

LENT

INHABIT



MADE BY



INHABIT

A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

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L E N T

INHABIT



M A D E B Y



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Introduction

The Psalms invite us into a both/and way of seeing the world and our place within it.



FOR EXAMPLE, PSALM 24:1 is an expansive celebration and affirmation of the ever-present reality of God: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” Everything that exists, or has ever existed, comes from the sustaining hand of God. It’s all his, yet he is pure love, and love gives itself away for the good of another, and so life is a gift *given* and *received* each and every day.

And while God is present in all places, the psalmist in the same breath reminds us that the LORD “inhabits the praises of his people” (Ps 22:3). His glory fills the earth yet is encountered in a special way as his children learn to praise him. He makes his home with them; he lives and dwells in their midst.

It seems, then, that our ability to experience the nearness of God is closely linked to a life of sustained worship.

If God inhabits our praise, we must learn to be a people shaped and defined by daily moments of adoration. **Lent teaches us to praise God so we can encounter his presence.** This sentence may surprise you. Lent may feel like anything *but* a life of praise and intimacy with God. Lent means rules and restrictions, not relationship ... right?

Though difficult to see, the limitations of Lent are actually essential to a life of freedom! Our decisions to curtail consumption set us free to hunger and thirst for God. As we rein in patterns of self-absorption and vanity, we are liberated to encounter his love in the face of the other. And when we commit ourselves to intentional rhythms of prayer, we learn to hear his voice speaking through the chaos and noise of our daily lives.

Each of us inhabits a story, and these stories give our lives meaning, purpose, and direction. In his kindness and love, God uses the season of Lent to reveal the countless ways we invite him to inhabit *our* stories rather than entering into *his* great story of redemption, restoration, and renewal.

These reflections for Lent remind us that God inhabits the praises of his people, yet true worship constantly reorients our lives to the truth of God’s victory over sin and death. He enters our story so that we might learn to live within his. As we do, the seeds of new life will take deep root and begin to flourish and grow, for that is the destination of our journey. Though Lent may begin in the darkness of winter, ours is a story of resurrection and life bursting forth from the tomb.

F I R S T
D A Y S

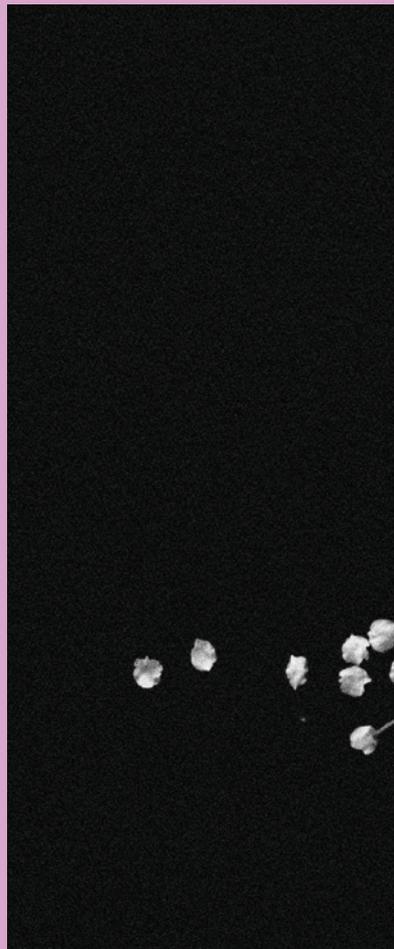
*¹Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sound the alarm on my holy hill.*

*Let all who live in the land
tremble, for the day of*

T H E L O R D

is coming. It is close at hand—

J O E L 2 : 1





in Lent

ASH WEDNESDAY

Sound The Alarm



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; Psalm 51:1-17;

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21



THE TRUMPET IS A POWERFUL INSTRUMENT. Even when it is accompanied by the most gifted jazz ensemble, it demands your full attention, leaving the other instruments behind as it flexes its sonic muscles for all to hear. In this way, it is rarely subtle or soothing.

In today's readings, we are presented with two different types of trumpets. Joel 2:1 describes a trumpet of alarm, alerting God's people to the reality of his power and holiness, that he is a consuming fire before which no enemy or opponent can escape. On the other hand, the trumpet of Matthew 6 is one of self-adulation, the literal tooting of one's own horn in order to be admired and revered by others.

Lent invites us to contend with both of these trumpets.

Like the trumpet of Joel 2, the Lord in his wisdom sounds an annual alarm, alerting his children to their need for repentance and restoration. Hear the call from Zion, he says, and return from the distant lands to which you have wandered. Come and be set aflame with the fire of my love.

Yet, in order to hear the call of his kingdom, we must silence the trumpets of our own ego, success, and pride that we continually blow. Can we learn to hear the Master calling to us over our own noise and frantic quest to be loved and admired by others? Are we willing to truly return?

The trumpet of fasting and repentance is always for our healing and restoration, never a deepening of wounds. We therefore return to the Lord with joy, "for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13).

THURSDAY

Tell the Truth



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Exodus 5:10-23; Acts 7:30-34



LENT IS A SEASON OF REPENTANCE, and the heart of repentance always includes a turning *away* and a turning *towards*. We turn away from a life of sin and isolation from God and turn towards his love, mercy, and grace. And yet, as we turn, we always bring the entirety of who we are with us: our hopes and dreams, as well as our anger, our fears, and our failures.

In the name of reverence or holy fear, we often think we are only able to approach God if our hearts are overflowing with faith and trust. And while reverence is to be encouraged and cultivated, we must remember that the Lord invites us near not only when we are at our best, but when we are at our worst, maybe even especially so. Repentance is a messy affair, and if we wait for it to be clean and tidy, we will likely be waiting a long, long time!

In Exodus 5, Moses embodies a raw and real form of repentance. In a place of confusion and despair, he “turned again to the Lord,” yet he brought the full weight of his confusion and pain with him as he returned to God, saying, “O Lord, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me” (Exod 5:22)?

This Lent, you are invited to return to the Lord in repentance and trust, yet doing so does not require you to silence the doubts, disappointments, or questions that swirl about in your heart and mind. The Lord is neither surprised nor intimidated by such vulnerability; instead, he celebrates your honesty before him, for honesty about the reality of our thoughts and desires is the first step of genuine repentance.

FRIDAY

Home Sweet Home



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Exodus 6:1-13; Acts 7:35-42



THE LORD IS A REFUGE TO ALL, yet many will not come to him for refuge.

Today you are invited to reflect upon the ways you have, or have failed to, make the Lord your refuge and dwelling place (Ps 91:9). Rephrased slightly, do you feel most at home in the house of the Lord? Are his ways the deepest desires of your heart, or do they live in the margins of your life, easily ignored and routinely dismissed?

In the Bible, a place of refuge is closely linked to a sense of *home*. Home, at its best, is a dwelling of refuge, a shelter from the storm, the place from which we depart and to which we long to return. Like the Prodigal Son, coming to our senses is a realization that we have made our home in a place of chaos and insecurity (Luke 15:17). Though we call it “home,” it couldn’t be further from the truth. It is a place of bondage and betrayal, luring us in and refusing to let go.

In this way, our search for and return to home can often be an uncomfortable, and even painful, process. It is difficult to wake up to the reality of our wayward wanderings. It is disorienting to realize the creature comforts that promise relief and refreshment are nothing more than fleeting pleasures, here today and gone tomorrow. And yet the invitation to return is forever on offer, ready and waiting to welcome us back into the arms of safety and love. Our Lord longs to be with us in trouble, to rescue and honor his children (Ps 91:15). Will we call to him and discover our true home?

SATURDAY

Where Are You Going?



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; John 12:27-36



MOVEMENT FOR MOVEMENT'S SAKE is neither wise nor productive. It is entirely possible to fill your life to the brim with events, activities, hobbies, and relationships yet fail to grow and develop into the person God longs for you to be. Life can be full and at the same time leave you empty and longing for more.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus reminds us of a seemingly simple yet profound truth: “If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going” (John 12:35). To aimlessly wander in the dark is a recipe for disaster—chances are high that you will get hurt or hurt someone else in the process! Of course, on one level we know this to be true, yet we cannot stand the thought of our own inactivity or indecisiveness, so we rush to fill the void with a constant busyness that we justify as a form of significance.

If you don't know where you're going, you should stop stumbling your way through the dark.

Truth be told, this is often more difficult than it seems. Busyness, even the most aimless kind, brings with it a degree of comfort. It keeps us distracted, never pausing to acknowledge the fears or insecurities that lurk just beneath the surface. Yet, this is precisely what you are invited to do today: pause. Stop moving. Take a deep breath and survey the landscape. Where are you going, after all?

It's easy to bumble about in the dark. Walking in the light, on the other hand, requires daily attentiveness and intentionality, seeking to be filled with the light and life of Christ, just as we resist the darkness that threatens to overtake our joy and steal our hope.

