

2015  
Lenten Devotional Booklet



Written by Lutheran Campus Ministry Students at Arizona State University and the  
community of University Lutheran Church

# Preparing for Lent

Lenten Journey

Dear Travel Partner,

Thank you for your willingness to trek along with us in thought, prayer, and devotion this Lenten season. It is the hope of our community and those who spent time creating these devotions that our writings will add to your experience of Lent. It is also our hope as you travel with us along this path a feeling of partnership in ministry is created and deepened. In fact, I have a request of you: each week in Lent would you please left up a prayer for our students and ministry involved in Lutheran Campus Ministry? We would greatly appreciate such support.

As you may notice, at the bottom of each devotion we have included a hunger fact and/or activity. Lent seems like such an appropriate time to strengthen our commitment to fighting hunger in our community and in our world. Perhaps an additional meal-time prayer for the hungry would add to our Lenten pilgrimage.

Thank you for traveling with us this Lent. We look forward to see you in Jerusalem!

Gratefully in Christ,

Gary N. McCluskey

Campus Pastor, Arizona State University

&

Alicia Danielson

Campus Ministry Associate, Arizona State University

Ash Wednesday  
"To dust you shall return"  
Genesis 2: 1-9

"You are dust. And to dust you shall return". So we say in Ash Wednesday for the Imposition of Ashes. Humbling words as we begin the journey of Lent. We come having carefully chosen what we wear each day, making sure we are washed and clean. Perhaps we have make-up, cologne or perfume, all in the interest of making a presentable appearance. Now we must go about with a dirty mark of ash on our forehead reminding us and the world we are not only as we appear. Yet look at this Genesis text. God takes dust into God's own hands. God molds, shapes, and creates. God breathes life into that which God created. God is intimate with God's creation. Close and personal. God does not mind getting God's hands dirty. God is not afraid to play in the mud or with dust. We are dust and to dust we shall return. Lent does remind us too that when all is said and done we return not only to where we started, but more importantly to whom we began: the God of creation. The God of Jesus. The God who is close, personal and intimate.

*Thank you God for your willingness to come and be close to us. Thank you for your willingness to risk being touched by our sin. Thank you for being our God this Lent. Amen.*

Gary N. McCluskey, Pastor

Hunger Fact/Challenge: During the week, say this prayer before meals: Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts be blessed.

Thursday, February 19

“Cain and Abel”

Genesis 4: 1-15

This passage tells the timeless recurring story that has happened in families and society throughout the generations. The first Biblical couple: Adam & Eve, experience great joy having and raising two sons Cain and Abel. The tragedy occurs when Abel’s sacrifice to the Lord is accepted, yet Cain’s sacrifice is not accepted. Cain in a fit of jealousy and rage, murders his brother. The most amazing thing to me is that the Lord shows mercy and protects Cain after he confesses his crime. To the basic code of justice; “An eye for an eye”; this initially makes no sense. Why offer mercy to a person who murdered a honorable person? My faith says that Lord was giving us a preview of the crucifixion of Jesus. Just as God gave protection to Cain when Adam’s son Abel was murdered; God will give the world despite the murder of his son Jesus. Hopefully we as Christian can show respect and mercy to those who harm us.

*Lord, lets us try to follow your example by giving mercy to those who harm us.*

Kenneth Overturf

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Pray for those who grow, harvest, process, transport, stock, sell, and prepare food.

Friday, February 20  
“Sin is drowned in the flood”  
Genesis 6: 1-22

Water, it's such an essential component for life. When we seek to make things new, we seek after fresh water. When, we look for life on exoplanets, we search for signs of water. It's no different when we search for “things being made new” and renewed life in Scripture. Too often, people see the Flood myths of Noah as a condemnation of the world, and, while there is some focus on sin and repentance, greater focus should be placed on the fact that an ailing world was made new. Water was employed by God to cleanse the earth of evil and bring forth a chance for new life and forgiveness. Today, that metaphor is relived in our baptism and confession of sin. We know that we die and are born again in Christ through baptism and renew that covenant through our confession during the liturgy.

John Collins

*Holy God, we thank you for the gift of water. Grant that we, having been made new in the waters of baptism, may live continually in the knowledge of your saving grace. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Find three things to repair, recycle, or reuse instead of throwing away or buying new.

Saturday, February 21

“Sin’s wage”

Romans 6: 15-23

One of the first things I can remember learning in church is what Paul reminds the Romans in this letter: that God has given us the free gift of grace to forgive us of our sins. This grace is not something we have to earn but is freely given to all people. Jesus did the work of earning this grace for us by his death and resurrection. We proclaim this message to be true and teach future generations about this free gift of grace, yet, do we say with confidence that we are freely forgiven by God’s grace? Do we truly trust that promise of forgiveness? Do we trust that gift of grace? Do we trust that there is nothing we need to do to achieve that forgiveness? No, we don’t. If we did trust in that promise, if we did truly and fully trust God, we would not worry about our continued sins. We would not live a life filled with concern and worry about our behavior, actions, thoughts, and words. We would not worry about death and what might come after. Paul says “the wages of sin is death,” and because we don’t trust that grace, we are afraid that judgment will come to us someday, that we have not been adequate images of Christ to the world. We don’t trust this grace because we think this grace revolves around us and, from personal experience, humans are not that trustworthy. But where we truly fail in this thought process is the “us” part, the thought that this gift of grace is about us.

We have been freed from sin by grace and Paul says we are called to live freely in that grace, but if we don’t trust that grace, how can we live in that grace? How can we do what God calls us to do—love and show respect to and serve and share grace with our fellow human beings—if we cannot fully embrace the promise of forgiveness freely given by a God who loves us unconditionally. That is the most important part of this gift of grace—it was given by a loving God. This grace has nothing to do with who we are or what we can do with it and has everything to do with the God who gave it, freely and lovingly. This is why we can trust in it—because it is not about us. As Paul says, the reward of living a life freely in grace is a life serving God.

*Righteous God, thank you for your promise of forgiveness and your free gift of grace. Help us to find the trust we need in order to live fully in your forgiveness and grace. In the name of our redeemer, Jesus Christ, we pray, Amen.*

Katharina von Bora

Hunger Fact/Challenge: One out of every six of our neighbors around the world lack access to a reliable source of clean water. Four million children will die this year from water-borne infectious disease. Give a gift to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal for each time you use running water today.

Sunday, February 22  
“Abraham is called by God”  
Genesis 12: 1-9, 15: 1-21

At the age of 75 years Abraham is called by God to move himself and his household to Canaan. And Abraham does as he is asked to. Why? Is it because God promises that by doing so he and his offspring will make a great nation? Because, after arriving and taking over the land from those inhabitants, Abraham is still childless. Yet God still promises that the descendants of Abraham will be as the number of the stars. Later on, God says. After these descendants have been in bondage and slavery for 400 years...

What depth of faith it took for Abraham to continue to believe in the promise of God!

We, too, are called by God. We, too, are beset by disappointments and barriers to our plans. Do we have the depth of faith to continue to believe in God and to continue to do God's will even when we think God may not be delivering on his promises?

