

**“COME, LET US BOW DOWN”
PSALM 95:6**



**A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL WRITTEN BY THE
MEMBERS OF GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH
ARLINGTON, TEXAS**

BOW DOWN

Lent is a season of repentance and our hearts turning back to God. Repentance includes the confession of sins (and I am the first to admit there are plenty of things to confess in my life), but it is also a call to admit my needs, my vulnerabilities, and my begging for the almighty God to intervene in my minute-to-minute everyday life. For example, I have recently felt overwhelmed by the challenges of dealing with COVID-19. I felt like I could not face the struggles with the virus alone. Guess what? As I offered God my struggle, I began to feel relief that could only come from him. God sent **people to encourage me** and I was able to move forward from where I had previously felt frozen.

This devotion booklet is about people who are on a journey together. I hope you will be encouraged by the sharing our members have put together. These devotions will lead us to bow down and acknowledge our need for God's almighty hand to direct us, heal us, forgive us, and renew us. You will read many honest and inspiring accounts of the real-life work of our living God. He is faithful to his family we call Grace Lutheran Church in Arlington, Texas.

"Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;"
Ps. 95:6

Pastor Doug Widger

Lent is that period from Ash Wednesday to Easter where we reflect and prepare our hearts for the celebration of Christ's resurrection. The following is a collection of devotions written by the members of Grace Lutheran Church to help us focus on the true meaning of Lent. May the Holy Spirit use God's Word and their thoughts to help us look inward during this season of repentance.

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Wednesday, Feb. 17

ASHES by Martin Bode

"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Genesis 3:19

And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. Job 2:12

I moved back to Minnesota when my mother had a series of strokes and my father was in hospice care for lung cancer. I spent some of my free time in the garage learning to turn wooden vessels on a lathe.

The first large container that I turned on my lathe was a funeral urn for my mother. When moving the bag of her ashes from the plastic box into the urn that I had made, I realized that some of ashes were loose in the box and were on my hand. This is the image I have when the ashes are smeared on my forehead and I hear the words, "and to dust you shall return."

Heavenly Father, let the imposition of ashes remind us of our deaths, be penitent for our sins, and focused on Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

Thursday, Feb. 18

TURN by Mark Oxner

"For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them." Matthew 13:15

Some years into my career, the Lord saw fit to send me to a Dale Carnegie Course. I know, this sounds mundane, but when nothing else was

doing it, this pushed me closer to Loving My Neighbor. I was learning a ton about computers and technology and their use in the real world. I was learning to optimize the fix and repair processes to minimize damage to business. But I didn't realize, I needed a push towards dealing with people. My heart was calloused. While I heard and saw just fine when it came to technology, I needed my eyes and ears opened to people.

Over time, because of my mother's allergies to perfumes, we had gotten out of the habit of going to church. Despite this, the Lord did not just let me go, he worked with what little openings there were in my callous heart. He worked with the people around me and I learned how to listen and how to see – how to empathize and to have compassion and grace. I'm human so I occasionally must remind myself to do these things. How about you? How is your heart? Is it calloused?

Friday, Feb. 19

REPENTANCE by Pastor David Joeckel

Joel 2:12,13: "Rend your hearts, not your garments...Return to the Lord... for He is gracious and compassionate." Matthew 4:17 "Repent! The Kingdom of God is near"

Lent... a season of heartfelt remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf. The theme of our devotion today is REPENTANCE. We hear Jesus saying to his disciples, "Repent! The Kingdom of God is near!" He calls for a change of heart. The prophet Joel says, "Rend your hearts... Return to the Lord." This truly is the challenge for us in these coming 40 days. Martin Luther helps us when he writes in the 95 Theses, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." Repentance is not some major onetime event...a "one and done" experience, but a day-by-day heart changing way of life.

And what is this change? We need to "repent, to return to God." Our sinful condition is to turn away from God...we say "MY kingdom come" "MY will be done." We end up seeking what is comfortable and convenient for us, rather than honoring the Lord and loving our neighbors (beginning in our own home and church families). We daily struggle with this as Paul writes, "The good I want to do I don't do and the evil I don't want to do I do!" (Romans 7) To us our Lord says, Repent! This begins as we say NO to all forms of BLAME and EXCUSE. Trusting in God's promise: "He is gracious and compassionate!" we admit and confess our self-seeking words and deeds to our Lord and to our neighbors...ready to say, "I'm sorry how I have hurt you!"