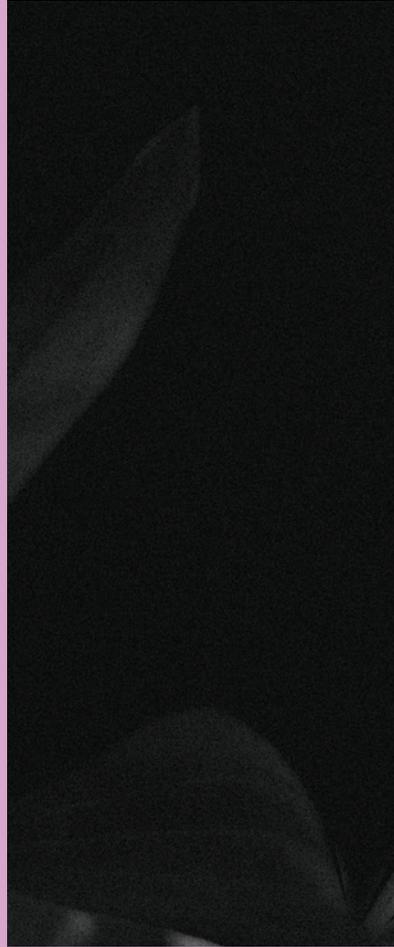
F I R S T
S U N D A Y

*¹Whoever dwells in the shelter
of the Most High will rest in the
shadow of the Almighty.*

²I will say of the Lord,

*“H E I S M Y
R E F U G E A N D M Y
F O R T R E S S , my God,
in whom I trust.*

PSALM 91: 1-2





in Lent

SUNDAY

Why Fast?



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13



IF WE ARE NOT CLEAR on the purpose of Lent and God's heart towards us, this extended season of fasting has the potential to inflict significant wounds upon our hearts and our life with the Lord.

Though Lent is not explicitly commanded in Scripture, the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is certainly the inspiration upon which it is built. We are told that our Lord ate nothing for forty days; instead, he battled against the devil and his lies (Luke 4:2). In a similar way, we are meant to join Jesus in the desert each year, learning to see the ways we have failed to believe and trust in God and have instead received the deceptions of the devil as truths to live by.

One of the lies we must resist in Lent is the distorted belief that God delights in our pain. If we struggle through one day of fasting, surely he's impressed by forty! If giving up one or two things is hard, then the near-impossible weight of a dozen *must* be somehow pleasing to the Lord, right?

Simplicity, not suffering, is the point of fasting in Lent. The Lord delights in our freedom, not our pain, yet invites us to fast in order to be truly free. Therefore, we simplify our lives to realize just how much time is spent on our own pleasures, the joy and indulgence of our senses. When we simplify our meals or turn off the screens, we create margin, space in which we are now free to hear God in redemptive ways. Simplicity in Lent requires intentionality, yet it is always an invitation born out of God's love for you and the life you gain, never focusing solely on that which is lost.

MONDAY

Abide in Christ



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 17; 1 Chronicles 21:1-17; 1 John 2:1-6



ABIDING IN CHRIST, as St. John commands us to do in 1 John 2, is not an exercise of the mind but a commitment of the will and heart lived out through concrete acts of obedience.

As John says in verse 6, “Whoever says, ‘I abide in him,’ ought to walk just as he walked.” This is what we *ought* to do, walking with Christ every moment of every day, perfectly submitted to his will and the ways of the Lord. This is the way of life and peace, revealing to us our true destination and ultimate home. And yet, as the traditional Anglican prayer of confession says, “We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.”

Lent reminds us that we do not live as we ought to live. We know, at least in our heads, what we ought to do, and yet we choose to walk in the way that leads to death, believing the lie that it is for our health and healing. With St. Paul we say, “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Rom 7:19).

Though the sickness of sin distorts our desires and cripples our will, the goal remains unchanged: an abiding life with Jesus Christ. He does not stand in condemnation over us but looks upon our weakness with compassion, advocating for us when we fall into sin (1 John 2:1). Greater awareness of sin should not lead us into a life of shame or hopelessness but instead deepen our encounter with the endless mercy and compassion of Christ, the one who abides with us even when we fail to abide with him.

TUESDAY

Honest to God



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 17; Zechariah 3:1-10; 2 Peter 2:4-21



ARE YOU HONEST WITH GOD IN YOUR PRAYERS? When you pray, do you approach the Lord with an awareness that he does not see us as others see us, but is the one who “looks on the heart?” (1 Sam 16:7). While we may know this to be true, so often we still struggle to honestly and openly share our hopes, fears, and disappointments with the Lord.

In Psalm 17, David offers a prayer to the Lord “from lips free of deceit” (Ps 17:1). It may be tempting to read this line as a prayer offered “from a pure heart,” and purity of heart is, of course, to be celebrated and pursued. Yet what do we do when our hearts are filled with confusion or outright anger towards God?

Deceitful lips speak words that deny the reality of our true heart condition. Prayers of praise and thanksgiving uttered from a heart that is crushed under the weight of unmet expectations or unforeseen heartache are deceitful and dishonest words. Honesty in prayer invites us to bring the entirety of our human experience before the Lord.

Jesus wants us to pray and relate to him when we’re in our “Sunday best,” yet he also longs for us to come to him when we cannot get out of bed and haven’t changed for days. Life is filled with moments of overwhelming joy and heart-wrenching pain, and our Lord longs to be near to you in each and every season. Every chapter of our lives has the potential to find its home and redemption in his grand story of love. Let us therefore live free from all deceit and come before him with honesty and the hope that he is working all things together for good (Rom 8:28).

WEDNESDAY

Be On Guard



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 17; Job 1:1-22; Luke 21:34-22:6



IN MANY WAYS, the entire season of Lent is summed up in Christ's words in Luke 21:34: "Be on guard." Spiritual sobriety is the invitation before us in this extended season of repentance. We must wake up to the countless ways in which we are inattentive to his voice and unaware of our own apathy and anxiety.

The weight of the world rarely comes upon us in an instant. Yes, there are moments in which it crashes in without any notice or forewarning—a tragic accident, terminal diagnosis, or relational betrayal—yet, mercifully, these are few and far between. For most of us, we must learn to "be alert at all times" (Luke 21:36), training our souls and bodies to anticipate the coming of our Lord in the ordinary rhythms of everyday life.

If we do not have a habit of daily attentiveness to Christ, the seemingly mundane challenges of life can grow into an unbearable burden. Taken in isolation, these difficulties may seem small: financial anxiety, wayward children, loneliness, or a lack of intimacy. Yet if these longings are left unattended and allowed to fester, they will slowly but surely overtake our hearts and consume our every thought.

Faithful discipleship requires us to battle these temptations towards despondency and sorrow, contending for that which is eternal. In this way, Lent is a training ground for your soul. Enter the arena and pray to God for the strength to be unencumbered by sin and earthly cares, living instead with a heart set free to anticipate the coming of his kingdom.

THURSDAY

Going Back



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 27; Genesis 13:1-7, 14-18; Philippians 3:2-12

SOMETIMES, WHEN WE'RE NOT SURE where to go or what to do next, we return to a familiar place, a familiar pattern. After his extensive journey to seek God's promise, Abram lands back where he started. St. Peter does the same after Jesus' resurrection, when he returns to the seaside.

Why do we do this? Certainly there's familiarity in that old place, a security we crave, especially when we feel something new emerging in our lives. It makes sense. And it's not necessarily sinful. It may sometimes be a way to hide from God or delay responding to a risky call. Sometimes, though, we simply don't know what to do; to return to "home base"—familiar work, old habits, a comfortable relationship, a hometown—can be a way to pause, rest, and listen.

Abram's return to Bethel, to his first altar, may have been an act of nostalgia or a lack of imagination. (He may also have just been shell-shocked from the drama of Egypt!) But if we look at Abram's life, and ours, through the eyes of grace, the eyes of Lent, we see that moving on often **requires** going back to a starting point. As C. S. Lewis once put it, if you need to fix a math problem, the worst thing to do is to keep going. You must go back to the start.

It is in that place of stillness, of recalibration, that God appears again to Abram, this time with new direction. "Raise your eyes now... Rise up, walk," says the Lord, and now Abram sees where to go next. He takes the next step, and there, in that new place, he builds a fresh altar, a new place of remembrance.

FRIDAY

Blessing



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 27; Genesis 14:17-24; Philippians 3:17-20



BLESSING IS IMPORTANT. It is one of the main ways God communicates his grace to us through others. Stop and think about the last time you were blessed by someone. Not in the general sense of being given a gift or a kind deed, but in the specific sense we see here: words of blessing spoken over you in the name of God.

