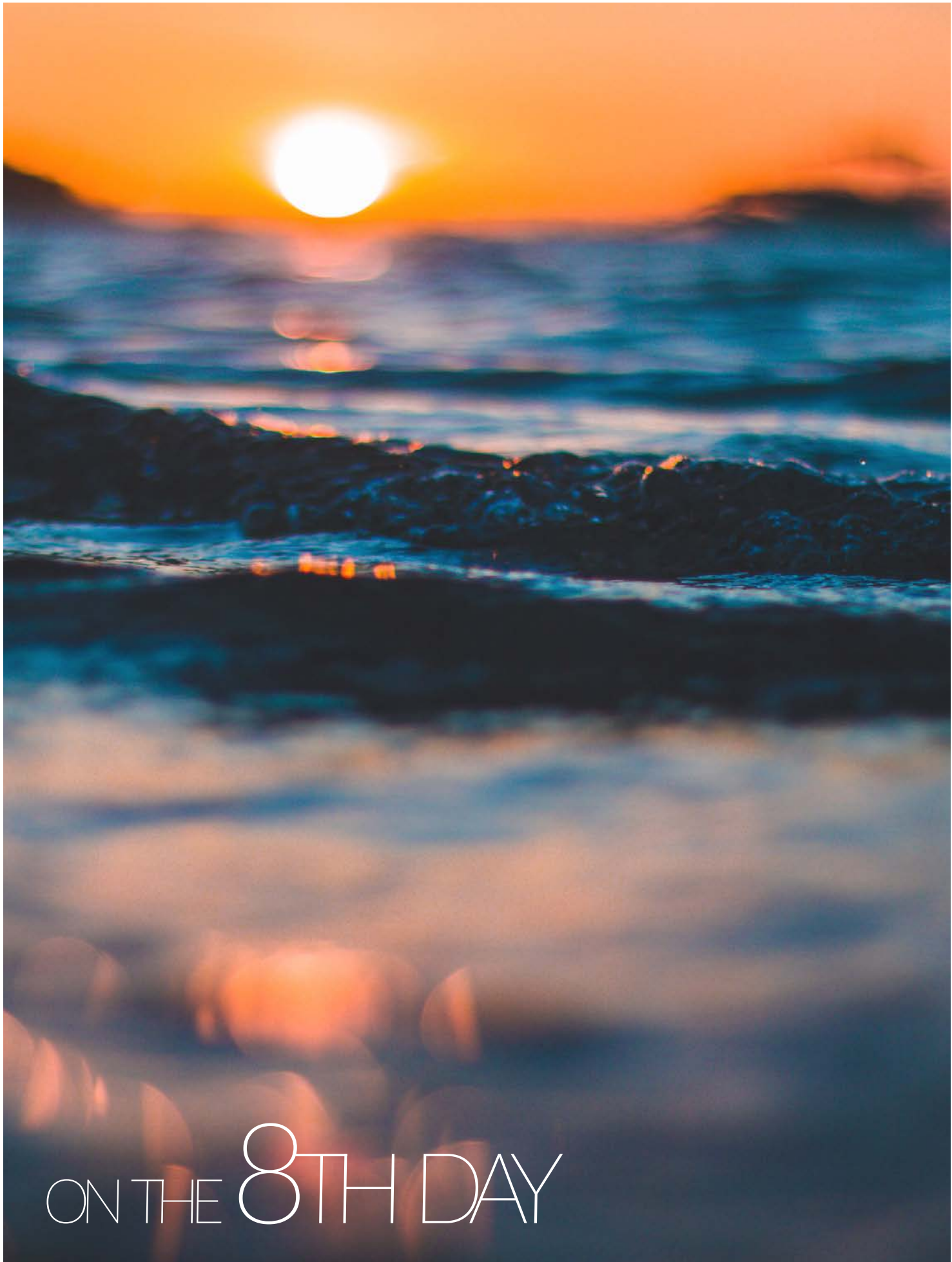


2021 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



ON THE 8TH DAY

FROM 8@8 AND THE AMERICAN ANGLICAN COUNCIL



ABOUT 8@8

8@8 IS A PRACTICE OF SCRIPTURE-INFORMED PRAYER AT 8PM FOR 8 MINUTES EVERY DAY

8@8 exists to encourage believers around the world to discover the richness of a personal and global rhythm of prayer. Each day, we post a call to prayer on our website and send it out through our email newsletter and Facebook group to thousands of people around the world. This Lenten devotional reflects these previous posts. Each daily call to prayer contemplates a scripture passage from the Anglican lectionary, asks the reader to pray, and then offers a closing prayer. All scriptures are taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

We are a ministry affiliated with the American Anglican Council and are born out of a vision of Christian unity, fervent prayer, and a sacramental vision of our life in Jesus Christ. 8@8 is an initiative open to Christians of all traditions from all around the globe who are seeking God's kingdom in prayer for the world.

Our hope is that the Lord will add praying people from all nations and from all Christian traditions to all twenty-four of the 8:00 pm time slots around the world. We long to see people everywhere turn to Jesus Christ, our only hope. May God, through his grace and mercy, use this endeavor as a tool to unify us as his people and to speak his love to our world. Please join us. For more information on this initiative, please visit www.8at8pm.org.





American Anglican Council

Developing. Equipping. Reforming.

ABOUT THE AAC

The American Anglican Council (AAC) is a network of individuals, parishes, and ministries who affirm biblical authority and Christian orthodoxy within the Anglican Communion. Since 1996 we have sought to uphold biblical faithfulness by maintaining a strong prophetic voice in order to call leaders to action for the pursuit of truth within the Church and integrity among her people, hoping in the transforming power of prayer. The mission of the AAC is to build up and defend Great Commission Anglicanism throughout the world by developing leaders, equipping local congregations, and always reforming the Church. Our goal is to help leaders of local, regional, and national Anglican churches and provinces remain faithful to their biblical and apostolic roots, and together, to fulfill Christ's Great Commission in the world. We also seek work with non-Anglican leaders, ministries, and churches to foster greater connections for Gospel ministry across denominational lines.

Our priorities are to develop faithful leaders through training programs and clergy care groups; equip local churches by providing church growth and revitalization resources; counsel and defend Anglicans and Anglican churches in legal and financial distress; grow a unified voice among global orthodox Anglicans based on Anglican essentials; and encourage ministries, programs, and projects that teach and affirm biblical orthodoxy.

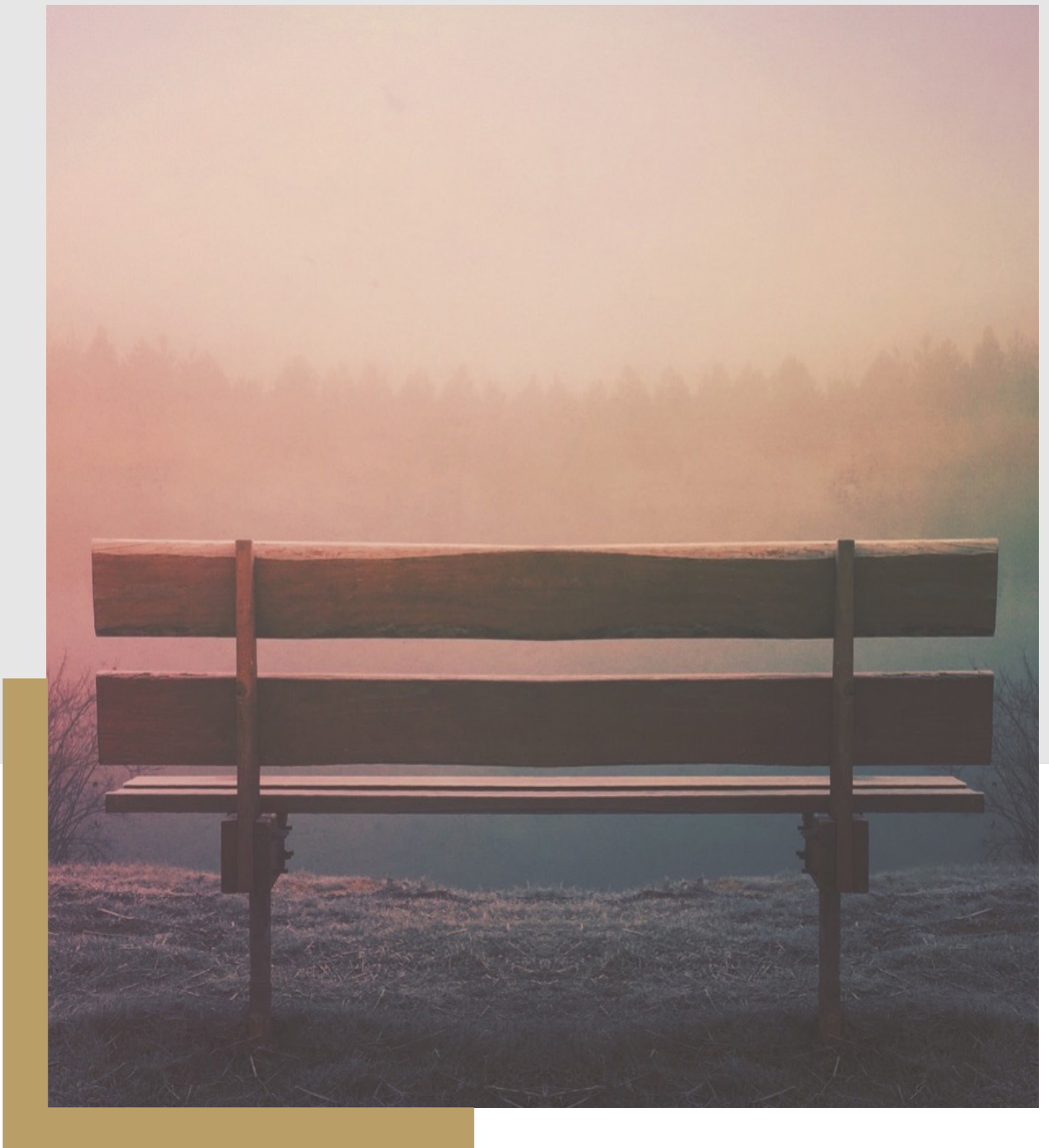
For more information on the American Anglican Council and how you can get involved in helping to strengthen Great Commission Anglican churches, please visit www.americananglican.org.



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ISAIAH 30:15-18

For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel,
“In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.”
But you were unwilling, and you said,
“No! We will flee upon horses”;
therefore you shall flee away;
and, “We will ride upon swift steeds”;
therefore your pursuers shall be swift.
A thousand shall flee at the threat of one;
at the threat of five you shall flee,
till you are left
like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain,

like a signal on a hill.
Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you,
and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.
For the Lord is a God of justice;
blessed are all those who wait for him.

ASH WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 17



Brief Reflection

It's Ash Wednesday, the day that begins the season of Lent and prepares Christian people for Easter. Since its beginnings the church has observed Lent. By the end of the fourth century, Lent had become an established six weeks where believers entered into fasting, prayers and repentance.

This year, Ash Wednesday is a good day to pause and ask ourselves if we really believe we can solve the crises that keep rolling over our world. Do we believe we are good enough, right enough, and strong enough?

At an Ash Wednesday service, as the minister makes the sign of the cross on someone's forehead, the minister says, "You are ashes and to ashes you will return." What a needed reminder for us!