In Jesus God has fulfilled his promises of forgiveness and renewal. He is the Lamb of God who takes away our sins! He took upon Himself the judgement we all deserve. In Christ we are really justified – declared Not Guilty...righteous ...receiving the power of the Holy Spirit... something we could never do ourselves. So it is that day by day "the entire life of believers is one of repentance." And from the heart we pray, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good and his mercy endures forever," AMEN!

Monday, Feb. 22

FAST by Gracie Topel

Ezra 8:23 "So we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and he heard our prayer."

Fasting is defined as "giving up food (or something else) for a period of time in order to focus our thoughts on God." Fasting is found throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It can heal during mourning, strengthen our prayer life, be an invitation to let God intervene in our lives, and it is an act of worship. We can fast from a posture of repentance or humility. When we fast, we deny

our worldly pleasures and allow God to guide us to a brand-new life.

Before we fast, we must find out why we are fasting and write down a specific spiritual goal we want to accomplish during the fast. Fasting is not a diet. If we go into our season of fasting with the mindset that we will come out of it with a smaller stomach, we will be focused on our fleshly desires and not on Christ.

Fasting requires prayer. Depending on our fasting posture, our prayers will look completely different. In some seasons, we take the time to recognize our sins and we ask for His grace. Some sin habits can only be broken through the act of fasting.

Fasting is not meant to be punishment for our bodies and a season where we deprive ourselves of basic needs. Fasting is meant to renew our minds and allow us to intimately know Him. His mercies are new each morning. Fasting can be a beautiful way to stop and recognize His goodness and to notice the little miracles each day. Taking out food, a substance that instantly fills us up, can help us learn to rely on Jesus to fill us up. When we begin to feel hunger in our bellies, we should connect that feeling with our hunger for God. Even Jesus fasted. Each testimony on fasting in the Bible ends in renewal and redemption. God will meet those who seek Him through prayer and fasting.

Tuesday, Feb. 23

THIRST by Pastor Russell Hildebrandt

"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" Psalm 42:2

There are times when I am not only thirsty, but I am also hungry. Thirst and hunger are a sign that my body is telling me that it needs to be watered or fed. What about when my soul is thirsty and hungry? What do I use to water and feed my soul?

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" Matthew 5:6 NIV. We all want that sense of peace that passes all our human understanding where we have that sense that all is well within our soul. The food that God gives us for our soul is his Word and the Sacraments. John the Apostle is told to eat the word of God in Revelation 10:8-11 and then he will prophesy to the nations. So, too, when we dine on the word of God in reading, devotions, and prayer our souls are satisfied from the dryness of sin and separation from God. The power of God's word fills the soul.

"On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them'" John 7:37-38 NIV.

Wednesday, Feb. 24

SUFFERING by Vickie Rosentreter

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." Philippians 3:10-11

What captures our attention in the referenced passage is Paul's desire to actually want to share in Christ's suffering. We yearn for Christ's return, but yearning for suffering is a stretch. One may only conclude that Paul's desire to share in suffering sprang out of a heart of deep gratitude at being rescued by God and entrusted with the privilege of being his ambassador for the Gospel. Haralan Popov, a converted atheist turned pastor who experienced 13 torturous years in Communist prisons, best sums up Paul's feelings, "To serve Him is wonderful, but to suffer for Him is an even greater privilege."

Hopefully, we will never experience the trials of these two men; but life's uncertainties should move us to be prepared through prayer and God's Word to have the faith and strength to never deny Christ.

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Thursday, Feb. 25

PURIFY by Barbara Koehn

For many years I have been concerned about our country pulling away from its Judeo-Christian roots and moving toward a secular world view. This concern has grown to a crescendo over the past few months as the recent election drew near. Combined with the COVID-19 crisis we experienced this year with people losing jobs, businesses, and losing loved ones due to fallout from this pandemic, I have at times been so stressed, I have experienced heart palpitations. I have recently been part of a small prayer group of friends who are meeting regularly to pray

specifically for our country. As we pray, I sometimes ask God if the prayers of so many saints, who I know are praying, are effective?

This past week, I heard a man on a news program talk about adding fasting to our prayers. He referenced many passages in the Bible about fasting. The most notable to me was Esther asking her people to fast for three days so she could approach the King and plead for her people. The Jews were saved. Jesus also taught His Disciples about fasting in the New Testament.

