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Lenten Devotional

REFLECTIONS FOR EACH DAY IN LENT

Editor's Note

Back in 2018, someone – probably me, but I’m not certain about that – suggested that we do a series of Lenten devotionals: a reflection for each of the 40 days, each one written by a different member of the congregation. And we did. Well, we almost did. The first year we had only four readings per week, instead of the six we’ve done since.

The first book contained several authors who are no longer an active part of our church. Sonya Davis is now a United Methodist deacon serving in Oregon. Other authors moved away from Seattle or to other churches; Gary Parker and David Charcas are in the 2018 book. And other writers – Connie McCutcheon and Tom Allen – have passed on from this life.

I don’t think any one would have imagined that in 2025 we would be creating our EIGHTH (and final) version of the Lenten devotionals. (Yes, we even put a book together during Covid.) What turned this project into an annual experience, treasured by members of our congregation? The answer is in the question and it is quite simple: the members of our congregation.

How many times have you read a devotional and said, “Wow, I never thought of it that way,” or “Her words really touched me.” or “I never knew that about him.” With the scriptures as a starting point, I have witnessed amazing spiritual depth, read evidence of a strong prayer life, and been touched by the sharing of a personal experience with God. Often these treasures came from folks who said, “Oh no, I’m not a writer,” but still accepted the challenge.

So, to each of you who has contributed, whether as a writer or a reader, to eight years of Lenten Devotionals, “Thank you, thank you, thank you.”

Barbara Moreland
Editor (Retired)

A Prayer for 40 Days

Jesus,

As a boisterous child you ate breakfast in your mother’s kitchen, and played in the yard by the carpenter’s shed.

As a precocious teen you learned the tenets of your faith, heard stories of the prophets, felt the beauty of the psalms.

As a young man you grew wise beyond your years, seeing – only dimly at first – what the future would require of you.

As an adult, you fully accepted your purpose:

“I am come that you might have life,
and that you might have it more abundantly.”

As a healer you touched people physically and emotionally, releasing pain, soothing spirits, and offering acceptance.

As a teacher you reinterpreted the laws, upset the status quo.

As an activist, you confronted power, lifted the oppressed, spoke for those long silenced.

And you paid with your life.

But that was not the end.

As we walk through 40 days of remembering,

Waiting for the celebration we know will come,

we want to follow your example, to BE what you taught.

Give us your courage and compassion so we may be
fully committed in our relationship with our Source,
protective stewards of our earthly home,
strong advocates for the welfare of our neighbors.

We wait, and we work.

Confident of resurrection.

Amen.

Day 1 | Ash Wednesday | Joel 2:1-2, 12-17
Kathryn Everett

We've all been inspired by Bishop Mariann Budde's plea for mercy in the service after the inauguration. She follows in the long honored tradition of the prophets who dared to speak truth to power. Our God is a God of mercy and grace, "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." And we are called to be people of mercy and grace. Who among us would not want and need a God like that? Today we're not so happy with the prophets when they talk about punishment, but I would call it consequences. Some would call it karma, "you reap what you sow" the Bible says elsewhere. But our God is full of second chances.

Jesus said to forgive 70 times 7. Are we brave and wise enough to proclaim and live that truth? Our people are so divided. We cheer when someone denounces the other side. Where is our grace and mercy and forgiveness? Forgiveness doesn't mean allowing someone to keep hurting us or others, but it does mean giving second chances when the hurting stops, and at the same time working to stop the hurting. Part of that work is speaking out even when that feels uncomfortable, even dangerous. We are called to speak truth to power with the love and grace and mercy Bishop Budde did.

Prayer: God of Grace and Mercy, may we have the courage and wisdom to speak out when we have the chance, and in a way that can at least plant a seed even if it doesn't change things immediately.

Action: Today, when we see an opportunity, let us speak with grace and mercy!

Day 2 | Psalm 51:1-17 | Claire Gebben

This psalm of David serves as a poignant beginning to the Lenten season, a time of penitence in preparation for the Easter resurrection. A time to turn to God, to ask for forgiveness for our wrong-doings, small and large. Lent lasts for 40 days. Or does it? If you actually count the days on the calendar, it's longer, 46 days until Easter. Why?

Long ago, circa the sixth century A.D., Pope Gregory standardized Lent as 40 days with the exception of Sundays, which are intended to be respites from fasting and abstinence (the original directive of the season). Sundays became known, therefore, as "little Easters," brief moments of joy and celebration of the resurrection amid this season of regret, penitence, and sorrow.

Whether you count Sundays or not, taking this season seriously means finding ways to draw closer to God. Sometimes that means sacrificing an indulgence, be it chocolate, meat, or perhaps hardest of all, TV or internet streaming. Or maybe, it means instituting a regular practice of prayer and meditation, or volunteering for a non-profit organization. However we go about it, the point of Lent is to be honest with ourselves in hopes of receiving God's wisdom and forgiveness.

There is a prayer to God in this psalm that stands out for me: "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit," a reminder that I practice Lent to be restored and renewed, to cleanse my spirit so that God can work within me and through me.

Prayer: Holy God, not my will, but thine. Amen.

Action: Choose an action or an abstinence to practice throughout Lent that might bring you closer to God, and to a new and right spirit within.

Day 3 | 2 Corinthians 5: 20 – 6: 10 |
Kurt Armbruster

In this passage, Paul emphasizes the role of believers as representatives of Christ, urging others to reconcile with God and be an agent of love and grace. This is easy to do on a Sunday morning in church, but it is hard to do in our daily lives. Things are stressful and often annoying. You may find yourself saying, “Jesus’s message is great, but he didn’t have to work with idiots like these...” (Well actually, he probably did!). The message is about the call to serve, and embody love, even when it’s hard.

To deepen your connection to being an ambassador for Christ, consider the times in your life when you were most Christ like.

- When you helped a distressed tourist buy something when they had lost their money.
- When you paused an angry discussion to say, “Let me listen better and hear your point of view.”
- When you helped someone less powerful than you when it was unexpected.

Take a moment to bask in your own gracefulness. Then use that thought and that strength to power future acts. Think quietly, “How might I apply that power one time today?”

Day 4 | Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21 | Teresa Benedict

Motivation: Reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way; general desire or willingness of someone to do something.