In the short story of Melchizedek, we see the holy patriarch Abram, our father in the faith, accept another human as a representative of the Most High. We see him receive and revere the words of blessing, and we see him make this ritual of blessing a priority in his life during a time of turmoil, warfare, and journeying. This blessing in the midst of victory is a foreshadow of Passover, of Holy Communion itself. And, as we hear from the book of Hebrews, Melchizedek was a forerunner and a type of Christ (5:6).

We are also called to be Christ to each other, and some of us in a special way, as ministers. A blessing is not magic. But just as God uses us to bless others in a more general sense, to woo us out of self-absorption and provide for others' needs, so he also uses humans to enact his grace by blessing others verbally, with intention, and in the name of God. To bless and be blessed this way, especially in the context of worship, restores our attentiveness to the one who gives the victory along every desert road and refreshes us with holy bread and wine as we press on.

SATURDAY

Let Down, Taken Up



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 27; Psalm 118:26-29; Matthew 23:37-39



“IF MY FATHER AND MOTHER FORSAKE ME, the LORD will take me up” (Ps 27:10). Some will hear this verse as hyperbole. Of course parents wouldn’t forsake a child! David exaggerates to make a point, right? Others read this with a gut check: they know only too well how forsaken or disappointed we can be by our parents, and they yearn for this promise in a special way. They long for the Lord to take them up.

It’s mysterious and complicated, the reasons we suspect the Lord himself might forsake us even when we’re following him and why we, like the psalmist, might feel the need from time to time to beg him not to. Sometimes, while digging down deep into our sin patterns, working hard at obedience, or making progress in the spiritual life, we find those good, comforting feelings—what the Christian mystical tradition calls “consolations”—removed for a time to help us grow even more. We can also feel fearful or abandoned by God because somewhere in our lives we have been abandoned by others. Some of the hardest, richest spiritual work can come from forgiving caregivers who have let us down.

In Psalm 118, we hear the joyful sounds of resting and celebrating in our trustworthy God. This feels so refreshing, especially when we’re challenging and exerting ourselves in Lent. But whether you dug down and did your best this week or not, we are all now equally invited to stop, reset, and join tomorrow’s festal procession, to be taken up in praise, in the fundamental security of the Father.

S E C O N D
S U N D A Y

*¹After this, the word of the Lord-
came to Abram in a vision:*

*“D O N O T B E
A F R A I D , Abram.
I am your shield,
your very great reward.*

GENESIS 15: 1



in Lent

SUNDAY

Grown-up



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35



CHILDREN BELIEVE ANYTHING. It's so precious, we sometimes reckon it to them as righteousness. But no matter how sweet a child's trust, we must still teach them to weigh trust against facts lest we leave them in constant danger. To keep ourselves and others safe, to make wise decisions in this life, they must learn how to doubt. Before Christ's return, the world is a deep blend of good and evil, beautiful and vicious. Skepticism keeps us alive.

But what happens when God solicits our trust? What happens when he gives us the facts, not from where we sit, but from where he sits?

God knows it's difficult for us to trust—and how much more Abram, who had seen so much of the world, a man of wealth, travel, and savvy? He knew the laws of inheritance, the basics of biology. He was no child, no fool. And yet, to find God trustworthy, he must prove himself. Abram took the challenge: “And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6).

If God's promise doesn't strain our ability to believe, then it is probably not a promise of God; it isn't wild and good enough. Jesus blessed Thomas after the doubting disciple touched his hands and side after the resurrection, but then said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29). From Adam and Eve to Abram, to us, whatever our level of faith or skepticism, faith will be a challenge. It will require recovering trust, not out of naïveté, but out of a more foundational set of facts. Choosing to believe that God's hidden facts undergird our current circumstances is grown-up work.

MONDAY

To Be Graceful



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 105:1-42; Exodus 33:1-6; Romans 4:1-12



DID ST. PAUL START THE “LAW VS. GRACE” DEBATE? Or did he resolve it?

Going back to our example of Abraham, we see that Paul (with some complicated twists and turns) follows the same thread in the story of God’s people. Even when the Lord commanded circumcision, even when the Ten Commandments were fresh, no one has ever relied on God’s law to receive God’s promise. God’s mercy and promises are pre-emptive.

And yet, of course, it takes two to tango. As we see the Lord bring Israel to the Promised Land at last, he’s none too pleased. He’s had to drag them along in the dance. As he’s shown preventive grace, they’ve refused to be grace-filled, willing partners. Even Paul has strong words for the people of the New Covenant: “Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means!” (Rom 6:2).

In Jesus, we see most clearly the initiating mercy of God, now “apart from the law” (Rom 3:21). What does this mean? God’s mercy is never lawless. But now it is given to the Gentiles, who, without Christ, would not know their ear from their elbow. And that is us. The ancient mercy is now in its sharpest relief when given to lawless outsiders, just as it was given to pagan Abraham, illuminating the divine hospitality.

Through God’s good faith, we’re given faith, and we’re shown what good works to do, which he prepared in advance for us to walk in (Eph 2:10). And as Jesus reminds the Pharisees, we rely solely on this mercy, on God’s first invitation, or else the best obedience is nil.

TUESDAY

Marking Seasons



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 105:1-42; Numbers 14:10b-24; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13



AS DIFFERENT SEASONS OF the Christian year all serve to tell the same story, this week's psalm reminds us that our life with God also moves in seasons and tells one story.

The wandering, wondering years of Abraham and Isaac, the tumultuous years of Jacob and his sons, the complicated blessing of Egypt and the emergency of coming out, the miraculous provision in the desert, and the blessing of stability, of settling into a new home: Psalm 105 urges us to use the pattern of Israel—which, the psalm insists, and often despite appearances, all contain the “wonderful works” of God—to mark out seasons in our own lives.

And these “wonderful works” include not only miracles but also (and perhaps best) God's “judgments,” or wisdom, and his long-term presence and faithfulness. These judgments are “in all the earth” (v. 7), a steady provision that encompasses our tiny life spans and goes far beyond them, “for a thousand generations.”

The Bible doesn't ask us to explain why things happen but to remember how God's wisdom and power have been at work, even long before you or me. This keeps us from interpreting present circumstances hastily, limiting grace to timelines, or cramming the darker mysteries of life into bright, tidy spiritual boxes. When seeking God, there is no need for “Hallmark card” answers. Our times are in his hand. Now is the time for seeking his care and trusting that when this season, too, is past, it will be revealed among the ranks of God's mighty history with his people, a page in the calendar year of God's time.

WEDNESDAY

Made Real



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 105:1-42; 2 Chronicles 20:1-22; Luke 13:22-31



WHEN THE GOSPELS SAY Jesus is making “his way to Jerusalem,” he’s heading towards his death. So whatever he’s doing here, he’s doing as if he were Israel in the desert, re-learning to renounce every dependency except God. He’s being perfected, humbled, made even more real for us (Heb 2:10). His death, in fact, will be the culmination of his life. Thirty-three years of living vulnerably in God’s love had perfected Jesus to become our brother, our Bread of Life, our Lord. Yet now, the time is short.

So what does Jesus do with his precious time? He teaches. It’s humble service, yet his lesson is not soft. In the sorrow, gravity, and self-denial of this Lenten path, Jesus warns his followers: *Don’t rest on the laurels of destiny, spiritual pedigree, or even your familiarity with me. Strive.* Strive to remember the point. Strive to receive the good news. Strive to trust the promises of God.

Yes, Jesus wants us to strive. Yet salvation isn’t an achievement. It doesn’t depend on what we have or who we’re near, Jesus says. But it depends on keeping fresh and following a desire we’re given, a desire deep within—a desire for Jerusalem, for God’s glory, for the peaceful city—and accepting whatever God gives for that journey. Jesus is being real with us: his path is hard to trust, and we’re apt to neglect it for more obvious ones.

As we strive in this Lenten way, let’s take a lesson from Jesus. Let’s tell the truth about what the narrow way is like. Let’s make it clear to the Lord and to ourselves what we’re feeling, learning, and missing. Let’s be made more real.

THURSDAY

The Fiery Furnace



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 63:1-8; Daniel 3:19-30; Revelation 2:8-11



IN SCRIPTURE, fire can be both a source of destruction and a sign of the very presence of God. This dual reality is perhaps nowhere more explicit than in the fiery furnace of Daniel 3. Here, a means of death is transformed into an encounter with the living God.

Filled with rage at Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's insubordination, King Nebuchadnezzar sought to make an example of them, heating the furnace seven times hotter than was customary (Dan 3:19). Yet this singular devotion to their Lord in the face of certain death led to one of the most remarkable stories in the whole of Scripture: God revealing himself in the midst of an instrument of death.