For far too long, we have believed we could solve our own problems. Israel faced the overwhelming Assyrians in the day of King Hezekiah, and many of them were convinced that the only safety was to turn to Egypt for help. Egypt. The very place God had told them not to turn. But in the midst of their stubborn fear and belief that they could find their own solutions, God continued to offer himself—"Do you realize I long to be gracious to you? To show you mercy? Pause and listen for my love."

Can we solve the strife and fears

that run rampant in our world? Can we expect our leaders to follow the course we think is godly and wise? Can we build a fortress strong enough to protect our health, our economy, or the life we have constructed?

Ash Wednesday offers us an opportunity to accept the reality that we are not self-sufficient. Ash Wednesday is an opportunity to listen.

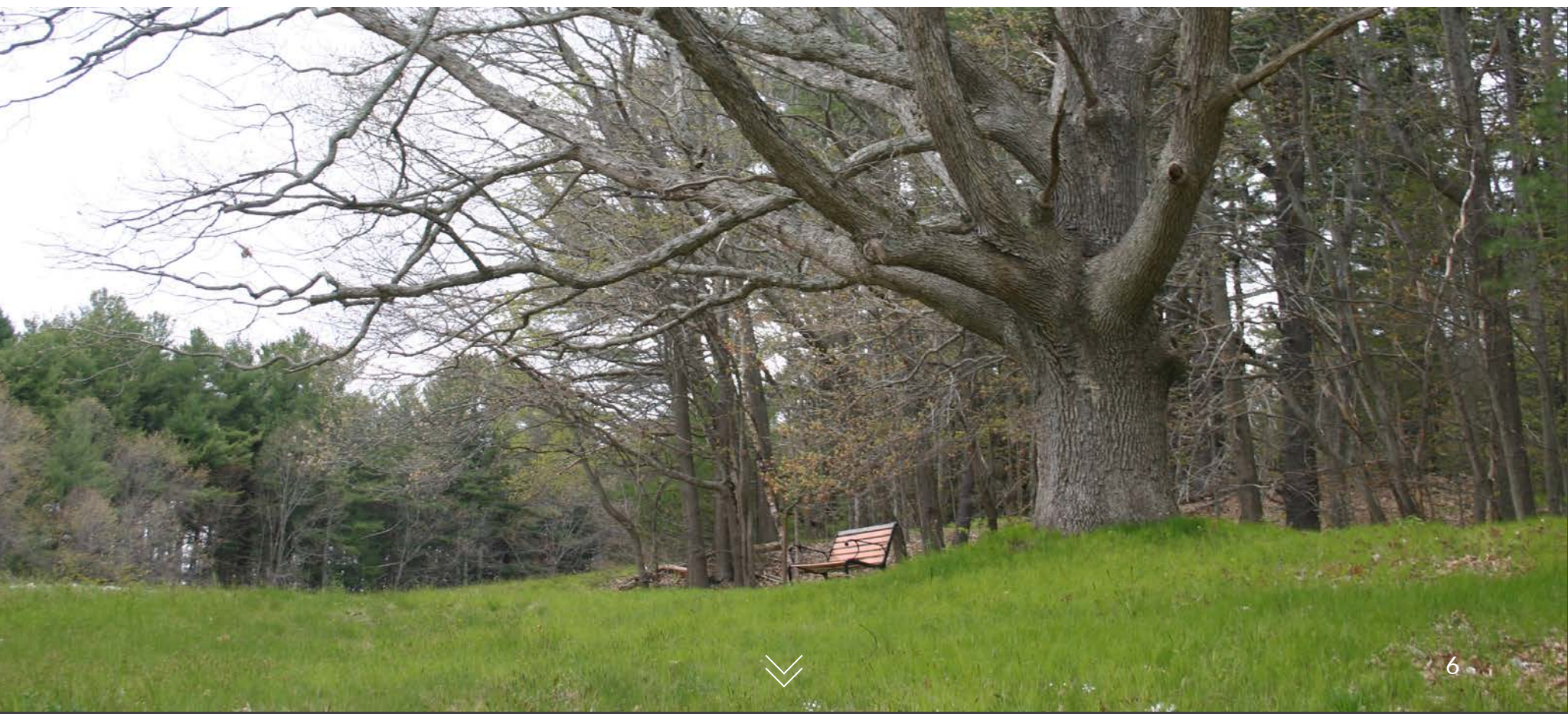
Do you hear the invitation from God? He longs to show you mercy.

As you pray tonight, tell yourself the truth about the things you so often trust instead of the Lord. Ask God for his forgiveness. Then pray you will learn—more deeply than you ever have before—how much God loves you. You can trust him.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Show favor to your people, O Lord, who turn to you in weeping, fasting, and prayer. For you are a merciful God, full of compassion, long-suffering, and abounding in steadfast love. You spare when we deserve punishment, and in your wrath, remember mercy. Spare your people, good Lord, spare us; in the multitude of your mercies, look upon us and forgive us; through the merits and mediation of your blessed Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Anglican Church in North America Book of Common Prayer)

Spare your people,
good Lord, spare us; in
the multitude of your
mercies, look upon us
and forgive...



THURSDAY
FEBRUARY 18



PSALM 126

**When the Lord returned the captives of
Zion,
we were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,
“The Lord has done great things for
them.”**

**The Lord has done great things for us;
we are glad.
Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like streams in the Negeb!
Those who sow in tears
shall reap with shouts of joy!
He who goes out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.**



Brief Reflection

Bracket aside your circumstances and enter the world of this psalm. God's people are on a journey. They have left their homes. Rich and poor are all walking together for days, slowly ascending to the temple of the Lord.

And then, midway through, others approach the group, stragglers who look to be from a foreign land. They regard one another, and then there are looks of recognition. Cries break out: "Look! Our friends are returning to us!" No one thought this was possible.

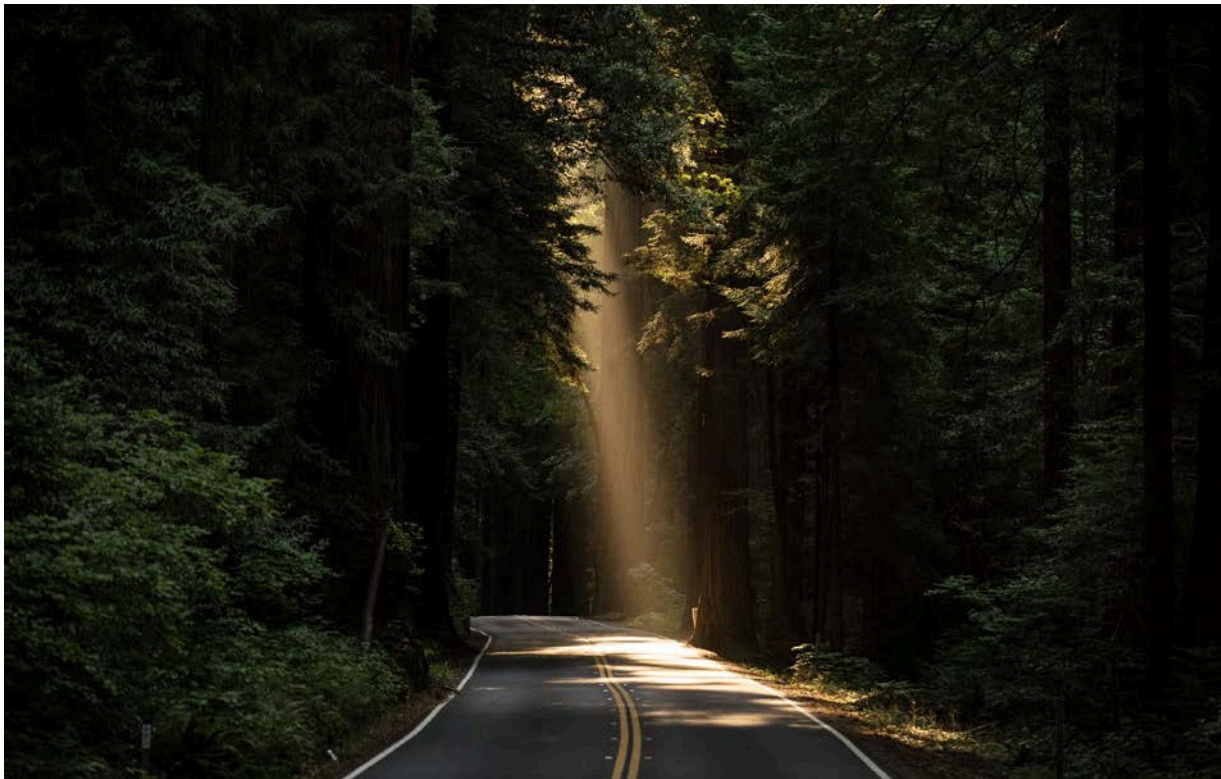
Israel had been fractured, and a large portion was carried away and forced into exile. They were never to be seen again. But here they are! They have a future now, thanks to our great God.

Return to the psalm and read it once more. Let yourself be there. Like streams in the desert, so runs the grace of our God. His salvation is known and experienced as we taste his grace together. We are exiles being welcomed home.

You may pray this psalm through tears tonight. You have real pain--intractable injustice, the loss of work, hopeless toil against an invisible enemy, dashed hopes, private griefs, the thwarting of all your best intentions and faithful stewardship. But God will have the final victory. For now, that moment of victory may feel like a far-off dream. But one day, your present pain will recede beyond the horizon and will linger only as a scar, a travail that the Lord carried you through.

Who are you separated from tonight?

Who has been swept away by the awful work of sin, struck by oppression and misfortune? Pray that the Lord's grace will find them and bring them to a home where his justice reigns. Who has been carried away by the enemy, but has forgotten their way home--the deluded and hopeless? Pray for their forgiveness and repentance and



salvation. And in the midst of all this, pray that you will have a heart big enough to receive all exiles in love and joy. Pray that you will have the heart of Christ.

Recommended Closing Prayer

O Lord, may your justice, grace, and peace prevail in our hearts and reign in our world. Shield us from the attacks of the evil one, and grant us courage and hope this evening. Thank you that the victory of your cross never fades and always guarantees our future. Give us real friends to help us endure until your glory comes in full. Amen.

the victory of
your cross never
fades and always
guarantees our
future...



PSALM 127

Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.
It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.
Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,
the fruit of the womb a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children of one's youth.

Blessed is the man
who fills his quiver with them!
He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 19



Brief Reflection

In vain, in vain, in vain. This phrase is repeated three times in these first two verses. Is there anything that can prevent our lives from being lived in vain?

You've seen enough of vanity lately. The fires rage, and the sick cry out. Our physical effort, strategic planning, careful hiring, best intentions and emotional investment—none of that guarantees much of anything. Even works done for God suffer the same fate when they aren't done by God. David and Solomon, writers of our psalms, were great builders, but the works of their hands were dashed and broken.

But notice: this psalm turns from vanity to progeny, the blessed fruit of the love of husband and wife. The fruit of our lives will be our children, including the people we have nurtured and cared for in love, prayer, and service. And the fruit of David and Solomon would not bring shame to their house for through their line came Jesus, son of David (Matthew 1:1).