God has given us the most precious evidence of his love, in the life and death of Jesus. Because Jesus lived and died we can believe that God does indeed love us and will be with us forever.

*Be with us this day, Dear Lord, and keep us in your way as we go forth to show your love to the people we meet in our work, our social lives and our families. Amen.*

Ellie Strang

Hunger Fact/Challenge: How many eggs are in your fridge? Give thanks for farm animals!

Monday, February 23  
“A child of promise”  
Genesis: 18: 1-15; 21: 1-7

Has anyone ever heard of a 90+ year old woman conceiving a child? I certainly have not! But who am I to say that it cannot happen? It apparently happened to Sarah, Abraham’s wife! This is not to say that she believed the Lord when He spoke to Abraham about her pending pregnancy. She laughed it off!

The Lord kept His promise to Abraham and Sarah. Within that year, Isaac had been born and circumcised. The birth of Sarah’s son is proof that God follows through on His word. We must hold strong to this story as we walk through Lent. Although this is a time to reflect on Christ’s passion, we must not forget the many stories that lead up to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Sarah was once a barren, old woman. By God’s grace, she gave birth to a son. Just because you think something cannot happen, does not mean it won’t happen. Expect the unexpected; it is what God does.

*Gracious God, we live in an age where the “proof is in the pudding”. If we do not think it can happen, we shrug it off. Help us to be more open to the unexpected, for that is how you like to work. Amen.*

Blake B. Petersen

Hunger Fact/Challenge: At meal times this week, say the “Come, Lord Jesus” prayer and add, “and may there be a goodly share on every table everywhere.”



Tuesday, February 24

“A gamble with God’s graciousness”

Genesis 18:16-23

“Then the men set out from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way. The Lord said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.’” Then the Lord said, ‘How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know.’ So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Then Abraham came near and said, ‘Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?’”

Sweeping away the righteous with the wicked seems unfair. Sometimes when God does something that surprises us or doesn’t seem fair to us, the best thing to do is question. Questioning God can bring us closer to God. We don’t understand everything that happens, but that is not necessarily bad. I think that God can handle it if we are uncomfortable with something bad that happens in our life. The key is not to become so angry that we alienate ourselves from God.

*God, please be with me today. Help me to be at peace with my surroundings, and trust that you are working for the good of all. Thank you for my blessings; the ones I am aware of and the ones I am not.*

Julie Gerrish

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Remember a time when you passed by someone in need. What made it hard to stop and help?

Wednesday, February 25

“Isaac is to be sacrificed”

Genesis 22: 1-10

This much admired text is also quite troubling. On the one hand, the faith of Abraham is exemplary. There is trust that God will provide. There is trust that God is above all human moral codes and able to act in God's own divine wisdom. Yet it is troubling that God would test Abraham so. Perhaps there is a sense of trust here which we miss. Perhaps God also trusted Abraham to follow instructions so that God could intercede and stop this heinous act. Perhaps. Truthfully we do not know. Maybe it is good this passage troubles us. Maybe that is a lesson of faith right there. Trust God to be God, trust that God is good. Trust that God is loving. Trust these things in the midst of all that might indicate otherwise. And act and live in ways that demonstrate such trust.

*God of Abraham, God of Jesus, God of us and God of all. Give us faith to trust in you when the trials and struggles of life might tear us from you. Amen.*

Martin Luther

Hunger Fact/Challenge: What will you share today?

Thursday, February 26

“God will provide”

Genesis 22: 11-19

As a child of God I think too often we overlook all the things God provides to us. As a student at LCM, God provides me with a family away from home and a daily support system. God provides us with physical things that we need like food, water, and warm homes, but I think the greater gifts God provides are emotional and more personal. Some gifts that I find myself under appreciating are the friends that surround me at school and work, the opportunity to love my family and puppy, and the time I get to reflect on the past and prepare for the future.

*Dear God, thank you for the chance to appreciate all the things you give to us. Help me to utilize these gifts to better serve you.*

Mikayle Holm

Hunger Fact/Challenge: An estimated 1.02 billion people in the world go hungry.

Friday, February 27

“God’s promise and presence follow Jacob”

Genesis 28: 10-22

*Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.*

*Genesis 28:16*

Jacob is on the run. He just tricked his elder twin brother out of both his birthright and the blessing of their father Isaac. Now Jacob fears for his life and is escaping to what he hopes is safety with his mother's relatives far away in Haran. He camps for the night and dreams about what we call "Jacob's ladder" – a staircase to heaven with angels moving up and down it. God makes several promises to Jacob. He will be given the land where he now is sleeping. He will have many descendants who spread out in every direction. But the final promise extends even further: all peoples on earth will be blessed through Jacob and his offspring.

What does this ancient story have to do with us? We too are blessed by God to be a blessing to others. God promises to work through us – whatever we are, wherever we are – to touch those around us with God's love. This is a big responsibility, but we are not expected to go it alone. God is with us always. The Lord is in this place now, today, and will be present with us in every place we journey throughout our lives.

*Promise and Presence. Thank you, Lord, for being with me every day, every step of the way. May I acknowledge your presence by extending your promise of salvation to those who touch my life. Amen.*

Kim Savage

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Think about donating to Feed My Starving Children. 93% of the total donations go directly to the food program. 7% goes to fundraising, administration, and overhead costs. To donate, visit [www.fmsc.org](http://www.fmsc.org).

Saturday, February 28

“God intends good”

Genesis 45: 1-20; 50: 15-21

Sometimes I struggle with why bad things happen to good people. I really have no answer to why these things occur, but I know what this passage tells us that God intends good. Maybe it is in our hands to carry out God’s intentions. Therefore I challenge you to do something each day to share the God’s good intentions with others whether that is being kind to people, volunteering in the community, or doing something to serve God.

*Dear God, thank you for the reminder that you have good intentions for all your children. Please encourage me to live out these intentions and show others Your great works.*

Mikayle Holm

Hunger Fact/Challenge: A \$10 donation to God’s Global Barnyard through ELCA World Hunger can bring a family 10 chicks – a source of food and income.

Sunday, March 1

“God’s people are oppressed in Egypt”

Exodus 1: 1-22

In this passage, we read about the oppression of God’s people. In reading about their oppression, I can’t help but think of all the oppressed peoples of the world today: those without clean water, without nutritious and abundant food, without human rights we in the United States take for granted. I think about women who are not valued the ways men are, and children who don’t know they are loved. I think about the oppressed people in our own country-our own backyards- how often we divide ourselves: there is *us* and then there is *them*. But this passage makes it abundantly clear: There is no *us* and *them*. There is only *we*. *We* are brothers and sisters in the love and light of our God. And then I think- in what ways this Lenten season (and beyond) can I ensure I live into that knowledge- that we are all God’s beloved children?