One of the most fascinating realities of this story is that the very same flames are a source of death for some, yet life for others. The guards who threw the three men into the flames were consumed and killed by the heat, whereas the servants of God entered without fear and, instead of meeting their death, were transformed by the power of God.

In Scripture, God is referred to as a consuming fire (Deut 4:24), and for those who stand in opposition to him and his ways, it is a fire that leads to death. However, if we are willing to approach the fire with fear and faith, it will consume the death that threatens to destroy us while leaving us filled with the fire of God's very life.

As we journey towards the cross, we encounter in Daniel 3 a foreshadowing of Christ's own death and resurrection, reminding us that our Lord enters places of certain death and, from within the grave, proclaims life, victory, and unspeakable hope.

FRIDAY

Be Perfect



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 63:1-8; Daniel 12:1-4; Revelation 3:1-6

REVELATION 3 REVEALS A PATH to spiritual attentiveness, reminding us of the ultimate aim and goal of the Christian life: to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:48). Perfection is the aim, imperfect though we may be. Until our works are found “perfect in the sight of God” (Rev 3:2), we still have work to do.

Perfection is the goal, and repentance is the way. As St. John says in verse 3, “Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent” (Rev 3:3). Remember. Obey. Repent. This is the three-fold rhythm of our life with Christ, one that remains at the heart of our journey of faith, whether we are just beginning or nearing the end of the race.

Remembrance is an entry into the story of God. It is a re-centering of our stories from the immediate to the eternal. To remember is to encounter the past in the present in a way that transforms the future. As such, remembrance is the first step of obedience, for how can we move forward in faith if we do not know where we’ve been, where we are, and where we are going? Obedience requires direction and cannot simply be aimless zeal or passion separated from divine purpose.

Similarly, without a defined way of life to clearly pursue, we will struggle to embody intentional and ongoing repentance, for how will we know if we’ve missed the mark unless we have a mark at which to aim? Thus, perfection remains our unwavering goal, even as we struggle to daily set our sights on the prize. When we fail, we return again and again to the great story of God, one in which the weak are made strong, the faithfulness restored to abiding faith, and the dead raised to life.

SATURDAY

My Soul Thirsts for You



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 63:1-8; Isaiah 5:1-7; Luke 6:43-45



LONGING FOR GOD AND BEHOLDING HIS GLORY in worship are inseparably linked.

Psalm 63 is a window into a heart filled with a desire for God, to know him and encounter his presence amid life's great struggles and sorrows. "O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Ps 63:1). For the desert wanderer, water is the singular pursuit and sole passion, with every other care and concern overshadowed by the desire for survival.

Beautiful and poetic as this imagery surely is, if you're honest, you may struggle with psalms of this nature. How does anyone truly obtain this desperate longing to know God? Rather than joining them in this place, you may instead feel confusion or even shame at your lack of desire. We may *wish* to long for God in this way, yet in our heart of hearts, we struggle to see how this could ever be true of us.

The answer, according to this psalm, is found in a life of worship. A thirst for God finds its fulfillment in his presence, beholding his power and glory (Ps 63:2). It is in God's presence that our desires are fulfilled *and* awakened within us. Our thirst is quenched, and we are simultaneously made aware of how deeply we long to know God more.

This Lenten journey of self-denial and repentance must lead us into a life of worship in the church, joining with the family of God as we together behold him in his sanctuary. It is here that our deepest longings are fulfilled. And it is in this place that our desires for God are stirred and sustained.

T H I R D
S U N D A Y

*⁶Seek the Lord while he may
be found; call on him while
he is near. ⁷Let the wicked
forsake their ways and the
unrighteous their thoughts. Let
them T U R N T O T H E
L O R D , and he will have
mercy on them, and to our God,
for he will freely pardon.*

I S A I A H 55: 6-7



in Lent

SUNDAY

Bearing Fruit



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9



THE CHRISTIAN FAITH REQUIRES THAT the life of Christ is planted and cultivated in the life of the believer.

Our Lord Jesus reminds us of this in Luke 13, where we find the story of a fruitless fig tree, having gone years without any signs of life or vitality. In this way, it has failed to be and do the very thing it was made to do: bear fruit! In the eyes of the owner, it is nothing more than a waste of good soil (Luke 13:7). And yet the gardener asks for more time, believing that the potential for life is still contained deep within. “He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down’” (Luke 13:8-9).

Jesus Christ, identified as a gardener in John 20:15, sees us in our fruitless state and does not stand by, indifferent and aloof. Rather, he enters the orchard of our lives and longs to see us become what we were made to be in the very beginning. He reveals to us the way of health, one defined by good soil and rich nutrients.

The question before us today is a simple one: will we “bear fruit worthy of repentance?” (Matt 3:8). As Christ draws near to us this Lent, will we respond in faith, delighting ourselves in the goodness of his presence (Isa 55:2) and receiving his expert care, not for our harm, but for our healing and ultimate good?

MONDAY

The Path to Life



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 39; Jeremiah 11:1-17; Romans 2:1-11



OBEDIENCE IS THE PATH TO A GENUINE RELATIONSHIP with God, and the heart of obedience is self-denial.

In a world of self-help positivity, the call of Christ upon our lives is both shocking and abrasive. At every turn, we are commanded to leave behind our former ways and turn to the source of true life and goodness. This is not a quest for self-actualization; neither is it an invitation to endless navel-gazing, hoping to find inspiration or direction deep within. Instead, it is the lifelong process of becoming sheep who need a shepherd and an enslaved people longing for freedom.

Jeremiah presents us with a God who does not shy away from giving clear direction and setting explicit expectations. “Hear and heed the words of this covenant ... listen to my voice ... do all that I command you” (Jer 11:2-4). If God’s character is questionable, such directives can be seen as abusive or even manipulative, a superior power forcing their agenda upon those under their command. Perhaps many of us bristle at these words for this very reason. Yet, we must remember the purpose for which God’s clear commands are given: the restoration of relationship.

Every word of direction from the Lord is meant for our good and the reconciling of the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19). He alone knows the path to life, and in love, invites us at every turn to follow him in this way. It is an invitation extended not out of duty or obligation, but from the loving heart of a parent who longs to see their children led to safety and places of rest. Let us therefore walk with joy in the ways of the Lord that we may be his people, and he will be our God (Jer 11:4).

TUESDAY

Knowledge Is Not Enough



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 39; Ezekiel 17:1-10; Romans 2:12-16



WE LIVE IN A WORLD THAT IS awash with information. In a way never before seen or imagined, human beings carry the world in their pockets. The answer to any question is only a few clicks or swipes away, bringing with it an incredible sense of power and knowledge. This information revolution has quite literally transformed our world and shaped or re-shaped every area of life, including our life with Christ.

Though the benefits of knowledge are immense, the danger in this moment, especially as it relates to the Christian faith, is that we are quick to confuse knowledge *about* God with fidelity *to* God. We read, research, and explore, assuming this leads to a life of virtue and holiness. And while knowledge of God is an essential piece of the puzzle, knowledge alone is simply insufficient to form us into the people God longs for us to be.

Into this malaise, St. Paul's words from Romans 2 offer clarity and much needed direction: "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified" (Rom 2:13). We are restored to relationship with God as we learn to become doers of the law, people who delight in his will and walk in his ways (Ps 40:8). Hear the Word of the Lord spoken to you today, and let that Word lead you from knowledge to obedience, and from obedience into an abiding relationship with God.

WEDNESDAY

Know Your End



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 39; Numbers 13:17-27; Luke 13:18-21



LENT, PERHAPS MORE THAN ANY OTHER TIME in the Christian year, invites a daily reminder of the frailty of life and reality of death. Though we spend much of our lives running from this truth, there is actually much to be gained by a sober assessment of our mortality. The fact that we will die has the potential to transform the way we live.

At times in the history of our faith, Christians have embraced a robust tradition of remembering our death, known by the Latin phrase *memento mori*. Though this may at first seem gruesome or primitive, it is in fact deeply Christian and biblical. To give but one example, today we reflect upon the ancient prayer of Psalm 39: “Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is” (Ps 39:4). This is not a prayer of escapism or fatalism but is instead the cry for spiritual wisdom and attentiveness to the importance of every single day.

Life on earth is a training ground for eternity and will be gone in the blink of an eye. It is as short as “a few handbreadths” or “a mere breath” (Ps 39:5-6). For those without hope, this may indeed be a source of great fear or anxiety, leading to aimless living and frivolity at every turn. Yet, for those of us who know the abiding life of Christ, it is a reminder to take every moment captive, believing it to be infused with untold potential and possibility.

Today, this very moment, is an invitation to remember your end so that your present is filled with the life of God’s Kingdom.

THURSDAY

The Way of Peace



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 32; Joshua 4:1-13; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5



Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us...

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace.

