they are our identities. And the irony is for most of us our names were chosen by someone else, most likely our parents. Some of us in our lifetimes choose to change the names that were given for us before we entered this world. For others they are changed when we get married. Many of our names have meanings, some don’t. When it comes to God, we as the people of God call God by many names--- Father, Creator, Lord and Maker are among many of them. But first and

with the Good News of Resurrection, it becomes easier to teach others the Good News with authority!

*Help me to listen to your word of assurance, O God,
and be filled with your grace to share your wondrous story!*

Mar. 26 – Friday **Read Psalm 31:9-16**
from Pastor Rod Hubbs, First Christian Church, McMechen

After reading this scripture, I think of how Jesus must have felt when He was entering Jerusalem. Knowing what was going to happen to Him and still going ahead. He knew that God was with Him. So I ask myself, “Why am I sometimes afraid of the future when I know that God is with me as He promised He would be?”

We sometimes forget what has been promised to us after we accept Christ as our Savior. Why do we forget? Because we are mere mortals. That is one of the glories of the Lenten season. It gives us a reminder of just how great God is.

Let us rejoice and be glad as we renew our faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

*Glorious God and Father of us all,
we ask that you continue to make yourself known to us
throughout each and every day of this and every season.*

Mar. 27 – Saturday **Read Philippians 2:5-11**
from Rev. Jayne Chafin, First Christian Church, New Martinsville

Many years ago, someone gave me a little glass plaque on a stand with the words *"Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus our Lord,"* written on it. I can still see that in my mind. I kept it on my bedside table for a long time. There are days I wish I still had it. After difficult days it is good to think on this text in rising or in retiring. It moves from the sobering thought of having the "same mind" as Jesus to praising his name!

We are called forth this Lent and always to remember what Jesus has done for us and to look forward to that day when *"every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."* Are you singing it with me?

*May I sing the eternal song of Christ's glory, O God,
as I rise up, and as I lie down,
confident of your renewing presence in my life.*

Mar. 28: Palm/Passion Sunday **Read Luke 19:28-40**
from Rev. Judy Bennett, Island Christian Church, Wheeling

As I grow older, I find it increasingly hard to tolerate noise and confusion. Loud music, TV, radio, crowds where people are yelling at the top of their lungs: all of these things and more seem to unnerve me. And I've just come to realize how noisy this passage from Luke seems to be. People singing and shouting – each one attempting to outdo the others. The scowling Pharisees

looks to be satisfied in other places, and to listen, eat, delight, and to live in God's abundant goodness.

*God, I seek you in this day because in it you can be found.
I call upon you because you are near, waiting to satisfy my desires.*

Feb. 25 – Thursday **Read Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18**
from Rev. Sarah Webb, Wheeling, WV

How long is a reasonable time to wait for a promise to be fulfilled? Abram and Sarai had more patience than most of us, but how long could they go on hoping? Even the most ardent of dreams can dwindle with time. Yet God is telling them to trust that barrenness was not to be their legacy. A new future is being offered.

It takes courage to believe that our lives can change. It takes daring to dream a new vision. The familiar is so much more comfortable. God offered Abram a legacy as numerous as the stars, but such an audacious dream requires hope. Hope is the gift that frees us from the same old mire that has held us back. As God's beloved children, can we dare to choose hope?

Loving God, give us courageous hearts to trust in the future you offer.

Feb. 26 – Friday **Read Psalm 27**
from Rev. Richard Howard, First Christian Church, Morgantown

Where do you best experience God? Is it a favorite physical place, such as a beach, or a mountain view, or even your own yard? Do you find God in architecture, such as your local church's sanctuary or a medieval cathedral? Or maybe it's a place in literature where you best experience God. Psalm 27 is a passage of scripture that can transport us to a special place with God where we know that we are in a beautiful approximation with the divine. *"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"* What a statement of confidence and trust in God! There is nothing on earth or in the heavens that will separate us from God's love. These verses describe a relationship with God that is intimate and familiar.