The first section of the scripture is about three acts of righteousness: giving, praying, and fasting. Jesus warns against acting like the “hypocrites.” My study Bible says “hypocrite” is the Greek work for “play-actor” and refers to those who fake piety. This definition, along with the descriptions of the hypocrite’s actions, paint a vivid picture for me. Sadly, I can picture these behaviors continuing beyond biblical times.

The second section of the scripture is about “Treasures in Heaven.” It brings to my mind the phrase “you can’t take it with you.” We are admonished not to hoard up worldly possessions. I’m still not sure what it means to store up treasures in heaven, but I do believe we are called to use our resources to do God’s work here on earth.

To me, what’s important about these verses is the importance of being aware of what is motivating us. We are called to do good works with sincere motives, solely for God’s approval. The causes we support show where our heart lies. This awareness seems especially important in today’s world.

Action: Look for a cause or charity that is important to you and to God’s values. Then commit to donating your resources of time and/or money.

If you are able, please consider donating blood through Bloodworks Northwest. The need is always there. However, at the end of January, they were at a crisis level, especially for type O blood, due to the fires in Los Angeles and the winter storms in the southern states.

Day 5 | Deuteronomy 26: 1-11 | Gary Skinner

Have you ever had a day when it seemed absolutely everything was messed up? Everything around you is going in the wrong direction, and you are so frustrated you simply want to “throw in the towel.” The channel you want to watch on TV is inaccessible. You can't find the telephone number you wanted to call. You've lost your glasses or your iPhone or your keys, and all that you want to do is to cry out to God, “Why me? Why now? Why?”

If you've ever had a day with those feelings, you may or may not want to read Psalm 22. Obviously, the writer of this Psalm was having a bad day. “I am a worm, not human, scorned by others, despised by the people, bones are out of joint, my mouth is dried up, dogs are all around me, and my hands and feet have shriveled. I can count all my bones!”

Sometimes when everything around and within us seems to be going wrong, we need to stop where we are, pause for a few moments, take a deep breath, and once again allow the redeeming and healing Spirit of the Holy One to touch us. Stop. Let the Spirit touch you. Allow yourself to be calmed by the presence of the Holy One who has cared for others and is now caring for you.

You may be surprised – surprised by joy. Once again, in spite of all that troubles you and all that seems insurmountable, in that moment you may hear a voice saying, “You are loved, simply loved,” and that's enough.

“O love that will not let me go; I rest my weary soul in thee; I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be.”

Day 6 | Psalm 91: 1-2, 9-16 | Julius Perez

Throughout Christianity many consider God to be primarily a protector and a guide. I'm no different. Scripture often makes clear the guidance and solace that faith will bring. Even within this verse, that protection is affirmed: “Because you have made the Lord your refuge... no evil shall befall you.”

However, in this Psalm lies a key difference in how God may guide. In the next lines, perhaps antithetically, the writer lists the challenges that may befall even the most faithful. We are told of the adder and the lion — figures representing woes painful and yet inevitable in the human experience. Trying to completely avoid problems would be futile. God will not “save” one from treading on a serpent. Rather God will give the faithful divine strength, so that individuals can trample such evils when they encounter them. The true gift is God's presence and guidance.

Consider the “venomous adders” one may tread across today. Exploitation, hate, and manufactured fear are all rampant in our world. These deadly powers may reach any person, no matter how devout in their adherence to God. But God offers the guidance and the power needed for someone to stamp out these forces and receive salvation.

As we look ahead at an uneasy time, dominated by extremist rhetoric and policy written with hate and prejudice, we are called to embrace God. Embrace God not to escape the many challenges of this world, but to trample them, when we inevitably step upon each one.

This passage highlights three truths about the message of the gospel. It is simple, it is universal, and it is personal.

Simple. The simplicity of the gospel's message as Paul reminds us here is echoed in the recitation we often say before communion: "All that is required is a desire to know Christ." It's easy to get lost in the fiddly bits of theology. The triune nature of God, the humanity vs. divinity of Jesus, the different types of grace Wesley defined. But rather than losing ourselves in arguments about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, sometimes it's important to simply remember: you are forgiven, and you are loved, warts and all.

Universal. God's love is freely given to all, without exception or stipulation. No matter who we are or where came from, Jesus's message and God's love are for all.

Personal. I find that the nearness of God Paul mentions reminds me of one of my favorite hymns, "His Eye is On the Sparrow." Much as in the song, God is omnipresent and universal, spanning the vastness of the stars and the empty lightyears between. Yet God is always near to each of us individually. God is beyond space and time, yet God's message is in our mouths and in our hearts.

As this passage highlights, for a globe-spanning religion, the core tenets of Christianity are far reaching and impactful, but quite easily summarized. The Lord's Prayer and The Apostle's Creed can be recited one after the other in under a minute, but between the two I struggle to think of any core tenets of the faith that are missing. Take a few minutes today to recite them to yourself, and see if there is anything you feel you would add.

A traditional reading of this scripture probably leads one to believe the most important message is to resist primal, everyday urges, similar to the seven deadly sins.

However, there's another way to see it, and that is about what we choose to do instead: what we choose to eat, how we allot our time, and what we seek in our daily tasks. There are many things about Lent that we choose to "go without", but there are things we can choose to "go with" as well. Yes, it is true that Jesus resists temptation from Satan. He knows what he will not do. But Jesus is also making choices of what he will do, and that was to put his trust in God that the devil would eventually leave at "an opportune time."

There may be seasons when we may feel like nothing is going our way as we watch people we disagree with gain power or wealth. At those times, ask yourself if power or wealth really equate to joy or fulfillment to you. Or is your joy about something else? Is it about serving God, and through God, serving others? Is it in a moment of reflection before you pull into the drive-thru because you know you have the option to eat something else? Maybe, instead of being led by people we disagree with, why don't we choose to message that friend we've been meaning to see and perhaps share a meal with them? Maybe it is just taking in a moment of reflection, to remember what really matters to us.

Action: When you are tempted, do something to counter that urge. Connect with the earth, sign up with a volunteer group, or choose something else that resonates with you in that moment.

Day 9 | Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 | Jane Gregg

Things look pretty bleak for Abraham. He cannot see a way forward that matches the promises God had made to him. A few chapters earlier God promises that Abraham will be the leader of a great nation, that all the people of the earth will be blessed through him, and that he will be protected from those who cursed him. Abraham finds himself questioning God as the facts of his life do not match these promises. In response, God reassures him, offering more details about how these promises will be fulfilled. Abraham is called to have faith – faith that the impossible will be made possible.