THIS IS AN ANCIENT CHRISTIAN PLEA, often sung or said before Holy Communion, asking the ascended Christ to make us pure and peaceful, “those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity” (Ps 32:2). As we receive this gift, repenting along the way and waiting for its completion in us, there are four comforts in Psalm 32 to help.

First, there is *honesty*. Even if the Lord treats us with mercy and courtesy and not as our sins deserve, this doesn’t mean we’re dishonest about where we’re at. The forgiven person is also, as we’ve seen before, real with God: one “in whose spirit there is no deceit” (v 2). We don’t pretend, and God doesn’t look at us from between his fingers. We come with our whole selves. He sees.

This requires regular *confession*. Keeping our sins and weaknesses hidden, like Adam and Eve in fig leaves, can keep God, our closest relationships, and our faith family from helping us. “While I kept silence ... my strength was dried up” (v 3). Confessing what hounds, distresses, or trips us up, to the Lord and in a trusted community, frees us.

The Lord will also give us *encouragement* along the way, cheering us on quite literally (v 7)! And, in verse 8, we hear about his *counsel*. We listen to God so that he can work with us more and more cooperatively, gently, subtly, and quietly—make us less mulish, more human.

Forgiveness, honesty, confession, encouragement, and counsel: this is God’s mercy, God’s peace along the Lenten path.

FRIDAY

Family Stories



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 32; Joshua 4:14-24; 2 Corinthians 5:6-15



LIFE WITH THE ALMIGHTY, as we see in Joshua, doesn't mean just moving from one thing to another, even when we're—spiritually speaking—trying to get someplace new. It's family life. It includes pauses (Sabbath), talking and listening (prayer), meals (Holy Communion), and a lot of grace for a large family's weaknesses, needs, and annoying interruptions (the Church). God provides for his people all that a healthy family needs.

So, what do we do in most family get-togethers? We remember. Stories. Nicknames. Heirlooms. Jokes. Photo albums. These are all ways to remember. Remembering is a part of family life—and a satisfying part for most families. It's the same in the family of God. The Lord teaches his people this pattern once again when he gathers with them at the Jordan River. *Stop a moment*, he says to them. *Take this in. And remember when we were in Egypt.*

And because we're physical creatures who need physical things to jog our memories, when God lays down a house rule, he always gives some material to help us: water, oil, ashes, bread, four walls, five senses—12 stones. These 12 "Stones of Remembrance" (*Ebenezers*) are not just a family legend but a teaching tool. Like the sacraments, food, nature, bodies, and other material gifts, they remind Israel and the Church who we are: rescued, blessed, disciplined in mercy, children in God's family, kept secure in every generation.

SATURDAY

God's Economics



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 32; Exodus 32:7-14; Luke 15:1-10



WHICH OF YOU WOULDN'T leave 99 instead of cutting your losses for one?

Which of you wouldn't host a block party for lost money you found in the washing machine?

Not that a sheep or a silver coin isn't worth *something*. Not to say that *no one* would do this. But it's a stretch.

In our modern world, we're good at cost-benefit analyses. They're practical. Sometimes, they're wise. We need to cut our losses. Get things done. More is more. But like the novelist Flannery O'Connor, drawing "large and startling pictures" in her stories to get a culturally religious audience to see truth afresh, perhaps Jesus is doing the same. What seems like an exaggeration may actually be the very kingdom life we think we're already living.

What are God's economics? He doesn't seem to simply cut his losses. He's patient, often slow, round-about in working "all things ... together for the good" (Rom 8:28). His salvation is meticulous, detail-oriented, attentive to creatures. And when one little thing falls into place—one person repents of sin—there's a party in heaven.

Of course, there may be some things modern or Western people miss here. In India, for example, in a traditional marriage, the bride is given 10 silver coins from her husband as a symbol of her worth and his faithfulness. Now, if a woman lost one of *these*, we might understand a block party.

However we view these stories culturally, they challenge us to see our value in God's eyes. We are called to inhabit this kingdom logic. People are the lost sheep and little coin God rejoices over, the precious deposit of Christ's faithfulness to his Bride.

F O U R T H
S U N D A Y

*¹Blessed is the one
whose transgressions are*

F O R G I V E N ,
whose sins are covered.

*²Blessed is the one
whose sin the Lord does not
count against them
and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

P S A L M 32: 1-2



in Lent

SUNDAY

Open Eyes



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32



WE'VE ALL SEEN THE MOVIE OR READ THE BOOK. A fluke, a magic potion, a half-serious wish—and when the protagonist wakes up the next day, everything has changed. Now he can see through walls. Now she is 13 again, or a millionaire. Now he turns into a wolf at the full moon. Their perspective has been transformed. It's a new world.

When St. Paul says, “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), he means that we who are in Christ *are* a new creation. Though it takes discipleship to experience fully, it's true: “everything old has passed away” by his cross and resurrection.

But he means something else, too. We used to see others from “a human point of view,” or “according to the flesh” (v 16): according to whether we liked them, whether they were useful, whether they fit our agendas or range of acceptable personalities, whether they had the right politics, nationality, belongings, or body—in other words, whether they were lovable and redeemable according to our standards.

Paul points out that it's possible to see Jesus this way, too—to judge, like, or love him only “according to the flesh.”

But when he opens our eyes, a transformation occurs. Whether overnight or over a lifetime, we see the world and others in a different way. “There is a new creation: ... see, everything has become new!” (v 17). We receive this humbling “superpower” because we have a special task to perform, “the ministry of reconciliation” (v 18). Now that we see how things really are, how God views the world, we have been called to open others' eyes, too.

MONDAY

Fools



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 53; Leviticus 23:26-41; Revelation 19:1-8



WHO ARE THE “FOOLS” WHO “SAY IN THEIR HEARTS, “There is no God” (Ps 53:1)? We don’t see atheists doing far worse things than other people. In fact, where we find the most heinous deceits, abuses of power, and oppressions, they are often done for religious reasons, from church leaders who bully to militant groups who kill in the name of God.

God comes to earth to see if there is anyone who believes in him with a pure heart, who acts as if he truly exists. And he finds ... no one! A humbling truth. At one level or another, all of us live from deceit, doubt, or fear rather than trust in God.

And yet there does seem to be another group, an exception: “my people.” God’s people are God’s treasure, and the fools (religious or not) are simply those who “eat up my people as they eat bread” (Ps 53:4). God’s people obey him enough to be mistaken for fools in the world’s eyes. In contrast, the real fools, in doubt and fear, become greedy in their behavior, regardless of what they profess to believe.

Are we God’s people, or are we fools? In the revelation of Christ, we see we are both. We are welcomed in God’s name, and as we approach, we know our foolishness and greed more and more intimately in the light of his holiness and are set free to repent. This is how the Lord restores the fortunes of his people. This is how he saves fools.

TUESDAY

Sabbath Work



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalms 53; Leviticus 25:1-19; Revelation 19:9-10

IT'S RIGHT ENOUGH TO THINK OF LENT AS spiritual work—something we do, try, give up, add, or offer to God. But anything we do with God is both *analogous*—comparable—and *disanalogous*—completely incomparable—to its counterpart in the human realm. If Lent is spiritual labor, spiritual exercise, it does us the most good when offered to God and done his way. Just as stopping in God's time can mean advancing, and giving can mean receiving, and being last is first and best, work in Lenten time is also Sabbath.

If you have entered life with Christ, you have already entered the land God is giving to his people. And most of our discipleship happens in the daily routines: work, relationships, housekeeping, making choices, and moving towards goals. But during Lent, anything we remove from or add to our lives as a discipline should only serve to create room for more attention to God—to let the land lie fallow for a season. We refrain from grabbing all we can and instead reduce (even reduce what we expect from Lent, perhaps!), slow down, and pay attention to what thoughts, feelings, sins, or desires might come nosing out of the woods of our hearts, like wild animals searching for Sabbath grapes.

In Lenten time, constraints should lead to liberty. They're an invitation to feel our need for the Lord, for his mercy, provision, and timing, so that in this looser, more "jubilee" frame of mind, we might lighten our heart's load.

WEDNESDAY

Broken, Gathered



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 53; 2 Kings 4:1-7; Luke 9:10-17

WHAT DID THE DISCIPLES LEARN from the twelve baskets of broken pieces left over after Jesus fed the crowd? Maybe they saw the Twelve Tribes of Israel, God’s people—fragmented, yet gathered up. Maybe they saw their own future apostolic roles in seeking out and bringing together the broken and scattered flock of God or in going among the people to serve them. Maybe they found a lesson in that role: it is God who feeds, provides—they simply facilitate, handle the overflow of grace.