Jesus, son of David, was a master builder, though he built no citadels, temples, or palaces. He left no children behind, and yet his descendants outnumber the stars in the sky. He took in strangers and made them children of God by his victory on the cross, bestowing life without end.

Jesus will labor through us now,

bringing life to our friends, neighbors, and enemies, reconciling all things unto himself. Even though time seems to mock us and our best intentions may never add up to much, we can join in the eternally significant and sure work of building up the children of God in the name of Jesus Christ. And yes, these children will need homes, schools, churches, and statehouses. But the people with bodies and immortal souls who fill and grow in them will be our legacy, not the monuments we leave behind.

Pray now and draw near to God's eternal temple. You are standing on a foundation that will never fade, built on the cornerstone of Christ. Jesus is expecting you, offering his blood so that you may enter this holy place. Will you allow him to welcome you and anoint you with his favor, blessing you as a child of God? Ask him for the courage to keep working even when you can't see fruit, trusting him and his will. Intercede for your parents, relatives, friends, and for this world. Ask him what you should do next.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Father God, only you can build what lasts forever. Help me show up as your servant, day by day in the life you have given me. Use my life to build what you desire. Grant me peace when my hard work fails, grant me faith to pour into your people, and grant me the true hope of eternal life with you and your blood-bought church. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

only you can build
what lasts forever...



SATURDAY
FEBRUARY 20



● PSALM 128

Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord,
who walks in his ways!
You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your
hands;
you shall be blessed, and it shall be well
with you.
Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;

your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.
Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the Lord.
The Lord bless you from Zion!
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life!
May you see your children's children!
Peace be upon Israel!



Brief Reflection

This psalm is a proclamation of blessing: The one who fears the Lord enjoys satisfying labor, family dinners, and a prosperous city. It feels so simple—uninterrupted by tragedy, unbroken by idolatry, uncluttered by random commitments.

Maybe you feel like this prayer is a fantasy or a distraction. Read the psalm again. Doesn't it make you long to live in the land where God is king?

Here, then, is the best news you will hear today. Our king has come, and you can dwell in his kingdom. Jesus offered a way to eat at God's table, to have children, and to lay up treasure in a place where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves cannot break in and steal.

Jesus had many ways of describing the kingdom, a reality that you could begin to know here and now, something that is growing in strength and power with the movement of the Holy Spirit.

You likely have had moments where you have encountered this kingdom, and you wish it were here in full. Reconsider your last week. Has there been a moment in it where you realized God is king? One day the king and his kingdom will be here in fullness.

Reading this psalm's blessing tonight should lead us to mourn the sin that has ravaged this world. At the same time, it calls us to begin dwelling with God in this very moment. Even now, we can receive our daily bread from the Lord. Even now, we can enjoy the slow growth of the Holy Spirit's presence. Even now, we can seek to see God's kingdom rule take hold as we respond to the circumstances of today with the heart of Christ.

Is he your king?

As you pray tonight, speak aloud your allegiance to the king of heaven



and earth. Commit your own life to his rule and reign. Ask that his kingdom would come in fullness. Be specific about what will need to change in this world and above all in your heart as this happens. Praise the Lord and rest in the confidence that he who raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in thy well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

(Anglican Church in North America Book of Common Prayer)

Mercifully grant
that the peoples
of the earth,
divided and
enslaved by sin,
may be freed...

THE FIRST WEEK
OF LENT

1



**Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth” —
let Israel now say —
“Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth,
yet they have not prevailed against me.**





PSALM 129

“Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth”—
let Israel now say—
“Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth,
yet they have not prevailed against me.
The plowers plowed upon my back;
they made long their furrows.”
The Lord is righteous;
he has cut the cords of the wicked.
May all who hate Zion
be put to shame and turned backward!
Let them be like the grass on the housetops,
which withers before it grows up,

with which the reaper does not fill his hand
nor the binder of sheaves his arms,
nor do those who pass by say,
“The blessing of the Lord be upon you!
We bless you in the name of the Lord!”

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 21



Brief Reflection

How do we pray against the evil that has gripped our land, our neighbors, and ourselves?

As this psalm begins, the pot is boiling over. For too long the unjust have afflicted Israel. So let Israel now say...

And then the psalm speaks through us with little for us to add and in images that make us recoil. "The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows."

For some of us, it is hard to know who we are to pray this psalm about. We don't really have enemies so much as people we wish didn't exist. But for the marginalized and discarded, the images of being furrowed strike close to home; their oppressors have faces. This psalm encourages us to identify with the least of these and to have their enemies become ours.

It is possible to have complicated feelings toward someone—to desire both their shame and their salvation. "May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward!" The curses contained in this psalm rain down upon evil, seeking to wash it away. These are prayers that God's mighty Spirit would excise injustice, burn away the dross, and unflinchingly restore the glorious image that sin has almost completely obscured. In asking for justice against evil doers, the psalmist is in fact seeking their good.

The center of this psalm is the key: "The Lord is righteous." The pilgrims who pray this psalm don't seek vigilante justice. They turn to the Lord, trusting his hand to hold the surgical knife and his timing to do so only when it is necessary. It is the Lord who will act against the unrighteous.

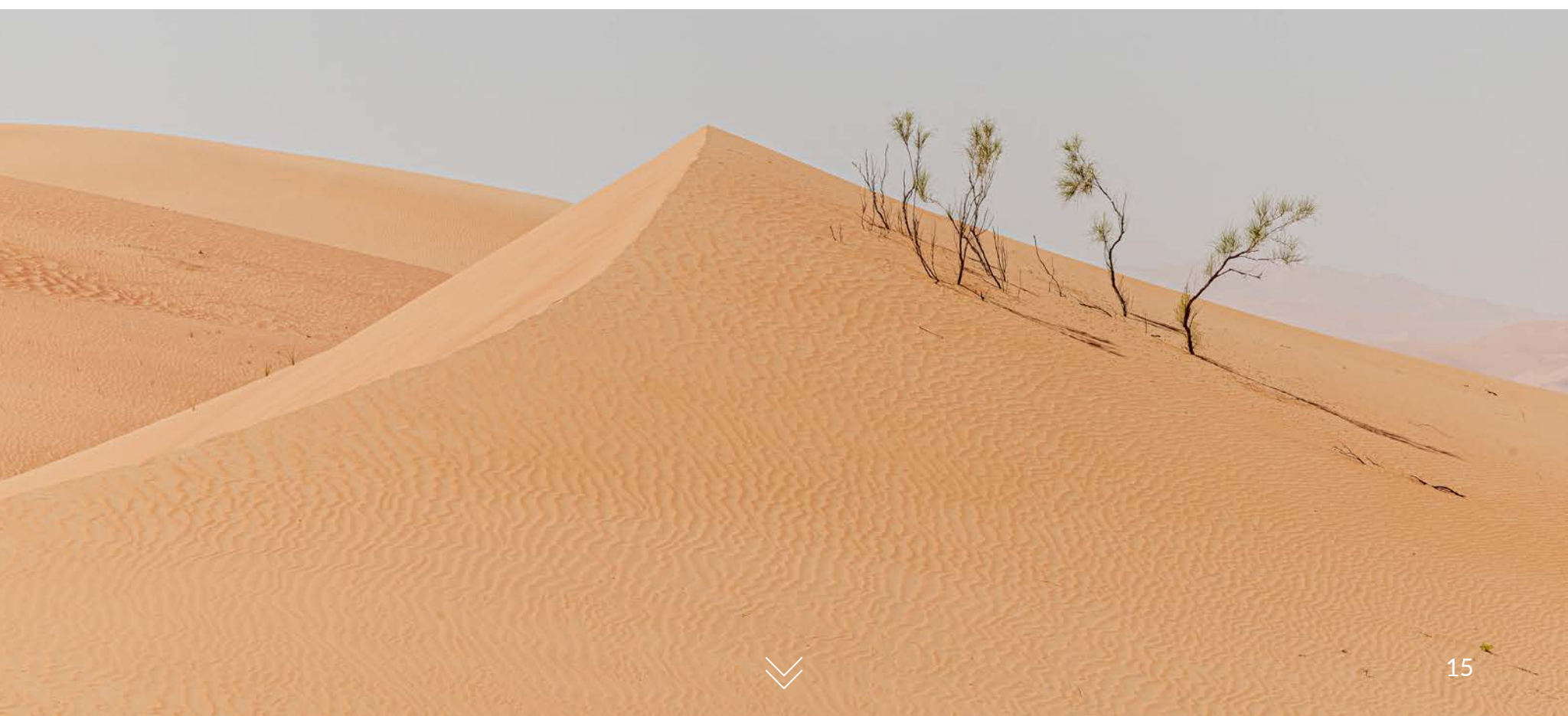
We must receive this psalm within the full context of scripture to understand how to pray it. "God desires that all should be saved and come to knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4). How does this salvation break in? Christ does not come with half-hearted blessings for the unjust and unrepentant. It is a great gift to be turned around when your every step carries you further from God. And so, we pray for the salvation of all with the words, "Repent and believe the gospel!" (Mark 1:15).

If you don't trust yourself to pray against enemies, simply pray the words of this psalm tonight. If you have enemies in mind, seek their strong repentance, knowing that for them to repent, God will intervene with his inbreaking justice. Be aware that as you do this, you are also praying for God to operate on your own heart. Offer yourself to him and trust that he will bring his good work to completion. Ask him to bring to mind people to whom you need to apologize or steps you need to take to bring your life more completely into his kingdom reality.

We pray that saving
knowledge of you
would fill the earth as
waters cover the sea...

Recommended Closing Prayer

Oh God, we pray that your justice would reign. We pray that your will would be accomplished. We pray that saving knowledge of you would fill the earth as waters cover the sea. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.