None of us are strangers to the feeling that our situation is bleak. Sometimes the facts of our lives do not seem to support hope. Yet, just as God reassured Abraham, he reassures us: we need not fear. We are called to have faith that there may be blessings amidst our difficulties, that our struggles can become strengths, and that the impossible can become possible.

For me, this kind of faith is the beginning of hope. When I can imagine a different outcome – one that counters my anxiety and worry – I find reason for hope. Even a small spark of hope can inspire me to act, creating the very change I long for.

Prayer: Dear God, when we feel overwhelmed by bleakness and doubt, encourage our faith. Help us see reasons for hope and give us the courage to take even small actions that move us toward the outcomes we desire.

Action: Take one small action that moves you towards creating the kind of world you hope for.

Day 10 | Psalm 27 | Teresa Canady

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? There is a lot to fear these days: incredible and destructive about-turns in government policy, wildfires and other climate-related disasters, pay cuts and job losses, war and violence, illness, isolation, and loneliness.

In this Psalm, we see a picture of God as a God of comfort, light, strength, and protection – the house of God is a fortress even, a hiding place, and a place of beauty.

As I read it, I was reminded of the Cherokee story of the two wolves who live inside all of us. One wolf is filled with peace, love, hope, courage, humility, compassion, and faith – like this God of light and protection, like the safe and beautiful house of God. The other wolf is filled with fear, anger, envy, jealousy, greed, and arrogance – like the scary events, despairing thoughts, news feeds, and social media posts that are so easy to immerse ourselves in. The two wolves are constantly fighting. When asked “Which one wins?” the answer is, “The one you feed the most.”

This Psalm invites us to dwell upon and feed upon this vision of God as a very personal presence, our light, comfort, and protection. As the Psalmist says, “I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord, in the land of the living.”

Prayer: God of power, light, and beauty, help me to see your goodness, and help me to be your goodness, in this often scary land we find ourselves in today. Amen.

Action: Find one small act of kindness you can do today to be part of the goodness of God we are all invited to see.

Day 11 | Philippians 3: 17- 4:1 | Joyce Frost

Today's scripture offers a pretty clear directive and seems especially appropriate for this current time of chaos and change. Paul describes the disastrous conditions around him. "Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame ..." Sound familiar?

But Paul also offers hope. He insists that now is the time to follow Christ and that those who do will be rewarded. "Join together in following my example ... keep your eyes on those who live as we do Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!"

Paul insists that we know what to do - avoid giving in to the temptation to follow along with the evil ways of the majority. And he reminded us that we know how to do it because we have the example of Christ to follow. Jesus taught us how to live through his sermons, his stories, his parables, his actions, and his example.

Yes, we are setting ourselves up for conflict, but our example, Jesus, did not shy away from important fights. Neither should we. We who are blessed with so much have a voice to speak up against injustice, inhumanity, and wickedness. We must use it.

Prayer: God, please give us strength to follow your teachings and to stand firm in our faith. Amen.

Action: Join together in following the example of Christ. Keep your eyes on those who live as we do. Stand firm in the Lord.

Day 12 | Luke 13: 31-35 | Jim Schone

I am struck by Jesus' dedication to and perseverance with his mission, even amidst the threat of death from Herod. He is a model for pressing onwards towards one's goals, regardless of the obstacles or ramifications to one's life.

This seems all too fitting for the environment in our country that we now find ourselves in. There are threats on a daily basis to so many people and institutions, as well as to things that I hold dear and that are important to me as a member of First United Methodist Church of Seattle.

I wish that I could be as optimistic as Jesus about reaching one's goals in 3 days! I don't think I have ever managed to do that! But his dedication to his goals speaks to me, as I realize with each passing day the enormity of the changes taking place in our country. I recognize the need to be just as dedicated in my efforts to support and protect the things that matter most to me.

Prayer: Dear God, Give me the wisdom to discern what goals to set in helping to move our world towards one filled with more love, and the courage to pursue those goals amidst all the challenges and obstacles I will find along the way.

Day 13 | Isaiah 55: 1-9 | Bruce Hall

This scripture promises joy and peace, food and drink. I do hope that as God's people we will ultimately have all that this scripture promises. It's probably true that in eternity all will be right. Meanwhile, "Have faith. God will take care of you." Really? That's it? What about now? Are we enjoying God's bounty right now? Maybe I am. But the Seattle streets are filled with hungry, cold people. If they are following Jesus, are they getting the good "milk and wine"?

Oh wait. This must not be literally true. So, the gift and sustaining nourishment referred to here are... what? Faith? And any morsel of joy one gets – that's God's gift! Maybe that's how this works. Maybe.

I've had conversations with people about when they have felt the Holy Spirit. They spoke of very clear experiences. One person told me how she always feels close to God, every day. I grapple with that, because I don't have the same experience. Maybe I've felt that at times. Mostly I intellectualize "it." Sometimes I wish God would talk to me more literally, as clear as my Alexa, or like George Burns in *Oh God*. In the meantime, I live with hope and faith, and I experience love from people in my life. I chalk that up to "God's love."

In this reading God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, and my ways are not your ways." I like this. Sometimes I think about how we can't comprehend what God sees and knows. It would be like us trying to tell a line of ants about airplanes or post-it notes!

But maybe, possibly, the reason I don't always hear God is that God is talking to me, and I am not listening.

Action: Today. Listen. Experience God's nourishing gift now.

Day 14 | Psalm 63:1-8 | Ayres Gibson

Psalm 63 is called a "psalm of David." King David is my favorite character in the Bible. To me, the passage is romance – without any physical touch.

King David was a man after God's own heart (Samuel 13:14). It was God's intention for Israel to have a king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Saul was king before David, yet God saw something spiritually more important in David. God favored him regardless of his sin. (Remember Uriah and Bathsheba?) I would like to be more like David – without Bathsheba.

Prayer, like the prayer in this psalm, helps you stay ahead of temptations. God's love is better than life. God offers eternal protection and satisfaction to his people, no matter their reputation.

This was not the first time David prayed for help. David says; "I have seen you in the sanctuary" and "I sing in the shadow of your wings." Did David actually see God or was that statement purely spiritual? I wonder. But this I am sure of: our relationship with God is one of closeness, trust, and reliance.

I am still reading much of the Bible for the first time. Thank you, First Church. It is a privilege to read the Bible and to share my spiritual devotion.