Of course, it would have been odd if they had not also seen themselves, the Twelve. After they were petulant, unwilling, and bossy, Christ turned their attention (and their varying personalities) back to the Father’s work. Now they’re each holding a basket of crumbly, smelly leftovers, thinking—what? That they were also broken, scattered, in need of gathering, a bit smelly? They were not masters of the situation, no matter how much the Lord used them or cherished them. They could not control his work or its timing, and they could not lord it over others. They didn’t have it “together,” except as they were held together from the outside, only secure by the weave of providence and grace.

Jesus called together a truly motley crew of clever, simple, earnest, ironical, philosophical, naïve, doubting, educated, and blue-collar people into life with him and his Father. He shared with them the Spirit’s power for good work. But, along with the solitude and rest with him they craved, perhaps they needed the same object lesson we do: we are baskets of mess who need gathering; we are vessels of the power of God.

THURSDAY

Nothing to Fear



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 126; Isaiah 43:1-7; Philippians 2:19-24



AT TIMES, PROPHETIC LANGUAGE, like the words found in Isaiah 43, can be deeply distorted and misunderstood. We cling to phrases like “I will be with you” or “you shall not be burned” (Isa 43:2) and create entire theological systems that isolate these promises from their immediate context and, as a result, their true power.

Though the witness of Christian history should cure us of this mistaken position, the belief that true followers of Christ will be spared the troubles of this life, including physical sickness, emotional turmoil, or persecution for their faith, still exists. If one is suffering such trials, some say a lack of faith or unrepentant sin must be the root cause. As even the disciples said in their blindness, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2).

Today, Isaiah seeks to remind us that our Lord is near to us *when* we pass through the turbulent waters and protects us *as* we walk through fire.

If your life today feels like a rushing flood or raging fire, this is an invitation into renewed faith, not increased doubt. You are invited to encounter the Lord in the trials of this life, not in spite of them. We learn to trust, not only when the waves are calm but also when they threaten to overtake us. And we believe he is good and near to us in the fires of life, purifying and refining us that we may be made ready for the life of his Kingdom.

FRIDAY

Concrete Love



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 126; Isaiah 43:8-15; Philippians 2:25-3:1



A LIFE OF REPENTANCE IS NOT ONLY oriented towards our internal sickness but is also concerned with life outside of ourselves. Repentance is meant to turn us towards others in sacrificial love, seeking to bless the world just as we have been blessed by the love and kindness of God. Repentance must never be separated from love of neighbor.

In this way, we today gain inspiration from a lesser-known New Testament figure—St. Epaphroditus—a brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier of St. Paul who ministered to his needs (Phil 2:25). Indeed, not only did this dear disciple of Christ serve Paul in love, but his heart was similarly filled with care and concern for the church at Philippi, wanting them to not be distressed over his sickness. Even in a time of great personal distress, Epaphroditus's heart was turned towards others, seeking their good over his personal comfort and well-being.

The cross of Christ must be applied in our lives through concrete acts of self-denial. We must learn to take up our cross and follow Christ, not simply in mind or spirit, but in a life lived with the good of others as a guiding light from which we never deviate or stray. With Epaphroditus as inspiration today, seek out specific women and men for whom you can give your life away, loving them with the self-giving love of God in Jesus Christ.

SATURDAY

Restored Fortunes



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 126; Exodus 12:21-27; John 11:45-57



IF WE AREN'T CAREFUL, the journey of Lenten repentance can lead us into a place of despondency and discouragement. It is a difficult and daunting thing to look underneath the hood, bringing into the light the experiences, longings, and practices that much prefer to stay hidden in the dark corners of our lives. And if these realities are surfaced simply to remind us of our sickness, no true healing is to be found.

Repentance includes clarity in diagnosing the illness *and* in the unshakable belief that healing can be found, or, perhaps more accurately, that it comes to find us.

In Lent, we journey with Israel into the wilderness and into Babylon, reminding us of our own aimless wanderings and exile from our true home. We were made to feast at the table of our Father, and yet we are drawn away into the world, wayward children who give in to our longings for wealth, success, and power. Lent invites us to see these for what they are and to see the restoration of life offered to us in Christ.

When God finds his people at their worst, a wave of joy washes over them as he draws near. The gift of God's presence is an oasis in the desert and a hand of rescue in a place of captivity. Though our sins steal our joy, his nearness restores our dreams, filling our mouths with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy (Ps 126:1-2).

F I F T H
S U N D A Y

*¹⁹See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not
perceive it? I am*

M A K I N G A W A Y
*in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.*

ISAIAH 43: 19





in Lent

SUNDAY

The Aim of Discipline



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philipians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8



WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE? Where are we headed in this journey of faith? Without clarity on questions such as these, we may be active and engaged in practices of faith without the ability to see how the individual parts contribute to the whole.

For St. Paul, there is no ambiguity surrounding the vision that animates his pastoral care and missionary zeal: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil 3:10-11). Anything less than resurrection life with Christ is a failure to see and pursue the fullness of the Christian faith.

Every act of discipline—prayer, Bible study, fasting, serving the poor—that is not oriented towards a deeper encounter with the living God in Christ is severed from its intended purpose. In a season focused upon intentional acts of discipline, this clarity of vision is more important than ever! We seek to rightly order our lives, not as an end in and of itself, but as an entry into communion, joining Mary as we worship in adoration at the feet of our Lord Jesus (John 12:3).

MONDAY

Unwavering Hope



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 20; Exodus 40:1-15; Hebrews 10:19-25



IN HEBREWS 10, we are presented with a clear and compelling call to lifelong faithfulness to Christ. “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23). This is the aim and goal of the Christian life, and many of us have been blessed to know extended seasons of deep and abiding faith in Christ. However, if one lives long enough, life has a way of unseating and unsettling even the most devout of believers. Job loss. Relational betrayal. Terminal illness. These are the moments in which we are tempted to waver and, if we are honest, have at times failed to hold fast to our hope in Christ.

It does us well to recall the words that immediately follow this exhortation to unwavering hope: “And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:24-25).

Unwavering hope is an impossible burden to place upon a single, isolated follower of Christ. The weight is simply too much to bear! Like a solo hiker injured deep within the woods, a discouraged or downcast Christian that lacks community finds themselves in a treacherous situation. Though your life with Christ is personal and unique, it is not meant to be nourished or sustained apart from the family of faith.

When you waver in faith, those who are strong in the Christian community can come to you with healing medicine of hope. And when you are strong, be attentive to those in your midst who are bleeding out and desperate for help. Only together, as the family of God, are we able to follow Christ without wavering.

TUESDAY

Remembered by God



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 20; Judges 9:7-15; 1 John 2:18-28



HUMANS ARE FORGETFUL BEINGS. Sometimes our forgetfulness is fairly innocent: misplaced keys, a lost phone, or a wrong turn. At other times, our absentmindedness has a greater and costlier impact: missed family milestones, neglected relationships, or lapsed promises. And perhaps most significantly, it is possible for us to forget God.

We may live and breath and journey through life, yet do so entirely unaware of the nearness of God and his desire to be known by us. Into this spiritual amnesia, the Psalms today are a source of incredible hope. Though we may forget God and fail to remember him, he remembers us and sustains our every moment.

Any movement away from forgetfulness and into a true knowledge of who we are in Christ is celebrated and cherished by our Lord. God remembers our offerings (Ps 20:3), even when we forget them. Though our hearts and minds may stray, he delights in our movement towards his mercy and in love and gentleness reminds us of who we are in him.

In this way, Lent is a journey of remembrance. As our Lord remembers, knows, and upholds us, our memory is restored to us. Quite literally, we are re-membered as we are held in the memory of God. We learn, slowly but surely, who we are and whose we are.

WEDNESDAY

Remember Mercy



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 20; Habakkuk 3:2-15; Luke 18:31-34



THE MERCY OF GOD IS THE CONCRETE APPLICATION OF THE LOVE OF GOD, revealing to us the character of God. When we pray for the mercy of God, we are asking him to love us in the only way he is able to love: perfectly, without corruption or selfish motivation. It is simply impossible for him to love us any other way.

Far too often, we envision God as an angry master looking to punish his wayward servants. Though there are plenty of examples in human history of such relationships, this is entirely foreign to the nature of God and his relationship to his creation. Christ is the *Good* Shepherd, caring for his sheep out of compassion and concern, never duty or obligation. Mercy is not a momentary pause in an otherwise oppressive relationship. It is the steady, unshakable kindness of God showered upon those he loves.

We must remember that God loves us more than we know how to love ourselves. In fact, most of the pain or sorrow we encounter in life is rooted in failures of love, whether our own or of others around us. Yet God is never the source or cause of such brokenness. He is the solution whose wrath is poured out, not against his beloved, but against the forces of evil that stand between us and his unceasing mercy (Hab 3:2).

THURSDAY

Xs and Os



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 53:10-12; Hebrews 2:1-9

WHEN IT COMES TO SPEAKING TO GOD, the Psalms are a kind of playbook. They don't exhaust what you can say, but for millennia Jews and Christians have found they contain all the basic emotional and spiritual moves a human heart can make.