*Gracious God, be with all your children today. Help us bear each other’s burdens, so that the weight each has to carry is lessened by the help of our brothers and sisters in You, and help us create a world full of systems of justice and peace. Amen.*

Abby Henderson

Hunger Fact/Challenge: At mealtime this week, say the “Come, Lord Jesus” prayer and add, “Guide us along the servant’s way, and lead us to your dawning day. Amen.”

Monday, March 2

“A baby escapes death on the waters”

Exodus 2: 1-10

The Hebrews were a threat to Pharaoh. Hebrew women were so strong no mid-wives were necessary for birth. The Hebrew population was growing and becoming a threat. Pharaoh's solution was to have all male Hebrew children thrown into the Nile. That would take care of the problem!

So early in scripture no one has yet learned God will not be thwarted by human plans. Pharaoh will soon learn. David would learn. The Romans would learn. God uses the very evil plan of Pharaoh to begin Pharaoh's undoing. We learn here it is not so much the Hebrews that were a threat to Pharaoh and his power. It is God who is the ultimate threat to power when used for evil purpose.

*Gracious God as earthly powers rage for control we thank you that you are aware and that you are at work to defeat those powers that ignore justice, peace, and all the good things you will for all your people. Amen.*

Anika Lehnhardt

Hunger Fact/Challenge: One out of every ten households in the United States is at risk of hunger. Visit [www.elca.org/graintinghope](http://www.elca.org/graintinghope) to learn about ELCA world hunger and domestic hunger grants.

Tuesday, March 3

“Moses is called by God”

Exodus 3: 1-12

“Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, ‘I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.’ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am,’ Then he said, ‘Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. ‘He said further, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, ‘I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.’ But Moses said to God, ‘**Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?**’ He said, ‘**I will be with you;** and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you should worship God on this mountain.’”

Moses didn't think the Lord was actually calling on him in this passage, probably because he had a speech defect and was used to living in the shadow of his priestly brother, Aaron. He even had a wife who was a Midianite, which was very hush-hush back then. How would he be a leader of all the Israelites? Moses went on to perform miracles with God's help. If he hadn't listened to God, think of all the people would have missed out on milk and honey! The Call of God isn't always as obvious as a talking burning bush. I think it is important to be mindful, though, of what the spirit is saying to us, no matter what place in life we are. Moses “keeping the flock of his father-in-law” is like us being at work, or in class, or at the store. Just typical! Next time you are at your every-day setting, look for the burning bushes. Maybe it is someone who looks sad, and just needs a smile or a listen from you! Maybe it is a piece of trash on the ground that will just stay there, or harm wildlife unless you help. Sometimes it feels weird or awkward to reach outside of yourself, or like it won't be appreciated, or like someone else could do a better job. Just remember that God “will be with you” whatever you do, and that with God's help, the outcome will be positive.

*God, please be with me today. Help me to notice my surroundings and do what I can to serve you within them.*

*Thank you for your willingness to listen to and serve us. Amen.*

Julie Gerrish

Hunger Fact/Challenge: How many cans of soup are in your pantry? Give thanks for the food you have to eat!

Wednesday, March 4

“The angel of death passes over”

Exodus 12: 1-32

Death is a part of life that we will all encounter. It is not something we enjoy talking about, witnessing, or learning about. For God, it is a process that we must go through in order to find new life. As the “Angel of Death” passed over Egypt, it was a sign of a new beginning that was about to come to Israel. There is beauty in death. We just have to look for it. Do not be alarmed when the “Angel of Death” comes, for it brings new beginnings for those who believe in God’s promise.

*Gracious God, may we never fail to believe in Your promises. Help us to be courageous when facing the death of a loved one, or our own mortality. We joyfully await the new life You have promised to those who believe in Your Name. Amen.*

Blake B. Petersen

Hunger Fact/Challenge: ELCA World Hunger-Health Care breaks the cycle of hunger and poverty by building up healthy families. What do you count on for health care? Imagine your life without access to these resources and services.

Thursday, March 5

“God’s people cross the seabed”

Exodus 14: 1-25

As the Israelites were being led out of Egypt by Moses, they lost faith in the Lord when they saw that they were being pursued by the Egyptians. How many times have you or I faltered in our faith? How many times has fear bested our faith in the Lord? At the apex of our fear, we are told not to. We must remember that the Lord is with us always and will vanquish our doubts even in the darkest of times. Much like the Egyptians pursuing the Israelites, evil will be swept away, and we will be left with the memory that the Lord will always be there for us.

*“Dear Lord, Give me the strength and the courage to know that in times of fear and darkness you are always with me, you will guide me to safety, and you will always fight for me. Amen.”*

Diane Bowersox

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Gifts to the ELCA World Hunger-Water help bring wells, reservoirs, water pumps, and irrigation systems to thirsty neighbors. Visit [www.elca.org/hunger/water](http://www.elca.org/hunger/water) to learn more.



Friday, March 6

“God delivers the ten commandments”

Exodus 20: 1-21

Many people will state that they know what the “10 commandments” are and then may have trouble remembering all of them when asked to recite them. This is not unlike our day-to-day lives, wherein we trudge along thinking about all the responsibilities we handle for our families, friends, work, expenses, all the tasks of a home life, etc. None of these concerns may cause us to consciously think about the 10 Commandments specifically. However, when we do stop to consider these laws of life, we must acknowledge that they are the required components of a life dedicated to serving the will of God through acts of love. When we do so, we set the example for those who have not become aware of these laws and lessons on how to live together.

The commandments tell us that God is first and only in life (verses 1- 3). He created us and brought us safely into existence so that we can honor Him and all that He provides for us. He, alone, is who we are to worship and follow (vs. 4 - 6). We are not to use His name for vain or vile purposes (v. 7) and we thank Him when we rest from our labors (vs. 8-11). We are to value the lives of others and honor their contributions to a life of community (vs. 8 - 17). The people traveling with Moses were frightened by the Voice that called them to witness the glory of God (vs. 18 - 21). This causes me to think about the shepherds who were called to follow the star in the East, and how they were frightened by the brightness and sound of the angels.

*Gracious God, help us to hear your voice every day and prompt us to follow the 10 commandments in our thoughts and deeds. Remind us to not be afraid of Your voice, knowing that because You are the Creator of all, we can trust in Your reassurance of life everlasting. Amen.*

Deb Hull

Hunger Fact/Challenge: How many fresh fruits and vegetables are in your fridge? Give thanks for farms!

Saturday, March 7  
“Snakes of deliverance”  
Numbers 21: 1-9

Snakes, the very reference conjures up images of dragons and the serpent in the garden of Eden. In Christianity, we frequently associate the serpent with temptation and the devil. However, that was not always the case in ancient Judaism and early Christianity. In the story of the Bronze Serpent, we see that the Hebrew people designed an icon of the snake on a stake representing God's victory and salvation. This image is seen today on the symbols of medical associations. The snake's venom, while dangerous, can also be used to provide antidotes for illnesses or to protect against other snakes. In Native American traditions, including the Zuni tribe, the snake represents a connection to Mother Earth as it crawls close to the ground. When Mother Earth needs rain, the snake acts as a way to get that necessary water from Father Sky. They're not so bad after all!