Day 15 | 1 Corinthians 10: 1-6, 11-13 | Jerry Roberson

In your childhood or youth, were you ever presented with a challenge from an adult, maybe a parent or teacher, where the benefit was not immediately evident? Cleaning your plate? Writing thank-you notes? Learning algebra? Growing up in Sunday school, I did not enjoy the weekly assignment of scripture memorization. My thought was, "I always have my Bible nearby to look up scripture when needed. Why do I have to memorize verses?" Yet, as I got older, I realized the benefit was two-fold. Firstly, it refined my brain power to recall detail; and secondly, it made God's Word instantly accessible at times when I needed it most (and my Bible was not handy).

The final verse in today's reading just happens to be my favorite of all 66 books. It was THE most challenging scripture verse memorization I recall (possibly due to length). Nevertheless, I have brought this verse to the forefront of my mind countless times over the decades when I've felt overwhelmed, lost, or defeated.

Today's full passage reminds us of our human failings, even amid God's ongoing provision. Occasions when I disappoint, when I offend, when I sin, are not unique to me. However, God's love for me is focused on ways that allow the unique person I am to find holy pathways for overcoming those failings. I recall from memory scripture that underscores the Creator's love, Christ's redemptive acts, and the Holy Spirit's perfecting grace, from which I am prompted to be a more effective follower of Jesus. And it's those weekly scripture assignments from my childhood that continue to ground my faith, inspire my walk with God, and give me that needed sliver of hope in uncertain times.

Prayer: Dear God, bring your Word to life in unexpected ways, especially when You know I need it most. Amen.

Day 16 | Luke 13: 1-9 | April Little

I'll be honest: I wasn't sure what the fig tree parable was getting at, upon first read. Jesus' parables perplexed the people of his time, so they can be all the more confusing for us who don't live in an agriculture-focused society. The first half of the Scripture makes me think about how some Christians believe that bad things only happen to sinful people, and that those who suffer are spiritually inferior to good, blessed Christian people. But Jesus makes clear that this is not true; perhaps he was thinking of the book of Job or other biblical narratives where good people suffer.

This parable of the fig tree does come alongside Jesus' words calling us to repentance and away from judgement. Maybe Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree is about seeing the potential for good in all people instead of seeing only their faults. The vineyard worker held hope that the tree could produce fruit if it was given fertilizer and better care. In both sections of this scripture, I think Jesus is pointing out that with repentance and love, we can create fruitful communities that can prevent some of the suffering in the world.

Prayer: God, may I remember my own mistakes, lest I rush to judge others. And may I see the potential for good in all my neighbors, making sure they have what they need to thrive. Amen.

Day 17 | Proverbs 31: 1-9 | Anonymous

The Bible gives us many models of how we are to engage the world. They all are examples of love. But for God, love is not a state of being, it is an action verb. How are we to “do” love? Jesus’ life shows us. We are to love God, ourselves, and our neighbor. And “neighbor” includes our enemies.

This Jewish Jesus brings to his teachings the injustice, wars, slavery, and the starving poor presented in the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament). When Jesus says “love,” he is bringing that understanding of a broken world to his work - and therefore to our work.

The Old Testament view of the world feels more relevant to me than it has in the past. I find comfort in the wisdom of the Hebrew Bible and gain understanding from their experiences.

The authors of Proverbs show us that wisdom must be practical. If we seek God’s Kindom on earth, we cannot be merely philosophical. We must get practical. When the world is collapsing and the leaders “forget the law, and violate the rights of the needy,” we must exuberantly love. We are TOLD (not a suggestion) to “Speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable.” But wait, I can’t fix all this. It is too overwhelming! The philosopher, Lin-Manuel Miranda reminds us, “I know how it looks. But just start. Nothing is insurmountable.” This is our opportunity to start. Take one step: Serve breakfast, accompany an immigrant, engage your Member of Congress.

Prayer: God of Action, calm my fears, remove my reluctance, move me to take on active love for the least, the last, and the lost. Amen.

Action: Write down your first three steps to get you started on actively loving as God desires. Give yourself a deadline.

Day 18 | Psalm 32 | Beth Snyder

Sometimes when I’m reading, a phrase just jumps out and catches my attention. In Psalm 32, there were two . When David whines about his sins, he says “my bones wore out” (verse 3). When God removes his guilt, he describes his relief by saying that God is “my secret hideout” (verse 7). So what’s David going on about? Sin! You could say evil, misdeed, transgression, or wrong. Even if we don’t like that word sin, we know what the problem is because we’re all guilty at times. We squirm, feel uncomfortable, and may even get to “my bones are worn out.”

What to do about our sin? This psalm tells us to admit it; confess it to God and God will forgive you. “Faithful love surrounds the one who trusts the Lord.” God can be our “secret hideout.” Moreover, then we can be glad and “sing out in joy!”

These are hard times. We may be inclined to go looking for the sins of others. Chances are good we should also examine our thoughts and actions. Are we choosing to be kind and helpful? Always?

How might you renew your efforts to be your best self? Some time ago I heard this suggestion. Before you speak, ask yourself: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it helpful? If you can’t answer yes to all three questions, it’s a good time to remain silent.

Jesus was a radical. As before, we see that being a Christian is counter-intuitive, frustrating, and maddeningly difficult. Paul calls believers to a radical change in how they view others and themselves, as described in this passage in *The Message*. He highlights that now, because of Christ, we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they appear. Instead, we look deeper, seeing them through the lens of God's transforming work. That's hard enough, but we are also called to look deeper at ourselves.

This perspective change is rooted in the belief that, in Christ, we become new people. Paul reminds us that the old life of selfishness, sin, and worldly priorities is gone, replaced by a fresh start and a new purpose. "The old life is gone; a new life emerges!" This transformation isn't just for personal benefit; it's part of God's larger plan of reconciliation. The world is divided into those of the old life (selfishness, sin, and worldly priorities), those of the new life doing the work to connect with Jesus, and those who are just trying to survive. God doesn't hold our mistakes against us but instead calls us into relationship with God through Jesus. The difficult part is that we're called to act, not merely to speak great words of love and compassion.

This passage is a challenge to move beyond surface-level judgments and embrace a deeper, Christ-centered view of others. It's a call to see the potential for new life in everyone, regardless of their past, to join in God's mission of extending grace and reconciliation to the world. (We'll see how I do.) In Christ, everyone has the chance for a fresh start.