In this Lenten time, let us proclaim as the psalmist proclaims, that the *"One thing I ask of the LORD (is) to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life."*

*Loving God, as we journey from our brokenness to your wholeness,
may you be our constant companion, protecting us on our way,
sharing your wisdom and your strength,
and rejoicing always in our relationships with you and one another.*

Feb. 27 – Saturday

Read Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

*from Rev. Rosetta Smith,
United Disciples of Christ Church, Charleston*

It's easy to fall into paths of wanting what one doesn't need. There are many paths to take and goals to reach, with our society enticing us with intoxicating offers and choices. We're overworked, and wonder why we aren't satisfied, while adding still more work. We run from one scheduled event to another, exhausting ourselves. Every moment is filled with something, leaving us craving. The more we exert or spend, the emptier we become; it's like trying to refill a cup of water with a hole in the bottom. The season of Lent calls us to stop and get back on path! We can be transformed with comfort, love and peace growing within. Release! Reform! Be Resurrected! Christ is coming! Stay on track, steady in God.

*Steady us, O God, on your calling to give ourselves to the life which satisfies,
which we find only in communion with you through your Son Jesus Christ.*

Feb. 28: Second Sunday in Lent

Read Luke 13:31-35

*from Rev. Jamie Gump,
Madison Avenue Christian Church, Huntington*

What do you know about a mother's love? What will a mother do to protect and look after her children? Anything and everything! Jesus – God with us – wants us to know that that kind of love and refuge is ours to have. Jerusalem was not willing to live in this closeness. Just as children at times refuse, rebel, and run from a mother's care, we, too, sometimes refuse the security God offers. When you step away from God's care, "your house is left to you," meaning we are left with the life we've chosen. Love allows us that freedom.

Neither God nor Mom can as effectively care for and nurture a runaway child. But one thing is certain – the love never ends! Both will wait – today, tomorrow, the third day, forever if need be - for the wandering one to return. That is the good news!

*Lord, may we remain close to you, and should we stray,
may we know that you will always welcome us back into your arms.*

Mar. 1 – Monday

Read 1 John 1:5-9

*from Pastor Rae Browning, First Christian Church,
Cumberland, MD*

As a child, I lived in a three story house with the bedrooms on the third floor. A dark, closed-in stairway led to the rooms. With my heart pounding, I'd climb the scary stairs and make my way into one of the rooms. Standing in the middle of the room, I would swing my arm above my head in circles searching for the only light which hung from the ceiling. Darkness loomed all around until, at last, I found the switch to turn on the light. Safe at last with the light on, my heart returned to its normal beat.

Mar. 23 – Tuesday

Read Ephesians 3:14-19

from Rev. Sanford Downs, First Christian Church, Parkersburg

The love of Christ is so great we really can't understand it, yet the Apostle prays that we, as all Christians, will strive to comprehend it, and more importantly, be firmly rooted in it. What does this mean? Try to meditate on this one thought today: the love of Jesus Christ. This love was incarnated for you, went to a cross for you, was resurrected for you, and promises you eternal life, now and forever. This much love is all consuming. It is overwhelming. We can't shut it up inside of us. When you feel that much love in you, you can't help but show it to others. We have to act out positively toward everyone in Christ's name and tell everyone about it. When we minister to others and tell others about Christ, we get to share that overwhelming love.

*Loving God, your love, justice, and compassion,
are beyond what my mortal mind can ever fully understand.
Let me live out that love in my daily life so that my words and my actions
may always be a living witness to your living love.*

Mar. 24 – Wednesday

Read Job 19:23-27a

from Rev. David Chafin, Deputy Regional Minister

Among the evidences for individual human history, none are so intriguing as those things which are engraved in stone. From the family graveyard to the hieroglyphs of Egypt, my imagination is captured by what is said and unsaid. One doesn't quickly commit to stone what one might hurriedly dash out in an email or text message.

Job's confidence in the justice of God, and indeed of his own sense of standing before God, is as sure as any engraving he could imagine. Beyond this wavering, uncertain world is a sure and reliable God – the rock of our salvation, the word that shall not pass away.

*Help me to know you, O God, as the ultimate reality
and to rejoice in the faith your constant goodness inspires.*

Mar. 25 – Thursday

Read Isaiah 50:4-9a

from Rev. Dawna Watkins, Bluefield, WV

"The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word." What happens when I'm the one that needs sustaining? Is that where we are as a church? Have we been in teaching mode so long that we have lost sight of the sustaining power of God? Have we stopped listening for the "morning by morning" gift of God's insight? Showing us those whom we are to teach; including ourselves!

I sometimes think that I'm alone in this, it's all me, and forget that God is with me. I discovered my prayer life has been for others while I struggle to carry my load without help. It's amazing how quickly God answered a prayer that I asked for myself. Once we remember that God is our teacher, filling us

crucifixion? Paul knows they are essential to resurrection, to new life. “This one thing I do” (v. 13) is a key to Pauline spirituality. Multi-tasking may be o.k. for a computer, but it kills spiritual life. (Remember Martha “busy about many things”?) Forgetting the past, moving toward the future are central for Paul; he knows life is always ahead, never in the past. After the sacrifices and suffering of Lenten life comes the glory of Easter.