MONDAY
FEBRUARY 22



PSALM 130

**Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!
O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!
If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;**

**my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.**



Brief Reflection

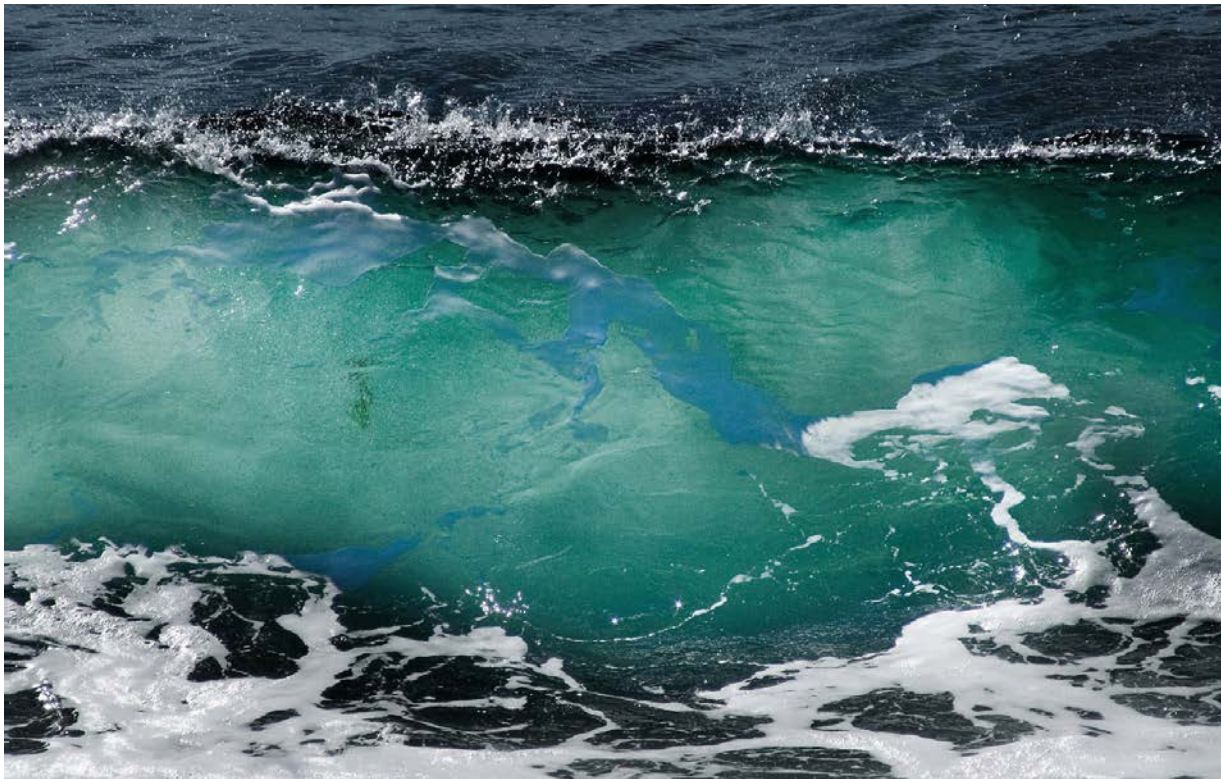
The ascent is long, and the road has taken turns we would not have anticipated. Now we enter the last difficult upward portion of these Psalms of Ascent, the moment before God's temple comes into view. But having walked the dusty roads and prayed the soul-searching prayers, we are plunged into the depths again.

Surrounded, where do we turn when our strength is failing? We remember our Lord and we cry out to him. We turn to him in our exhaustion. We come to him in our hunger. We flee to him for shelter from evil. We ask him for mercy. The forgiveness we know in God is the first of his blessings toward us, a first fruit of the redemption of the whole cosmos.

In the second half of this psalm, the psalmist longs for God's redemption to be fully known. The last two stanzas are anthems to patience, the songs of someone hewn in the image of Christ, who longs for daily bread and for God's kingdom.

The psalmist is aware of hunger and longing, but instead of reaching for a quick fix or instant gratification, he directs his attention to the Lord. "I wait for the Lord...my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning." A night watchman is on guard at all times in case of attack, but the watchman's longing is that daylight will come without any evil occurring. Tonight, you can pray with eager expectation, tilting toward the east and waiting for the dawn that will be visible any second now.

What depths do you call out from tonight? Acknowledge them and ask God for mercy. God has redeemed Israel. Ask that God's just reign would extend over the whole cosmos. God's dawn is coming, and he will not disappoint. Ask that your life would reflect the resurrection of Jesus and give cause for others to hope in him. Encourage your own soul to hope in the Lord.



Recommended Closing Prayer

The Song of Simeon:

Lord, you now have set your servant free
to go in peace as you have promised;
For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior,
whom you have prepared for all the world to see:
A Light to enlighten the nations,
and the glory of your people Israel.
Amen.

these eyes of
mine have seen
the Savior...



PSALM 131



**O Lord, my heart is not lifted up;
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child is my soul within me.
O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time forth and forevermore.**

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 23



Brief Reflection

After a long journey upward, at last we have passed through the gates of Jerusalem. The reality outside the walls of the city fades to secondary importance. Drawn inward toward the temple, we find ourselves approaching the Holy One of Israel.

To approach the Lord in his temple, worshippers brought sacrifices that they offered to the priest. The pinnacle of all such sacrifices was humility, as Psalm 51:17 teaches, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”

This short psalm captures the essence of the sacrifice God will not despise—the humility of a worshipper of the Lord. “My heart is not lifted up.” The person praying it is not asking (as several of Jesus’ disciples did) whether they can be the greatest in the kingdom. “My eyes are not raised too high.” The psalmist does not demand to first know the mysteries of the universe or God’s exact plan for righting the wrongs of the world. This encounter with God is rooted in humble dependence and leads to quiet intimacy and praise.

A unique and beautiful image captures the moment. “I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother.” The child reclining against her mother no longer requires milk, yet she clings to her mother in

joy, basking in her continued protection and nurturing.

Tonight as you pray, ask for this posture of humble joy in the presence of your Lord. Quiet your heart, don’t clamor for material blessings or high positions of authority, and rest securely in him. Thank God that his presence is all that we need, and ask him for the gift of hoping only in him.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Father, give me a calmed and quieted soul before you. Let my heart not be lifted up or my eyes raised too high. Grant me contentment and hope in your presence, from this time forth and forevermore. Amen.

Let my heart not be
lifted up or my eyes
raised too high. Grant
me contentment...



WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 24

PSALM 132

Remember, O Lord, in David's favor,
all the hardships he endured,
how he swore to the Lord
and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
"I will not enter my house
or get into my bed,
I will not give sleep to my eyes
or slumber to my eyelids,
until I find a place for the Lord,
a dwelling place for the Mighty One of
Jacob."

Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah;
we found it in the fields of Jaar.
"Let us go to his dwelling place;
let us worship at his footstool!"

Arise, O Lord, and go to your resting
place,

you and the ark of your might.
Let your priests be clothed with
righteousness,
and let your saints shout for joy.
For the sake of your servant David,
do not turn away the face of your
anointed one.

The Lord swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:
"One of the sons of your body

I will set on your throne.
If your sons keep my covenant
and my testimonies that I shall teach
them,
their sons also forever
shall sit on your throne."

For the Lord has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his dwelling place:

"This is my resting place forever;
here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
I will abundantly bless her provisions;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.

Her priests I will clothe with salvation,
and her saints will shout for joy.

There I will make a horn to sprout for
David;

I have prepared a lamp for my
anointed.

His enemies I will clothe with shame,
but on him his crown will shine."



Brief Reflection

This psalm captures the moment of our ascent when we enter the temple, the dwelling place of God. The Lord has accepted the sacrifice of righteousness that was the accomplished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We have taken on his humility (Psalm 131). Now we dare venture in.

Praying tonight's psalm aligns us with David as he dwells on the significance of the temple.

And what is the centerpiece of this psalm?

More than David's heart for God and for God's temple, Psalm 132 captures the Lord's heart for Zion and for the people of Zion. It reveals God's intentions for his kingdom rule on this earth. The throne of Zion is the temple, God's dwelling place among men.

The temple was much more than an edifice of blocks or the best place to experience song, incense or mystical symbols. It was the focal point of God's promises and the physical manifestation of God's unshakable intention to draw our story to an end where heaven meets earth. Standing at the temple as we make our ascent, we are overwhelmed by God's abiding love and goodwill toward us. We are unworthy, yet we are truly blessed.

Have you forgotten God's promises for you? Pray these verses aloud tonight. God spoke them prophetically over his Son, and as you participate in Christ, they are promises for you as well. Praise him and thank him.

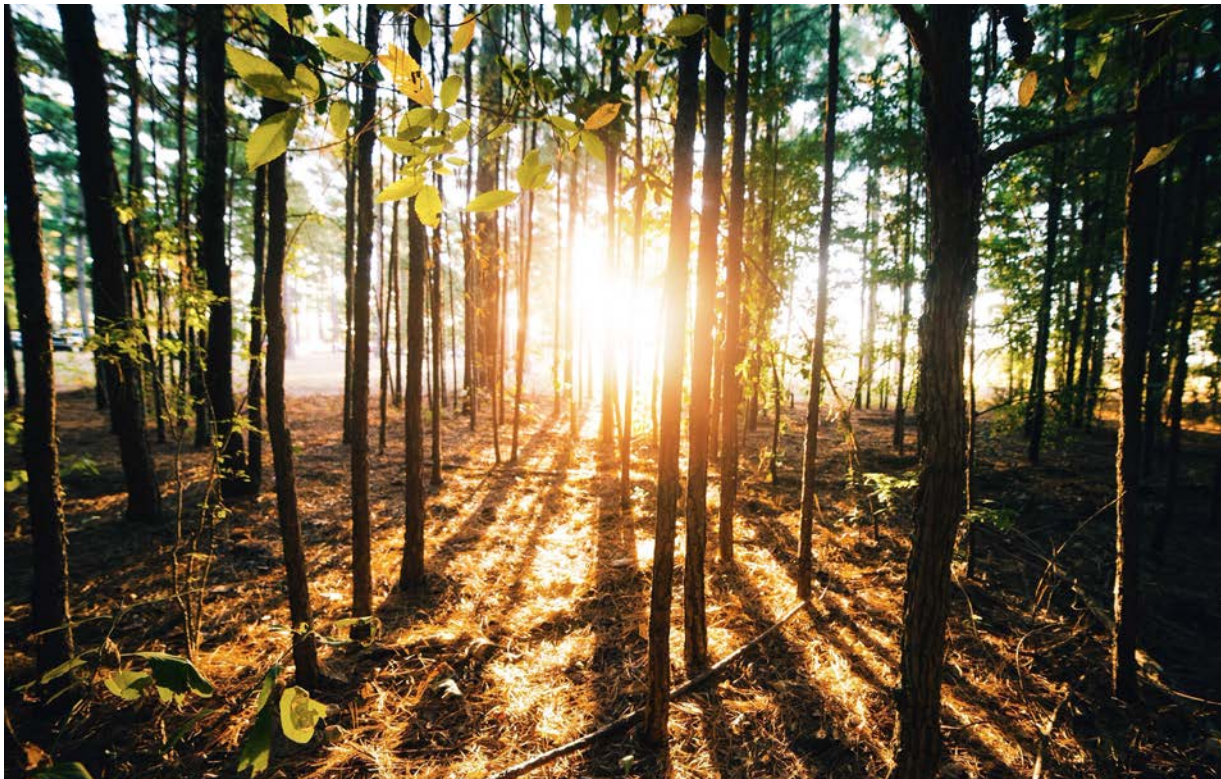
Recommended Closing Prayer

The Song of Zechariah:

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty savior, born of the house of his servant David. Through his holy prophets he promised of old,

that he would save us from our



enemies,

from the hands of all who hate us.

He promised to show mercy to our fathers

and to remember his holy covenant.

