



"Becoming God's Best & Revealing God's Glory"

2026 Lent 40 Day Fasting, Devotion, and Prayer Journal

February 18th - April 4th

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Greetings Antioch Family,

In efforts to “**Become God’s Best and Reveal God’s Glory**” you are invited to join us for our 40-day Lenten Fast, **February 18th – April 4th**. Lent is a period of 40 days leading up to Resurrection Sunday during which we commit to sacrificing and seeking God together. Our aim is to **starve the flesh and feast more spiritually, seek God persistently, serve others intentionally, and sow generously**.

How can you participate? Join us in the Daniel Fast; which is a biblical dietary restriction exemplified by Daniel who ate only fruits and vegetables. "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink."(Daniel 1:12). From this experience, Daniel was said to gain knowledge, wisdom, spiritual understanding, favor, and even better appearance. God answered his prayers and gave spiritual insight (Daniel 10: 11-12). Additionally, Jesus fasted 40 days in preparation for fulfilling his purpose on earth.

Likewise, we will Prior take this time to prepare for the work God has called us to. During this time of consecration remember fasting is not about what we are giving up, but growing up in Christ. Be intentional.

- Set aside time for prayer and study of scripture daily
- Join our daily 7am prayer call
- List areas of your life where God wants you to grow
- Do one act of Kindness everyday
- Set aside daily seed offering daily to give weekly
- Journal Your Journey

Make note of what you are learning, answered prayers, and your experiences with God. Remember 2 Chronicles 7:14 “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” For the next forty days lets stand in faith, expecting God to do great things in us and through us.

Grace and Peace,

Kirk T. Houston Jr.

Pastor K.T. Houston jr.

Instructions for Participating in the Daniel Fast

February 18, 2026 – March 28, 2026 (Sundays are not included as part of the 40 Day Lent and Fast)

7am Daily Prayer and Devotion Conference Call (720)740-9653 Access Code (2316324#)

March 30 – April 4, 2026 – Total fast 6:00am- 6:00pm

February 28th & March 28th 9am In-Person Corporate Prayer

Daily Acts of Kindness

DANIEL FAST MEAL PLANNING

Making easy meal substitutions will save you time and effort so you can focus on the true purpose of fasting, which is not an obsession with what you're eating, but is all about drawing closer to God to become God's best and revealing God's glory.

Daniel Fast Food List

All fruit – fresh or frozen
All vegetables – fresh or frozen
All whole grains – barley, brown rice, oats, quinoa and whole wheat
All nuts and seeds
All legumes – dried beans (all types), lentils
Beverages – spring water, distilled water, filtered water, 100% fruit/vegetable juices

Daniel Fast Foods to Avoid

All meat and animal products
White rice
Fried foods
Caffeine
Carbonated beverages
Refined sugar/sugar substitutes
White flour and all products using it
Margarine, shortening, high fat products

Easy and appetizing food substitutions for meals include plant-based meat substitutions, plant-based cheese, plant-based salad dressings and humus.

Many of your plant-based items are found in most grocery stores.

MEAL SUGGESTIONS

Breakfast

An alternative to oatmeal, smoothies or fruit is a delicious omelet using plant-based eggs (Just Eggs). Use plant-based cheese, veggies of your choice and enjoy. Don't forget plant-based sausage or bacon if you must have an alternative to meat.

Lunch/Dinner/Snack

- **Roasted Chickpeas:** 1 (15 ounce) can chickpeas, drained and rinsed, 1 tablespoon olive oil, ¼ teaspoon kosher salt, or to taste, ¼ teaspoon smoked paprika, ¼ teaspoon black pepper, 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste, 1/8 teaspoon garlic powder

Gather all ingredients. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees F. Place chickpeas in a bowl and blot with a paper towel to dry them. Toss chickpeas and olive oil in a bowl. Season to taste with garlic salt, cayenne, and salt and toss again. Spread chickpeas on a rimmed baking sheet. Roast in the preheated oven until browned and crunchy, 30 to 40 minutes; watch carefully to avoid burning them. You may also sprinkle a little cinnamon on your chickpeas for an added treat. Enjoy!

Bean Chili: Instead of beef or turkey, make your favorite chili recipe without the meat or use plant-based crumbles. You can add extra beans, bell peppers, and onions if needed. Top with avocado, cilantro, chopped onions and plant-based cheese if desired. Delicious!

Portabella Steak: Instead of your favorite cut of beef, try hearty portabella mushrooms instead. Clean out the mushroom caps and brush with olive oil, then you can grill or bake them. Serve with a side of potatoes and vegetables. Try it you steak lovers!

Veggie Noodles: Spaghetti and meatballs are a classic weeknight favorite because this meal is a quick and easy crowd-pleaser. What can you eat in place of traditional noodles? Try spaghetti squash or sub zucchini or sweet potato noodles (many stores have these already spiraled and available in the produce or freezer section). Top with simple tomato sauce and add some steamed or sautéed vegetables for a more filling entree.

Daniel Fast-Friendly Pizza: This is a Daniel Fast-approved ingredient pizza. Start with a flatbread or cauliflower crust (no dairy ingredients). Top with tomato or pesto sauce, then add veggies and bake. Don't forget options like artichokes, olives, pine nuts, etc. Tip: you can process macadamia nuts in the food processor for a Parmesan-like substitute and don't forget to use plant-based mozzarella cheese.

Lent Acts of Kindness Calendar

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		18-Feb	19-Feb	20-Feb	21-Feb
		Pay for someone's food/coffee in the drive thru or inside restaurant.	Write a note of encouragement for a coworker or someone else.	Buy a coworker their favorite snack or drink.	Leave an extra tip.
23-Feb	24-Feb	25-Feb	26-Feb	27-Feb	28-Feb
Let someone go ahead of you in line at the store.	Run an errand for someone that is unable to.	Leave a 'Jesus loves you' note on someone's car.	Give water to a delivery worker.	Unload an elderly person's groceries into their car.	Write an anonymous encouragement note for someone in the congregation.
2-Mar	3-Mar	4-Mar	5-Mar	6-Mar	7-Mar
Send a 'thinking of you' text or call someone you don't usually talk to.	Help an elderly church member with groceries or an errand.	Prepare a meal or baked goods for another family.	Create a "blessing bag" (snacks, water, scripture card) to give to someone in need.	Offer a ride to a church member who needs transportation.	Invite another member or family to lunch or dinner.
9-Mar	10-Mar	11-Mar	12-Mar	13-Mar	14-Mar
Bring treats to a neighbor or a first responder	Pray with someone an Antioch church member.	Send a handwritten thank-you card to a ministry leader	Check in on someone who's been absent	Write a thank-you note to someone who serves faithfully	Give away a Bible, devotional, or inspirational book
16-Mar	17-Mar	18-Mar	19-Mar	20-Mar	21-Mar
Prepare or deliver a meal to someone who is sick or grieving.	Perform a secret act of kindness and tell no one.	Call an elderly member just to talk and listen.	Spend time with someone who's grieving.	Say "I appreciate you" to someone and explain why.	Donate needed items (food, toiletries, clothing).

Lent Acts of Kindness Calendar

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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23-Mar	24-Mar	25-Mar	26-Mar	27-Mar	28-Mar
Offer your skills (repair, cooking, listening) as a gift.	Pray with a coworker or friend who needs support.	Write your partner a list of 5 things you love about them.	Leave an encouraging note or text for an adolescent.	Encourage a youth or young adult in the church.	Offer help to a neighbor.
30-Mar	30-Mar	1-Apr	2-Apr	3-Apr	4-Apr
Thank Antioch clergy, volunteers, or staff personally.	Write a note to Antioch choir members, janitorial staff, or ushers.	Help newcomers feel welcome.	Introduce yourself to a student that you do not know.	Give a compliment to someone, just because.	Send a thank you e-card to someone.

FEBRUARY 18 | ASH WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 9:1-8
— PREPARE US ANEW, O GOD —

And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” Mark 9:7

At this time of year, I begin clearing out cluttered rooms filled with old things, dust, and distractions. My house becomes ready for something new to take place once I've cleaned and organized. Lent is like a spiritual spring cleaning, a time for the Holy Spirit to clear the clutter in our hearts and prepare us anew for God's transforming work.

Mark opens his Gospel declaring a new beginning for God's people through the "good news of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God." He introduces John the Baptist as the messenger who prepares the way for Jesus, using a blend of Old Testament texts—Exodus, Malachi, and Isaiah. John's role is a fulfillment of God's promises and a continuation of the work of prophets like Elijah, who called people to prepare their hearts for the Lord.

Just as the Israelites waited for the promised Messiah, we too are waiting—for Christ to come into our lives more fully. John's message is clear: repentance is not a mere outward act but a 180-degree inner turn. It's not just about changing our behavior but about a deep, heart-level transformation—turning away from sin and rebellion against God to prepare our hearts for Jesus.

As John baptized with water, he pointed to the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). This is the transformation we need—not just rituals, but the power of the Holy Spirit working within us to renew us.

Lent is a time to examine our hearts and ask the Holy Spirit to purify us. It's an opportunity to clear the clutter in our hearts—the sins, distractions, and attachments that keep us from fully experiencing God. As we receive the ashes today, let them remind us that we are dust, but also that in Christ, we are called to a new beginning.

Heavenly Father, remove the clutter from my heart through the transforming work of your Holy Spirit that I might know and love Jesus more.

FEBRUARY 18| ASH WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 9:1-8

— PREPARE US ANEW, O GOD —

Heavenly Father, remove the clutter from my heart through the transforming work of your Holy Spirit that I might know and love Jesus more.

FEBRUARY 19 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 1:9–11
— LORD, BE PLEASED with ME —

And a voice came from the heavens, “You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased.” Mark 1:11

Jesus is following in the footsteps of those he is called to serve. Without hesitation, Jesus goes to the water for baptism by John. This shows us the human character of Jesus! Jesus led by example in all that he did. He did not just talk about it; he practiced what he preached!