Lord of Life, in these days of Lent let me know you.

Give me courage to leave the past behind and move toward the life that is new each morning and the light of Easter’s empty tomb.

Mar. 21: Fifth Sunday in Lent **Read John 12:1-8**

from Rev. Dr. Larry Grimes, Community Christian Church, Beech Bottom, WV and Bethany College Dir. of Church Relations

“He’s raised the dead so **the least we can do,**” Martha said, “is give him a dinner.” Mary, she knew, wasn’t interested in the least—not in grape leaves, unleavened loaves, olive oil. Not even wine. Certainly not filling jars and sweeping floors. Not in the least. **Mary wanting more,** took a pound of costly perfume, anointed his feet, wiped them with her hair.” **Wasteful,” said Judas,** thinking less, wanting more. “What about the poor,” he said, hearing the jingle of coins in the front of his brain, the click of dice. “Yeah, the poor. Tell her to sell that nard, give the money to me. Worth a lot, that nard.” “**They will always be with you, the poor,**” Jesus said. “**I am their good news.**” And Mary, he said, about my feet, thank you for the oil and the softness of your hair. Keep the rest . . . for later.”

I adore you, my God, and that is what matters in this day, this season, my life.

Mar. 22 – Monday **Read Colossians 1:9-17**

from Rev. Richard Howard, First Christian Church, Morgantown

Western culture has so thoroughly domesticated Jesus that it takes an active imagination to see the cosmic Christ proclaimed by Colossians. This is the age of Jesus as our bosom buddy, our pal, our friend. We find comfort in a Jesus that bears much resemblance to ourselves. But Colossians tells us of a greater being, a glorious being, one through whom “*all things in heaven and on earth were created...*” And this is the power that has been made manifest through his present body on earth, the Church. If we would just embrace such an understanding of Christ, and then seek to be the conduits of his powerful love to the world around us, how much closer to the divine kingdom on earth we would be.

As we make our Lenten journey, let us be thankful that such love for all creation has chosen to dwell in the world through those who are willing to give themselves to God.

Gracious Lover of Creation,

instill in us even a small portion of your love,

that we too may work to bring healing and wholeness to a broken world.

Finding the light of Jesus is much the same way. In acknowledging sin, turning to Jesus, we are forgiven. Darkness is lifted. Accepting Jesus turns on an everlasting light that diminishes the darkness even of death. 1 John 2:12 says, “I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.”

Within our darkest night, you kindle a never-dying fire, O God.

Shine in my life, and into our world, through me.

Mar. 2 – Tuesday **Read 1 John 3:1-3**

from Rev. Sarah Webb, Wheeling, WV

With bright eyes they scramble to the front of the sanctuary to take their places around the pastor, jockeying for their favorite positions. They are eager to tell their stories, perhaps to get a laugh from the congregation. Even the shy ones come with hope and pay close attention. Each child wants to be seen and appreciated.

We look at them and see ourselves – how we all want to be known, to be loved, to be seen for who we really are. When we stand before our Lord Jesus, we are fully known – not just for who we are now, but for who we are becoming.

Lent is a journey through the layers of ourselves, that we might become ever more honest with ourselves and transparent before God. It is the hard work of coming clean.

Thank you, Lord, that you know us completely, and love us still.

Mar. 3 – Wednesday **Read Isaiah 55:1-5**

from Rev. Joshua Patty, Central Christian Church, Fairmont

My mother and brother once ate at a newly opened restaurant. When they asked for the check, they were told that there was no charge; the restaurant was training its staff before the official opening a few days later. Imagine if the restaurant had advertised this: “Come and eat, whatever you want, *for free!*” They would have been overrun. People would have waited for hours.

Isaiah writes that God offers this very thing, an everlasting banquet, to all who will come. It’s not a secret offer either. But there are no crowds, no lines. It’s almost like no one knows or cares.

In our busy, stressful lives, we often overlook God’s offer, not knowing exactly how hungry we are. We keep looking for drinks to ease our parched throats, not realizing our thirst is spiritual. Despite our foolishness, we stumble across God’s banquet, and partake. During this Lent, let us confess our tardiness and thank God for this waiting, gracious feast.