I fasted one day this week and I remember thinking I felt very weak and I prayed prayers in small bits during the day. Nothing profound. I slept all night which is very unusual for me. I did not wake up worrying. I woke up with a sense of hope and peace. I decided there must be something about fasting when we pray that changes us. Is that part of purification? I needed to be reminded that I don't need to have all the answers because God does. There is something very humbling about fasting.

James 4:8-10 and 2 Cor 7:1 tell us to cleanse ourselves and draw near to God. Then we are promised He will draw near to us.

Friday, Feb. 26

BURDEN by Pastor Steve Roth

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Galatians 6:2

It is safe to say that all of us have carried our share of burdens into 2021. 2020 was a burdensome year, but I continue to learn some important lessons: I cannot carry my burdens on my own. I am so thankful for those people God has brought into my life to help me carry them. I NEED OTHER PEOPLE.

It does not take theological training to help someone else carry their burdens. It just takes a

compassionate heart. It might be a timely prayer, a listening ear, or a card in the mail. Social distancing may prevent us from giving someone else a hug, but God's love transcends the physical touch. A practical act of kindness, done in the name of Jesus, can touch someone else's soul.

"Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens." (Psalm 68:19) Did you catch that? Our Savior daily bears our burdens, and very often He uses other people to help.

Lord, help me carry someone else's burdens today.

Monday, March 1

SORROW by Cynthia Jackson

"Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD." – 1 Samuel 1:15

"My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word." – Psalm 119:28

When your heart fills with sorrow – whom are you driven to first?

Your spouse?

A parent, sibling, son or daughter?

A best friend or co-worker?

How often have you turned to your Heavenly Father first? Can you let emotion pour over you without depending on anything else but His support? It is only natural to desire human empathy – often Christ provides that through people – but during a season of sorrow, to healthily move through it, it must be laid at His feet.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted. He saves those who are crushed in spirit. Our lives will not be exempt from being "consumed" by the deepest despair - but if we call out to God in the

midst of deep despair, He is right there, as always.

I let waves of sadness wash over me when needed. Its release is the beginning of authentic healing. These practices have been beneficial to me:

- Journaling my prayers and thoughts
- Reading the Bible out loud to myself
- Singing and/or listening to praise music
- Talking to a wise, trustworthy Christian friend, or to a minister or professional counselor

May God's comfort and Word strengthen you in your next season of sorrow.

Tuesday, March 2

SIN by Jenna Del Cristo

"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more," Rom 5:20 ESV

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom 6:23 ESV

The original words for sin in Greek (hamartia) and Hebrew (chait) translate to "to miss the goal" or "to err." When a child misses the goal at a soccer game, how would a good father feel in that moment?

In comparison, how do we treat ourselves when we make mistakes? How do we treat others?

God has abundant grace for all our sins, because of the sacrificial Blood of Jesus. Let us walk in faith and be merciful to ourselves and others, as He has been merciful to us.

Dear Lord, forgive me in everything I have done against You and this world of people You love. Help me to recognize my mistakes and seek You when I stray from Your path. Correct any wrong

thinking I may believe and help me to forgive myself and other's quickly, as you do. Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Wednesday, March 3

SEEK by Alison Roth

Matthew 6:33- "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" has become my life verse.

As a young couple Steve and I had our share of worries. We had two young children and I had aging parents with their own problems. Money was extremely tight, and we were living from paycheck to paycheck. Worries about food, shelter, and clothing were very real. Our faith and trust in God were growing, and reading the Bible became an important part of each day.

Matthew chapter 6 tells us not to worry about our life, our clothes, food or drink. God will take care of us. Doesn't He feed the birds and clothe the flowers and the grass? How much more will He take care of us! Worry won't change anything but seeking God will change everything.

Matthew 6:33 spoke to my heart. Am I seeking God 's kingdom and His righteousness? Because if I am, He has promised all the things I need will be added to me. The cares of this world are real, but when anxiety hits me, I look at Matthew 6:33 to evaluate my relationship with Jesus. Is it stagnant or am I seeking? I go back to this verse and ask myself am I truly seeking the Lord. This verse always speaks to me and helps me stay focused on Jesus.

Thursday, March 4

FORGIVENESS by Mike Kennedy

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another,

tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:31-32

These verses are very hard for me to put into practice when someone has offended me or, more importantly, offended my family. My initial reaction is to let the offender have it with full force and wrath. There are still instances from my past that I have not completely forgiven yet, because I haven't been able to shake off the anger I have for the offender.