Not only do we recognize the human character of Jesus as he goes to the Jordan for baptism, we also see the true desire of Jesus to do his Father’s will. As the time drew near for Jesus to be crucified, he said, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

During this Lenten season, I challenge all believers to ask this simple question: how much do we truly desire to do our Father’s will? Are we willing to endure temptation? Are we willing to endure betrayal? Are we willing to go to the ends of the earth to proclaim the name of Jesus in areas where persecution, judgement, and even death may occur?

Lastly, because of Jesus’ willingness to be about his Father’s business, we see those famous words from our Heavenly Father: “You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

We are living in a world where everyone wants and seeks the approval and pleasure of human beings. We should, as believers, strive to mimic Christ in his desire to do his Father’s will, and not his own. Only then do we hear those words echoed from heaven towards us: “This is my child, my beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

*Father, please help me to focus on doing your will, and not my own will.
I want to hear you say that you are pleased with me.*

FEBRUARY 19 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 1:9–11
— LORD, BE PLEASED with ME —

*Father, please help me to focus on doing your will, and not my own will.
I want to hear you say that you are pleased with me.*

FEBRUARY 20 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 1:12-13
— REFLECTION, REPENTANCE, and PREPARATION —

“And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.” Mark 1: 12-13

In the season of Lent, we are called to the work of reflection, repentance, and preparation to deepen our relationship with God. Jesus himself went through a similar season when he was tempted in the wilderness.

Reflection Leading to Repentance: Jesus endured temptation by Satan in the wilderness. He came to redeem his people, Israel, from their past failures. The Israelites rebelled against God in the wilderness and thus endured forty years of wandering, but Jesus remained faithful during his wilderness trial, resisting temptation. Jesus rights the wrongs of the past in order to bring God’s people into right relationship with him once again.

In order to have true and meaningful repentance, we must first reflect on our standing before God. In this season, we are to look at ourselves with a sober mind so that we can turn to God once again. We need to know where we are so we can know where we must go. Do we, like the Israelites, need to be brought back to right relationship with God?

His Preparation, and Ours: In the Gospel of Mark, the temptation of Jesus happens before his public ministry begins. The forty days in the desert served as a time of preparation. Jesus was drawn closer to God before he began his work. This experience prepared Jesus for what was ahead. Mark tells us that “the angels waited on him,” or “ministered to him” (NASB, 1995). The forty days of temptation were not undergone by Jesus as a show of strength. Rather, this was a time for Jesus to draw near to the Father in order to prepare himself for his great reconciling ministry.

Lent is intended to be a time of preparation for each of us. We may not have three years of incredible ministry abounding with miracles lying ahead. However, every one of us lives a life that tells those around us about God. How will you allow God to prepare your heart this season?

God, I ask that I would have the humility to see myself honestly so that I might be prepared to accept your great gift of mercy.

FEBRUARY 20 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 1:12-13 — REFLECTION, REPENTANCE, and PREPARATION —

God, I ask that I would have the humility to see myself honestly so that I might be prepared to accept your great gift of mercy

FEBRUARY 21 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 1:14–12
— ABANDONING THE PLAN —

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people. ‘And immediately they left their nets and followed him.” Mark 1:17-18

Sometimes life doesn't turn out the way you planned. You thought you'd be married by now, but you aren't. You thought you'd have the promotion by now, but you don't. You thought you'd be happy by now but you're still deeply depressed. You thought your life would go as planned but then it didn't. The four men in today's devotional reading knew this feeling all too well.

Simon, Andrew, James, and John probably thought they would fish every day for the rest of their lives. It was how they kept food on the table and made their livelihoods. That is, until Jesus notices them and wrecks all of their plans (v. 16, 19). He calls them to let him lead them as he forms them into different kinds of fishermen (v. 17, 20). Through this call, Jesus compels these four men to use their skills for the building of his kingdom and his plan.

Their first response to this call is to leave behind everything—their nets, their boats, their families, their livelihoods (v. 18, 20). These men abandon every semblance of their plans for their lives in order to enter the new life that Jesus came to offer them.

This Lent, may we be encouraged that when life is not going as planned, a reformation of our plans is on the way, noticing us and calling us to leave these plans behind and to let him lead us in a new way to live. His name is Jesus.

Lord, help us to willingly and joyfully leave our plans behind to follow you and teach us how to use our gifts for your glory. Amen.

**FEBRUARY 21 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 1:14–12
— ABANDONING THE PLAN —**

Lord, help us to willingly and joyfully leave our plans behind to follow you and teach us how to use our gifts for your glory. Amen

FEBRUARY 23 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 1:40–45
— ALL THINGS NEW —

Then Jesus, moved with compassion stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, ‘I am willing. Be made clean!’ immediately the skin disease left him, and he was made clean.” Mark 1:41-42

Today, we read about the healing of a paralyzed man who was lowered through a roof to reach Jesus. Today, we focus our attention on a leper.

To have leprosy meant you were cut off from your community. In mark 1:40, this man breaks the law—he comes into society and falls at Jesus’ feet, begging to be made clean. There is no mention of the leper coming to Jesus with a great offering or preparing in anyway. He came and fell at the feet of Jesus just as he was, a man burdened with leprosy.

This healing story showcases the power and greatness of Jesus. We are witnesses to his ruling over the heavens and the earth. We are also witnesses to the outcast, downtrodden and lowly who come humbly before Jesus. Jesus sees them, loves them, and heals them. He restores them. He makes them new.

Let us remember this during lent. Jesus comes to us. You. Me. He comes for us all. Therefore, let us come to Jesus in our imperfections and fall at his feet. Oppressed, burdened, beat down, tired, desperate, marginalized—wherever we are, Jesus comes, and nothing is too great for the one who conquered death. Let us see ourselves in the leper. We need not prepare, be buttoned up, or ready. Instead, we must go to him with haste and humility.

*O lord, open our hearts and draw us near. Let us come to you just as we are.
Amen.*

FEBRUARY 23 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 1:40–45
— ALL THINGS NEW —

***O lord, open our hearts and draw us near. Let us come to you just as we are.
Amen.***

FEBRUARY 24 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 2:1-12 — WE HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS —

And he stood up and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!” Mark 2:12

During Lent, we reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. The story in Mark 2:1-12 offers us insight into the nature of Christ's work and the life-changing power of faith.

The scene is set in Capernaum, where Jesus is teaching inside a house so full that there is no room for even one more person. Amid the commotion over Jesus' presence in the house, four friends lower a paralyzed man through the roof, determined to bring him into the presence of Jesus. The faith of both the friends and the paralyzed man is incredibly visible not in words but in action: a relentless pursuit for healing.

Jesus' response is striking. Instead of immediately addressing the man's physical condition, Jesus speaks to his deepest need: "Son, your sins are forgiven." This statement sparks controversy among the religious leaders present, who accuse Jesus of blasphemy. Yet Jesus demonstrates his authority as God's Son by also physically healing the man.

Our key verse, Mark 2:12, records the crowd's reaction: "We have never seen anything like this!" This awe-filled response from the crowd reminds us that Christ's work defies human expectations. Our Lord does not merely address the superficial problems of humanity; He penetrates deep into the heart, offering forgiveness, restoration, and eternal life.

As we move through Lent, we are invited to consider the deeper areas of our lives that need Jesus' healing touch. Are there sins we have hidden or burdens we have carried for too long? Like the paralyzed man and his friends, we are called to bring our brokenness to Christ, trusting that he will give and we will receive what only he can offer.

Jesus continues to work in ways that leave us in awe, often beyond what we can ask or imagine, which leads us to proclaim in awe on our own faith journey, "We have never seen anything like this!"

*Lord, thank you for your power to forgive and heal.
Help us to trust you with every part of our lives, so that we can
experience and bear witness to your transformative work in this world. Amen*

**FEBRUARY 24 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 2:1-12
— WE HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS —**

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FEBRUARY 25 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 2:13-17

— CEDAR, SINNERS, and THE SAVIOR —

When Jesus heard it, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” Mark 2:17

I didn't know I had seasonal allergies. But every winter/spring, with the Central Texas cedar in bloom, I would get these mysterious sinus attacks that eventually became full-blown infections. Finally, my wife stated what was obvious to everyone but me: “You have allergies. You need to see a doctor.”

In today's passage, Jesus is walking by the sea with a crowd that just saw him forgive a man's sins, then proving he can do that by also healing the man's paralysis. The crowd included more than only a few tax collectors and sinners. Verse 15 notes, “for there were many who followed him.”

And yet, there's still one sitting in his booth. Levi (also called Matthew) hears Jesus utter two little life-changing words that all who encounter him must face: “Follow me” (v. 14). Levi not only accepts, but invites Jesus, his disciples, and a rowdy crowd of sinners into his home for dinner.

As they're enjoying the meal, some Pharisees ask why Jesus, this supposedly holy teacher, is so cozy with sinners. Jesus replies, “Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous but sinners” (v. 17). And here's the real kicker: Jesus' mission doesn't stop with the tax collectors and sinners, for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

My denial of my allergy to cedar only hindered my healing. In the same way, an insistence on do-it-yourself righteousness only holds Jesus at arm's length when what we really need is to be seated with him among other sinners. The only real difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector isn't any absence of sin, but the ability to recognize it and obey that one, simple command: “Follow me.”

Today, take a moment to recognize your infirmity and thank God for the presence of Christ, our Healer.

Jesus, I admit my need for a healer and rejoice in the grace you show daily as I follow hard after you. Amen

FEBRUARY 25 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 2:13–17
— CEDAR, SINNERS, and THE SAVIOR —

Jesus, I admit my need for a healer and rejoice in the grace you show daily as I follow hard after you. Amen

FEBRUARY 26 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 2:23–28

— REST or RESTRICTION? —

“Then he said to them, ‘The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.’

Mark 2:27-28

Sabbath sounds so simple. You take a day off from work and rest in the presence of the Lord. Yet, I personally get so bogged down in the details of which day should be my sabbath, or what to do if I have something that needs to get done, that I feel more constricted by the sabbath and end up not entering into God's promise of rest. This results in feelings of shame rather than peace. That decision, while on the opposite end of the spectrum, is not dissimilar to the Pharisees in its deviation from God's heart.

In considering the sabbath and what that practically entails, I have a day that technically could “count,” a day in which I will often spend time in worship or fellowship with friends rather than working. To call it sabbath though comes with a feeling of restriction, almost like being a prisoner to an expectation where I no longer can work on things if I need to.