Like a playbook, the Psalms may also feel dense or repetitive at times. The brilliance and depth reveal themselves the more you put them to use—out on the field, you could say. The more you've "been there," the more the psalmists speak what you know and express your own most daring hopes, darkest questions, and liveliest joys in the heartbreaking life of God with his people. In fact, the Psalms often go beyond where we're willing or able to go. They increase our range.

Jesus prayed the Psalms. And as Israel's King, he also fully lived all that the Psalms express. We might especially imagine, late in Lent, how he inhabits these poems on the way to his betrayal and death.

Today we hear Jesus expressing divine and human dismay over how the servant of God is treated: dread, scorn, fear, and avoidance (v 11); forgetfulness and neglect (v 12); annoyance, anger, and hatred. In other words, from the breaking heart of Jesus, we also read in the Psalms a playbook of our sins towards others. Yes, we are pursued by enemies. But we also attempt to make ourselves enemies, including, as we will soon see, towards Jesus. We know this isn't the way the story ends. The Psalms themselves testify to that. But it may be good to sit, just for a moment, make ourselves the Os instead of the Xs, and ask, "Who is praying for deliverance from me?"

FRIDAY

Rooted



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 54:9-10; Hebrews 2:10-18



IN THE MIDDLE OF HIS PEOPLE'S SUFFERING, God reminds them of his promise never again to overwhelm the earth, not with water, anger, or rebuke. *Do you remember when I threw in my lot with you before?* God says. *I'm not taking it back!*

God's promises, like roots in fertile soil, only go down deeper over time. God's faithfulness is God's rootedness in our lives—his deep and unrepenting involvement in all of creation, from the tiniest plant or animal to the greatest saint. And as we walk through the Gospel with Jesus, we're watching this ancient promise about to be fulfilled.

In Jesus we see, and will see, these roots go deeper yet. In his Incarnation, there is no "taking it back." To become human was to fulfill Isaiah's words that his "steadfast love shall not depart" (54:10). Now we will see him make a new, even more powerful "covenant of peace" with creation. What will be the new altar, the new sacrifice, the new bright rainbow, now that God has permanently moved in with us?

In the book of Revelation, the throne of God is described with a rainbow around it, dazzling and green, greener than fresh shoots of life (4:3). This is a hint. God makes his promise. God will reconcile us with God. But what could it mean that, in St. John's vision, we see the color of earthly life in God's own bright eternity? Let us follow Jesus' steps carefully and see. As in all of God's covenants with humans, he humbly came to us. Now, is he leading us somewhere?

SATURDAY

Communion



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Psalm 31:9-16; Leviticus 23:1-8; Luke 22:1-13



GOD IS ABOUT TO MAKE A FRESH COVENANT. But this time, the signs will be hidden. They will be on display but obscured in dense and violent circumstances. They will be for everyone, but few will pick up on them in the moment, and no one (that we know of) will really understand, except in retrospect.

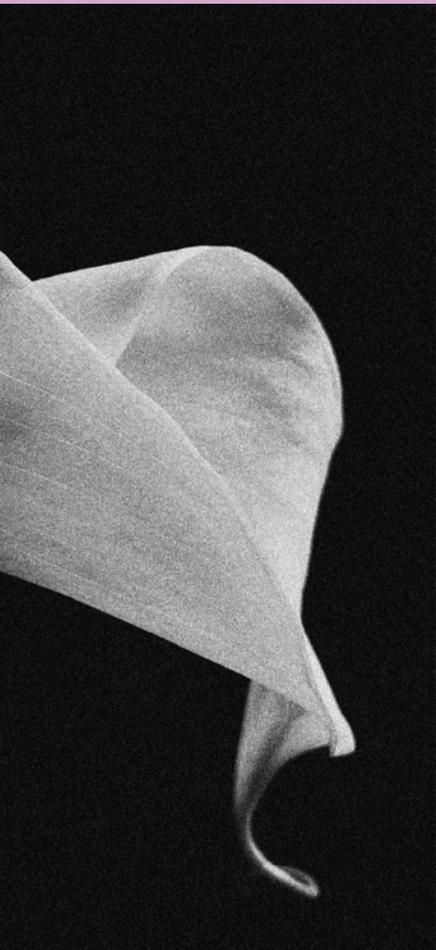
This is what it means for the Lord to dwell with us. For his law and promise to be written on our hearts, God goes down to the basement of human experience and quietly begins the renovations there. No fiery altar, no parting sea. Just another run-of-the-mill injustice, the kind of betrayal we've seen a thousand times. This will happen, and somehow it will be a great Passover of God.

Let's take a moment to notice how it begins. Far from leaving the ancient covenants behind, Jesus honors and embodies them. Like Noah's promise, this one begins with water. A man carries a jar of water—women's work. What could this be hinting at? And then a homeowner generously provides strangers with a beautiful furnished room. Like God with humanity in the garden, like Melchizedek with Abram, like Abraham and Sarah with the angels, this covenant is rooted in basic hospitality.

Nothing is completely clear yet, but in these hints, we sense Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob watching and listening. Along with the disciples, we have returned to familiar, ancient, and holy ground. Now more than ever, it is time to listen with them, to be still. In what we are not prepared to notice, God is at work.

*Holy
Week*





*¹⁴But I trust in you, Lord;
I say, "YOU ARE
MY GOD."*

*¹⁵My times are in your hands;
deliver me from the hands of
my enemies, from those who
pursue me. ¹⁶Let your face
shine on your servant; save me
in your unfailing love.*

PSALM 31: 14-16

PALM SUNDAY

Blessed Is the King

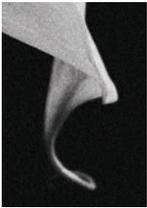


OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Liturgy of the Palms: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29;

Luke 19:28-40 Liturgy of the Passion: Isaiah 50:4-9a;

Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 22:14-23:56



FOR THE EARLY DISCIPLES, the words of Scripture animated their imaginations and oriented their praises. They allowed their hearts and minds to be formed by the Jewish Scriptures, not as a form of indifferent study or isolated interest, but to give meaning and purpose to the present realities of their daily lives. Knowledge of the promises and faithfulness of God in the past was central to their endurance in the present and hope for the future, and it is no different for us today.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, riding upon the back of a colt, he did so as King, the Righteous One of the Lord (Ps 118:20). And though his revolution was unlike anything they expected or even hoped for, in that moment, the disciples revered him with the honor and glory he deserved. With Psalm 118 upon their lips, they connected the ancient praises of God with the immediate reality of his presence, proclaiming, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Ps 118:26; Luke 19:38).

As we today begin our journey to Easter Sunday, we are invited afresh to soak our lives in the story of Scripture. Our Lenten journey has invited us to minimize distraction and silence the noise that competes for our attention at every turn. In doing so, our hearts are set free to be formed and shaped once again by the goodness and mercy of God revealed in his Word. With lives rooted in the holy words of Scripture, as we encounter the reality of God at work in our own world today, let us, like the Christians of old, “praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that [we have] seen” (Luke 19:37).

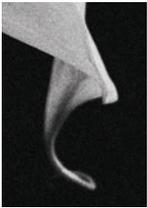
MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK

To Establish Justice



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 36:5-11; Hebrews 9:11-15; John 12:1-11



HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK OF JUSTICE as the goal of Jesus' ministry? And yet we hear that nothing less than his total self-gift ("He will not grow faint or be crushed/until he has established justice") is what brings it to pass, not only between the individual and God, but to every nation, and "in the earth" itself (Isa 42:4). Not a single far-flung island is forgotten.

Though our understanding and abilities are limited, we are also called throughout Scripture to pursue justice, especially for the poor. With contemporary politics and systems, this is often complicated—when has it not been?—but if this is the very shape of Christ's ministry, we are called in the strongest possible terms, by the cross itself, to make our attempt.

And yet it is the cross, the shape of Jesus' ministry, that is key. We may at times have to lift our voices when we pursue what is right. But Christ, who worked silently, will go before us this week and establish—lay the foundation for—whatever he calls us to do. In our clumsiness and sin, we may mishandle justice in the name of justice and damage some lives while we help others. But the creative Word of God, through whom all things were made, will make a way for us without breaking the weak, quenching the quiet, or neglecting any good. Though we might stumble along his path, it will be perfect. And he will help us, if we trust him, to fight with the wisdom of serpents and the innocence of doves.