On the other hand, I have huge planks in my eyes that I need to remove for the hurt that I have caused my family and others. I need to think and pray about these Ephesian verses every day to have a peaceful heart and be thankful God gives me these words to strive to be Christlike in my life.

Another Scripture that I am most thankful for regarding forgiveness is Matthew 26:28. *"for this is the blood of my covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

I do not know why God gives me so many chances, but my words cannot begin to describe my thankfulness for Jesus dying on the cross for the forgiveness of my sins, through Holy Communion.

This is the best news ever!

Friday, March 5

TEST by Delores Smith

...that the tested genuineness of your faith... may be found to result in praise, glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:6,7

Life is a time of preparing for our "Exit Exam" with our Lord and Savior. We all face anxious times of testing: an evaluation of progress in schoolwork, responsibility, job performance, recovery from illness, perseverance in quarantine/precautions and FAITH. Whether

results are satisfactory or need improvement, we continue to prepare for our goal of eternal life in heaven.

Testing of faith is compared to being refined by fire/purified like gold or silver. For Christians being cleansed or purified, our daily walk with faith in Jesus is somewhat the pop-test to check our complete trust in our Savior. Though we don't seek trials, we daily face our testing prepared with God's Word in Scripture. Jesus is the answer to our biggest testing problem – sin. Through God's grace and mercy, the Holy Spirit guides and keeps us learning and growing in the genuineness of our faith in Jesus, our Redeemer.

Thank You, Heavenly Father for providing our Way to heaven. King Jesus, thank You for Your loving sacrifice to redeem us. Thank You, faithful Holy Spirit, for guiding and growing our genuine faith in Jesus.

Monday, March 8

TEMPTATION by Jan Runzheimer

Matthew 4:1-11, 1 Cor. 10:12-13, James 1:2-18

Temptation seems to be nearly as old as mankind. Though scripture doesn't tell us how much time passed after the creation, the story of the Fall follows immediately in Genesis 3. The story of the serpent's temptation of Eve results in the shame and guilt we so often experience after we sin.

Have you watched a toddler reach for the cookie before dinner that was for dessert? The delight in the child's eyes quickly turn to shame when Mom discovers the sin. No doubt the child's consequence includes no cookie for dessert that evening. However, the next day Mom gives the child a cookie for dessert because the child has avoided the temptation before dinner.

Put yourself in the place of the child with God the Father. The Father has made the law clear to us,

but when we are tempted, He has provided a way out. We have Christ as our example, even as He resisted Satan's temptation recorded for us in Matthew. Jesus was aware of our weakness when He taught us to pray, *"Lead us not into temptation; deliver us from evil."*

Furthermore, the apostle Paul cautions us about temptation in his first letter to the Corinthians, while reminding us of a way out. Perhaps James makes it the clearest: when we persevere in our trials and overcome temptation, we receive the crown of life. When/where/how are you easily tempted? To whom do you turn in times of trial?

Praise God that the Holy Spirit protects and sanctifies us in all our need and makes the way out clear.

Tuesday, March 9

WILDERNESS by Pastor Doug Widger

"Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. ⁴Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. ⁵Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you." Deut. 8:2-5

God leads Israel into the wilderness. Not, God "allowed" them to wander into the wilderness. God *led* them. Ever wonder why? He was humbling them! They, like us, were in constant need of humility. Perhaps they might have started to think - "we are pretty special people" – God's chosen. He delivered US. WE must be deserving.

We each experience times of humbling – wilderness moments. These are opportunities to turn to him and watch for his provision. They were hungry and he fed them with manna. Needed clothes - the old ones did not wear out.

We are lonely and isolated and he says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” We experience illness and he says, “I am the great physician.” He knows the wilderness you experience. Humbly bow down and ask for his provision now!

Wednesday, March 10

WAIT by Abigail Jarrett

Psalm 27:14 “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”

I have taken a shining to baking. One of my favorite things to bake are cream puffs. They are a delicate, surprisingly simple pastry. The downside is, they take a lot of time. Whilst baking, one must wait for the dough to reach a specific texture, the outer shell must bake before the cream is added, all parts must completely cool before coming together. It’s easier to wait for little things like cream puffs, than it is to wait for big things like the end of a quarantine. Trusting that tiny balls of pastry dough will puff up is much easier than trusting God’s time.

The writer of Psalm 27:14 reminds us that even in the waiting periods, we are to trust God. There is no sense in worrying about the unknowns, so we refocus ourselves on God’s love and move on to the next step hand in hand with our Savior.