When did sabbath become about what is expected rather than as the gift that God gave us? When did it become more about a checklist of things not to do rather than an opportunity to be free in the presence of the Father? When did the false expectation of doing absolutely nothing invade my heart and shove out the reality of what sabbath is.

Jesus confronts this directly in this passage, gently reminding us that the sabbath was made for us. He establishes his authority over it. A common theme throughout Scripture is God's grace over our inadequacy, and our ability to sabbath “correctly” is no different. We need to dethrone the rules and expectations placed on us by others and by ourselves about what correct sabbath rest looks like in order to fully experience the loving presence of our God. Our sabbath will not all look the same, and that is okay. Let us remember that Jesus, not us or our expectations, is the lord of the sabbath.

***Lord, I pray that you gently correct my view of the sabbath
and remind me to rest in your presence. Amen.***

FEBRUARY 26 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 2:23–28 — REST or RESTRICTION? —

Lord, I pray that you gently correct my view of the sabbath and remind me to rest in your presence. Amen.

FEBRUARY 27 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 3:7-12
— VISION to VICTORY —

“Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.”

Mark 3:11-12

In today's verses, crowds gather from all directions, drawn by whispers of healing and freedom. From Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, and beyond, they press in, hands outstretched, seeking a touch from the Savior. As Jesus healed, the unclean spirits recognized him. They fell at his feet, crying out, "You are the Son of God!" (v. 11). They recognized him but remained bound by their nature. It was a vision of truth, a sight of the divine without transformation. Their cries, though true, were silenced—words without power.

We are often in a similar place—recognizing Jesus, his power, his love, yet struggling to let that knowledge move us. But unlike the unclean spirits, we are not without hope. Though they were silenced in their futility, in Christ, we are invited to respond—to allow his truth to reshape us and bring victory!

Reflecting on my journey to seminary, I recall an important crossroads: I was doing the right things—praying, seeking, serving—then grief struck, sharp and sudden. The call to release certain people and comforts was unmistakable, but I hesitated. I had known the warmth of belonging, but in clinging to the gift, I resisted the victory the Giver offered.

It was a quiet tension—holding onto blessings that bound me. In surrender, I found the strength to take the next right step. It wasn't about preserving comfort, but embracing who Jesus is, beyond his gifts. I began seeing Him as the telos—our ultimate purpose. Each step of trust led to freedom, revealing that every blessing and calling is a path to walk, not a possession to cling to.

Lent calls us to look beyond the blessings to the One who gives them. True vision isn't just seeing—it's responding, letting his truth sink deep and reshape our lives. To see him is to surrender, to let that vision bring the victory of transformation.

Lord, thank you for the hope of your victory. Open our eyes to the vision of your restoring work, that we may surrender fully and walk in the transformation you offer. Amen.

**FEBRUARY 27 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 3:7-12
— VISION to VICTORY —**

Lord, thank you for the hope of your victory. Open our eyes to the vision of your restoring work, that we may surrender fully and walk in the transformation you offer. Amen

FEBRUARY 28 | SATURDAY| READING: MARK 3:13–19

— WANTED —

“He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him.” Mark 3:13

The God of the universe wants us. The one who created all, sees all, and knows all wants us. In this passage, we see Jesus calling the Twelve to himself and giving them their mission as apostles. They are to be with him, go out and preach and are given the authority to drive out demons. So why didn't Jesus choose others? What was so special about these men compared to any others he might have chosen? In calling these twelve men, did he not exclude others who might be more qualified or gifted? Did Jesus not want others?

I believe the answer has nothing to do with the twelve chosen, and everything to do with the One choosing. Jesus wanted these men because he had created them for this moment and this purpose. It was not that he excluded others because he did not want or love them, but rather that this was not their mission.

Our culture tells us we can go anywhere and do anything. The God who loves and created us tells us that we are wanted in Christ for a specific time, mission, and call. This might mean we are excluded from certain circles, jobs, ministries, or relationships, but ultimately, it is better to be excluded while walking in obedience to God's call than to attempt to walk separately from God's grace and covering.

Lent offers us an opportunity to remember the choices Jesus made to ignore the temptations of power, wealth, and fame for the lonely call to death, because he wanted us back more than anything.

Lord, thank you for wanting me, pursuing me, and calling me to a life lived in obedience to you. May you give me the grace to walk in your footsteps.

**FEBRUARY 28 | SATURDAY| READING: MARK 3:13–19
— WANTED —**

Lord, thank you for wanting me, pursuing me, and calling me to a life lived in obedience to you. May you give me the grace to walk in your footsteps.

MARCH 2 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 4:1–20

— SOIL, SEEDS, and SCRIPTURE —

The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced. Mark 4:18-19

In our reading for today, we encounter the first parable taught by Jesus in the book of Mark. Jesus uses an agricultural approach. He knows the crowd would be familiar with the language of seeds and soil. The disciples ask for clarification; Jesus explains the parable, equating the seed sown with the Word of God.

How many times in life do we take soil and seeds for granted? We have become so accustomed to purchasing our food that we forget the miracle of a new seedling bursting from the soil. Consider: a tablespoon of soil contains billions of microorganisms, creating the perfect ecosystem which can bring forth new life right from under our feet. Consider also the seedling: taking root, growing, and, hopefully, eventually, bearing fruit. It is amazing to think what a plant must fight to survive: weeds, hungry insects, crazy weather patterns, and pesky squirrels!

Just as we take God's creation of the soil and seeds for granted, we can do the same with Scripture. While we know that the Word of God is ever present and alive, the busyness of our lives and the desires of this world can seem louder than Scripture. With smartphone technology, social media, and other outlets vying for our attention, these resources can spark unrest within us rather than helping us maintain space for Scripture to take root within our hearts.

During this Lenten season, I encourage you to get in the garden. Plant seeds and marvel in the miracle of the earth, which God made, and which provides everything needed for seeds to sprout. The same God who makes the seeds flourish in the soil is the same God that creates hearts within us that can receive the gift of Scripture. Set aside busyness and the desires of this world so our hearts can become rich soil in which Scripture takes root, flourishes, and bears fruit as we journey toward Easter.

*O God, wonderful Creator of the soil, seeds, and Scripture,
allow our hearts to receive your word and your creation as grace
and be filled with both awe and wonder.*

MARCH 2 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 4:1–20 — SOIL, SEEDS, and SCRIPTURE —

*O God, wonderful Creator of the soil, seeds, and Scripture,
allow our hearts to receive your word and your creation as grace
and be filled with both awe and wonder*

MARCH 3 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 4:26–29
— THE MYSTERY of SEEDS —

“The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.” Mark 4:26-27

In this season of Lent, what an image we receive, what a representation of the Kingdom we find in the Gospel of St. Mark.

I love the expression here as we delve into the workings of the kingdom, explained so easily in imagery we can understand: seeds are spread, the plants grow, and the harvest is reaped. But within this seemingly simple process lies a deeper mystery, one for which we are given no explanation. What causes the sprouting and the growing that enables the harvest to eventually take place?

I am sure that we could fill in the blanks with an all too human and complex answer, but the answer may be simple: to experience a mystery, we must empty ourselves. Our self-denial, or penitence, is an emptying of ourselves, a tilling of the soil of our souls. It is a preparation for the conversion of faith that is planted by the seed of the gospel.

The seed, the word of our Lord, grows in our hearts as we consider it in obedience. Faith begins to sprout. Slowly, tended by caring, love, and prayer, something so small and delicate grows stronger, a stalk, but not apart from the wind and storms of this world. They batter and test the plant as it grows, and yet the full fruition of faith, that which is to be reaped by the hands of our great Lord, is a glorious event despite our trials. It will be a harvest unlike any other, one in which the fruit is not consumed, but saved and preserved, for it has been made whole and healthy, even if it does not know why.

And why should this seem so strange to us? He was laid in the tomb, in the earth, and three days later our salvation sprang forth to new life, in full bloom. We know not exactly how! And the kingdom grew, and it grows.

Oh God, most merciful Sower of the seeds of our lives, we thank you for the mystery of faith and for our growth in it. May I be emptied of myself so that your glory may shine upon me. Grow me according to your design, in the name of our resurrected Savior, Christ. Amen.

**MARCH 3 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 4:26–29
— THE MYSTERY of SEEDS —**

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MARCH 4 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 4:30–34

— OFFERING OUR SMALL FAITH —

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth.” Mark 4:30-31

The season of Lent has a way of highlighting our exhaustion and opening our eyes to the demands of our lives that comes from our jobs, relationships, and even our daily rhythms that seem to strain our felt relationship with God. As we try to follow Jesus through his forty-day journey in the desert in which he resists temptation while centering on simplicity and contemplation, we might find ourselves feeling worn and weary.

We might feel disappointed in ourselves for not successfully giving something up or starting something new during the Lenten season. There might be frustration when we miss a day in our Lent Devotional. Whatever that thing is, this season sometimes has a way of highlighting our exhaustion and imperfections. So, what do we hold onto as we encounter this reality in our Lenten journey?

The words of Jesus in Mark 4:30-34, the parable of the mustard seed, offers a gentle and kind reminder to keep journeying despite our exhaustion and imperfection. Jesus extends encouragement to our souls as he gives reassurance that if we have faith the size of a mustard seed – the smallest seed known on earth – we can rest knowing growth is possible.

The growth of our faith, just like the growth of the Kingdom of God, is assured if we can hold onto an ounce of faith the size of the tiniest seed – the mustard seed. Lent reminds us to trust God and give time for the loving Gardener to cultivate growth within and through us over time. These small acts of obedience we observe during Lent such as prayer, Scripture meditation, fasting, etc. can lead to transformative growth in our spiritual lives despite our ability to practice them perfectly.

Dear God, please remind us of Jesus’ words that the smallest measure of faith or acts of devotion, despite imperfection or exhaustion, like a mustard seed, can lead to flourishing growth over time. Amen.

MARCH 4 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 4:30–34
— OFFERING OUR SMALL FAITH —

Dear God, please remind us of Jesus' words that the smallest measure of faith or acts of devotion, despite imperfection or exhaustion, like a mustard seed, can lead to flourishing growth over time. Amen.