John Collins

*Holy God, we thank you for the marvelous diversity of your creation. Teach us to live peacefully and reverently with all your creatures, that we be worthy of the bounty of your earth. Amen.*

Hunger Fact/Challenge: The HIV/AIDS pandemic is a major cause of hunger and poverty in parts of Africa. Adults in the prime of life are unable to work and care for their families. Children orphaned by AIDS become head of their households, which often keeps them out of school. Give, pray, and advocate for the overcoming of the tragedy of HIV/AIDS.

Sunday, March 8  
“King Saul loses God’s favor”  
I Samuel 13:1-15

This passage can cause confusion for several reasons. Why would God punish Saul so severely for performing an offering? Why would Saul not wait just a little longer for Samuel? Surely these are questions for a scholar, but here is one layperson’s perspective. Saul’s reaction was very human. The Philistines had gathered a large army and were ready to strike. Saul’s troops feared for their lives and many were deserting the army. The prophet Samuel was late, who had promised to come to the battlefield, presumably to offer a sacrifice to God. With the army deep in chaos and the Philistines primed to attack, Saul decided to perform the ritual himself. Desperation and fear caused Saul to do something, anything, to calm his troops and give them something to fight for. His decision was practical and perhaps logical, but also reflects impatience and pride. In doing this, Saul overstepped his boundaries as king and as a Benjamite by claiming the authority to do something only the prophet and priests could do. He was unwilling to wait just a little longer than he had expected for Samuel to arrive, who was also human and subject to being late during times of war, and so he decided to take power for himself that could not belong to a king. Had Saul had the patience to wait for Samuel, and the humility not to usurp the prophet’s responsibilities, perhaps he would have been a better king. But, seeing these flaws, the text tells us that God decided to shorten Saul’s reign.

*The first section of the Serenity Prayer seems oddly appropriate for this topic (no joke; seriously), and goes as follows:*

*“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference.”*

Walter Johnson

Hunger Fact/Challenge: How many sinks are in your home? Give thanks for clean water!

Monday, March 9  
“King David with Bathsheba”  
II Samuel 11: 1-2: 15

I decided to ask two women to get their opinions about the relationship of King David and Bathsheba. My mother said that what King David did to seduce Bathsheba “Definitely not Kosher.”. A friend Ruth, claimed, “I wondered how Bathsheba felt?”. So I am wondering how did Bathsheba feel during this relationship with King David? The Bible gives no indication if Bathsheba was simply taking her bath and David seduced her. Perhaps she felt threatened, since women at the times were little better than property. My personal belief is that she simply tried to make the best of the situation at hand. She surely felt sadness at sickness and death of her baby. Some Biblical scholars believe that Bathsheba was the “power behind the throne”, that brought her second son, Solomon to be King of Israel; despite their being at least one son of David older than Solomon. My opinion is this lesson teaches that when a person wields power they must be respectful of others.

*Lord: Please let me humble with the power and influence you given me. Please help me be considerate and respectful of others*

Kenneth Overturf

Hunger Fact/Challenge: How many books are in your home? Give thanks for education!

Tuesday, March 10  
“King David repents”  
Psalm 51

When I was little I remember having a hard time grasping what it meant to repent. It was easy to give the Sunday School answer and say that to repent was to ask for forgiveness. But as I've learned, repentance is going a step further. It's realizing your wrong-doing and making a change to do something about it. It's that extra step that I still struggle with to this day. We've all been in King David's shoes- we've done something horrible and haven't thought twice about it, only to feel great remorse once we realize what we've done. King David was by no means perfect, but Psalm 51 gives us an excellent example of how to repent. If you're ever challenging with how to go that extra step, be encouraged and guided by King David's words in Psalms.

*Lord, I thank you for giving me the chance to be washed whiter than snow, even though I don't deserve it.  
Forgive me for my sins, and help guide me on your path as I try to change my ways. Amen.*

Melanie Lehnhardt

Hunger Fact/Challenge: How many birds do you see out your window? Give thanks for all of God's creatures!

Wednesday, March 11

“A history of unfaithful kings begins”

I Kings 12: 1-33

It is relatively easy to think Rehoboam of as an absolute fool for not heeding the counsel of the elders, and perhaps he was, but it is important to remember that Rehoboam is being portrayed this way by the author of 1 Kings. More than likely, Rehoboam was in a very complicated political situation and received multifaceted advice from both parties, which is being oversimplified by the author to make a point. The passage indicates that *all of Israel* went to Rehoboam. Even if this is an exaggeration, there was likely a very large mob which went to the king to demand relief from the policies of the previous king. The passage makes the group sound benign but, as with any mob of upset people, they were likely causing twelve types of chaos in the city. An inexperienced ruler who likely grew up privileged, as the son of the king, Rehoboam chooses to listen to the younger counselors and exercise his new power to harshly demonstrate that this sort of public disturbance is unacceptable; rather than appease the people and risk appearing weak and easily manipulated. There is value in considering why Rehoboam may have acted the way he did, as it humanizes a seemingly inherently evil individual, and allows us to take something meaningful from the story. Similarly, it could be helpful to think about the true nature of circumstances faced by Jeroboam when he creates the golden calves. However, despite the unfortunate circumstances faced by the new kings, their actions are not justified - only human. Rehoboam decides to begin his reign by imposing hardship and fear on the people, and Jeroboam chooses to begin his reign by intentionally leading his people away from God. What does this tell us then? The kings' actions are significant because they serve as reminders that ethics and faith cannot be abandoned during trials, nor do they become irrelevant in complicated and confusing situations.

*God, help us and our world's leaders to strive for peace and justice, even in the most challenging and uncertain of situations. Help us to remember the importance of faith in our lives.*

Walter Johnson

Hunger Fact/Challenge: In Mumeya, Rwanda, getting health care used to mean a long and dangerous walk. Now the community has its own health clinic. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for all the ways God blesses and multiplies our gifts to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal.

Thursday, March 12  
“God has expectations”  
Amos 8: 1-14

In Amos Chapter 8, God warns Amos of a coming time of destruction and famine. The people of Israel had been lying, cheating, and scamming the poor in the marketplace. This oppression and ill treatment of the poor displeases God so much that he promises a famine - a famine for the word of God. The people of Israel will mistreating the poorest members of their society. God has expectations for how we treat the people we know and encounter in our lives. To treat people with anything other than love and compassion and acceptance is to ignore the expectations God has set for us and to distance ourselves from God.

*God, Help us to remember the expectations you have for us as we interact with others. Remind us that we are called to love and accept others regardless of any differences we may have. Thank you for being the perfect example of love. Amen.*

Colleen Sherrod

Hunger Fact/Challenge: What food might you grow at home?

Friday, March 13

“Difficult news”

Jeremiah 23: 1-8

In this passage, the Lord has become unable to tolerate the people of Jerusalem any longer, because of the actions of Manasseh. God declares that because they have rejected Him, He will bring a death upon them that not even Moses and Samuel could stop. He promises to create "widows more numerous than the sand of the sea" and to "put an survivors to the sword before their enemies". It is also proclaimed that no one will mourn for nor take pity on Jerusalem. This passage highlights the importance of living a righteous life and accepting God in your life.