Jesus, hold my hand and walk beside me as I battle with uncertainty. Give me peace in the waiting. Amen.

Thursday, March 11

SOUL by Jenn Rukavina

*Psalms 62:5-8; Psalms 63:1-8
I Pray the Lord, My Soul to Keep*

Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Guide me Jesus through the night and wake me with the morning light.

How many times have you said that prayer? Do you really think about it? Or was it just a comforting rhyme that you said because it was in the routine?

In Psalm 62 and 63, written by David, he is praying for his soul, safety, and support - prayers for the keeping and guidance of his soul. When you read them, you can almost see them using these verses to create this childhood prayer for when we think of God, what we think of God, and what he means to us.

Can you see it now - how David might have prayed that same prayer and not just as a nightly routine? Can you see that prayer in a new light? As we head towards the cross and Easter- do we use this time as comfort and routine - or do we really stop to think about what it means for the Lord to keep our souls? For Jesus to guide us? To wake up in his glory?

Say that prayer tonight and think about how it sits in your soul as the Lord keeps us and guides us through the night.

Friday, March 12

GUIDE by Richard Del Cristo, Jr.

*Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you
are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day
long - Psalm 25:4-5*

Sometimes, it can be hard to let the Spirit guide our decisions as we walk through life. We as humans enjoy overseeing our own paths and making our own truths. It can be a humbling experience to truly know and understand what it is like to be guided through the throngs of life’s best and worst moments.

I tend to get in the way of myself from being able to hear and understand God's path for me. I have felt alone, worthless, and scared many a times because of the decisions I have made or because of the unknowns I feel.

Maybe YOU are feeling down and out right now about that path you are on.

Stop. Take a deep breath.

We need to step back, be still, and be patient. The Holy Spirit will soothe your soul. God's guidance has always felt like a flowing stream of peace over my body. Allow him to take control. Let Him carry your burden and guide your path.

Monday, March 15

GUILTY by Pastor Steve Roth

"You handed him over to be killed and you disowned him before Pilate." Acts 3:13

Who are the guilty ones who sent Jesus to the cross? The Roman soldiers and unbelieving Jews may have carried out the physical act, but we are all guilty of sending Jesus to be killed. Meditate of this: You and I had a part in sending Jesus to the cross. Even though He went voluntarily, it was the sinful nature of mankind that nailed Him to the cross.

We are all guilty! Yes, you are too! It's important that we recognize this fact, because when we admit our guilt, it's then we discover His grace. The Sinless Man willingly died for a sinful people.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21

Dear Father, we are guilty of sending Jesus to the cross. His incredible sacrifice has taken away our guilt. We praise You for Your grace and mercy.

Tuesday, March 16

WEAKNESS by Pastor Doug Widger

2 Cor. 12:9 - But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

There are so many things I aspire to be: biggest, fastest, strongest, most handsome, smartest, (you notice I said aspire 😊)... but not the weakest! Yet, God through his servant Paul tells us to boast in weakness. Why is that?

I believe it is because when we identify a weakness it allows people to connect to us. Internally all people know something isn't "just right" and we feel vulnerable. Every person struggles with something! When we honestly share the broken parts of our lives and take off the mask of invincibility people can relate. We have a common ground.

God's grace is sufficient for all of us. We, the people of God at Grace Lutheran Church, are a beautifully broken, wonderfully weak group of people - being healed by that same grace which Paul rejoiced in. His power to restore is released through us as we share our hurts and hang-ups with others. Don't be afraid to boast in your weakness. God uses it with great power!

Wednesday, March 17

TRANSFORMATION by Jan Penland

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

As a young person, I didn't think too much about God's will for my life, although I tried to live according to Biblical teachings. As I matured and

grew older, I came to realize that my place in God's plan was to be a caregiver. First, for the second of my three sons, who had numerous serious health issues but was blessed with a joyous spirit and beautiful faith. Then for my beloved husband, as he endured lung and brain cancer. Then for my widowed mother and aunts. And later, for friends as they struggled with health problems. I truly believe that this was God's "good, pleasing and perfect will" for me.

These days my caregiving is limited to prayer, but I know only too well the power of prayer. During this season of repentance, I pray that God will continue to transform each of us in his image.

Thursday, March 18

LOVE by Mary Thiede

"For God so loved the world that He save His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16

We as humans love our children so much. In the children's book, *Guess How Much I Love You*, Sam McBratney tells about a big hare and a little hare and how much they love each other. They say at the end when the little hare is so sleepy that they love each other right up to the moon. That's love.