MARCH 5 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 4:35–41
— IN THE BOAT with JESUS —

“A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.” Mark 4:37

Jesus, while sitting in a boat, teaching a large crowd gathered on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He tells the parable of the Sower, illustrating how different hearts receive and respond to God’s Word. Jesus also explains the parable to his disciples, emphasizing the importance of seeking and understanding God’s truth.

He continued to teach using the parable of the lamp, the parable of the growing seed, and the parable of the mustard seed to illustrate the growth of the kingdom of God. With urgency, Jesus emphasized the importance of hearing and understanding his teachings and the need for faith and trust in him. Overall, Jesus was reaching out to the people, teaching them, pointing to the kingdom of God, and demonstrating his humble authority. His mission was (and is) to bring salvation to all who believe in him.

While still in the boat, Jesus nudges his disciples to sail across to the other side of the sea. Jesus had been in the boat all day. Jesus had been teaching all day. Jesus, appropriately, took a nap!

My mind often wonders why Jesus, who is fully God, would fall asleep during such an alarming situation. However, this moment reminds us of Jesus’ humanity and his complete trust in God. Even while sleeping, Jesus showed his disciples that they could trust God’s protection and care. When the disciples woke Jesus, he called out and calmed the storm. “Peace! Be still!” What a powerful statement of his authority over nature and his ability to bring peace amid chaos.

Lord Jesus, meet us today! During this Lenten season, give us the boldness to follow your teachings while resting in your care, and help us to trust in your sovereignty, especially when facing life’s storms.

**MARCH 5 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 4:35–41
— IN THE BOAT with JESUS —**

Lord Jesus, meet us today! During this Lenten season, give us the boldness to follow your teachings while resting in your care, and help us to trust in your sovereignty, especially when facing life's storms.

MARCH 6 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 5:1-20

— FACE to FACE —

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with him. But Jesus said, “No, go home to your family, and tell them everything the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been.”

Mark 5:18-19

In Mark 5:1-20, we see an interaction between Jesus and the residents of a region called the Gerasenes. When Jesus arrives, people and demons come face to face with Jesus.

When meeting someone new, it is natural to ask, “Who are You?” Throughout history people have asked the same question about Jesus. C.S. Lewis said Jesus was either a liar, lunatic, or Lord. John Duncan called this the “trilemma,” or a three-fold dilemma. We must decide who Jesus was and is. Just like those residing in the Gerasenes, we encounter Jesus and face the question, “Who is Jesus to me?”

For the demons called Legion, they knew Jesus was God. He was not their Lord and Savior, so they fled. For the people, they must have thought He was a lunatic or a liar, so they ran Jesus off due to fear. But for the man who had been freed from the Legion, he knew Jesus to be Lord, so he followed.

Sometimes I like to put myself in the story and wonder, “what if I was a bystander who witnessed the crazy man sitting sane? Or, what if I was the man with the Legion?”

I think you and I are both. Jesus came to reveal God’s glory so that we may be free; not from physical chains, but from spiritual chains. Whether there is a Legion, or whether we have lived in sanity, we are all in need of Jesus as our Lord.

So, as a bystander of God’s miracles in the written Word and in the lives of people around me, as a woman freed from the chains of sin, I have come face to face with Jesus saying, “Lord, let me be with you.” In return, Jesus says to you and to me, “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you” (Mark 5:19, NRSV).

Thank you for coming from heaven to earth to face and free us. Help us to remember and share our testimony. We declare you, Jesus, not only as God, but as Lord, for the glory of your name. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

MARCH 6 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 5:1–20 — FACE to FACE —

Thank you for coming from heaven to earth to face and free us. Help us to remember and share our testimony. We declare you, Jesus, not only as God, but as Lord, for the glory of your name. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

MARCH 7 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 5:21–43
— HEALING, RESTORATION and FREEDOM —

“Jesus said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.” Mark 5:34

We are nearing the halfway point of the Lenten season. For some, this journey may have begun with great excitement and high expectations about what you will experience as you seek to empty yourself and be filled with the truth of God. Whether this Lenten season has rekindled and deepened your faith or left you feeling confused and anxious, may you find the healing power of Jesus and the freedom he offers, as illustrated by the two daughters of Israel we read about today in Mark.

During his ministry, Jesus is consistently seen crossing boundaries—whether social, economic, or spiritual. When Jesus returns to the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee, He meets Jairus, who pleads with Him to “come and lay [his]hands on [his daughter], so that she may be made well and live.”

As Jesus begins to walk with Jairus, he is surrounded by a large crowd. In the midst of this crowd, bodies are pressing together as people push to get closer to Jesus, creating a chaotic atmosphere. Suddenly, Jesus pauses. He feels a presence that stands out among the crowd. It is a woman who has suffered from a blood disorder for twelve years. Despite many doctor visits and possibly spiritual visits, she has been left hopeless and drained—mentally, physically, spiritually, and financially.

While the woman receives her healing through her encounter with Jesus, Jairus learns that his daughter has passed away. However, we know how the story ends: when Jesus enters Jairus’s house, his daughter is healed and restored.

During this Lenten season, as we strive to be imitators of Christ in faith, let us remember that true healing, restoration, and freedom are found in the presence of God. Those who encounter Jesus are never the same. There is a transformation that takes place, as seen in the stories of the unnamed woman and Jairus’s daughter. This leads us to one question that we all must ask ourselves during this time: how can we bring Christ’s healing into the lives of others, leaving them in a better condition than we found them?

God, may we genuinely seek you above all else. May our faith illuminate your goodness, faithfulness, and healing power. Thank you for granting us the courage to enter into the lives of others, no matter their condition or circumstance, and equipping us with the resources needed to alter their condition.

***MARCH 7 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 5:21–43
— HEALING, RESTORATION and FREEDOM —***

God, may we genuinely seek you above all else. May our faith illuminate your goodness, faithfulness, and healing power. Thank you for granting us the courage to enter into the lives of others, no matter their condition or circumstance, and equipping us with the resources needed to alter their condition.

MARCH 9 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 6:7-13

— THE BEAUTY of the DIVINE CALL —

“He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.” Mark 6:7

The Lord is calling. Are you ready to answer? The mission of the Twelve reminds all Christians that we have a divine call on our lives. This special calling was given to us by our Savior, Jesus Christ. It allows us to participate actively in the kingdom mission here on Earth. As his disciples, obeying our calling moves God’s mission forward—a mission that sends us out to be witnesses to all.

It is in this special relationship with the LORD where we find our purpose, which calls us to action. As gospel witnesses, we get to be ambassadors carrying out our Lord’s life-changing and life-saving teachings. We get the blessing of partnering with other Christian believers to share the good news—the same good news that brings deliverance and healing.

Mark’s narrative informs us that throughout our journey, there will be places that may not welcome or accept God’s teachings. This knowledge is important as we prepare for our various ministry assignments. Having this knowledge in advance helps us to not get discouraged along the way. Instead, we must continue to move on and reach out to those whose spirit wants to hear from the Lord. As authorized missionaries, we must proclaim Jesus to all hearers who choose to listen.

Our mission unites us all with Christ through his teachings. As his called disciples, we are given the authority to teach others. Your purpose has been anointed with power from the only source who holds all power—power that has authority over all things. Power that calls the lost back to their Creator and saves them from their sins as long as they repent and profess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Remember, brothers and sisters in Christ, we do not need to take anything for our journey. We just need to be content and fully dependent on God and trust in his provision, knowing wholeheartedly “that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

“Lord Jesus, we ask that you continue to mentor us in your ways so we can minister effectively to your people in your name. Amen.

MARCH 9 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 6:7–13 — THE BEAUTY of the DIVINE CALL —

“Lord Jesus, we ask that you continue to mentor us in your ways so we can minister effectively to your people in your name. Amen.

MARCH 10 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 6:14–29
— POWER ANXIETY —

“The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her.” Mark 6:26

Growing up, I thought power was everything. If there was a character in a movie that had destructive, world-altering magical powers, then that would be the person I played on the playground. I always had to be the king or general in our backyard battles because I clearly knew the best battle tactics. I ran the grand high council of my friends with an iron fist!

My desire to be someone with all the power and control has dwindled as I've grown up. This is mainly because of the terrible toll that power, even whimsical playtime power, exacts on a person. This toll is the fear of losing power.

Herod Antipas feels fear in this scene. Why else would he go through with such a grotesque request from his wife and niece? While John clearly provoked and angered Herod, the passage indicates that Herod still enjoyed listening to him. However, Herod made an oath in front of everyone. I can image the anxiety Herod felt as his dinner guests all turned to him, waiting to see if he's a man of his word. Herod's fear of holding on to power, respect, and control leads him to permit the execution of John the Baptist.

This passage is located right before the feeding of the five thousand, and because of that, we can see a shocking difference between the power of Herod and the power of Jesus. Herod's power is one that is wrapped up in fear and scarcity. Jesus' power is best displayed through service, abundant giving, and, as we will see later in the Gospel, selfless sacrifice.

As we journey to the cross this Lenten season, let us put aside the power of this world that hoards and destroys, and live into the power of Jesus, which loves and uplifts.

Jesus, help us to let go of our desires for power and control and teach us the power of service, giving, and sacrifice. Amen.

MARCH 10 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 6:14–29 — POWER ANXIETY —

Jesus, help us to let go of our desires for power and control and teach us the power of service, giving, and sacrifice. Amen.

MARCH 11 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 6:30–44

— COMPASSION and PROVISION —

“He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn’t even have time to eat.

Mark 6:31

Does this sound familiar to you? After a wildly busy season, we seek rest. In my decades of ministry, I have needed a respite—“a place to rest awhile.” This is the invitation Jesus gives his disciples. But, just as for the disciples, our rest is often abruptly disrupted by people’s needs.

A great crowd had gathered because of Jesus’ miraculous works. They wanted more of his attention, time, and ministry. At this moment, Jesus reveals to us, once again, the heart of the Father. He had compassion for them. He took “a small loaf and two fishes “and fed the hungry masses.