In the tender compassion of our God

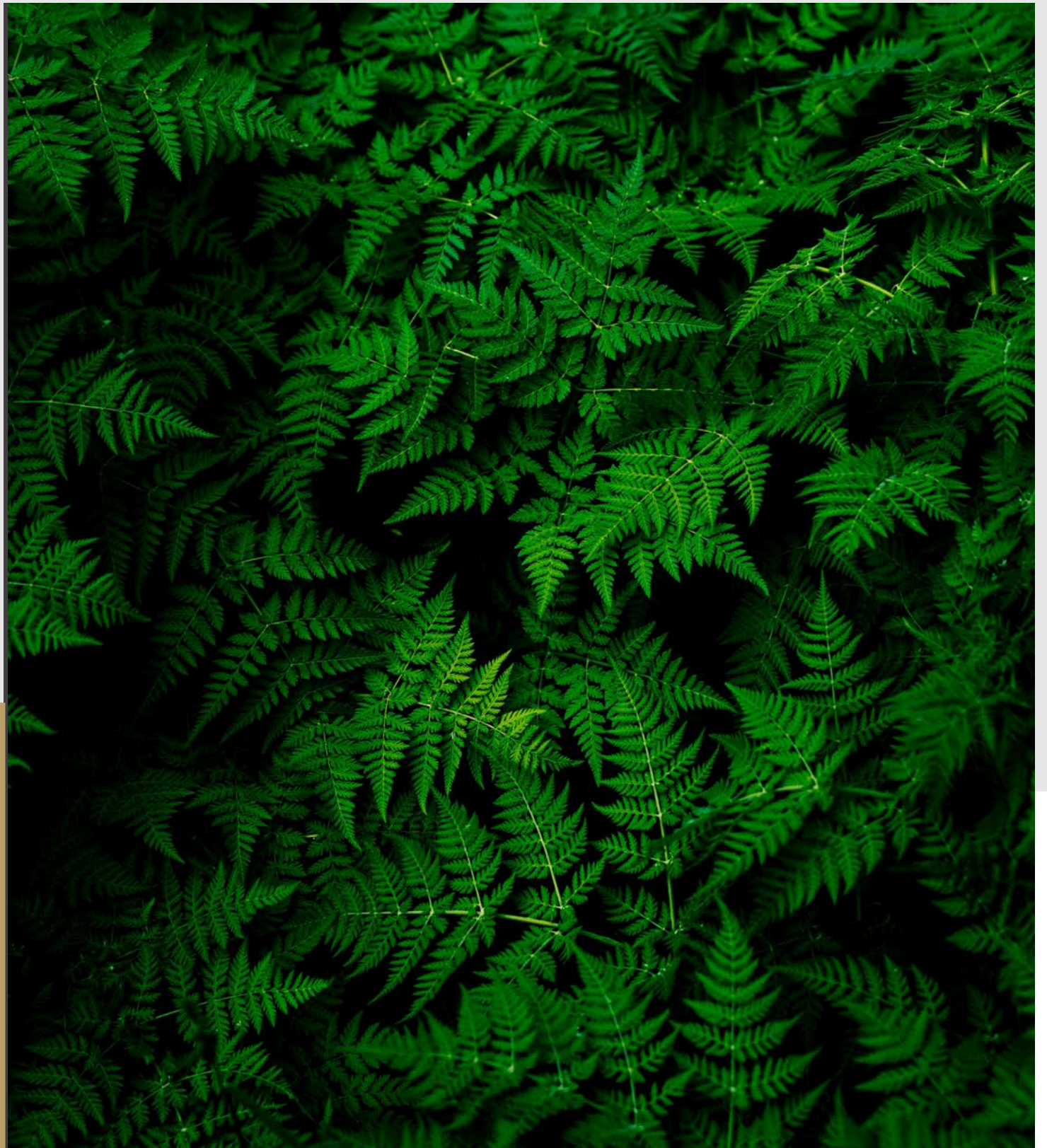
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,

and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Amen.

In the tender
compassion of our God
the dawn from on high
shall break upon us,
To shine on those who
dwell in darkness...



PSALM 133



Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!
It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 25



Brief Reflection

The words good, pleasant and unity might not be on your lips these days. You may have spent days, weeks and months with family members, room-mates or friends. Close quarters with others for an extended time can lead to raw nerves, short tempers, and even acrimony.

Tragically, we cannot use words like good, pleasant and unified to describe how people are getting along in our world. Our society, our churches, our workplaces, and our families are fractured by disagreements. We are perhaps more divided today than ever before in human history.

In Psalm 133, the psalmist says, "Behold!" Pay attention! It is both good and pleasant when people in the family get along. This psalm is a word for the people of God. Only in God is real unity possible; it is where it must begin.

But we know this isn't simple or easy. The battle between evil and good, in us and all around us, started in the garden. In the shade of a tree, God's first children severed their relationship with their Creator in a power grab for knowledge they were not intended to possess. Broken connection with God makes unity in the human family arduous and elusive.

Can these painful days we live in work for our good and reveal God's glorious goodness? Can the days we

live in possibly become a time where we say, "I know the goodness of real unity with other Christians?"

Yes, they can—but only as we draw near to God. Intimate fellowship with him is our greatest need, and his friendship makes intimate relationships with others possible. Draw near to the Father through the Son. Reflect on the deep love within the Triune God, who is Father, Son and Spirit. Ask God for unity of spirit with others. Ask God to teach you to love.

Unity, centered on God, is like fragrant oil anointing Aaron the high priest, running down his head, onto his beard and onto his collar in excessive abundance. Oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit. Let God's gracious Spirit flow over your life. Receive God's abundant provision of forgiveness, acceptance and love.

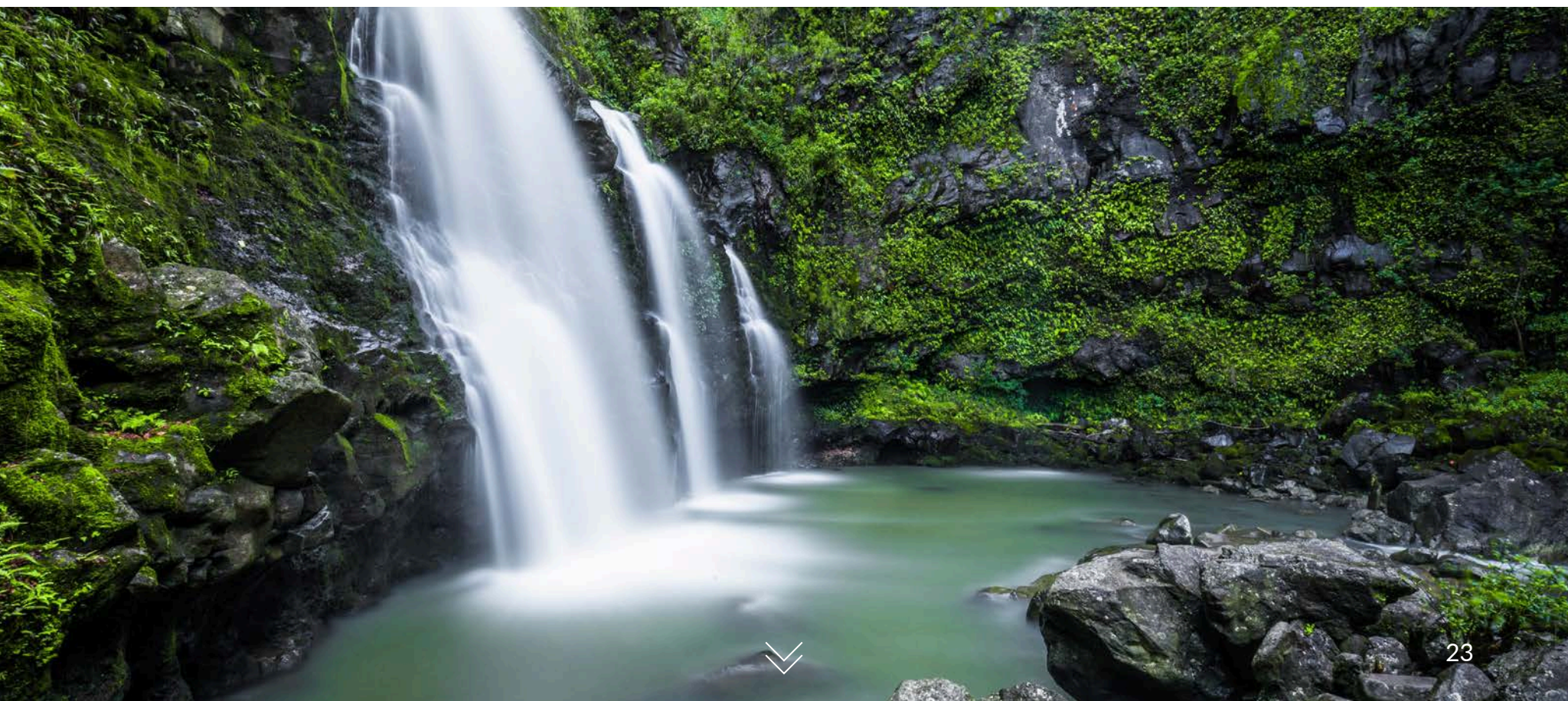
Unity is like the dew from Mount Hermon, the highest peak, refreshing the arid climate on Mount Zion many miles away. Pause to be refreshed by the one who is living water. Psalm 133 promises us that goodness flows from lives lived in unity with others.

As you pray, ask the Father to plant you deeply in his goodness and his love.

Let us linger at the
cross and be freshly
amazed at the lengths
you went to bring us
back to you. ...

Recommended Closing Prayer

Father, grant us true unity with our brothers and sisters, rooted in our restored relationship with you. Please give us the love that you have for all people. Forgive us our hatred and apathy. Let us linger at the cross and be freshly amazed at the lengths you went to bring us back to you. Grant us fresh faith to pursue friendship and love, for it is love that will mark us as your people. Amen.



FRIDAY
FEBRUARY 26



PSALM 134

**Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the
Lord,
who stand by night in the house of the Lord!
Lift up your hands to the holy place
and bless the Lord!
May the Lord bless you from Zion,
he who made heaven and earth!**



Brief Reflection

Psalm 134 is the last of the Psalms of Ascent—the songs sung by pilgrims who journeyed from their homes in Israel to Jerusalem three times a year for festival celebrations. The Psalms of Ascent move from expressions of lament, to confidence, to cries for help, and, finally, to praise. This last psalm, a benediction of sorts, dwells on temple worship. But notice that the setting for this psalm is nighttime. In a sense, entering into Lent, anticipating Easter, is like living in the darkness, waiting for dawn and seeking to praise God even as we wait.

This psalm and this season ask a question of us: how are we, as Spirit-filled servants of the Lord, to bless him when days like ours look dark as night?

In this fallen world, we experience what the Apostle John described, “people loved the darkness rather than the light.” (1 John 3:19). Our world is now staggering under the weight of senseless murders and devastating violence as well as a widespread health crisis. We can’t find our balance. Evil abounds—evidence that the world loves darkness.

This psalm exhorts us, even and especially in the night watches, to bless the God “who is light and in whom there is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5). We are called to lift our hands to the Lord as we praise him, not only for who he is, but also for what he has done for us.

We, too, once “were darkness but now we are light in the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:8). Through a miracle of grace and mercy, we have joined the company of priests serving in the night watches.

Tonight, even though it’s hard, lift your hands in praise to the Lord.

Praise him that he is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Pray for those who are still trapped



in the kingdom of darkness.

Pray that these dark days would result in real revival in Jesus.

Pray the words of Isaiah from centuries ago:
“The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light,
Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.”
(Isaiah 9:2)

Recommended Closing Prayer

The Valley of Vision:
Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells,
And the deeper the wells the brighter Thy stars shine.
Let me find Thy light in my darkness,
Thy life in my death,
Thy joys in my sorrow,
Thy grace in my sin,
Thy riches in my poverty,
Thy glory in my valley.
Amen.

Thy life in my death,
Thy joys in my sorrow,
Thy grace in my sin...