We love our children so much. We want to give them food, shelter, happiness, and the love of our Awesome God.

God loves His Son, and He loves us too. He loves us so much that He had His Son die on a cross for my sins, our sins, and the sins of the whole world. Now that is a real love which is hard for us to understand, but we know it's true.

Lent leads us up to Jesus' death, but more importantly, it leads us up to Resurrection Sunday when Jesus rose again. That is what gives

us hope of eternal life with Him someday in heaven.

Friday, March 19

CROSS by Jan Runzheimer

Philippians 2:8, Acts 2:23-24, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Hebrews 12:2

The cross is at the center of everything. . . or is it? How many things are important in your life? Whom and what are you thankful for?

The cross was a symbol of death in Jesus' time. He knew what awaited him on earth, and yet he agreed willingly 'in the beginning', submitting his will to the Father. Surely, they both knew what was to come at creation. The Son out of love for man submitted to the will of His Father. Jesus trusted the Father to raise him from the dead. They would be separated on the cross, but reunited in the resurrection. The cross lay at the center between them; it was the means by which Christ overcame death and sin. Even as we are separated from God by our sin, Jesus has reconnected us to the Father by the cross. He endured once and for all, the burden of our sin that we might have eternal life.

As His crucifixion approaches, may you cling to the cross and Christ, your Lord and Savior. How many things are important, and what are you thankful for?

Heavenly Father, we are humbled by the love your Son displayed on the cross.

Monday, March 22

BROKEN by Joyce Pinnow

Psalms 51: 16-17; Jeremiah 2: 11-13

Most of us dislike when something gets broken, our car, a favorite heirloom, or even the internet.

We often lose our temper when these things happen. We get angry and put blame on others. We ask the question, why? Why were you playing near the vase? Why did you not put oil in the engine? Why, why, why? It gives us a sense of such loss. Then when our emotions calm down we pick up the superglue or call the mechanic or our favorite IT person and try to get it fixed.

When we are broken, sometimes we look to other people or other things for fixing. Sometimes those things take on our praise and admiration for they can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Jesus came to earth and was broken for us. He was separated from his father. Separated from his glory. He was physically broken by being whipped and nailed to the cross. Jesus even asked God to take away the brokenness he was going to have. He wanted to be fixed, reunited with his father for eternity.

God wants us to look to Him to be the superglue in our lives. We may fall apart over and over, but God is always there willing and able to repair us until that day when we join Him eternally and will be broken no more.

Jesus, come and repair this broken child once more until that day we can be with you in heaven and truly be complete.

Tuesday, March 23

SURRENDER by Abigail Jarrett

Romans 6:13 - Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

Matthew 16:24-26 - Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he

must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?..."

I'll be the first to admit that I like control. Controlling small things makes me feel better about the inability to control social wrongdoings and political destructiveness. But this illusion of control strips me of the ability to fully surrender myself to God's plan. I spend all my time gripping so tightly to the little things, losing sight of eternity is inevitable. Fully surrendering is not a prayer to be taken lightly.

Heavenly Father, give me the wisdom to walk in your love and fully surrender what is already yours. Amen.

Wednesday, March 24

REFLECTION by Jennifer Chavez

Be still. I heard that many times as a child. I'm still not very good at being still. My mind is constantly racing, even if my body has slowed down since my youth. I don't like to be still. When I do finally stop, I find myself thinking about this past year; and it doesn't bring me peace. It actually hurts. I think of everything that so many of us have been through. Vacations and parties cancelled, graduations missed, virtual learning, loss of income, and even death.

If I reflect on much of what has happened in my life this past year, I am left with a feeling of loss and sadness. I think of the times I was selfish and short tempered, or the times I had hate in my heart. Lamentations 3:40 says "Let us examine our ways and test them and let us return to the LORD."

Psalm 46:10 doesn't just say to be still, it says "Be still, and know that I am God." When we reflect upon our own ways and realize our sins, we must

turn to God and repent. Only then can we find peace in the stillness, knowing that God is in control.

Thursday, March 25

HOPE by Serena Pace

This Lenten season, I focus on the 'Hope' of the world. While I have many hopes of my own (good health, finishing that project I've wanted to tackle, solid community partnerships for Grace), I recognize these hopes are somewhat within my own power to achieve. This kind of hope starts with a desire for something to turn out a certain way and can easily lead to disappointment if it does not turn out as I expect.