This scene reminds us of the tension we often feel between personal rest and the urgency of ministry. We find ourselves overwhelmed by the people’s “need. “But Jesus, ever attentive to the needs of others, saw an opportunity to teach his followers something profound: ministry flows not from our strength but from God’s abundant provision. Compassion and provision go hand in hand.

When we feel depleted, it’s easy to see interruptions as obstacles. But Jesus transforms interruptions into opportunities for grace. He demonstrates that proper rest isn’t found in escaping the needs of others but in relying on the Father to meet those needs through us. Rest isn’t a withdrawal from ministry—it’s a posture of trust, believing that God will sustain us as we pour ourselves out in love.

This passage challenges us to embrace both compassion and dependence: compassion for the meeting of needs around us and dependence on the One who can do immeasurably more than we can imagine. Even in seasons of exhaustion, he reminds us that he is the source of all we need.

Jesus, you are the source of compassion. We find our rest and compassion in you.
Amen.

**MARCH 11 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 6:30–44
— COMPASSION and PROVISION —**

*Jesus, you are the source of compassion. We find our rest and compassion in you.
Amen.*

MARCH 12 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 6:45–52

— HE SEES US from the MOUNTAINTOP —

“Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded.” Mark 6:51

Have you ever tried walking on water? I know I have, and I can giggle at the thought of an eight-year-old me, with a puffed-up chest and pink swimsuit, trying for the fifteen time to make it across my grandma’s pool without swallowing a mouthful of water.

When this passage was written, biblical, Jewish, Greek, and Roman traditions reinforced the commonly held notion that rulers had power over the sea, symbolically showing a ruler’s authority. Why is this significant for us?

This passage evinces Jesus as the true King, with ultimate and full divine authority.

In verses 45 and 46, Jesus sends the disciples into the boat, saying farewell. This implies a loving assurance to the disciples to have faith in reaching their destination. In verse 47, Jesus remained alone on the land until early morning, which would have been between 3:00 AM and 6:00 AM. Jesus can see the disciples in the sea from the mountaintop he was praying on amid darkness and distance (v. 46). That’s extraordinary! But, in verse 48, the disciples have made little progress against the wind as Jesus intended to pass them, just as God passed by Elijah and Moses in Exodus.

Jesus manifested himself to his disciples as the true King and Messiah. But “when they saw him walking on the sea” (v. 49), they were all “terrified” (v. 50). I’m sure I’d be frightened, too. But Jesus reveals himself, saying, “It is I.” These are the same words God said to reveal himself to Moses through the burning bush. It also foreshadows the soon-to-be reappearance of Jesus after his death and resurrection. So, Jesus stepped into the boat (v. 51) in the middle of the disciple’s disbelief and their “hardened hearts” (v. 52).

In this Lent season, let us be reminded that Jesus sees us from the mountaintop amid the storm, walks towards us on water, steps into our boats, and casts out our disbelief with his undeniable divinity. We are not afraid, because it is he who defeated death and rose again.

Jesus, thank you for all the times you’ve left the mountaintop to be with me in my storms and disbelief. Please continue to show me and remind me of your divinity.

Amen.

**MARCH 12 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 6:45–52
— HE SEES US from the MOUNTAINTOP —**

Jesus, thank you for all the times you've left the mountaintop to be with me in my storms and disbelief. Please continue to show me and remind me of your divinity.

Amen.

MARCH 13| FRIDAY | READING: MARK 6:53–56
— RECOGNIZING JESUS —

After they had crossed the lake, they landed at Gennesaret. They brought the boat to shore and climbed out. The people recognized Jesus at once, Mark 6:53-54

“Which is better: number one or number two?” the ophthalmologist asks, flipping between lenses during an eye exam. The hope is that your vision will be adjusted in order to see crisply, cleanly, and clearly.

In yesterday’s reflection, the disciples’ failure to see and understand Jesus clearly caused them great and unnecessary fear. By contrast, our passage today says that when the boat reached Gennesaret, “the people at once recognized him.” They saw Jesus clearly and knew with certainty who he was.

In the middle of everyday life, it is sometimes hard to recognize Jesus. School drop offs, work, grocery shopping, and even church activities can blur our vision, causing us to begin feeling anxious or to look elsewhere for healing.

The disciples failed to recognize who Jesus truly was, even while walking with him daily. By contrast, those who lived “in between” recognized him immediately and believed that just touching the fringe of his garment could bring healing. By wishing just to touch his tassels (called tzit tzit; which observant Jewish men wore on prayer shawls), they were proclaiming him as not only a prophet who could heal, but as the Messiah.

Where do we need to ask Jesus to adjust our vision in order to see him more clearly today? Where have we lost sight of who he truly is, or allowed beliefs or circumstances to skew our vision? Have we failed to recognize him in our daily lives?

During this Lenten season may we seek to see him clearly, in all his humbleness and in all his glory, to truly recognize Jesus in all those around us and in the midst of our circumstances.

Lord Jesus, forgive us for failing to see you clearly at times. Help us to recognize you in the midst of our busy lives, the people around us, and those we love. Give us eyes to see you clearly and to respond in faith.

MARCH 13| FRIDAY | READING: MARK 6:53–56

— RECOGNIZING JESUS —

Lord Jesus, forgive us for failing to see you clearly at times. Help us to recognize you in the midst of our busy lives, the people around us, and those we love. Give us eyes to see you clearly and to respond in faith.

MARCH 14 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 7:1-8

— CHECK YOUR HEART —

“Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.’” Mark 7:6-7

In the past few days, we have read about Jesus performing miracles, including the feeding of several thousand people, his walking on water, and healing the sick. Yet the Pharisees and scribes in today's reading are focused on rituals and tradition. Traveling from Jerusalem to see Jesus, they did not seek to follow him. Instead, they were looking for evidence they could use to support their rejection of him as the promised Messiah.

In this scene, they focus on ritual purity, condemning Jesus' disciples for not engaging in the traditional handwashing ceremony before a meal. Quoting Isaiah 29:13, Jesus turns the tables on the religious leaders. Calling them hypocrites, Jesus reveals the importance of inner purity, rather than mere external cleanliness achieved through ritualistic performances. Jesus calls them hypocrites, because their traditional rituals mask the true nature of their hearts—they claim to honor God with their rituals, but their hearts are far from him.

This reading offers us an important reminder for the season of Lent: we must be sure our Lenten rituals, traditions, and practices draw us closer to God and are not for mere show or vain worship. This means we need to check our hearts.

The religious leaders, concerned with traditional handwashing rituals, emphasize external purity, not the inner purity of their hearts. Traditions are important, but not more important than having hearts close to God. God cares more about our heart posture than our precise execution of religious rituals.

During this Lenten season—as we sacrifice, reflect, and repent—let us pursue God, rather than mere ritual. Let us check our hearts, so we can be sure our hearts are not far from him.

Dear God, helps us see the true nature of our hearts, and give us a desire to pursue you this Lenten season. Amen.

MARCH 14 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 7:1-8 — CHECK YOUR HEART —

Dear God, helps us see the true nature of our hearts, and give us a desire to pursue you this Lenten season. Amen.

MARCH 16 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 7:31–37
— HE HAS DONE EVERYTHING WELL —

*“He has done everything well,” they said.
“He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” Mark 7:37*

Jesus continued to travel as he left Tyre, through Sidon, and on by the Sea of Galilee. Still in Gentile territory, he was brought a deaf man with a speech impediment. Jesus took the man aside in private and performed a miracle. Verse 34 says Jesus looked up to the heavens, sighed, and said, “Be opened.” The man could now hear and speak plainly. Once Jesus healed the man and was brought back to the crowd, they could not contain their amazement at what Jesus had done. Verse 36 says that the more Jesus ordered them not to tell what He had done, the more zealously they proclaimed it. The crowd and the healed man proclaimed, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf hear, and the mutes to speak.”

Imagine how difficult and socially isolating it must have been for the healed man to have lived in an oral tradition while being unable to hear or speak properly. This would have affected how his community interacted with him and how he, in turn, interacted with them. But both he and his community had faith that Jesus could restore him. Their faith in Jesus allowed them to gain more than they expected: physical restoration of the man and a shared spiritual revelation, causing them to marvel at Jesus.

How much faith do we have in Jesus, both for ourselves and others? What would happen if we took the little faith we have to Jesus, believing that he will answer and he will restore? I believe we too would be like the man and his community, expecting one thing but receiving even more than we could imagine; enabling us to exclaim “He has done everything well.”

Lord, help us to act on the faith you have given us so that our ears are open and our tongues may always exclaim, “he has done everything well!”

**MARCH 16 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 7:31–37
— HE HAS DONE EVERYTHING WELL —**

Lord, help us to act on the faith you have given us so that our ears are open and our tongues may always exclaim, “he has done everything well!”

MARCH 17 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 8:1-10
— CAN IT BE TRUE AGAIN? AND FOR ME? —

“His disciples replied, ‘How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?’ Mark 8:4

The story of Jesus's feeding the four thousand hits me like a movie title containing the number “2.” (“Really? You couldn’t have come up with something better than *Gladiator 2*?”) Second installments tend to be second-rate and live off their predecessor’s name and nostalgia.

I feel these things when I turn the page to Mark 8: “Didn’t I already read this story? You mean the feeding of the five thousand, right? Oh, four thousand. Got it. So, Jesus basically did this again? Oh, but fewer people with more food? So . . . a lesser miracle? Got it. ”What possible nutritional value could this story hold that I haven’t already gleaned from the first feeding?

The story comes to life for me, however, when my eyes shift from Christ to the disciples. The same literary trope of repetition (i.e., yet another feeding narrative) that makes Jesus’s miracle appear lesser also makes the disciples’ disbelief appear greater. The rerun of their not-getting-it now becomes doubly disconcerting. I am amazed at their unbelief, and I want to stand beside Jesus to ask the Twelve his question: “Do you not yet understand?” (Mark 6:21). How is it possible that the disciples could have taken part in the miraculous feeding of five thousand and not been ready to believe that Jesus could do it again?