The Message asks: "How does living in light of what Jesus has done change the way you see others? Yourself?"

I find the younger son's decision to leave home and make his own way admirable. Although he had his inheritance, it wasn't enough to prevent him from ending up destitute. It takes self-awareness to admit failure and seek help. We don't know if he was suited for independence, but at least he had the courage to try. The point of the parable isn't to demonize him, as the older son seems to do.

I don't have an inheritance to fall back on, but I relate to the younger son's need to make his own way. The older son's judgment seems rooted in privilege; he didn't need to leave home to find security. As the father reminds him, "I am always with you," showing that the older son doesn't understand the struggles his brother experienced.

While I empathize with the older son, his judgment is unfair. He sees the younger son's actions as reckless, but he has wasted the chance to grow during his brother's absence. Instead of developing beyond his role as the dutiful son, he focused on being the opposite of his brother. There's no indication that the older son ever thinks of confronting his own shortcomings. When the younger son returns, his worldview is shaken by his father's actions. But this shouldn't be surprising; his father had given the younger son his inheritance without conditions or disapproval.

The contrast between the brothers is clear. The older son is driven by external validation, seeking reward for his loyalty, while the younger son's journey was one of internal growth, gaining validation through his own mistakes and efforts. When the younger son returns, the father doesn't chastise him but celebrates his return. The younger son's redemption reminds us that grace is not earned – it is inherited in all of us.

Day 21 | Isaiah 43: 16-21 | Ann Shaffer

As we consider this passage, the news surrounds us with hourly updates about political attempts to roll back progress this country has made. The United States has long worked on affirming civil rights for all; supporting dignity and respect for all people and living creatures; protecting our earth and fighting climate change. We weep at the pain in our world as many face war and starvation. We see powerful people in our government turn away and refuse to offer help.

Then we read Isaiah which tells us the Lord says “... do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?”

Do we see a positive new thing? How do we perceive it?

Yes, we look for the way God is creating life in the wilderness. God uses us to help win the creation process. Groups are getting together, organizing and working to protect the rights of the persecuted and providing for the needs of the oppressed. We watch, and we challenge those who abuse their power. We work to provide for the hungry and those who face violence and war. We pray, we use our resources, we summon our courage, and we act under God’s guidance. We see the progress that science and entrepreneurs are making in creating alternative energy sources and making them financially viable.

We celebrate and praise God for giving us knowledge, wisdom, and strength.

PRAYER: Holy Redeemer, thank you for leading us through darkness. Stay with us. Give us energy and courage. Amen.

ACTION: Look for and support a positive action or a group that is addressing a current challenge. Share your decision with another person today.

Day 22 | Matthew 18:1-5, 10-11 | Lorry Celin

Jesus is telling us in this scripture reading to be more like children. One of the good qualities that children have involves being kind. When we see adult people being mean, we can think about the kindness that children bring. Other good qualities of children are that they like to have a lot of fun and really like to play. Adults usually don’t spend as much time playing as kids, which doesn’t allow them to have enough fun in life.

What if there are people in this world that never have the opportunity to play? I think especially about people who are worried about being deported right now, or kids who are worried that their parents might be deported. We need to do something to help. One thing we can do is send letters to our government to let them know this is mean and we want it to stop. We can also attend peaceful protests and participate and speak out in meetings.

Jesus reminds us that if we welcome all children, welcome all people, and welcome all animals, then we are also welcoming Jesus. That means when we are kind, like children, to all creatures, we are being kind to Jesus. We are being like Jesus and doing what he wants us and asks us to do.

Action: First, write letters to our government telling them to be kinder to all people. Second, think about all the animals in our world, and be extra kind to all the animals in your life and to all that you see today. If you see someone being mean to animals, help rescue the animals and make sure they find a place where they’ll be treated well.

Prayer: Dear God, help us be kind to everyone and protect all the animals.

Day 23 | Philippians 3: 4b-14c | Craig Matthews

Lent is a season of surrender – a time to let go of what holds us back and press on to know Christ more fully. In Philippians 3, Paul reflects on his past achievements, recognizing that everything he once valued is worthless compared to knowing Jesus (v. 7-8). His greatest desire is not religious status or personal success, but deep, intimate fellowship with Christ.

To know Jesus in a deeper way, Paul embraces both the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings (v. 10). This Lenten journey invites us to do the same. We long for the power of Christ to be at work in us, yet true intimacy with Him also comes through sharing in His sufferings – laying down our pride, surrendering our will, and trusting Him in trials.

Paul reminds us that we have not yet arrived (v. 12), but we press on. Lent is not about perfection; it is about pursuit. Each day, we take another step in knowing Jesus, letting go of distractions, and fixing our eyes on Him (v. 13-14).

As we journey through Lent, may we count all else as loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. May we seek Him, not just in moments of triumph but in every challenge, every surrender, every step of faith.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to know You more. Help me to surrender all that competes for my heart and to seek You above all else. Strengthen me to press on, trusting that You are my greatest treasure. Amen.

Day 24 | John 12:1-8 | Mona Tanaka

For me, perfume is more than just a scent. It is a personal expression, a memory maker, and a powerful way to influence emotions. It can take us back to another place and time.

In the Bible, perfume was used for religious ceremonies. Fragrant oils burned on altars as an offering to God. It was also used to anoint bodies of the dead, signifying an act of respect and preparation for the afterlife. It also symbolized beauty, devotion, and a righteous life.

I can think of two occurrences in the Bible where Jesus is given perfume. The first is in Matthew 2, when the Magi present baby Jesus with gold, frankincense (incense), and myrrh, a fragrant oil used for anointing and in religious ceremonies.

Since perfume was sold for money in Bible days, the gifts the Magi brought to baby Jesus are both symbolic and practical. The gifts are practical because they may have been sold for living expenses when Mary, Joseph and Jesus fled to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod.

The symbolic meanings of the Magi's gifts are, first, that gold represents Jesus' role as king (although not an earthly king). Frankincense recognizes Jesus's divine nature and worthiness of worship, and myrrh symbolizes Jesus' future death and burial. Frankincense and myrrh are still used today in cosmetics, incense for religious and cultural ceremonies, and as medicine to treat chronic diseases.

The second time Jesus is presented with perfume is in today's passage in the gospel of John. Mary massages perfume onto Jesus' feet. Jesus not only allows this extravagant gift, he defends her when the disciples object. This teaches us that it is important to graciously accept kindness and generosity with one another. Doing so can foster understanding, trust, and respect between people, leading to more meaningful relationships.