*Dear God, let us not stray from a righteous life and let us always find ourselves by your side. Amen*

Nick Cota

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Imagine that you can finally return home after living in a refugee camp for years. What are your hopes and fears?



Saturday, March 14

“Homecomings”

Jeremiah 23: 1-8

While this passage is called homecomings, I believe it is also intended to be a passage of tremendous hope. Not only does Jeremiah promise that God will bring his people back to their homeland, but also bring a new ruler who is wise and just.

For the people of the Old Testament, this meant hope for a change from the current oppressive rulers and anticipation at being able to return to the land of their ancestors.

But what does it mean for us today? I believe it means that God wants us to have hope for the future because he sent his son to be a “wise and just” leader who will bring us all together in our heavenly home.

*Dear God, thank you so much for sending us your son to be the lord of our salvation and please help us to listen to your wisdom.*

Rebecca Wong

Hunger Fact/Challenge: In Chile, your gifts to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal help women improve the health of their families and communities.

Sunday, March 15

“God sent the prophets and his Son”

Hebrews 1: 1-14

When you take the time to think about the many ways God made himself known to man, it is truly incredible. The prophets of the Old Testament were mere people- just like you and me. But God spoke through them and made himself known through people who were also sinful and flawed. To top it off, God sent us the greatest gift of all- the gift of his Son. A Son more glorious and marvelous than even the angels of the heavens and the very same Son that God gave as a sacrifice for our sins. As we go through Lent, it's important to wake up each day and remember the wondrous gift God bestowed upon us that we don't deserve.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Son. Help me to live each day remembering the selfless gift given to us through the sacrifice of your Son.*

Melanie Lehnhardt

Hunger Fact/Challenge: In rural Haiti, pigs and other animals function as a family's bank account. Share some of what's in your "piggy bank" to help fight world hunger.

Monday, March 16  
“The Word lives here”  
John 1: 1-18

Today’s passage is one of the most quoted in our church. However, I’m not sure how often we stop to reflect on it. For today’s devotional, repeat the following three times each, at least once out loud, and take a moment of silence to reflect on it:

“In the beginning was the word.... The Word was God.”

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

Thanks be to the Word. Thanks be to the light that the darkness did not and cannot overcome. Thanks be to God.

*Gracious God, be with us as we move throughout our days. Help us take moments of quiet to reflect on your Word, on your light, on your choice to become flesh and live among us. Continue to live among us today. May we give you thanks. Amen.*

Abby Henderson

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Give a gift to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal for every year of school you have completed.

Tuesday, March 17  
“A child is on the way”  
Luke 1: 26-56

In today’s passage, Mary learns from the angel Gabriel that she is to conceive a bear a son. She also learns of the miraculous pregnancy of her older cousin, Elizabeth, so far childless and “getting on in years.”

I think it is telling that the story of Jesus and John’s conceptions, and the pregnancies of the two mothers, is told in tandem. Often, we get so caught up in who Jesus was as an individual – a miraculous figure, the son of God, God himself – that we overlook the community of people who raised him and turned him into the man he became.

God did not choose blindly when (S)He chose Mary to be Jesus’s mother. She was a woman dedicated not only to God but to family, as this passage reminds us, when it states that Mary, having arrived at the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah sometime “during the sixth month,” stayed about three months more. Just long enough, in other words, to help Elizabeth through her final months of pregnancy and, probably, to support her during the birth of the child.

Jesus’s whole life, as recounted in all the Gospels, was spent surrounded by people who loved and supported him. He was rarely alone – even when he wanted to be! Not only was he raised by righteous and loving parents, but he was adored by his disciples and supported throughout his ministry by the love and care of women like Mary and Martha.

Rather than focus on his miracles and all the things which set him apart, I think today’s reading reminds us that God dwells within the context of human community. It is in the support and love we give to one another that we will find and nurture God’s presence.

*Holy God, thank you for teaching us how to live and love through the person of Jesus. Continue to dwell with us, we pray, as we seek you in loving service to our brothers and sisters. Amen.*

Ruth Lindsay

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Gifts to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal help children and adults learn how to read.

Wednesday, March 18

“A savior is here”

Luke 2: 1-20

When I was growing up, my home church would always do a Nativity play on Christmas Eve every year. I always wanted to be the narrator, even when I was really little. I could not wait until I was old enough to be the narrator because I loved telling the story. I got so wrapped up in the part of the story about Mary and Joseph and the birth of Jesus that I never really paid much attention to the rest of the story. As I have matured and grown up I realize that one of the most important and influential part of the story is that of the shepherds. The shepherds drop what they are doing and head off to go meet Jesus. They take the angels at their word, and set out in search of this little baby who will change the world and then share this miraculous story with everyone they know. We may not always get a host of angels to point us in the right direction, but just like the shepherds we are called to seek out Jesus and to share the story of his love and grace with everyone we meet.

*God, Thank you for the gift of your son. Help us to follow the example of the shepherds and seek you in our daily lives. Amen.*

Colleen Sherrod

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Time how long it takes you to shower today. Every day this week take a shorter and shorter shower to conserve water.

Thursday, March 19

“Jesus is tempted”

Luke 4: 1-11

Throughout history, humanity has been known for its selfishness. The Holy Bible is filled with stories of men wanting more power, better looking women, and even some extra spending money. Since Jesus was a man, it is more likely than not that He endured the same temptations we go through on a daily basis. The Holy Spirit led Jesus out in order to mold Him into the person God was calling Him to be. It was a time for Jesus to discern the will of God, and make a decision on what path He would take. In order for the Son of God to truly understand our condition, He had to endure many temptations. Christ understands our humanity. This is a God who is truly *with us*.

*Merciful God, we thank you for the humanity of Jesus. Help us to look to Him when we are in the middle of our “wilderness”. May our resolve be to follow in His footsteps. Glory to You in the highest. Amen.*

Blake B. Petersen

Hunger Fact/Challenge: ELCA World Hunger-Training and Education efforts help break the cycle of hunger and poverty. Give a gift to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal in honor of a teacher.

Friday, March 20

“Jesus teaches”

Matthew 5

*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” –Matthew 5:8*

Other than John 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 13, Matthew 5 might contain some of the most famous verses in the New Testament in the form of the Beatitudes. These verses comprise one of Jesus’ first sermons to his followers, and Jesus is eager to teach. To those who have studied the Gospels, the Beatitudes and the verses that follow seem like familiar friends; Matthew 5 is a great introductory to the Gospel. However, we must not fall into the trap of becoming so familiar with the passage that we don’t stop to reflect on its meaning and its purpose.