MATTHEW 11:28-30 (MSG)



Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

HEBREWS 4:9-11 (MSG)

The promise of “arrival” and “rest” is still there for God's people. God himself is at rest. And at the end of the journey we'll surely rest with God. So let's keep at it and eventually arrive at the place of rest, not drop out through some sort of disobedience.

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 27



Brief Reflection

Does it feel like this broken world drags on and on without relief? We all need a break. We need a change.

Some people can now arrange their days so they know a spacious new rhythm. They see much goodness in a life without a tight schedule and with new possibilities for ordering their days. Some may be deeply pained for the world, but for their own lives, they are quietly giving thanks.

Some spend long, empty hours distracting themselves to death. They are worn out by endless distractions online and invitations to virtually connect. Others are gripped by anxiety. Sleep is elusive. Others have had new jobs land on them: homeschooling and keeping a family sane when nobody gets a break. Others know the intensity of overwork in a world that hasn't shut down for them. It's only gotten more complex.

People's circumstances have always been different, and God has always invited all of us to find rest in him. From the Genesis beginning, he's held it out as a gift: Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Tomorrow is Sunday. For centuries, Saturday for the Jewish people and Sunday, the Christian Sabbath, were seen as set apart days. Yes, Sabbath has been abused and turned into a legalistic club. But now in this crisis, could we reexamine Sabbath rest? The

Hebrew word for Sabbath means many things, but three meanings stand out. Sabbath means take a break, celebrate, and let the present be imperfect.

Will you take a break and stop your to-do list for one day? Stopping is way to trust God and to grow more discerning.

Will you choose to celebrate? Goodness, beauty, and truth have not left this world. The insight to see and to say thank you is an offering to God that reshapes your life.

And finally, will you let the present be imperfect? Will you accept life as it is? God guarantees a future of joy, but for now, we walk a pilgrim path in a dimly lit valley. Will you submit to it being enough?

You are invited to rest. From the beginning, God has offered rest. In Jesus, he reaffirms that offer. Come to Jesus, run to Jesus, rest in Jesus.

Are you willing to choose a Sabbath life for tomorrow? Will you say yes to God's invitation?

Recommended Closing Prayer

Almighty God, after the creation of the world you rested from all your works and declared a day of rest for all your creatures: Help us to put away our anxieties and prepare us to worship you without distraction and with our

Help us to put
away our anxieties
and prepare us to
worship you without
distraction...

whole hearts. We come to you for protection and security, looking forward to the eternal rest promised in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Anglican Church in North America Book of Common Prayer)



THE SECOND WEEK
OF LENT

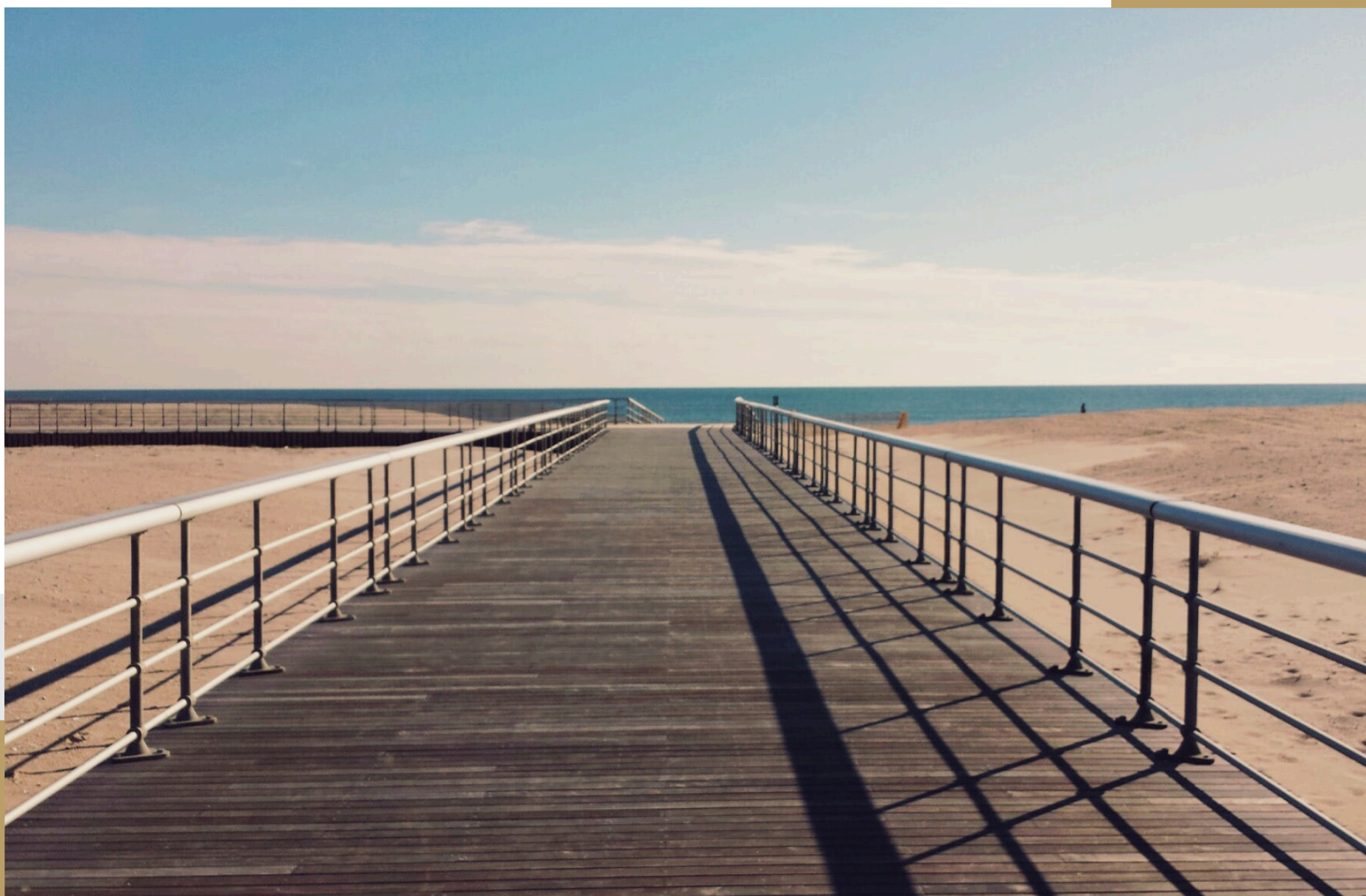
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**Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,
and to God the things that are God's**



SUNDAY
FEBRUARY 28



MATTHEW 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

Brief Reflection

What a foolhardy mission of the Pharisees, setting out to entangle the Word made flesh in his words. The Word of power, the Word that formed the universe and mysteriously holds it together, the Word that would show all hypocrites the way of repentance and truthfulness—this Word will not be stopped by the design and tricks of sinful, deceitful men and their empty words.

If these Pharisees only listened to what they were saying about Jesus, if they only took their own descriptions seriously, then they could have come to Christ and gained all he had to give them.

He is truth. He can show you the real way to the Father. He is not swayed by appearances. He knows what is in the heart of man. Stop coming to him with your agendas and your flattery and your maneuverings for power or prestige. Take him on his own terms. Render to God what is God's—most importantly, your own soul.

As you pray tonight, let this short gospel scene examine you: what will you do with the witness and words of Christ? Will you believe he is the Word of Life, and surrender your own life to him?



Recommended Closing Prayer

Christ, help us to render ourselves to you, the maker, lover, and sustainer of our souls. Amen.

help us to render
ourselves to you,
the maker, lover,
and sustainer of
our souls...



MARK 1:35-39

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.” And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

MONDAY MARCH 1

Brief Reflection

Do you pray in the desolate places?

Other translations of these verses use the word lonely, solitary, or deserted to describe the place Christ sought early in the morning so he could speak to his Father. The word has connotations of a desert—arid, dry, and isolated.

Why does Jesus pray in such a place? Surely in part for solitude. As Simon points out, everyone is looking for Christ. The crowds search for him as Jesus searches for silence to deeply connect with his Father.

But still, why didn't Jesus seek out a beautiful and quiet setting in which to pray? Isn't there something in the loveliness and majesty of creation that draws our heart to God? Aren't the psalms full of effusive delight in God's handiwork that turns to rich praise of God? Jesus knows this, and yet he chooses to pray in a lonely, dry, desert-like space.

Perhaps he knew, and wants us to know, that God will meet us in all the solitary, arid moments of our lives. It is easy to pray in an oasis; it is hard to offer petition and praise to God in the wasteland. And yet Christ rises early and seeks the face of his Father in a desolate place, knowing God would meet him there. Lent is a time when we seek those desert places to be with our Father and to pour out our hearts

to him.

Tonight as you pray, remember you are in Jesus. God will always meet you in your turning toward him. Be at peace in the desolate places.

Recommended Closing Prayer

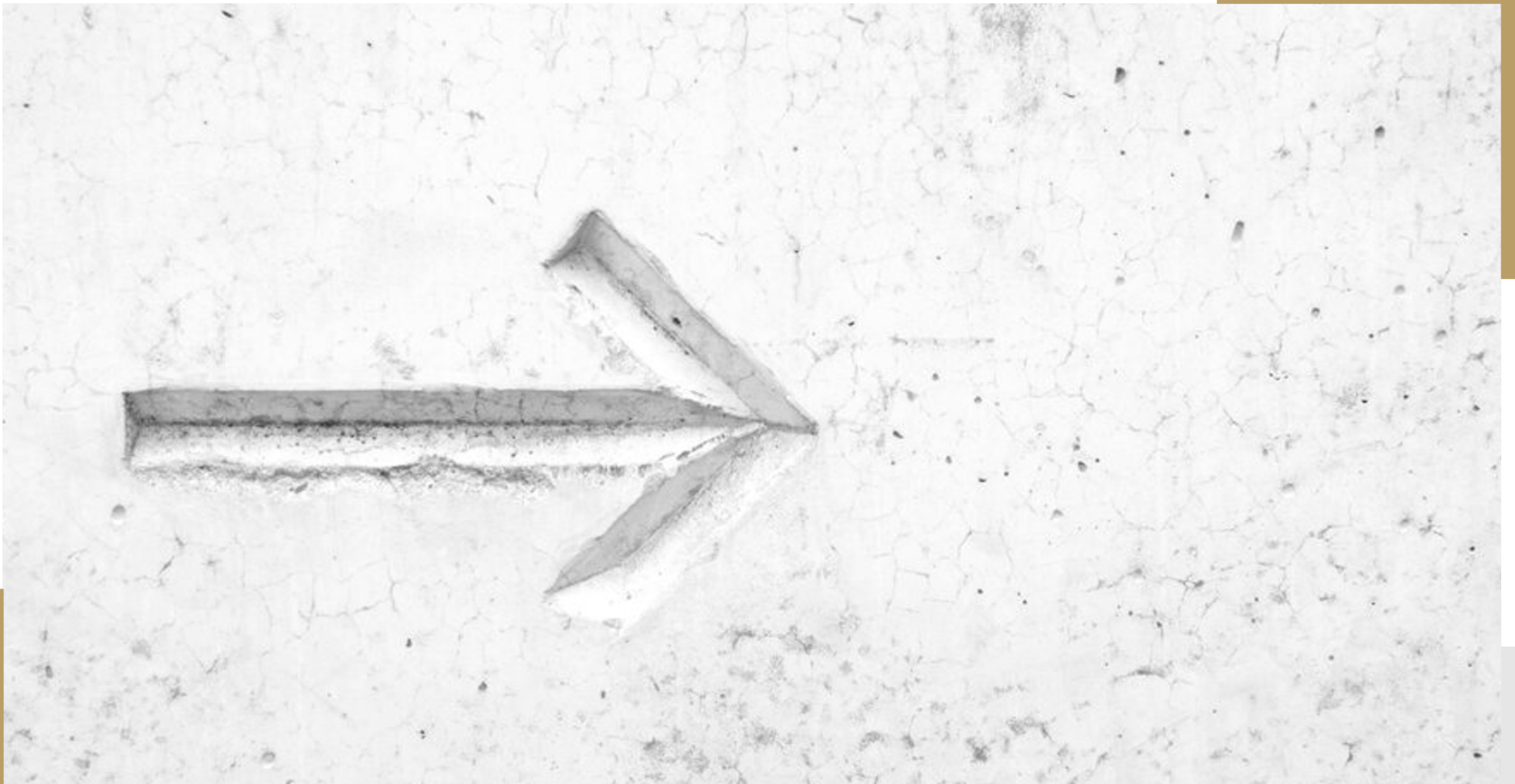
Celtic Daily Prayer:

Let nothing disturb thee,
nothing affright thee;
all things are passing,
God never changeth!
Patient endurance attaineth to all things;
who God possesseth
in nothing is wanting;
alone God sufficeth.
In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Let nothing disturb
thee, nothing affright
thee; all things are
passing...