Cultivate the hunger that you have planted within us, O God –

a hunger for you, for your gracious nourishment,

for healing and peace.

Mar. 4 – Thursday **Read Romans 10:8b-13**

Rev. David Chafin, Deputy Regional Minister

The heart of the faith lies in the resurrection of Jesus, and the propelling passion of our mission lies in the assurance that the gift of resurrection living is available to all.

Dare we ask ourselves, as we examine our own lives, who it is that we might prefer not receive this new and living faith? How will we incorporate those who seem foreign to us into the life of the church? Are there limits to our version of this proclamation of the gospel that Paul's letter would not allow?

*If I have failed to see your good news as good news for my neighbor,
O God, help me to know it, and by your grace to deal with it faithfully.*

Mar. 5 – Friday **Read Psalm 63:1-8**

*from Rev. Scott Thayer, Bethany Memorial Church and
Chaplain of Bethany College*

Today's scripture speaks of two realities that we all can understand: appetite and satisfaction. For the Psalmist, bodily yearnings for food and drink were reminders of a hunger and a thirst for Something else. In his book, *Confessions*, Augustine wrote, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in God."

We were created complete, but not whole. Our circuits are all in place, but they are not integrated. There is a missing factor, a secret ingredient, an undiscovered treasure that we spend our lives looking for. It is a faintly gleaming star, a still, small voice, a subtle aroma. It does not blare out of the radio or scream from the headlines. But in the silent watches of the night God invites us to the banquet. We come, we eat, we drink. And we find that the essence we were looking for is already ours in God's steadfast love.

*O God, when we think of you in the watches of the night,
may our souls be satisfied with the abundance of your grace.*

Mar. 6 – Saturday **Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

from Rev. Magdalyn Sebastian, First Christian Church, Wheeling

"[God] will not let you be tested beyond your strength." My heart aches as I sit with congregants who are in horrific physical, mental, or spiritual pain especially when embarrassed, they try to nullify their pain by saying, "others have it worse than me" or "God's not going to give me more than I can handle, right?"

I find it a fuzzy line between drawing true strength from scripture and murmuring "correct" words that we do not feel. The problem, I believe, is that we forget to read the second half of the above verse: "but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it." Somewhere along the way, we have internalized that this "way" is something we must find and do all on our own. The gift is that the "way" God provides us out of our suffering and pain is through the combination scripture and the company of others believers. Our strength is not limited to what we personally can muster,

Claim this assurance for yourself today. God is with you in the midst of your deepest need. Do not fear! God who created you is calling you by name — holding your hand — carrying you through the deepest of waters. Have courage knowing you are loved beyond your wildest imaginings by the one in whose image you have been created.

Ever-Present One, help me to see you at work in all of life.

Mar. 18 – Thursday **Read Isaiah 43:16-21**

*from Rev. Jamie Gump,
Madison Avenue Christian Church, Huntington*

Ever been lost? As a child, I lost sight of Mom while in a store. At that age, a large store is a scary wilderness. I can feel now the initial fear and panic, and also the security and comfort after being reunited. The Lord says, "I am about to do a new thing." If we are honest, that which is new, which stretches us and pulls us out of our comfortable faith routines, can be like a wilderness, like being lost. Still, God is always about to do a new thing. In a faith that is alive, we are daily called to something new, which can be challenging, even scary. Yet the good news is that the Lord "will make a way through the wilderness." As we face the new, the Lord will guide us through the discomfort and uncertainty. Something new is springing forth at this moment. Can you perceive it?

Lord, may we trust that you will make a way for us.

Mar. 19 – Friday **Read Psalm 126**

from Rev. Thaddaeus B. Allen, Regional Minister

Sometimes we find ourselves in thankful postures. Groups can give thanks for restoration as well as individuals. And how sweet it is when groups of people become corporately aware of God's watch-care over them. Some things are best said together. During Lent, the church will have more than one occasion to confess aloud that "the Lord has done great things for us." And in doing so, may "we rejoice" together.

God has never left the church. God has never left us. May we return in new ways during this season that we hold so dear. May we return with shouts of joy.

*As we rejoice in your life-giving and redeeming presence, O God,
may we celebrate the love which draws us together in your name.*

Mar. 20 – Saturday **Read Philippians 3:4b-14**

from Rev. Dr. Bonnie Bowman Thurston, Wheeling, WV

What a rich text! Paul gives his impressive *resume* in vv. 4b-6, then says it is "loss" and "rubbish" (using a *much* coarser word!) compared to knowing Christ, not knowing *about* Him, but knowing *Him*. Verse 9 is Pauline theology in a nutshell that is followed by a bombshell: Paul wants to be like Christ in suffering and death! Who among us prays for suffering and

presence, it might be because of our unlovely attitudes and actions towards those who are right here.