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them,”* Jesus says in verse 17. However, He is imparting some novel ideas about God and the kingdom of heaven. In the Beatitudes, Jesus explicitly praises the meek, the peacemakers, those poor in spirit, and those who mourn. Instead of extolling the virtues of the mighty and powerful, He teaches the crowd that the path to the kingdom of heaven leaves plenty of room for those who may not have the best of circumstances in their earthly lives. Later on in the chapter, Jesus clarifies some of the prevailing attitudes of the people as gathered from the Old Testament. Instead of continuing the tradition of “an eye for an eye,” Jesus tells his disciples to turn the other cheek instead of seeking vengeance. He also tells the crowd to not only love their neighbors as themselves, but to also pray for those who persecute them, which is infinitely harder. While we have heard these verses retold many times, it can’t escape our attention that these first teachings of Jesus are markedly different than the stories in the Old Testament. Even though Jesus did not come to abolish the law, we can already see the beginnings of his ministry and how He came to lay out a different path to the kingdom of heaven, completed by His death and resurrection.

*Dear God, please give us the wisdom to know Your word and guide us through Your teachings. May we never lose sight of the importance of the Gospel. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

Christine Wilkins

Hunger Fact/Challenge: At mealtime this week, say the “Come, Lord Jesus” prayer and add, “Come deep within our hearts and dwell, that we may all your goodness tell. Amen.”

Saturday, March 21

“God’s love revealed through parables”

Luke 15

In this Bible passage Jesus uses three different parables to illustrate just how much God loves, and he uses real life examples of just how much He loves us. In the parable of the lost sheep Jesus tells a parable about how shepherds look for one sheep that has gone missing even if they have 99 other sheep, because they love each sheep equally and every sheep is important to them. Similarly in the next parable about the lost coin the woman who has ten coins and has only lost one looks for the lost one as much as she can because each coin is equally important just like how God thinks that each one of us is equally important. Then finally in the last parable Jesus talks about the massive amount love that a father has for his son even if the son as done wrong against the father, just like how God loves us even if we have wronged him.

*Dear God, Please help us to remember that You will always love us no matter what. Help us to spread this love that you share to all people. Amen.*

Alex smith

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Gifts to the ELCA Disaster Response bring help and hope in times of drought and flood.



Sunday, March 22

“Jesus is the one”

Luke 4: 16-30

Have you ever questioned if God is real? Do you ever wonder if Jesus was the Son of God? Life constantly throws curveballs at us that brings us to a place, spiritually and emotionally that is hard to dig ourselves out of. We can sometimes reach a point where we begin to doubt our own faith. This is where it is easy to call out to God and ask him to prove his existence and show us his power.

Remember that we do not need instant proof that God is real; the proof is in what is around us everyday. God is our creator and he sent his Son to deliver his word to us. “They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.” God is always working miracles through us just as he did through Jesus on the brow of the hill.

*Dear Lord, fill our hearts with joy and mold us into your servant. Help us to strengthen our faith and bring us closer to you. Amen.*

Troy Wagner

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Donate old clothes that no longer fit you or that you don't want anymore.

Monday, March 23

“God’s will is joy”

John 2: 1-12

This iconic story - Jesus turns water into wine - is one of the first miracles noted in the Gospel of John. More than just a clever party trick, this miracle shows Jesus’ power to transform ordinary things and provide for others. Although this is a famous text, there are many things that can go unnoticed by those relying on memory alone. It is interesting to me that Jesus’ mother is the one to convince Jesus to perform the miracle. Even though He claims his hour “has not yet come,” He follows his mother’s lead and transforms the water into wine. Even Jesus, the Son of God, listens to His mother, as any human would.

My own transformation in faith was prompted by my mother, though I didn’t know it at the time. Much like you can lead a horse to water, you can lead your teenage daughter to church, but you can’t make her like it. I can’t say I hated going to church growing up, but I couldn’t muster half the enthusiasm my mother had for going to worship every Sunday. Like many people this age, I doubted my faith. What if God isn’t real? Am I wasting my time? The idea of my Sunday mornings going to waste made me feel restless. I couldn’t wait to grow up and not be forced to go to church every week.

This feeling was short-lived, as I promptly started attending ULC within my first week alone at college. My mother’s repeated efforts to take me to church had given me a strong faith background, which was only strengthened through periods of doubt. When I became a member of LCM, my faith was transformed and I began to actually enjoy going to worship on my own terms. Like Jesus in the text, the things we do to humor our mothers and mentors can transform us.

*Dear God, please bless all the mothers, fathers, mentors, and teachers and share with them Your wisdom. May Your power transform us and allow us to transform the lives of others for the common good. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

Christine Wilkins

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Learn about LWR’s Fair Trade coffee, chocolate, and handicraft projects at [www.lwr.org/fairtrade](http://www.lwr.org/fairtrade). Do you know if your congregation serves this coffee?

Tuesday, March 24  
“God frees us from the demons”  
Luke 4: 31-37

In this passage, Jesus is just beginning his ministry. After the leaders of his home town of Nazareth attempt to kill him, Jesus travels to a synagogue in Capernaum in Galilee. He taught in the synagogue with the authority of God the father which was a surprise to many people, including a demon possessed man. The demon was afraid of Jesus and taunted him. All Jesus had to say was “Be quiet and come out of him!” and the demon was cast out of the man. After this event, the people of Galilee and the surrounding area all began to talk about Jesus.

This passage is amazing because it really shows the authority by which Jesus came to save us. If the demons who could take over a mans life and ruin it, were so afraid of Jesus, it just shows how much power He has. We also see Jesus using his power to cast the demon out so easily and it makes us feel safe because He is so much greater than any danger possible. It reminds us of the third verse of Martin Luther’s hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

And though this world, with devils filled,  
should threaten to undo us,  
we will not fear, for God hath willed  
his truth to triumph through us.  
The prince of Darkness grim,  
we tremble not for him;  
his rage we can endure,  
for lo, his doom is sure;  
one little word shall fell him.

*Heavenly Father, Thank you for sending your only son to us. Remind us that Satan and his demons have no power over Jesus. Through Him, we are totally safe from the evil one. We have nothing to fear. Continue to protect us so we may go into the world and do your will.*

Andrew Tadlock

Hunger Fact/Challenge: The average Food Stamp benefit is \$1 per meal per person.

Wednesday, March 25  
“God wills health and healing”

Luke 5: 17-26

Think back to a time when you’ve found yourself paralyzed. Were you paralyzed by fear? Worry? Possibly struggling with a difficult decision? No matter what the reason, you can be sure that Jesus is with you through these stressful times. Just as the men in the passage placed their paralyzed friend at Jesus’s feet to be healed, you can bring your troubles before Jesus and he will take a share of the burden from you. He will say to you, “your sins are forgiven, get up and walk”. With time and prayer, Jesus will help you through life’s many challenges.

*Dear God, thank you for being there to help me walk when I cannot. I pray that you will be a source of comfort and strength for those who are facing challenges in their lives. Amen.*

Christian Normand

Hunger Fact/Challenge: At meal times this week use this table grace from Latin America: “To those who hunger, give bread, and to those who have bread, give them hunger for justice. Amen.”