TUESDAY
MARCH 2



MARK 5:21-24, 35-43

And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet and implored him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.” And he went with him...While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?” But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. And when he had entered, he said to them, “Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, “Talitha cumi,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Brief Reflection

People who have it made in life often have a hard time accepting help. Jairus has arrived. He is the ruler of the synagogue in his region. He is known; he is important. Jesus is the controversial young itinerant rabbi—welcomed by some and run out of town by others.

But Jairus is desperate. His beloved twelve-year-old daughter is dying. He'll risk his reputation and do anything to save her, even asking Jesus for help. Humbling himself, he doesn't send a messenger, but instead he comes and falls at Jesus' feet.

Wonderfully, Jesus begins to follow Jairus to his house, but then Jairus faces another opportunity for humility. Jesus stops in his tracks to help a nobody woman (Mark 5:24b-34). She is not the adolescent daughter of a well-to-do man. She is middle-aged, unclean, hopeless, and without family. But she too is determined to seek Jesus' help.

Despite the protests of his disciples, Christ stops to care for this woman. Likely, desperate fear and anger rise up in Jairus. They can't delay! His daughter is dying.

The worst happens. Although the woman is healed, people arrive from Jairus' household with a soul-killing message: his daughter is dead.

Pause. Let Jairus' despair touch you. Was he simply overcome with his loss? Was he angry at the woman and at Jesus' delay? Were his thoughts flashing ahead to his wife's anguish and the emptiness in their home from now on? Did he have a stab of fear that he'd likely lost status by turning to Jesus?

Before Jairus can respond, Jesus speaks. The verbs Mark uses in this passage are best translated, "Don't go on fearing the worst, keep on believing the best."

Pause now as you prepare to pray.



Lent is a time to learn humility. Are you willing to humble yourself and ask Jesus to help you? Are you willing to humble yourself and accept the hope he offers? "Don't go on fearing the worst, keep on believing the best." Pray tonight for the grace to run to Jesus, to wait for Jesus and to know Jesus is stronger than death itself.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Lord, all of us grieve someone who has died. Oh, help us in the depth of our loss and pain. Help us to trust that you will make all things new. Lord, all of us find stubborn places in our hearts where we don't want to ask you for help. Forgive our anger, our impatience, our sense of entitlement and our despair. Teach us to keep on believing. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

Forgive our anger,
our impatience,
our sense of
entitlement and
our despair...

PSALM 147

Praise the Lord!

**For it is good to sing praises to our God;
for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is
fitting.**

The Lord builds up Jerusalem;

he gathers the outcasts of Israel.

**He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.**

**He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.**

**Great is our Lord, and abundant in
power;**

his understanding is beyond measure.

The Lord lifts up the humble;

he casts the wicked to the ground.

**Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre!**

He covers the heavens with clouds;

he prepares rain for the earth;

he makes grass grow on the hills.

**He gives to the beasts their food,
and to the young ravens that cry.**

**His delight is not in the strength of the
horse,**

**nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,
but the Lord takes pleasure in those who
fear him,**

in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!

Praise your God, O Zion!

**For he strengthens the bars of your
gates;**

he blesses your children within you.

He makes peace in your borders;

he fills you with the finest of the wheat.

He sends out his command to the earth;

his word runs swiftly.

He gives snow like wool;

he scatters frost like ashes.

**He hurls down his crystals of ice like
crumbs;**

who can stand before his cold?

He sends out his word, and melts them;

**he makes his wind blow and the waters
flow.**

He declares his word to Jacob,

his statutes and rules to Israel.

**He has not dealt thus with any other
nation;**

they do not know his rules.

Praise the Lord!

WEDNESDAY MARCH 3



Brief Reflection

“It is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant and a song of praise is fitting”, says the psalmist.

In the uncertainty of our world, is this the way you feel? The last psalms of the psalter build together into a crescendo of praise. Psalm 147 calls us four times to praise or sing thanks to the Lord.

Can we honestly offer praise in these days with challenges pressing in on every side? We can if we will let ourselves see all the ways God cares for us.

He builds up, he gathers outcasts, he heals the broken-hearted and he binds up their wounds. Our God is tender and personal, even though he is all powerful—creating, numbering and naming the stars, covering the heavens with clouds and preparing rain for the earth. He bends low to gently lift the humble. He takes pleasure in those who fear him and trust him, who hope in his steadfast love.

Are you overwhelmed? Are you living as an outcast? Come to Jesus. Are you brokenhearted, wounded and broken in spirit? Come to Jesus. He knows brokenness because he entered into it. He is not a stranger to any challenge you face.

He is the Word the Father sent, the Word that runs swiftly to meet your

every need. Let the wind of his Spirit blow fresh life and infuse living water into your burdened heart. Experience his strength, his pleasure and his peace.

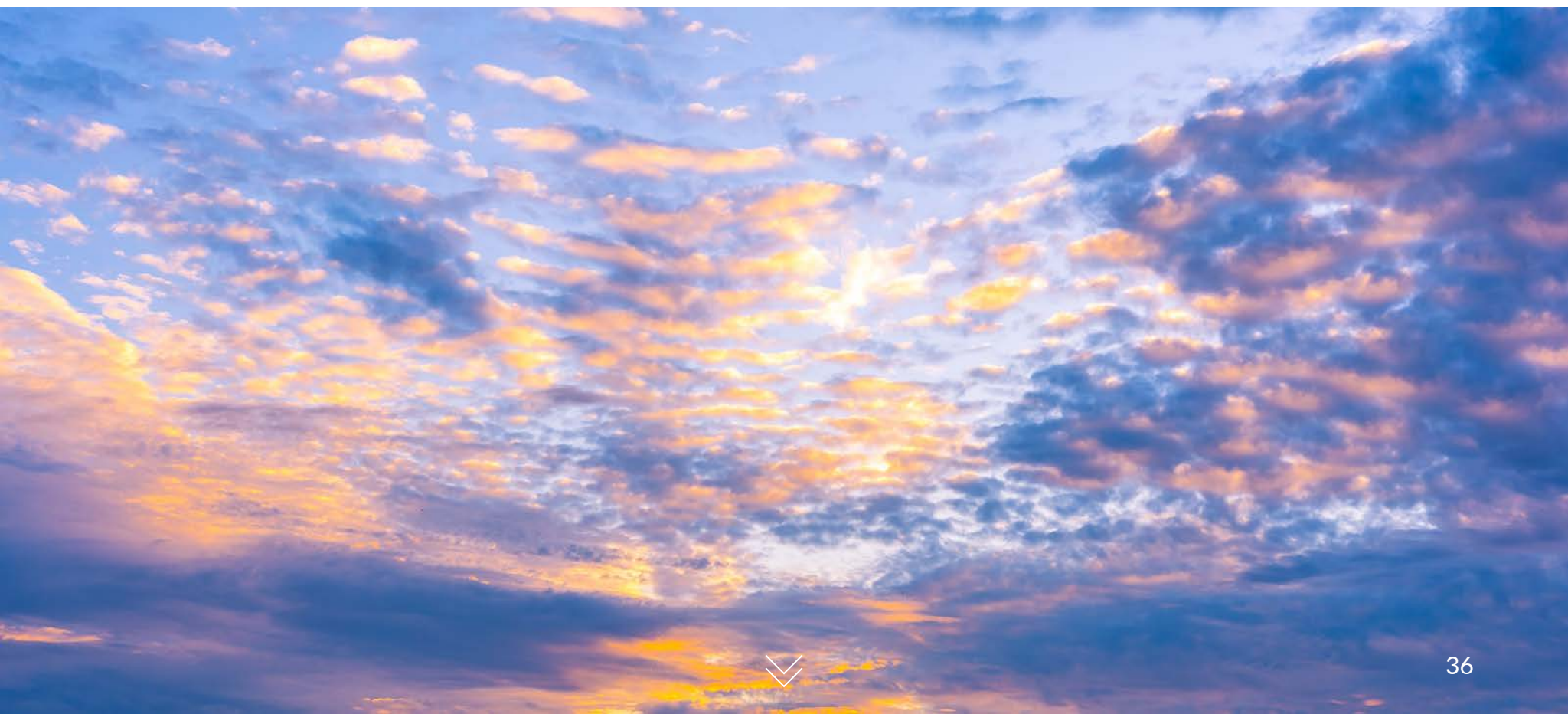
The beauty of the gospel is simple, but it is not small: put your hope in the love of God.

Now rise to praise him, for he inhabits and takes delight in the praises of his people. It is good to sing praises to our God.