These verses tell a well known story about two sisters. One working hard in the kitchen and the other sitting with a group of men listening to Jesus. We read this story and learn that it's as important to take time for spiritual enrichment as it is for doing and serving. I know I identify more with Martha than Mary, but I'd like to think about what the sisters teach us.

We don't know much about Mary and Martha, but this scene makes me wonder about their relationship. Sibling relationships can be complex. Martha is feeling sorry for herself and exasperated that she has been left with all the preparations. Granted, this was her place as a woman and hostess, but she'd like Mary's help. Circumstances would make it difficult for her to ask Mary. Martha would have to go into a place where women are not accepted and interrupt the occasion. Something that certainly would quiet the crowd and draw attention to her. Awkward.

If she did go into the room, how would Martha approach Mary? Would her tone be a kindly ask or a stressed, "We've got work to do!"? Would Martha be fearful of Mary's reaction? How would Mary respond? Graciously or "Not now!"

We don't know these things, but we do know that Martha is comfortable asking Jesus for help. We know that Jesus notices Martha and cares for both her emotional and spiritual state. There Jesus goes again: caring for women and being a friend and teacher.

Action: Next time you are overwhelmed, be comforted in knowing that Jesus sees us and that we can call on him for help. Taking a moment to spend time with him may be the most helpful choice we can make under any circumstances.

I have kept a gratitude journal since March 2018, writing at least one thing I'm thankful for every day. I want to live with the same love that I believe God has for the world. I have a lot to be thankful for. That said, I know I come from a position of privilege, and it is easier to be thankful for the small things when your big needs are met. I think those of us in my circumstances are here to help meet the needs of others and to fight for their rights and safety. They too deserve to feel gratitude instead of living in fear.

The psalm also highlights the rejection of the stone that becomes the cornerstone, which is a powerful symbol of divine reversal. The ones who are cast aside or disregarded by human judgment are often chosen by God for higher purposes, pointing to a type of justice that transcends human ideas of fairness. Ultimate justice lies with God, not human leaders, especially not those who are attacking the people God calls us to protect.

I believe we need to fight for God's justice from hearts filled with gratitude, against those who think they are fighting for God's justice with hearts full of hate.

Prayer: Oh Creator, help us to be thankful for what we have been given in life. Give us the strength to fight for justice and safety for the downtrodden. May their needs be satisfied and their hearts be filled with gratitude. Amen.

Today, it is the poets who teach me.

I awake in the morning and sit
silently by the window with their
words,

I hear their voices.
I watch their words pry open my
heart.

I do not struggle to barricade the avalanche
the screaming voices of fear,
the cunning whispers
in my ear,

preaching dominance,
promising dreams of
quick easy riches.

All of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up. All of them.

The long march for justice has begun
again, and continues.

It is the poets who teach me this.

We don't deserve the attention of our merciful God. At least, not as much as the psalmist David did. Our lives aren't consumed by anguish. We aren't living in a city under siege. We aren't suffering from the utter contempt of our neighbors. We have privilege. We have safety.

But wait – who are “We”?

“We” are not just the volunteers who show up to serve meals early Sunday mornings. “We” are the folks who aren't sure when their next real meal will be.

We are not just the people who come to worship service on Sunday mornings. We are the unhoused people, the forgotten people, who have to be awakened from the church courtyard, so that others can enter the building.

Surely we are not scorned by others, and hearing “Terror on every side!” isn't about us. But if we are in the non-white portion of “we,” we are made out to be persons to fear and to hate. Especially if we don't have the proper papers.

We are not living in distress. But someone among us is grieving for the loss of a friend or family member almost all of the time. And we and all of creation are in distress because of more frequent and powerful hurricanes, bigger and hotter wildfires, and the extremes of human-caused climate change.

We **ALL** really do need God's mercy and God's unfailing love.

Prayer: O God, we are thankful that Your grace is not earned or deserved, but freely given. We all need a rock of refuge. We ask that every day, we will see a way to stand up for immigrants and refugees, for the homeless, for transgender people, for all those who are feared and despised, for all who suffer unjustly. Hold us all in Your hands. Amen.

Day 29 | Philippians 2:5-11 | Karen McOmber

While on earth, Jesus could have had a clear advantage – after all he was the son of God! However, Jesus did not stand on his laurels, bask in his own importance, or speak down to people. Instead he chose to live humbly and simply, with the people, as a poor person. He chose to promote equality, fairness, and love to all people whatever their circumstances.

The name Jesus means “God Saves” or “salvation” We have a good idea about Jesus’ thinking from his words and actions recorded in the Bible. Today’s verses say we should exalt his name and acknowledge his greatness. While it is good to praise someone, I think deciding to follow Jesus’ teachings is the real message for us and what he actually expects of us.

For myself, I try to treat people fairly and with respect. I try to help where there is a need. And there is always a need somewhere.

Prayer: Help us to understand the mindset of Jesus, so that we may more effectively follow his teachings. Amen

Action: Before starting your day today, close your eyes and think of one thing that you could do today that will help someone you don’t know very w

Day 30 | Genesis 1:26-31 | Anonymous

When was the last time you read the creation story in the first chapter of Genesis? The descriptions in these verses sometimes sound to me like science fiction. “There was nothing. Then the powerful force moved, and suddenly, light appeared.” Other times it reads like a children’s bedtime story. “First there were animals in the water, whales and jellyfish, and then animals on the dry ground, like tigers and puppy dogs. Yes, God even created bugs and snakes, and no, I don’t know why.”

Regardless of how many times I read or hear this description of our beginnings, I am struck by two strong emotions. First is a sense of awe at the complexity and grandeur and intricacies of creation. On the one hand we have the Grand Canyon and Mount Everest and the Pacific Ocean. All of them are testimony to a creative force with an unconstrained power. Then the same Creator made delicate flower petals and butterfly wings, and creatures so tiny we can’t see them with our naked eyes. Beautiful creations that last only a few days, maybe only a few minutes.

The second reaction I have to this story is immense gratitude at the overwhelming generosity of the Creator. After the universe was finished, the Spirit entrusted all that had been made to the care of their final creation, humankind. The price for this gift? “Care for it. Use it wisely.” Such a logical and reasonable request! How could we not protect and preserve all that has been entrusted to us? How could we not stay intimately connected with the Creator?