*Loving God, may this Lenten season deepen my gratitude
for the mystery of Christ's atoning sacrifice.
As I meditate on His cross, show me how to love more deeply.*

Mar. 10 – Wednesday **Read Psalm 28:1-2, 6-9**
from Rev. Mark Mills, First Christian Church, Moundsville

Desperation. Whether quiet or expressed through anguished cries, to be desperate must be one of the worst emotions we can feel. In the midst of desperation, to feel as if God has abandoned us leaves us in the deepest darkness. Yet darkness gives way to light, and to the Light we must turn if we are to have hope. Our Lenten journey is to help us focus on the deepest part of the human spirit's connection with God's divine Spirit, the deepest Light. God is never silent though the ears of the soul may at times be deaf. Trust that God hears your heart. Trust that desperation will always be temporary and fade at the onset of the Light of Easter.

*God, reach into my soul and let me hear the rhythm of your breath,
filling me with your wholeness and saving grace.*

Mar. 11 – Thursday **Read Joshua 5:9-12**
from Pastor Rod Hubbs, First Christian Church, McMechen

I may be off in my thinking, but when I read this scripture I am reminded of when Christ celebrated the Passover with His apostles. Up until that time they had been following Jesus, enjoying the manna he provided. Upon his crucifixion, their manna was gone and they were on their own to be and to teach the Good News.

This brings to mind when we were first converted. The stone of ignorance was rolled away, and we were on our journey toward being new creations in Christ. We put away our old ways, and started our new lives.

Every Lenten season is a reminder of our new lives in Christ - a refreshing of our minds in the way that we should love each other and live as Christians.

*Father, be with us in our refreshing period
and guide us in the way you would have us to go.*

Mar. 12 – Friday **Read Psalm 32**
from Rev. Sanford Downs, First Christian Church, Parkersburg

It may seem strange to talk about the way to be happy during Lent, but the psalmist says, "*Happy are they whose sins are forgiven.*" Our sins have been forgiven through Jesus Christ. Too often, people pretend they don't have any sin. They often harshly judge others for every transgression, but deny their own. This does not lead to happiness.

Happiness is found by confessing our sins to God and then accepting God's forgiveness, which also means forgiving ourselves. This, then is the real purpose of Lent. It is not a time of sadness or want. It is a time to confess our sins to God, to repent of everything we have done wrong - and everything we failed to do right - so that we may accept forgiveness and truly be happy in the Lord.

*Forgiving God, I have not always done everything as I should have;
so forgive me and help me to forgive myself and everyone else,
that I may be filled with your happiness.*

Mar. 13 – Saturday **Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21**
*from Pastor Rae Browning, First Christian Church,
Cumberland, MD*

My Mother and Grandmother always told me that there is some good in everyone. I was reminded of this listening to motivational speaker Suzie Humphrey. Her message was, "I Can Do That." She explains how she has stepped into situations and jobs having no idea how to face them, but always answers, "I can do that." For this, she is one of today's best motivational speakers. She emphasizes looking at the positive, especially the positive in other people.

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" Therefore, as ambassadors of Christ - knowing that God sent Christ to break the chains of sin and make us whole - and as reconciled children of God, can we see through eyes of faith and say, "I can do that," too?

*Help me to see all that your love can enable within me, God,
and give me the will to do it according to your will.*

Mar. 14: Fourth Sunday in Lent **Read Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**
from Rev. Kevin Bowers, First Christian Church, Weirton

We know today's Gospel lesson as the Story of the Prodigal Son. I can imagine that most of us have heard dozens of sermons and Sunday School lessons preached and taught from the angle of the father (or mother, for that matter) of the older brother and of the younger brother. Most of us can relate to one or all of the people in the parable at certain times in our life.

I hope wherever you are you hear the voice of home: the voice of a loving church, that has her problems, but has her arms open in love for you; the voice of a loving God that always has arms open for you. I pray that this Lenten season you find yourself resting in those arms. This is where home is. If you have left either for awhile, they're waiting for your return. You are always welcome home!

*Welcoming God, help me to find my home in you
and among your dear people.
Together, may we welcome your whole world.*