Thursday, March 26  
“God works to restore us”  
Mark 5: 1-20

The man in this passage is an outcast from society, living among the tombs. He has been abandoned by those who initially tried to restrain him. Everyone fears him and avoids him as he struggles with his demons. Through this passage it is made clear that Jesus meets us where we are, wherever we are, no matter what we are facing and who has abandoned us. Jesus is not afraid of the man with the demons. Once he has cast them out, he will not let the man come with him as he leaves the region, but insists that he go back to his family, to those who gave up on him and left him for dead. He asks that the man restore his relationship with these people and share with them what Jesus has done for him.

In this way, we see that Jesus works to restore us completely, no matter where we are, what is happening to us, or who has given up on us. He restores us so that we can be whole again and return to the land of the living.

*God, thank you for meeting us where we are. Thank you for working to restore us, even when we feel hopeless or alone. We know that we will not be healed instantly like the man in the passage, or even ever be completely healed. Help us to find peace in knowing that you will work to restore us no matter where we might be. Amen.*

Maddie Shaner

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Help ELCA Disaster Response be prepared to care by giving a gift for every candle and flashlight in your home.

Friday, March 27  
“God’s will is not death”  
Mark 5: 21-43

I wonder how Jairus must have felt when the crowds were pressing in on Christ, and when Christ delayed arriving at his house, to find the person who had touched his clothes. His daughter was “at the point of death,” and he must have surely had some sense of urgency in getting Christ to his home, to heal his little girl, right? But when the people arrive from his house, and tell him that his beloved daughter is dead, Jairus doesn't turn to Jesus and say, “I'm sorry I troubled you; feel free to leave. And he doesn't say, in anger, “Why did you waste such precious time? Why didn't you hurry to my home?” Instead, he trusts in Christ's command to “only believe,” and his belief was not found to be vain, for Jesus healed his daughter – not of whatever had brought her to the point of death, but rather of death itself. Delays had brought his daughter to (what most considered) a point beyond healing, a place beyond God's intervention; before long the disciples would all feel the same about their Messiah, as he hung on a cross, and was buried in the ground. If only they'd learned, sooner, what Jairus knew: God cannot be delayed, and the power of God is bound by no thing on earth, nor even the grave beneath the earth.

*Lord of life, Conqueror of death, make us alive with the knowledge and assurance that your will cannot be postponed, nor your desires denied, no matter how hopeless our situations may appear to our eyes; but, rather, help us to see, ever more clearly, your work in your creation.*

James Rottnek

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Pray for neighbors, known and unknown, in need of healing.

Saturday, March 28  
“God’s will is new life”  
John 11: 1-44

This scripture tells us that Jesus’ dear friend, Lazarus, was very ill and his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent word to Jesus to return to Bethany in Judea. The disciples cautioned Jesus that his own safety would be in jeopardy if he went there; however, Jesus was not to be deterred. He knew that Lazarus was not supposed to die at this time, but Jesus was delayed for several days, and Lazarus did die and Jesus was distraught. He went to Bethany but by this time, Lazarus was already entombed for four days. Each of the sisters went to greet Jesus and testified to him, “Lord, if you had been here, Lazarus would not have died”. Jesus told them that Lazarus would rise from the dead and they stated that they indeed believed that he would do so on the resurrection day. Jesus then asked to have the tomb opened. He prayed aloud thanking God for hearing and answering His prayers. Jesus called for Lazarus to come forth and Lazarus emerged from the tomb, wrapped from head to foot in cloth bandages. Jesus said to the onlookers, “Unbind him and let him go”.

We know that God does not want His children to die – to be separated from Him and His love due to sin. Through Jesus, we are promised new life, a better life in Him and eternal life with God. By calling Lazarus out of the tomb, Jesus demonstrated the power of God, the power of prayers, and the power of the Son of God to fulfill God’s will for us.

*Hear my prayer, Oh, God, that I may be a better servant who is a good and loving friend; that I may be free from the binding and constraining effects of sin and death; and, that I may ever have faith in the power of prayer. Amen.*

Deb Hull

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Think about donating to ELCA Disaster Response, whether it be your time or gifts.

Sunday, March 29

Palm Sunday

“Jesus approaches Jerusalem and death”

Mark 11: 1-11

For a twenty one year old, I have thought a lot about death. Though we don't really have a say, I would really appreciate an epic death. Like dying while climbing Everest or skiing in the Alps. Either way, I imagine there will be at least a second of fear before I die. I cannot imagine the pressure Jesus felt as he entered Jerusalem. Though maybe he didn't know of his impending death, I bet he knew whatever was coming wasn't good. Yet Jesus kept his cool and approached his death with belief that his Father would protect him.

*Dear God, thank you for saving our sins by giving your son to die on the cross for us. Help me to live every day in service of you.*

Mikayle Holm

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Reflect on the difference between wants and needs. How much is enough for you?



Monday, March 30

“The parable of the wicked tenants”

Mark 12: 1-12

This passage detail a parable Jesus told when he was confronted by a group of elders. The parable tells the tale of a man who plants a vineyard and rents it out to a group of farmers. When the man tries to collect rent from the farmers, they repeatedly beat and kill those he sends to collect the rent. Finally, the man sends his son, whom he loves greatly, in the hopes that they will respect him but the son is killed like the rest of the servants. This parable is a metaphor for the way mankind has received the servants of God and foreshadows Jesus' fate.

*Dear God, let us see in Jesus and his cross testimony of your great love for all of us and, having experienced your love, let us love one another. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Nick Cota

Hunger Fact/Challenge: What would make your next Christmas celebration more meaningful and less stressful?

Tuesday, March 31  
“A new promise revealed”  
Mark 14: 12-25

Every Sunday morning we make our way to church to give thanks and worship our Lord and Savior. With 52 weeks a year, this can become repetitive and it is easy for use to forget why we are there sometimes. One of the most important parts of worship is receiving communion. Think about your sins you have committed today. Do you remember all of them? Of course not, but do not worry, Jesus gave his life for us on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven.

On the night before Jesus was betrayed, Jesus took the bread, broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying “take and eat, this is my body given to you, do this in remembrance of me.” The bread we receive is a form of Christ’s body and the wine is a form of his blood. After supper Jesus took a cup and raised it for all to see saying “this is the new covenant of my blood, shed for you and all people, do this in remembrance of me.” Christ died for our sins and receiving communion every week reminds us that he was bold enough to die a painful death in order for us to be forgiven for our sins.

*Dear God, thank you for sending your son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. Through his death we know that our sins are always forgiven. In your name we pray, Amen.*

Troy Wagner

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Remember a time when you passed by someone in need. What made it hard to stop and help?

Wednesday, April 1  
“Jesus is judged by the religious”  
Mark 14: 53-65

Jesus was not well liked by the religious. He was seen as a threat to Israel, especially by the Pharisees. So what did they do about it? Well, they put Him on trial. They thought the only way to get rid of his revolutionary teachings was by putting Him to death. Even in His darkest hour, Jesus remained firm in who He was, and what He believed. Jesus had the strength to endure false accusations, and ultimately much more. We must also push through the judgments of those who disapprove of our faith. Being true to oneself is something that Jesus showed us during His trial before the High Priest. Trials may come, but never hold back from speaking the truth.