There is a hope that can be sure, a hope without any hint of doubt in it. It's a different kind of hope, the kind that fills believers to know for certain that the best possible outcome will take place in their lives. This hope comes only from placing our trust in the Lord, Jesus Christ, to provide new life and love that lasts into eternity. This hope celebrates the truth that...He's coming back again!

"We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him, our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name." Psalm 33:20-21

May we draw strength from you, Lord Jesus; for our hope is in you alone. Amen.

Friday, March 26

RENEW by Jan Runzheimer

Isaiah 40:29-31, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Psalm 51

Renew means to re-establish, restore, or give fresh life or strength to that which would otherwise end according to Webster. Isaiah states that those whose hope is in the Lord will renew their strength and not grow weary (Isaiah 41:31). The prophet surely used the term,

renew, long before Webster defined it. A botanist would recognize the need for plants to receive food, water, and sunlight to renew their growth, especially in the spring. Every living creature requires the same sustenance for life to continue. The food necessary for spiritual maturation comes from Christ.

When it comes to spiritual growth, the process of renewal is ongoing. An infant's faith is only the beginning of the relationship with Christ. The child must learn the meaning of the gift of faith to achieve spiritual maturity. This begins one's daily walk with God and His continual renewal of our faith by the process of sanctification. Though not a Lenten hymn, "What A Friend We Have in Jesus" certainly describes this walk and our growing relationship with Christ, our Savior. To carry everything to God in prayer suggests that we need renewed strength on a daily basis. Jesus taught us to pray and the Father desires to hear from us daily. Whether one is in Bible study, church, fellowship, or one's closet, a believer is privileged to seek Him in prayer. Through such a close relationship with Him, Jesus will indeed renew our faith and hope and the Holy Spirit will provide us with all we need.

Let us focus this Lenten season on the opportunities we are given to rely on His renewed strength and to be ready to give an answer to all for the hope that He continually renews in us.

Lord Jesus, grant that I may be ever mindful of my need for your renewed strength and hope.

Monday, March 29

GRACE by Ruth Brown

What's in a name?

During my lifetime I have been a member of Lutheran churches with these names: Immanuel, Apostles, Trinity, and Grace. Most of my life has been spent at Grace. All these names

have religious meanings, but I want to focus on the word GRACE.

Now GRACE could mean many things such as:

- A girl's name.
- A prayer before or after meals – saying grace.
- Gratitude – Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16)
- Kindness – Let your conversation be always full of grace (Col. 4:6)
- Mercy – The bill was due on the 1st of the month but they gave us five days grace.

There are more meanings, and they are all wonderful. But the best meaning for my life is found in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

That is why I have loved being a member of Grace Lutheran for 56 years. Let's use all the attributes of GRACE in our lives and live under God's wonderful GRACE.

Tuesday, March 30

RESTORE by Pastor Doug Widger

Psalm 80: 3,7,19 - "Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved."

Lebron James earns an estimated \$60 million per year in endorsement deals. Companies such as Nike, AT&T, Pepsi, and Beats Electronic all pay to have his face shine on their products. His face sells stuff – lots of stuff!

The author of Psalm 80 cries out three times for the face of YHWH to shine on his people. They had been ravaged by foreign powers. They are asking for God's endorsement. Let the world know that we are still your favored, blessed, accepted people the Psalmist cries. The shining face of the Almighty will restore and save his people.

This Lenten season we are again humbled by raging foreign elements. For example, COVID has changed the way we worship, gather for fellowship, and study of his Word. Although we are dispersed, we are not discouraged. We know God's face will endorse his church. Ultimately, he will shine upon us and we will be saved.

Jesus, you won the right to restore all of creation through the cross and the resurrection. We long to see you face to face in the coming of the new creation! Until then, we humbly bow before you.

Wednesday, March 31

BOW DOWN by Nancy McCormick

Psalm 95:6 - O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

According to the dictionary, to bow down is a gesture of respect, deference, and submission. When we bow down to the Lord, we put ourselves in His hands, turn over our problems to Him and surrender to His will. With repentance, reverence, and humility, we seek His guidance in our lives.

Have you ever been on your knees, literally or figuratively, under the weight of problems, worry, sadness or loss? Perhaps during the current pandemic, you may have felt loneliness, anxiety, and hopelessness. Life presents so many bumps in the road, but we can take comfort that our Lord and Savior is nearby.

One of the most difficult times in my life was the loss of my mother. I have never felt the pain of grief and loss so profoundly. She and I were very close. It seemed that the sadness would never lift from my shoulders. Tears would come at unexpected times when some random thing would remind me of her. I prayed a lot and, eventually, a sense of peace came to me.