But, on closer examination of my own heart, I find that I am not able to stand beside Jesus. I stand, rather, among those dense disciples. For example, I read all sorts of miracle stories in the Bible and “believe” them: God’s creating ex nihilo, the parting of the Red Sea, Jesus’ resurrection. I know what the Bible says—at least with my head. Still, I hunger: a loved one needs healing, a pre-teen needs guidance, a congregation needs growth, a work for which I need equipping. How often do I come to the text with an empty plate and clean fork, starving—angry, bitter, worn—and wondering, “Is there anything here? Anything left? Anything for me?” In my daily disbelief and hunger, I hear the Lord asking me also, “Do you not yet understand?”

***Lord Jesus, may I come to you this day trusting in you,
in your Word, and in your power to provide, heal, deliver, and redeem.
Increase my faith in you and give me understanding. Amen.***

MARCH 17 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 8:1–10 — CAN IT BE TRUE AGAIN? AND FOR ME? —

Lord Jesus, may I come to you this day trusting in you, in your Word, and in your power to provide, heal, deliver, and redeem. Increase my faith in you and give me understanding. Amen.

MARCH 18 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 8:14–21
— FORGOTTEN BREAD —

“When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets of leftovers did you collect?” They said to him, ‘Twelve.’ Mark 8:19

We generally read the Scriptures with judgmental eyes. How could the disciples forget the miracles their rabbi had performed? The solution is obvious to us, especially when Mark gives us this account immediately following Jesus's feeding of the four thousand. Bread was not the only thing the disciples forgot. This exchange describes us more often than not.

How often does desperation and panic blind us to the past goodness and provision of God in our lives? Like the disciples, how often do we let the gravity of our struggles warp our view of who God is? All through the Old Testament, we hear God tell his people to remember—establish festivals to remember, place stones to remember. When we remember that our Heavenly Father is merciful, completely good, loving, kind and sovereign, trusting him becomes possible. When we remember what he has done for us, we find rest for our souls.

Jesus asked them, “When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full...did you collect?” Did they understand as they answered him, “twelve” – knowing there were twelve of them? Perhaps these hungry thousands were not the only people to whom Jesus was offering provision. Was it intentional that there were twelve baskets of leftovers to remind the disciples they would always be provided for as well? As they answered him, “twelve”, did they remember the miracles he had performed? Did they remember who he was?

Let us be people who are intentional in remembering. Remember how God has provided for you. Remember who God is. He is faithful. He is good. He is gracious. Remember what God has done for his people.

Holy Father, teach us to remember. Help us to keep who you are and what you've done at the forefront of our hearts and minds. Amen.

MARCH 18 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 8:14–21 — FORGOTTEN BREAD —

Holy Father, teach us to remember. Help us to keep who you are and what you've done at the forefront of our hearts and minds. Amen.

MARCH 19 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 8:22–26

— TWO-STAGE SIGHT —

“Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.” Mark 8:25

Yesterday, Jesus left us with a startling question, “Do you not yet understand?” Despite all that the disciples had witnessed and learned from Jesus, they still lacked understanding. Though they had seen his miracles, they did not yet grasp the full scope of his mission. You might say they were partially blinded to the truth.

Which brings us to our present passage. This unique miracle is the only instance of a two-stage healing in any of the Gospels, which coupled with its placement between two accounts of the disciples and Jesus, points to the importance of this story for understanding discipleship in Mark’s Gospel.

The blind man at Bethsaida is very similar to the disciples in the first half of Mark’s Gospel. This man is guided by Jesus out of the village and experiences his healing touch, but at first he is only granted partial sight. Like the disciples, he does not yet grasp the full picture. It is only upon experiencing Jesus’ touch again, and looking intently after the fact, that his sight is fully restored.

The disciples, and Peter most especially, will have their own two-stage experience in Mark 8:27–30 and Mark 8:31–9:1, where their understanding of Jesus’ mission will be challenged and clarified. Like the blind man at Bethsaida, they must look intently at who Jesus is and what he says if they are to truly come to know him.

During this Lenten season, as we prepare to celebrate the victory of our Lord in his Resurrection, we should reflect on the person and work of Christ. Where do we remain partially blind to the transforming nature of the gospel? Where do we try to fit Christ to our predetermined understandings, rather than look intently at the Jesus of Scripture and allow our understanding to be shaped by him?

***Lord Jesus, help us to see you clearly and know you truly,
as you have revealed yourself in your Word. Amen.***

MARCH 19 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 8:22–26
— TWO-STAGE SIGHT —

*Lord Jesus, help us to see you clearly and know you truly,
as you have revealed yourself in your Word. Amen.*

March 20 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 8:27-30

— “YOU ARE THE MESSIAH” —

*“He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?”
Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” Mark 8:29*

Yesterday, we saw Jesus restore the sight of a blind man in Bethsaida, giving him clear vision. Instead of sharing this amazing news with everyone around him, Jesus commanded the man to go straight home. Today, we reflect on a moment that Christ shared with his disciples, where his true identity was confirmed and held to be a secret.

Jesus and his disciples continued their journey to Caesarea Philippi, where he asked them a series of the most direct and important questions found in the Gospels. First, Jesus asked, “Who do people say I am?” (v. 27). The disciples shared the various answers they had heard: one of the prophets, Elijah, and even John the Baptist (v. 28).

While each of those prophets was chosen by God and played an essential role in the coming of Christ, the disciples knew that Jesus was not these men, that he was so much more. Jesus asked them again, “But who do you say I am?” It was Peter who answered, “You are the Messiah” (v. 29). This very same Peter, who would go on to deny Christ in the face of his arrest, was the one who confirmed that he was the one and only Messiah!

Once again, Jesus commanded the disciples not to say anything (v. 30). Imagine knowing the most incredible, life-changing secret: you know the Messiah, and you can’t tell anyone. We are privileged to be on the other side of this life-changing conversation involving the disciples. We know who Jesus Christ is and his identity as the Messiah. Unlike Peter and the disciples then, who were told not to talk about it, we can and should share the good news of the Messiah with everyone!

*“Jesus, as we reflect on the Lenten season, help us to remember
that you are the Messiah, deserving our honor and worship. Amen.”*

March 20 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 8:27–30
— “YOU ARE THE MESSIAH” —

“Jesus, as we reflect on the Lenten season, help us to remember that you are the Messiah, deserving our honor and worship. Amen.”

MARCH 21 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 8:31–9:1

— THE CALL to SURRENDER —

“For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” Mark 8:35

Jesus displayed his great power through miracles in the beginning of Mark 8. Then, Peter declared him the Christ, the Messiah, the long-awaited conquering Messiah! Jesus consistently surprised the twelve disciples. He still amazes us today. Instead of taking over by force, the Son of God came to suffer, be killed, and rise again. Peter couldn't fathom this being true, but Jesus reminded him that he was setting his mind not on divine things, but on human things.

The kingdom of God on earth is a paradoxical kingdom. It is easy to be stuck in the worldly view, with no clear vision of the upside-down way of Jesus. In fact, the powers of this dark world fight to limit our sight only to what our culture embraces. They teach us to hold on to things tightly. Jesus shows us that we must surrender everything and even be willing to embrace suffering. That does sound outrageous, doesn't it?

The season of Lent is a time to reflect, repent, and prepare for Resurrection Sunday. We look to death so that we may celebrate life. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you something you are grasping for or holding on to tightly. Is there anything you need to surrender to God? In doing this, how might you embrace the upside-down way of Jesus today?

*Lord, help me to freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.
Amen.*

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MARCH 21 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 8:31–9:1 — THE CALL to SURRENDER —

*Lord, help me to freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.
Amen.*

MARCH 23 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 9:2-8

— SEEING JESUS' GLORY —

Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”

Mark 9:5

This odd little passage provides theological riches disproportionate to its length. We see Jesus' divinity shine through the flesh in which he had come to dwell. We see an affirmation of Jesus' ministry as the fulfillment of both Law (Moses) and Prophecy (Elijah).

What most draws my attention as a historian, however, is the resonance between this story and the “beatific vision.” In mystical theology, this vision is the summit of the spiritual journey, the moment when a person receives such a powerful sense of God’s presence and love that all senses are overwhelmed, and the person is lost in spiritual bliss with God.

Peter, James, and John receive just such a vision. Peter exclaims, “It is good for us to be here,” and offers to build shelters so they can all stay awhile. Instead, a cloud overshadows them, and the moment is gone. John Chrysostom preaches that Peter offers this in order to avoid the suffering and tragic loss that Jesus predicted in the previous chapter. Why not just stay on the mountaintop? Jesus knows, however, that his work is not complete without the suffering that is to come.

If you are lucky, Jesus will at some point show you his glory like he does here. You cannot find it yourself. You can make your heart ready, but there is no sure way to get there. If you do receive this gift, you cannot keep it, for it is only a foretaste of glory divine. It is good to be on the mountaintop with Jesus, but it is not good to stay there. There is still work to do before we can enter forever into God’s glory.

Lord Jesus, grant us today a deep sense of your glory, and let it empower and sustain us when you lead us down from the mountaintop and into your service.

MARCH 23 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 9:2-8 — SEEING JESUS’ GLORY —

Lord Jesus, grant us today a deep sense of your glory, and let it empower and sustain us when you lead us down from the mountaintop and into your service.

MARCH 24 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 9:14–29

— THE PRAYER of UNBELIEF —

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” Mark 9:24

The journey of growing in faith can feel daunting at times for the believer. Faith is a currency in our Christian Walk that is challenged every day. A diagnosis can challenge your faith in God's attribute as a healer. Financial burdens can challenge your belief in him as a provider. A parent with a child battling addiction can struggle to believe in God as a deliverer. We face these battles as human beings. Like us, the father that we meet in this chapter in Mark was undergoing trial, struggling with his own faith.

Faith is mainly challenged by our sight. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth that we should walk by Faith not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Sight is deceitful, debilitating, and limited, and Jesus knew this father was debilitated. The disciples of Jesus are not able to help his son. He had seen his son thrown in the fire, thrown into the water, and had seen his son close to death each time the evil spirit attacked his son. Jesus took time to address the state of this man's heart. We cannot encounter Christ and leave the same. What is the current state of your sight?

The father answered Jesus, “I believe, but help my unbelief” (v. 24). His acknowledgement of unbelief did not disqualify him from experiencing the healing he so desired for his son. The grace of God can move us from unbelief to belief. His strength is made perfect in our weakness.