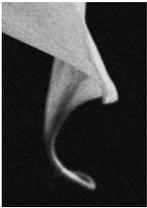
TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

Pay Attention



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36



ISAIAH ALERTS US TO THE ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE of this week. We are told to “pay attention” (Isa 49:1), to be attentive to the story of God that has been told since before time began, now reaching its ultimate climax as the world is drawn into a singular moment in Jerusalem’s history, one to which all of history points and from which all true significance and meaning emanates. This is the cosmic shape of history, as well as the path to personal fulfillment that each of us is invited to walk.

In an immediate sense, most of us reading these words are geographically distant from Jerusalem. We are the “coastlands” of Isaiah 49, the people far away from the historic homeland of God’s people. Yet, in a spiritual sense, many of us may likewise enter into Holy Week sensing a great distance between us and God, a chasm between where we are and where he invites us to be.

The hope of Holy Week is that the goodness of God comes to us in our weakness and frailty, shining as a light to far-flung nations and distant hearts. Each of us is invited to the foot of the cross and the empty tomb, there to find our true restoration (Isa 49:6).

If we can cultivate ears that hear and eyes that see, over the coming days we will remember together the story that animates and gives life to every individual hope and dream in each and every generation. God longs to find you in the margins, seat you at his table, and then send you out, healed and restored, to invite others to find the light that first found you.

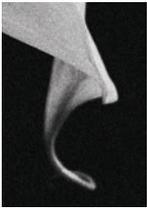
WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

Deliver Me



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:21-32



TODAY THE PSALMIST CRIES OUT FOR GOD to deliver him from those who have it in for him, who long to hurt and kill him. Christ knows that he will be betrayed. He is about to be handed over to those who have it in for him. And tomorrow night, he will pray a similar prayer: *Let this cup pass from me.*

Jesus dreads his death. He begs to be rescued. This can be easy to forget because we know the ending and because he accepts what he receives, when he is sure it is his to receive, in such astonishing quietness. But God has given us, and Jesus shares, a good, natural resistance to death, pain, and suffering. Who could feel the wrongs of death more than the one “through whom all things exist” (Heb 2:10)? Just as a Lenten fast is not about giving up something bad (which can be done anytime), but about temporarily setting aside something good and natural, so Jesus finishes laying down his life, including his ability to preserve and defend it, perfecting his obedience and letting the Father bring whatever result he will.

Rather than an embrace of destruction or a suicide mission, Christians throughout history have seen Christ’s Passion as medicine. In order to restore us to life, Jesus cries out, “O LORD, do not delay!” not only for himself but also on behalf of all of us. And the answer he receives is to be, for us, that very savior he cries for and to trust the Father, beyond all hope, to be his.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

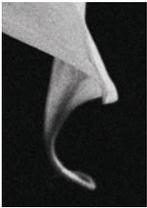
Keep the Feast



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19;

1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35



FOR THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, the Passover was both a singular moment of unrepeatable significance and an ever-present reality, giving meaning, order, and direction to their everyday lives. Its observance marked the beginning of their calendar and shaped every day that followed it (Exod 12:1-2). Just as the Lord rescued them in their time of great need, they were to remember that he continued to uphold and protect them, with every waking moment shaped and sustained by the mercy of God.

As our Lord Jesus gathered his closest friends and disciples to celebrate this meal, he pointed them to a new moment in their history that would supersede and transform their understanding of the depths of God's love and his desire to rescue his people. God himself, in the flesh, became the Passover Lamb, a new covenant in his very body and blood (1 Cor 11:24-25). And like the Passover of old, though the events of Holy Week are unrepeatable and lead to a singular moment of unrivaled redemption, their significance is no less real and immediate today than they were thousands of years ago.

On this day, and every day that we gather with the family of God to keep the feast (1 Cor 5:8), the transformative reality of God's humility, mercy, and love is made present to us. Remembrance is not simply a mental recollection of past events but is our entry into that great story of redemption in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. As we remember, we inhabit God's story of rescue and redemption, fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

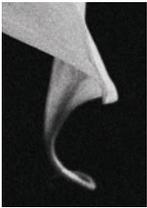
GOOD FRIDAY

Look Again



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25; John 18:1-19:42



THE LORD HAS MADE A NEW COVENANT. And it's like nothing we've ever seen. We don't yet know that this bloody execution, this injustice, this mangled relationship, has, like all other evil, been taken up, secretly yet certainly, into the purposes of God.

Let us allow ourselves to be puzzled, frightened, and disturbed. If Jesus was the Lamb, his was not a quick or careful killing—respectful to life, conscious of God—as a Passover lamb's would be. His was done by underpaid officers, pencil-pushers, traitors, and executioners trained to take it slow. Only those who loved him or felt sorry for him brought solemnity to the scene. Others were picking their fingernails, passing by, poking fun, glad it wasn't them. Flies gathered. This is no holy sacrifice we've ever seen. And anyway, lamb's blood has to be taken to the Holy of Holies to complete a sacrifice. Now there's no one to do it. God-with-us simply isn't.

Hebrews says, *look again*.

For 33 years Jesus gave himself, a fragrant offering to the Father. When we hated that living sacrifice, which reminded us of our sin, of the closeness with the Father we lacked, we killed it. We twisted it to the cross, into the image of our own brokenness.

But this victim was also Master. By giving over control, by dying, he drew everything we threw on him into the life of God. Our ancient ritual of passing off blame, living by killing, has died with him. And now how will we be saved? The answer now lies hidden, the Great High Priest having gone behind the curtain. Easter is coming, but for two days, we must learn patient hope, waiting in the mystery, the silence and emptiness of the Friday we call "good."

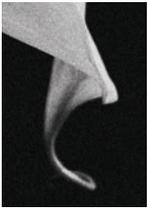
HOLY SATURDAY

The Final Word



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Job 14:1-14; Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16; 1 Peter 4:1-8; Matthew 27:57-66



IN COUNTLESS WAYS, we rush through life, quickly moving from one event to the next, rarely pausing long enough to allow the full significance and weight of the moment to sink into our hearts and minds. As we journey through Holy Week, arriving today at Holy Saturday, we must be keenly aware of this temptation. It is easy to collapse the time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday and rush immediately from the cross to the empty tomb, failing to see the invitation before us to wait in the silence and stillness of this day.

Holy Saturday invites us into a place of tension and is, in many ways, a picture of our entire life with God. We live between the agony of the cross and the hope of resurrection. New life is promised to us through the victory of God in Jesus, yet we feel the weight of the world and the agony of sin every day. As we see today in Job 14, though there is hope that new life will sprout again, we are so often aware that our world is like a tree cut down and in need of restoration and regrowth (Job 14:7).

Resist the urge to resolve this tension. In so many ways, growth into the likeness of Christ is found in the space in-between, the days in which agony and hope intermingle and co-exist in the everyday realities of life. It is here, with Christ on Holy Saturday, that we bring our fears and doubts, as well as our hopes and dreams, trusting that we are a part of a story in which death is defeated and life has the final word.

Easter





¹⁴The Lord is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.

¹⁵Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: "The Lord's right hand has done MIGHTY THINGS!"

PSALM 118: 14-15

EASTER SUNDAY

A Little Ahead



OPEN DWELL AND LISTEN TO

Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; Luke 24:1-12



EMPTIED OF DIVINE PRIVILEGE, made perfect, the Son has shown us what the whole Trinity is willing to do, who he is, and the logic by which all of creation was made: self-gift. Now the Father, as he has always done, gives to the Son. He gives him the feast of his life back, overflowing, after the long fast of obedience in a human life under the power of death. All things are placed in his carpenter's hands. *Christ is risen!*

What was forged on the cross emerges with Christ from the tomb: creaturely life, mortal life, set free into the life of the Son of God—every human, every son of Adam, every daughter of Eve. In him, we are saved.

Now, in the course of Eastertide, Pentecost, and the long season of Ordinary Time, we will celebrate what the ancient Church calls *theosis*: following Jesus out of slavery to sin and death and into this new world. Walking through the door he opened. In our wake, every animal, bird, fish, blade of grass, all the hosts of heaven—"the whole creation"—groans for the completion of this joy (Rom 8:22).

This means, in part, to go the way the women went that first morning, heads spinning, hearts hoping painfully, not yet in the manifest presence of the One who has gone a little way ahead. As we follow, we must go the way he went: through obedience, self-gift, the cross and tomb and their silent mysteries. He has yet to show us every step we must take. But today we celebrate. How can we fast when the Bridegroom is with us? The lights are lit. The music has begun. The feast is prepared. *Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast!*

Endnotes



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Prayers taken from *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the Episcopal Church*. New York: Seabury Press, 1979.

*"I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?'
if I can answer the prior question
'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"*

- ALASDAIR MACINTYRE

WHAT STORIES DO YOU INHABIT?

This is one of the most significant questions anyone can ask. Do you have clarity on the values, convictions, and beliefs that animate your actions and inspire your imagination? Are you attentive to the ways in which these stories of meaning and purpose shape and form your deepest desires?

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