Heavenly Father, we bow down in prayer and ask for Your help and guidance in our daily lives. Forgive us and give us comfort according to our needs. In Jesus name. Amen.

Thursday, April 1

SACRIFICE by Jan Runzheimer

Romans 3:25-26, Ephesians 5:1-2, Luke 10:25-37

Sacrifice—the word itself brings painful experiences to mind for most of us. Our lives are filled with choices. Many times, we must make a choice that involves sacrifice. Have you put aside your own wishes, plans, or time to help someone else? Was it a tough decision to do so? How did you feel about the other person? How did you feel about yourself? And perhaps most importantly, how do you think God viewed your choice?

We are directed to care for others—to love others as we love ourselves, the second great commandment. The story of the good Samaritan makes it very clear that others include those who are very different from us. This kind of agape love involves sacrifice. It requires us to put aside our own needs for the sake of someone else.

Jesus became fully human to become the perfect sacrifice for our sin. He loved mankind so much that He submitted to the will of His Father, our Father, and came down to earth for the sole purpose of securing our salvation. He made the ultimate sacrifice, the only one that could be fully pleasing and acceptable to the Father. His death on the cross made atonement for us, so that we might be made righteous before God the Father. Because He was without sin, his death satisfied the judgment of the Father.

When you find yourself in a situation that requires your sacrifice, remember that the Father has given you an opportunity to show your love for one of His children. As you respond, give thanks that the Father has loved you so

much that He and His Son have made the ultimate sacrifice for you, that you will have salvation, a restored relationship with God for eternity.

Lord, thank you for being the perfect sacrifice and for redeeming us for all eternity.

Good Friday, April 2

CROWN by Pastor Doug Widger

John 19: 1-3 - Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face.

I did it! I drove the nails into his hands. I slapped him in the face and mocked him and flogged Jesus. My sin did that. Not just my really "bad sins", but the more subtle stuff like pride and gossip. It is as if I were standing there at Golgotha shouting, hitting, spitting at the innocent son of God.

In spite of my behavior, He forgives. He cried out from the cross, "Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." He died and I will not taste the punishment of hell, total separation from the God of perfect love. Jesus' obedience replaces my disobedience. He is the true King and deserves all my reverent worship - especially this day!

Father forgive me - for I don't know what I'm doing much of the time.

Saturday, April 3

GRIEF by Pastor Steve Roth

"Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him." Acts 8:2

I mourned deeply when my mother and father died. I still miss them and occasionally have a tear as I remember the love we shared with each other. Even though I know I will see them again in heaven, grief is still an important (and necessary) process for us to go through. While our grief as Christians can be equally as intense, there is something that sets it apart from the unbelieving world. We grieve with hope!

Our mourning can be very deep and emotional, but hope keeps us from going over the edge. Our Resurrected Lord meets us and enables us to move forward. I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVES!

Remember the words spoken by Jesus on the night before He was crucified, *"Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy."* John 16:20

Easter Sunday, April 4

RESURRECTION by Pastor Russell Hildebrandt

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26

The question still needs to be answered: do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life and all who believe in him will never die?

Martha and Mary were wearing their grave clothes when they went to meet Jesus. Both sisters were physically and spiritually wearing their grave clothes in the deep loss of their brother whom they loved. We all have been like Martha and Mary when we have experienced

deep loss. Loss of a loved one hurts deep within our being.

Fast forward to the tomb of Lazarus and Jesus calls for Lazarus to come out of the tomb. *"The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'"* Notice the last words that Jesus said at the tomb: *"Take off the grave clothes and let him go."*

Now fast forward to chapter 12 in John and you see they are having a party. *"Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead."* Did you notice "where Lazarus LIVED"? No grave clothes here! Lazarus is alive!

2020 has been a year when the world has been wearing grave clothes. You and I have worn grave clothes as we wear masks, social distance, and live in fear of catching Covid 19! Jesus says take off those grave clothes and live because he is the resurrection and the life. Jesus did say to be a "wise as serpents and gentle as doves." We still need to wear our masks and social distance until the pandemic is gone, but we can spiritually take off our grave clothes of despair and doubt. Do not fear death but also live with wisdom and be safe.

Jesus was buried in grave clothes but he left his grave clothes in the tomb. Put on your party clothes and Join Jesus on His Mission of sharing the good and great news: the tomb is empty!