And yet, we have fallen short in our responsibilities, and it is now a matter of survival that we change our ways. I read this story now as a call to action. May we step up to meet then challenge.

Just a couple chapters before today's passage, Jesus answers a Pharisee's question about commandments. Besides loving our God, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. Of course, that's what I've heard practically my whole life. It wasn't until recently, however, that I really started thinking about it. That happened when Friends Committee on National Legislation added a couple words, "No Exceptions."

Wow. Those two words make it crystal clear that we must show love to not only our favorite neighbors, not only the neighbors who are like us, but ALL neighbors. Once you learn to see the person behind the ragged clothes, behind a badly scarred body, behind the wheelchair they sit in, showing them love and kindness really isn't all that hard. But what of others whom you may think of as "least"? What about the serial killer? How will you show that person love? Would you visit them in prison? What about the tyrant who enslaves his subjects? You likely would see that tyrant as one of the 'least' because of his low morality, if for no other reason. Could you love that person? If you could, how would you show your love? When you get down to people like that, love is tough work! But then, nobody said it would be easy.

Action: How will **you love** your neighbors - that is to say, everyone in this world so shrunken by instant communications - with **no exceptions**?

On first reading this Psalm, I connected with the singing. There is no purer way for me to express what I'm feeling, whether it's sorrow or joy, than by lifting my voice in song. I love this translation from the Hebrew because it conjures idyllic pictures of farmers returning from their fields, not too weary from their labors to join in songs. Rogers and Hammerstein come to mind.

But looking at different translations deepened my understanding. The Hebrew term *rinnah*, translated as "joyful song" in many versions of the Bible, actually means a shout or cry. It's a single sound, a response to strong emotions - sometimes joy, sometimes anguish.

The poetry of the Psalm becomes more complex when we notice that *rinnah* is used three times, each time connoting joy that follows a period of anguish. There's something profound to be discovered here. When we are confronted by tragedy and distress, we have a choice. We can succumb to despair or recognize hope. Some of the most powerful messages I have heard concern the different choices made by Peter and Judas. Both faced the anguish of betraying Jesus, and both had the option of receiving God's grace. Judas chose despair. Peter's faith was rewarded when he lived to see Christ's Resurrection.

God does not ask us to engage in the "toxic positivity" that would be deny our right to grieve, our need for tears, or cries of anguish. Instead, Christ's love and Peter's example remind us that God's grace and compassion will bring us through the tears to happiness so profound and so startling that we can't help but cry out with a rousing and joyful cheer.

This passage is from the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus teaches us how to live. These specific verses tell us that we should expect that God is always with us and how we should treat each other.

We can trust that God is with us, but we cannot be passive about our relationship with God. We must Ask, Search, Knock. That's persistence! The best relationships in our lives are nurtured and grow because we pay attention to them. Our relationship with God is no different – it deserves our energy and effort.

But how do I do that? Look around for examples. There are people in our church who meditate regularly. Others find times during the day to devote attention to God in our physical world. Some turn to studying God's word. Others focus on praying, talking to God about their concerns or what specific individuals need. There isn't one perfect way to stay in relationship with God. Find a way that works for you.

Jesus says here that we should treat people as we would want them to treat us. The "Golden Rule" has been the backbone of the moral systems of just about every civilization. But Jesus flips the idea on its head. It's not good enough to not do what you don't want done to you. You must actively do for others what you would like others to do for you. Engage with people in the most loving way possible.

Our relationship with God deserves our full attention and will inevitably lead to caring for others.

Prayer: Loving and Ever-present God, I pause for a moment to say a prayer for someone I know needs one.

Action: Prayer and action are a duo. What can you do this week for that person you just prayed for?

This passage is so familiar to us. How many times have we heard it read during Holy Week as direct commentary on Jesus' suffering? But this text is understood to have been written during the Babylonian Exile, somewhere around 500-600 BCE. So the author(s) simply could not have had Jesus in mind. Still, it is so hard for us, as Christians, to hear it otherwise.

Moreover, it is nearly impossible for us to hear this passage as anything other than an undergirding for what is, arguably, Christianity's worst mistake: atonement theology, which is the theological rationalization for the myth of redemptive violence. Atonement theology understands Jesus' violent suffering and death as somehow required by God for our salvation. In this view, it is violence that somehow redeems us. Thus, violence becomes good. And centuries of ever-increasing violence have been the logical result. If you feel at all captive to this oppressive and destructive ideology, I invite you to read *Proverbs of Ashes*, by Rebecca Parker and Rita Nakashima Brock. They will set you free.

A more immediate invitation: Return to this passage - even if only to the most familiar part, (53:1-6) and replace the third person singular (he/him) with the third person plural (they/them). "...They grew up...They were despised and rejected...But they were pierced...they were crushed ...and by their wounds..." Read it slowly in this way, perhaps even aloud. And consider who "they" might be in our world today.

Is this really God's will? Or is it, perhaps, ours? And what might this mean as we once again enter Holy Week, living still in the shadow of Caesar's throne?

Although today's text is familiar Jesus' "triumphal entry into Jerusalem" – everything about it is strange. The owners of the colt releasing it to the disciples with no other explanation than "the Lord needs it." Jesus requesting a colt that had never been ridden. Coats instead of a proper saddle, not exactly a prudent way to ride. If we saw a similar procession today, it might look like impromptu street theatre.

So, what is going on? Unlike the nobleman in the preceding verses, Jesus is not a king on a war horse. He is a king riding an untrained teenage donkey. The crowd doesn't seem to get it. Why this crazy donkey ride rather than a magisterial parade of imperial power. The parade progresses, with the people spreading their coats on the road, shouting "Blessed is the king." The crowd was expecting Jesus to liberate and save them from the Romans. They desperately wanted a king who would "fix" everything.

That is not what they got. What they got was a king who was a messenger of peace. A king who would love his neighbor, lift up the poor, the immigrant, the marginalized and forgotten. A king who was committed to justice, mercy, and compassion. A king they could not recognize.

In telling the story of the first Palm Sunday, the Gospel recalls the prophet Zachariah. "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle tow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to all the nations."

Prayer: Gracious God, during this season of Lent, let us remember the true message of Jesus. Amen.