For those of us whose faith has been tested by our sight, God is able to move us to belief through prayer. We can not only pray for God to change our circumstances, but we can also pray that God can change the state of our heart. To pray for faith is an acknowledgement that God is still all powerful and all things come from him, even our faith. Both the son and the father received exactly what they needed from Jesus. The man came for healing for his son, but with a simple prayer he also encountered Jesus, and his faith was forever changed.

Heavenly Father, I pray that you strengthen my faith today. In the areas where my faith has weakened, I desire to move to belief. May I believe in you more, love you even more, and desire to walk faithfully in all you have called me to.

**MARCH 24 | TUESDAY | READING: MARK 9:14–29
— THE PRAYER of UNBELIEF —**

Heavenly Father, I pray that you strengthen my faith today. In the areas where my faith has weakened, I desire to move to belief. May I believe in you more, love you even more, and desire to walk faithfully in all you have called me to.

MARCH 25 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 10:13–16

— “ONCE A MAN, TWICE A CHILD” —

When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. Mark 10:14

Today, our focus is on Jesus’ command to have “childlike” faith. Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it” (v. 15). What are the characteristics of “childlike” faith that we are to remember during this season of Lent? I suggest two that teach us, in part, how to follow Jesus.

The first is helplessness. At the heart of our Christian faith is the realization that we are utterly helpless on our own. We do not have the strength of character to always do what is right. We do not have the spiritual strength to live disciplined and holy lives. Neither do we have the emotional maturity to always respond in love and with compassion. We are utterly helpless when it comes to living out the Christian life; we simply cannot do it in our own strength. Just as a child is utterly helpless without a care giver to provide for its every need, so we too are helpless before God. Thus, true faith begins when we recognize our helplessness and stop depending on our own strength.

The second childlike quality is dependence. If we are helpless in our own strength, then we must therefore become dependent on God. The Lord is our Provider, and we are dependent on God’s provision, both in this life and for the next. No one can enter the Kingdom of God in their own strength. No one can enter the Kingdom of God through an attitude of independence. To enter the Kingdom of God, we must be childlike in acknowledging our helplessness and our dependence. As we do that, so we shall become inheritors of the Kingdom of God and know what it is to have life in all its fullness. Having that mindset is a wonderful place to be and a wonderful way to live because we are finally released from social pressures to succeed, and we have nothing to prove to anyone anymore.

Help us, Lord Jesus, to have a childlike faith that looks beyond ourselves and is totally dependent on you and your will. Amen.

MARCH 25 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 10:13–16
— “ONCE A MAN, TWICE A CHILD” —

Help us, Lord Jesus, to have a childlike faith that looks beyond ourselves and is totally dependent on you and your will. Amen.

MARCH 26 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 10:17–31

— TRANSFORMED in SUBMISSION —

“Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” Mark 10:27

In today's passage, a rich young ruler presented himself to Jesus as one who had lived in obedience to the law in totality. The rich man presented his spotless track record to Jesus and confidently asked, “What else do I lack?” Despite his pride, Jesus loved this man, and answered his question, desiring that the rich man would truly enter the kingdom of heaven. In the rich man's rejection of Jesus' answer, Jesus revealed that obedience to the law was not complete by checking off a list, but rather by complete submission to God. That is the real heart of the law.

When the rich man presented his inquiry, the focus was on what he must do to enter the kingdom of heaven. He was the main actor. Perhaps the rich man believed that in his obedience to the law, he could be good, perfect, and without flaw. But as Jesus emphasized throughout his ministry, he came because there is nothing any human could ever do to be good enough.

Jesus desire is that all would be united with him, that none would be lost. But as he spoke to his disciples and as he speaks to us today, he is well-aware of our inability to faithfully live according to his purposes apart from him. Jesus didn't detest the rich young ruler but, rather, he loved him. Even though it may be easier for a camel to pass through a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom, God chose to make it possible through his Son, Jesus Christ. He continues to guide us through our Helper, the Holy Spirit.

In our gratitude and daily submission to the Father, he graciously continues to teach us and cause us to look more like him.

Lord Jesus, thank you that only you are good. Thank you, God, for being a good Father to us. Help us to always remember that you have given yourself that we might be faithful to the life that you call us to live. May we always rely on you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**MARCH 26 | THURSDAY | READING: MARK 10:17–31
— TRANSFORMED in SUBMISSION —**

Lord Jesus, thank you that only you are good. Thank you, God, for being a good Father to us. Help us to always remember that you have given yourself that we might be faithful to the life that you call us to live. May we always rely on you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

MARCH 27 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 10:35–45

— REDEFINING GLORY —

So Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant.

Mark 10:42-43

What is glory, and what is its source?

While imagination is the seedbed of hope, it can also be corrupted by compromised definitions of greatness. Idolatry, the elevation of lesser loves and the fulfillment of longings through unworthy pursuits, shows that other sources by which we seek glory are utterly insufficient when compared with a holy God. But our problem isn't always simply going to the wrong source— it also stems from warped visions of desired outcomes.

In Mark 10, James and John went to the right source. They asked Christ for their hearts' desire: to sit at his right and left. Their imagined glory included an expectation of elevation and high position, a vision that makes sense under a cultural construct of greatness that “lords” power over others.

But it makes no sense when submitted under the lordship of Christ. His kingdom is founded on a radical redefinition of glory: exaltation as humility— and “of the truth of these words Jesus himself is the proof; of the certainty of their fulfillment to us he is the pledge.”

“Christ, though in the very form of God, didn't regard equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead, he emptied himself, taking on slavery, humanness, and humble obedience unto death on a cross, sealing this promise by blood.

And God exalted him, to the glory of the Father.”

How do you imagine glory? What is its source? Where are you trying to find it?

The whole point of Lent is to “give up” our right to ourselves and trust our lives to Jesus— not in part, on our terms, ordering Jesus to do our bidding. The language of “must” in Mark 10 isn't a Christian suggestion—this reorientation of our conception of glory through crucified obedience are non-negotiables for a life fully submitted under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Don't mark Lent by temporary and partial submission to God while continuing to seek false glory from any alternative source. Trust God, the true source of all glory. Submit instead your everything, for here is our greatness: to give all glory to the only One worthy of it.

LORD Jesus— take all that I have and all that I am, for YOUR glory. Amen.

MARCH 27 | FRIDAY | READING: MARK 10:35–45 — REDEFINING GLORY —

LORD Jesus—take all that I have and all that I am, for YOUR glory. Amen.

MARCH 28 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 10:46–52

— SIT in SCARCITY —

“Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Mark 10:48

True desperation is developed when we sit in scarcity. On this, the eve of Palm Sunday, Jesus continues his Jerusalem journey and encounters Blind Bartimaeus sitting near the city gates. How many people passed through that day? Sure, there was a crowd following Jesus, but what of those rushing about, minds bent on whatever errands traveling through Jericho might entail? A hub of commerce, there would be many who ignored their need for mercy in favor of trade, a restock of wheat, or all manner of other ordinary business. Many would lack eyes to see the embodied mercy walking among them...but not Blind Bartimaeus. Though his eyes were clouded, he perceived Jesus clearly in his spirit. Seeing Jesus for who he was, he began to cry out, and as he cried, the seeing blind tried to silence him. In the face of stern disapproval, what gave him the gumption to cry out “even more loudly?” True desperation.

Maybe you find yourself caught up in the busyness of ordinary life, entranced by everyday pressures and desires—their pursuit numbing your spirit’s hunger for God’s mercy—blinding the eyes of your heart from seeing your need for God. Just as numbness is nurtured, so too, desperation is developed.

Lent is a season for reflection and a time to embrace lack, forty days to adopt the posture of Blind Bartimaeus. While countless people walked through Jericho’s gates that day, Bartimaeus was sitting and begging. Forced to depend upon others to sustain his life, Bartimaeus sat in scarcity and his desperation for Jesus grew.

Do you find it hard to desire Jesus? Are you discouraged by your lack of guttural response to the beauty of resurrection? Sit in scarcity. It’s not too late.

***Lord, as I spend one more week in scarcity, will you cultivate my desperation for you so that my soul might cry hungrily for your mercy, and receive it in full?
Amen.***

**MARCH 28 | SATURDAY | READING: MARK 10:46–52
— SIT in SCARCITY —**

*Lord, as I spend one more week in scarcity, will you cultivate my desperation for you so that my soul might cry hungrily for your mercy, and receive it in full?
Amen.*

MARCH 30 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 11:15–19
— SACRED SPACES, INCLUSIVE PLACES —

And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? But ye have made it a den of thieves. Mark 11:17

After the Triumphal Entry, Jesus made his way to the temple before leaving the city that evening. There was nothing said or done, just a visit. Then the following day, after reflecting all night on what he had experienced, he went back to the temple and was outraged by what he found. He overturned the tables and drove out the vendors, declaring, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.” The temple was meant to be a sacred space—a place where all people, regardless of background or identity, could encounter the Divine. Yet, the commercialization of the temple had transformed it into a place of exclusivity.

As we reflect on this passage during Lent, we are invited to consider the ways in which our communities—whether churches, schools, or neighborhoods—have also been turned into spaces that exclude or marginalize others. We must ask ourselves: Are we truly a house of prayer for all people, as Jesus envisioned? Or have we, knowingly or unknowingly, created systems of oppression that favor some and exclude others?

In Lent we are invited to examine the social injustices in our world and in our faith communities. From gender inequality to racial injustice, from economic disparity to ableism, there are many ways that our “temples” have become places that harm rather than heal. Jesus’ words challenge us to create inclusive, welcoming spaces where all can find a sense of belonging and connection with the Divine.

During this season of repentance and renewal, we are invited to confront these injustices. As we repent, we also strive to repair and restore the brokenness in our communities. This means advocating for the marginalized, confronting systems of injustice, and ensuring that our communities are not only places of spiritual refuge but also of social transformation. May our communities be places of healing, where all people are welcomed, loved, and valued.

Holy Loving God, help us tear down the barriers that divide us and guide us to build a house of prayer for all nations—no exceptions. Amen.