*Good Shepherd, help us to be honest in what we hold true. Make us strong in times of hardship. Help us to be more like You, and less like the religious who bore false witness against You. Amen.*

Blake B. Petersen

Hunger Fact/Challenge: How many Bibles are in your home? Give thanks for the word of God!

Thursday, April 2  
Maundy Thursday  
“The authorities pass judgment”  
Mark 15: 1-20

“Barabbas or Jesus? Who do you want?” That was Pilate's question to the Jewish leaders. Jesus had just been imprisoned by the Sanhedrin, “out of jealousy,” and Pilate could find no fault with him; Barrabas had been captured with rebels who had created an insurrection against Roman rule in Judea. The Jewish leaders decided to release the violent rebel, instead of the Prince of Peace. Why?

Like so many, before and after them, they thought freedom, justice, and God's reign on earth would come through a sword. But Christ taught something else; Christ taught that God's Kingdom was not of this world – it was a Kingdom unlike any other, a Kingdom which would create justice, and cast off the shackles of oppression not through force of arms, but through a peace that the world cannot give. They could not see what Christ could see: That God does not work like earthly Kings and Emperors, and the earthly Kings are all the same, no matter which people they are a part of, and so 2,000 years ago, they chose to set a violent rebel free, and to condemn the Prince of Peace.

*Most Gracious Lord of the Heavenly Armies, you came to bring peace to the hearts of your creation, and to show us a new and different paradigm for living life with one another. Be as a lamp for us, that we might walk upon a path of peace, instead of destruction.*

James Rottnek

Hunger Fact/Challenge: How much did you collect/commit to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal during your journey through Lent? Write a check for the amount – see [www.elca.org/hunger/howtogive](http://www.elca.org/hunger/howtogive).

Friday, April 3

Good Friday

“The way of the cross”

Mark 15: 21-41

*Today we recommend you spend time reading the Passion of Jesus in today’s text and also in John’s gospel and to take time to reflect and pray upon it.*

In a previous Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples to take up their cross and follow him. In this passage from Mark, we see Simon of Cyrene literally picking up the cross and following Jesus to Golgotha, the site of his crucifixion. Many years later, the disciple and church leader Peter is crucified upside-down. I doubt these stories of literally taking up a cross and following Jesus to his death were what Jesus had in mind when he said this, but let’s take a step back and look at why Jesus was on that cross to begin with.

What did Jesus do to receive this punishment? His whole life was spent in a ministry of preaching and teaching about love and of showing love to the people. This concept of love for all people was strange and almost blasphemous to everyone at Jesus’ time. His ministry broke traditions and social norms; he wasn’t afraid to call out the church leaders for their misdeeds and mistreatment of all people—both Jews and Gentiles. All of this is what gave the Jewish church leaders and Romans an excuse for putting him on that cross. Now, this concept of loving all people wasn’t just strange and blasphemous in Jesus’ time. How often do those who currently teach about and show love receive ridicule for what they say and do? Jesus was doing what he thought was true and right, and because of this he was crucified.

At this heavy time in the season of Lent, we look to the cross to remind us of the crucifixion, of the awful death Jesus suffered. And though contemplating on this scripture text, which details Jesus’ graphic journey to the cross, is important, when we look to the cross we need to focus on why Jesus was placed there, what Jesus did to warrant this type of death. The way of the cross does not have to be about sadness and death and mourning; the true purpose of this scripture text, the true purpose of this season, is to focus on the amazing message Jesus lived out every moment of every day through his life: a message of love. This message put him on that cross and is the message we should see when we look to that cross and when we take up that cross.

*God of all people, thank you for showing us your love for us through the ministry of Jesus and through the cross. Help us to better understand your love so we can share that love with others through the taking up of our crosses. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

Alicia Danielson, Campus Ministry Associate

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Thanks be to God for the response-ability to “Go and do likewise” and be a good neighbor. Share with someone what you’ve learned on your Lenten journey.

Saturday, April 4

Holy Saturday

“Jesus is buried”

Mark 15: 42-47

Well, the end has finally come. The ugly crucifixion has taken place, the earth has shook, the curtain has torn. Jesus was dead. The Sabbath was quickly approaching so Jesus needed to be buried soon. A Jewish council member and believer, Joseph of Arimathea, offered up his own personal tomb for Jesus' burial place. This man had saved money to purchase the final resting place for his own body, yet, he willingly offered his tomb to Jesus. This is the first time in Mark's gospel where we meet this man, this believer in the coming kingdom of God. There is no history of him being a disciple, no knowledge of whether he had ever met Jesus before today, but here we see Joseph offering a service to this deceased man whom he hoped would bring about God's kingdom.

Joseph's hopes turned out to be true and he saw God's kingdom come to Earth through Jesus' death on the cross. Luckily, we don't have to hope or wait, because God's kingdom is alive and thriving among us today, spreading through acts of service. It came to Earth through the ultimate act of service: Jesus' death on the cross. Joseph saw this act and knew that he needed to spread God's kingdom through service, so he served in the best way he could by giving Jesus his tomb. The tomb, whether filled or empty, is a reminder of the ultimate act of service done to spread the kingdom of God among us. How can we serve in the best way we can? How can we be like Jesus and Joseph in spreading God's kingdom through service?

*Eternal God, thank you for sending your son, Jesus, to show your endless love for us. Help us to seek out places and people in the world that need your love to shine through and teach us to serve with willingness and welcoming hearts. In your redeeming son's name we pray, Amen.*

Alicia Danielson

Hunger Fact/Challenge: The average life expectancy at birth for a female in the United States is 80 years. In Zimbabwe it is 37 years. Give a gift to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal for every year of your life.

Sunday, April 5  
Easter Sunday  
“God conquers even death”  
Matthew 28: 1-10

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! We almost sing the words on Easter. Through Jesus Christ death has been conquered! Sometimes that is all we think Easter is about. That means that *someday* our faith will "pay off". That is, for putting up with much in life, we will reap the reward of eternal life. We easily miss that Easter is much more. Let us put it more succinctly. If in Jesus we see that God can conquer death, then what in life cannot be overcome by God? Failing grades? Stress? Family problems, divorce, poor health? Cannot these too be overcome by God? Easter is more than a hint of some future. Easter points us to the reality that is part of our present. God can overcome death not only when we breathe our last but God can overcome those death experiences we go through in life when some difficult ending looms or arrives. Easter faith is not simply faith in some future. Easter faith is the way Christians live the present. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

*Gracious God, your good news accompanies us every day in every place. Thank you for raising Jesus from the grave. Thank you for raising us up from that which would entrap us in this life. In Jesus risen name we pray. Amen.*

Gary N. McCluskey, Pastor

Hunger Fact/Challenge: Cut down waste and save money by avoiding food and drinks served in disposable cups and containers.



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