I love passages in the Bible that demonstrate to us how Jesus was fully human. That he had close friends whom he loved, and he wanted them to know "he loved them fully." In this passage Jesus and the disciples (without Judas) are doing what they have done many times before: gathering together, sharing a meal, keeping the traditions of their religion. I imagine them talking and laughing, juggling for favorite positions around the table, and checking out the food. But Jesus knows his time with them is almost over, and he has one more lesson to teach them.

In washing and drying the feet of his friends, Jesus has taken the role of someone with no status or identity, a servant, a nobody. He has become the "least among us." I imagine that most of the disciples were uncomfortable with the situation, but it is loudmouthed, impulsive, speak-before-thinking Peter (always my favorite disciple) who reacts. "No, not me!" Because for Peter, this act completely upsets the proper order of the relationship. And he is absolutely correct: Jesus WAS teaching a new kind of relationship. His actions demonstrated a radical idea: equality, fairness, and acceptance as the basis for how we treat each other, for how we live in the world. And In no uncertain terms, Jesus insists that we do the same, "Just as I have done, you also must do."

I admit to sometimes being like Peter. A little slow to understand Jesus's directions or too quick to think, "Yes, it's a good idea, but not for me." Eventually, hopefully, I come back to my senses, and like Peter, I offer "all of me."

Have you ever been in an elevator in a hotel or high rise where the top floor or penthouse is an unavailable option? You need a special key card or code to get to that coveted top floor. Only special guests or favored tenants are allowed access to the penthouse. What incredible amenities are on that floor? Do you wish you could have those privileges? And yet, aren't there times in life when you feel like you don't deserve to be at the top or to have a voice?

In the letter to Hebrews we are reminded that, despite our failings, Jesus has opened up a path of acceptance and repentance. Verse 17 says "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

To be forgiven of our sins is a promise that Jesus offers all of us, but sometimes it can seem too good to be true. Jesus turned the world on its head by doing away with blood sacrifices, by paying the ultimate price for all of us, his life. In essence Jesus is reaching out to you, personally handing you the special key card so that you have direct access to God. All you have to do is have enough faith to reach out and grab it. The curtain in the temple was torn into two pieces to symbolize our access to God. What do we need to cast aside or overcome to open ourselves up to God's grace? How does knowing that God forgives our sins affect how we view ourselves?

We are not alone. Verse 25 tells us to "meet together" and "encourage each other." Let's shed our insecurities and be determined to support each other, to reach out in faith and grab that access card that is available to all.

In a moment of vulnerability, I'm going to admit something: I like reality television. Not all of it, but I'm enjoying a show called the Traitors which operates like the party games Murder or Mafia, where the people playing must try to identify the "betrayal" of the group, and eliminate a player each round. In each episode the host leads the players to a table to deliberate, accuse, and eventually eliminate someone they think is a Traitor, many times getting it wrong. Can you imagine having been at the Last Supper and having Jesus announce to his disciples that there was a traitor amongst them? Did Jesus dramatically invent the very first game of Mafia?

Historically and currently, Christians have refused to truly recreate Jesus' table with a seat for everyone in the Kingdom of God. Instead, we have opted to accuse "others" (immigrants, people of color, the poor or unhoused, LGBTQ+ and especially Trans/non-binary) of being traitors to the Kingdom, a threat to its purpose, to its values, and to its future. It's hard not to ache for the progress we felt we had made, even if that progress was possibly a façade.

I wonder if Jesus felt a similar ache towards the end of his mortal life, knowing the betrayal was coming, and knowing that thousands of years later, betrayals of His people at all levels would continue.

And yet, we continue to set a table here at First Church. We continue with the hope that others will set tables too, and that we'll all continue to invite in those who have been shut out from other tables. That's my hope: that we'll continue to stand as a haven and never stop inviting people in unconditionally. It may be the most important thing we can do as a church.

Day 39 | Good Friday | Matthew 27:32-44, 49-50 |
Kristina Gonzalez

Jesus' energy was flagging. The cross was very heavy. It was hot and dusty. He had been beaten and stripped, deprived of water. He must have been moving slowly, prompting the soldiers to exert their power to conscript someone from the crowd to move things along.

Who was this person picked randomly from the crowd? He was not a soldier, not someone the Romans considered to be an equal. He was not a Pharisee, for the Pharisees were privileged among the Jews for their role in maintaining order.

Was Simon of Cyrene someone who moments before had been jeering at Jesus or weeping for him? It could have been either or neither. We don't know, and it doesn't matter.

To my reading, Simon symbolizes the power of an empire to terrorize a people so completely that they would become inured to an innocent person being brutally murdered, and to a random person among them being forced into service of that goal. Conscripting a random person for this purpose must have reinforced a common message: "We can."

And who was Jesus but someone who said, "No you can't. Not in the long run."

Jesus was dangerous to the establishment. He started an alternative movement that displaced the crushing hand of authority and invited people to see a different way of living - one where their dignity resided in God and their commitment was to one another and to community. How empowering!

On this Good Friday, what if most of us are in the crowd, whether we are jeering or weeping? What if the power of the empire is as close to us now as it was then? What is our role in this time if we claim to be followers of Jesus?

Day 40 | Holy Saturday | John 18: 1-19, 42 |
Tom Carlson

I believe Jesus was arrested and (without fair trial) executed because he spoke truth to power. That got him in deep trouble with the Empire's overlords and with complicit (and I imagine corrupt) local religious authorities.

The truth Jesus spoke was about a reign from "another place." He proclaimed a reign of good news for the poor, release of the captives, sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed, and love for enemies. He challenged a world order of power, domination, and oppression. Like the prophets before him, he was a threat to those benefiting from that power, so he was unfairly prosecuted.

This account of Jesus' arrest has chilling parallels today. Authoritarian rule, deceit, hate, and yes, facism is taking hold in our country and in much of the world. More and more political (and sadly) "religious" leaders are craven, corrupt, and complicit.

As disciples of Jesus, we too are called to speak truth to power. We are called to speak out against injustices, misinformation, lies, and just plain meanness. We are called to be the light of the world in these dark times. We are called to proclaim a higher vision - Jesus' vision - of love, justice, equality, and freedom.

Following the way of Jesus may be perilous and may well take us down the road to the cross - the road of suffering for the sake of the greater good. We are not alone, though. We have a cloud of witnesses who precede us. The apostle Paul, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Alexi Navalni, Nelson Mandela, and many more.

Prayer: Gracious God, grant me the courage to follow the way of Jesus during these troubled and dark times.

Action: Be alert to ways that God is calling you to speak truth to power.