MARCH 30 | MONDAY | READING: MARK 11:15–19 — SACRED SPACES, INCLUSIVE PLACES —

Holy Loving God, help us tear down the barriers that divide us and guide us to build a house of prayer for all nations—no exceptions. Amen.

MARCH 31| TUESDAY | READING: MARK 12:13-17

— BEYOND THE IMAGE on the COIN —

“And they came and said to him, ‘Teacher, we know that you are sincere and show deference to no one, for you do not regard people with partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?’ Mark 12:14

Jesus' ominous death march to the Cross has begun. He is in Jerusalem. He attracts widespread attention and admiration from the crowd and full opposition from the religious leaders, some surveilling and some conspiring. Confrontational questions are raised, aimed at Jesus, and Jesus counters their question with questions of his own (Mark 11:27-33, 12:1-37). Such was the scene in Mark 12:13-17. Tension heightened when the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders sent to Jesus some Pharisees and some Herodians who also had an earlier appearance in the Gospel (Mark 3:6). Their unholy alliance – one associated with strict Jewish laws and the other with loyalty to the Roman-appointed dynasty of Herod underscores the growing hostility towards Jesus.

Bent on ensnaring Jesus, they asked Jesus an insidious question regarding whether it was lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not (Mark 12:14-15). For the Jews, this was a quandary question, for they saw the imperial tax as religiously illegitimate yet politically inevitable. Jesus, recognizing their layered motives and disingenuous attitude, responds without abrogating Jewish monotheism or committing treason, as the Herodians and the Pharisees hoped to hear. Jesus asks for a coin and says, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s (Mark 12:16-17).”

The emperor is entitled to the coin that featured an embossed image of Caesar’s head, but God is also entitled to “the things that are God’s.” Humanity bears God’s image, and we belong to God. We are his. If Caesar is due the coin, we owe God our very lives. We owe God our heart, soul, and mind. Lent invites us to reflect and ask ourselves: are we truly giving to God what is God’s? Let this be a time of deeper self-examination and surrender, giving to God a gift that exceeds any human currency: the gift of our very hearts.

Lord, help us to recognize that we are made in your image and help us to give you all that we are, surrendering our hearts, our lives, and our wills into your loving hands. Amen.

MARCH 31| TUESDAY | READING: MARK 12:13–17
— BEYOND THE IMAGE on the COIN —

Lord, help us to recognize that we are made in your image and help us to give you all that we are, surrendering our hearts, our lives, and our wills into your loving hands. Amen.

APRIL 1 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 12:28–34
— THE GREAT COMMANDMENT —

Realizing how much the man understood, Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions. Mark 12:34

A scribe who was a Jewish scholar and expert in the law of Moses approached Jesus with a question: “Which commandment is the first of all?” (v. 28).

Knowing his audience, Jesus begins his answer by quoting the Mosaic Law. The Law of Moses contains 613 Jewish commandments, and Jesus’ answer cuts directly to the heart of the law: love. Love is the great commandment, and all of the other commandment’s stem from love. Without love, following the commandments becomes a worthless pursuit.

Many people, myself included, tend to back away or tense up when they hear the word “command.” People’s natural tendency is that they don’t like to be told what to do. But as Christians, we are called to obey God’s commands.

The good news is that God does not require anything that he has not first given to us. God first loved us with an all-encompassing love, even though we turned our backs on him. God is love, and all he asks for is our love in response: to love God and to love each other.

This Lenten season offers us a reminder of God’s great love for us. God demonstrated the greatest act of love by sending his Son Jesus into the world as a sacrifice on our behalf so that we may be invited into and share in God’s loving fellowship. As we reflect and prepare during this season, let us clothe ourselves in the love of God, seeking to fill our heart, soul, mind, and strength with the love of God, and embodying the love of Jesus Christ. Love is how we confidently know that we “are not far from the kingdom of God” (v. 34).

*Jesus, open our hearts to graciously receive the love you have given us.
Write these words that you command us on our hearts and
teach us to love others as you first loved us. Amen.*

**APRIL 1 | WEDNESDAY | READING: MARK 12:28–34
— THE GREAT COMMANDMENT —**

Jesus, open our hearts to graciously receive the love you have given us. Write these words that you command us on our hearts and teach us to love others as you first loved us. Amen.

At the house he enters, say to the owner, “The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?” Mark 14:14

Before his suffering and death, Christ desired one last meal with his disciples. He had prearranged the place for their Passover meal (Mark 14:12-16). This meal was no ordinary gathering; every act and word of the Lord was deeply prophetic and eschatological. He knew what was about to happen and who would betray him, yet he did not confront or rebuke Judas. His subtle references to betrayal troubled the disciples, but everything was unfolding as written about him. In the face of impending danger and tragedy, he remained incredibly calm and confident.

The secret of his peace was his deep trust in the Word of God. He saw everything happening as it had been foretold about the Messiah. Although it was painful to witness his own disciple betray him, he understood that even this was part of God's salvific plan. Thus, he gave bread and wine as tokens of his love and covenant to everyone, including the traitor.

Ministry often becomes a crucible—a place of testing that involves breaches of confidence, pain, and trouble. Nevertheless, even in the midst of the crucible, you may catch a faint silhouette of our Lord. He comforts us with these words: “Take; this is my body.” Like Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:5-8), we are nourished by heavenly food and drink. Just as the Lord strengthened the weary prophet and sent him back to Israel with a renewed mission, Christ feeds, comforts, and empowers us to continue our ministry for the sake of salvation.

As he gave the cup of wine to his disciples, Christ looked ahead with hope, anticipating the day he would drink the new wine with them in his Kingdom. It was with this eschatological hope that Christ walked through the crucible of suffering. Now, our Master invites us to follow him, carrying our own cross with the same hope.

Lord, may my life and ministry reflect your mercy and love. Amen.

APRIL 2 | MAUNDY THURSDAY | READING: MARK 14:12–25 — HOPE in the CRUCIBLE —

Lord, may my life and ministry reflect your mercy and love. Amen.

APRIL 3 | GOOD FRIDAY | READING: MARK 15:21–32

— THE SUFFERING SERVANT —

Well then, “Save yourself and come down from the cross.” Mark 15:30

Characteristic of the Gospel of Mark, the crucifixion of Jesus is recounted with utter simplicity. The features of the story are quickly recounted one after another. A “passer-by” is conscripted to carry the cross of the beaten Jesus (v. 21). The one so weakened from his torture refused the pain-dulling wine that was intended as an antidote to such suffering (v. 23). And then, in great brevity (only three Greek words), Mark announces, “And they crucified him.” The entire Gospel has been building to this moment, and yet Mark spares us any theatrics, preferring instead to invite us to linger in the gravity of it all—“And they crucified him.”

The charges against him were clearly on display (v. 26), much as his now nearly naked broken body was on display for all to see. As the crowds passed by, their acts of shaming were matched by their mocking taunts, “Save yourself and come down from the cross.” The chief priests and scribes likewise hurled mocking invectives at him, taunting him “to come down from the cross” (v. 32). Even the two bandits joined in the torturous ridicule.

The one who hung there on that cross was the one who had stilled the stormy seas and resuscitated the life of a sweet child. He was the one who had freed the demon-possessed man and brought sight to another. In each of these moments, and others besides, Jesus spoke and the seemingly impossible occurred. In each of these moments, Jesus called into existence what was not.

But not here, not in this moment. On the cross, with insults being hurled, Jesus remains silent—silent not because he is powerless to act, but because the seemingly impossible is being accomplished through his suffering silence. He refuses to come down because in this moment, even in his silence, he is calling into existence that which is not—the redemption of all of creation.

O Jesus, in your redemptive suffering, we have found new life. On this holiest of all Fridays, the one we affectionately label as “Good,” teach us to linger in the gravity of this day, so that we might love you all the more.

**APRIL 3 | GOOD FRIDAY | READING: MARK 15:21–32
— THE SUFFERING SERVANT —**

O Jesus, in your redemptive suffering, we have found new life. On this holiest of all Fridays, the one we affectionately label as “Good,” teach us to linger in the gravity of this day, so that we might love you all the more.

APRIL 4 | HOLY SATURDAY | READING: MARK 15:42-47

— WAITING in HOPE —

Then Joseph bought a linen cloth and, taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mark 15:46

What do you do when your whole world falls apart? What do you do when what you thought was God's plan for your life (and the world) seems to have become completely impossible?

In today's passage from Mark's Gospel, we are given a glimpse of how some followers of Jesus reacted to such a time. When Jesus was crucified by the Roman oppressor, all their hopes were lost for the future coming of the Kingdom of God. The Messiah had failed them. God had abandoned them. Many of the disciples ran away and hid in terror.

A few, however, reacted differently. In that strange twilight time between Jesus's death and the sunset which marked the beginning of the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea risked his wealth, position, and perhaps even his life, to go before Pilate to ask for Jesus's body (v. 43). This action arose from more than love of a departed friend. Joseph was also acting in obedience to God's commandment to bury a body which had been killed by hanging on a pole before sundown (Deut. 21:22). Mary and the other women who had remained with Jesus through his crucifixion accompanied Joseph in this sorrowful task. Then, from sunset through Saturday, they rested and kept God's Sabbath (Mark 16:1). In their moment of greatest crisis and deepest despair, these faithful followers chose to cling to God's law rather than to reject it. They waited in the hope that God had not abandoned them. In the words of the Psalmist, in following God's law they "found comfort in affliction" (Psalm 119:50).

Of course, their hope was not in vain. While they obeyed on Holy Saturday, God was acting for their redemption more powerfully than they could ever have imagined. On Holy Saturday, we who wait like these early friends and followers of Jesus can also take consolation in the promises that when our lives seem darkest and most hopeless, God is still acting for us.

Lord Jesus, give us the strength and faithfulness of Joseph of Arimathea and Mary; that we may obey and persevere during life's trials, knowing that we too will one day experience your comfort and redemption.

APRIL 4 | HOLY SATURDAY | READING: MARK 15:42–47 — WAITING in HOPE —

Lord Jesus, give us the strength and faithfulness of Joseph of Arimathea and Mary; that we may obey and persevere during life's trials, knowing that we too will one day experience your comfort and redemption.