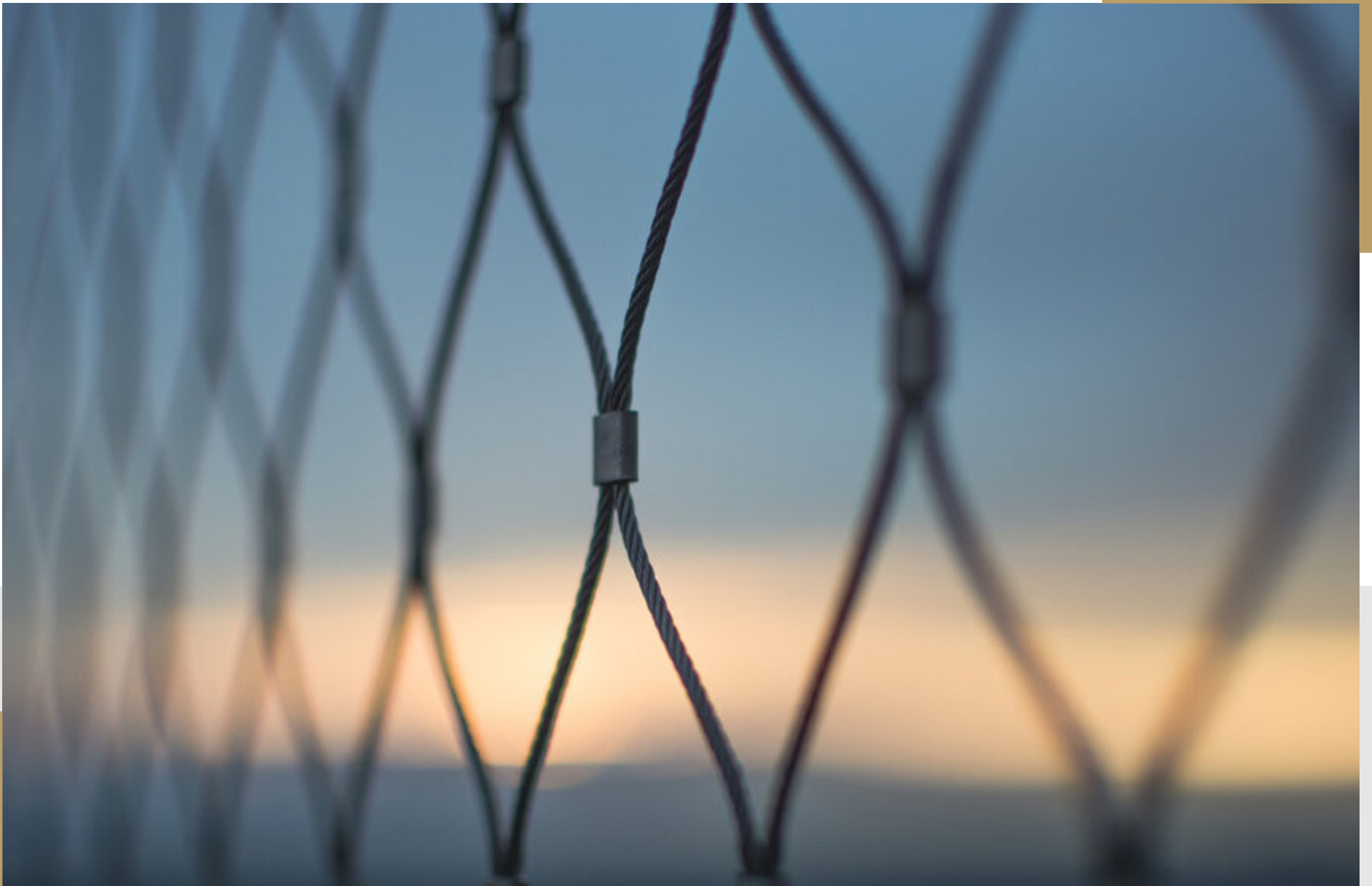
Recommended Closing Prayer

Oh Father, it is unbelievable to me that I, a sinner, though forgiven, am the object of your pleasure and delight. Thank you that I am among those you’ve gathered to yourself. I praise you with all my heart. Amen.

Thank you that I am
among those you’ve
gathered to yourself...



THURSDAY
MARCH 4



PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18 (NIV)

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.



Brief Reflection

There is a connection between a joyful, contented living and firmly holding to the word of life, namely Christ. That connection can't be severed by personal hardships or the crookedness of the world around us. That connection keeps us from devolving into the natural responses of complaining and grumbling when life is difficult.

If we are wholly alone in suffering and hardship, if all we can see is the darkness in our world, then complaining and grumbling would be an understandable response to the times we live in. But Paul calls us to put away complaining and arguing when we face hardship and a bleak world. How can we?

Paul says he is able to rejoice because holding on to Christ brings joy. He is rejoicing because a life of holding on to Christ is never in vain. He is honest about this life being one of service; it feels like being poured out like a drink offering. It is full of intense, sacrificial work. But this kind of life is possible because Paul hopes in the day of Christ and in the coming of the king.

It can be the same for us today. Are you facing a season of deep trial, of sleeplessness, of anxiety, of pain? Hold to Jesus, and more importantly, know that he holds you. He will work in you his good will. You can, as Wendell Berry writes, "be joyful though you have considered all the facts." In fact, your joy is more realistic than despair. Christ is king, and he will come again.

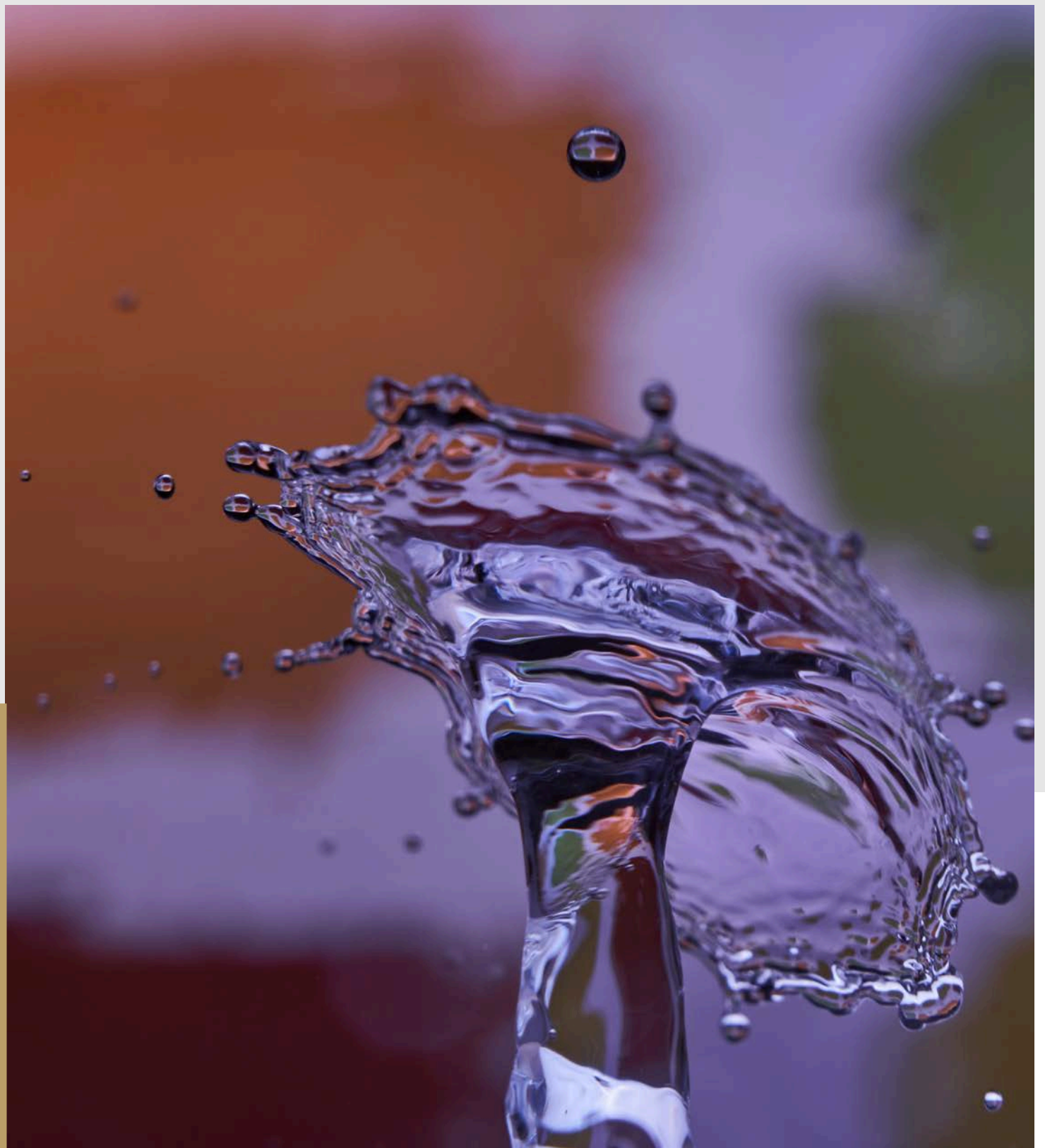
Tonight as you pray, confess your grumbling. Ask for a fresh awareness of the abiding presence of Christ, and ask for the strength to rest in his sovereign love for you.



Recommended Closing Prayer

Oh God, in your mercy and grace, supply my every need according to your riches of glory in Jesus. Amen.

supply my every need...



LAMENTATIONS 3:19-30 (MSG)

I'll never forget the trouble, the utter
lostness,

the taste of ashes, the poison I've
swallowed.

I remember it all—oh, how well I
remember—

the feeling of hitting the bottom.

But there's one other thing I remember,

and remembering, I keep a grip on
hope:

God's loyal love couldn't have run out,
his merciful love couldn't have dried
up.

They're created new every morning.

How great your faithfulness!

I'm sticking with God (I say it over and
over).

He's all I've got left.

God proves to be good to the man who
passionately waits,

to the woman who diligently seeks.

It's a good thing to quietly hope,

quietly hope for help from God.

It's a good thing when you're young
to stick it out through the hard times.

When life is heavy and hard to take,

go off by yourself. Enter the silence.

Bow in prayer. Don't ask questions:

Wait for hope to appear.

Don't run from trouble. Take it full-
face.

The "worst" is never the worst.

Why? Because the Master won't ever
walk out and fail to return.

If he works severely, he also works
tenderly.

His stockpiles of loyal love are
immense.

He takes no pleasure in making life
hard,

in throwing roadblocks in the way.

FRIDAY MARCH 5



Brief Reflection

The worst is never the worst. Wait for hope to appear. God's loyal love will never run out.

The prophet Jeremiah is likely the one who offered these promises to the Jewish people as their world fell apart. Jerusalem was razed and the nation obliterated. Every educated and wealthy person was being hauled off to captivity in Babylon. All appeared to be lost. Five poems of heartbreaking lament fill this book of the Bible.

But Lamentations is not a book of despair. Yes, it is an honest speaking of agony, confusion, and anger. Jerusalem suffered a painful, shattering loss. Things would never be the same, but Lamentations proclaims that the Lord is mightier and more beautiful than every loss.

It is Lent, a time for lament; we have much to lament in our lives right now. The Bible takes the lead in teaching us how.

Tonight as you pray, feel free to name and lament your sorrows and your losses.

In the midst of your lament, remember that you are talking to the One who is more real than your grief or your fears. The Mighty Eternal God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, will never walk out on us and refuse to return. He is here as Immanuel in the midst of it

all. He will one day make all things new as Revelation 21:5 promises us.

When you sense you have spoken your heart, be still for a moment. God accepts you as you are.

As best you can, pray that your hope and courage will grow.

Who do you know who is lost in sadness or fear? Pray for them to know the loyal love of God in new ways.

Pray you become the kind of person who offers a calm, fixed hope to others.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations, and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (*Anglican Church in North America Book of Common Prayer*)

Come quickly to help
us who are assaulted
by many temptations,
and, as you know the
weaknesses of each of
us, let each one find
you mighty to save...



SATURDAY
MARCH 6



MARK 6:45-52

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Brief Reflection

After feeding the 5,000, Christ makes his disciples get in a boat and begin the journey across the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps, as John hints in his version, Jesus knows his disciples could be caught up in the movement by the crowd to make him king. Maybe he is protecting them from short-sighted foolishness. Jesus dismisses the crowd (and his disciples) and climbs a mountain to pray. Finally, he has time to be with his Father. He lingers long there.

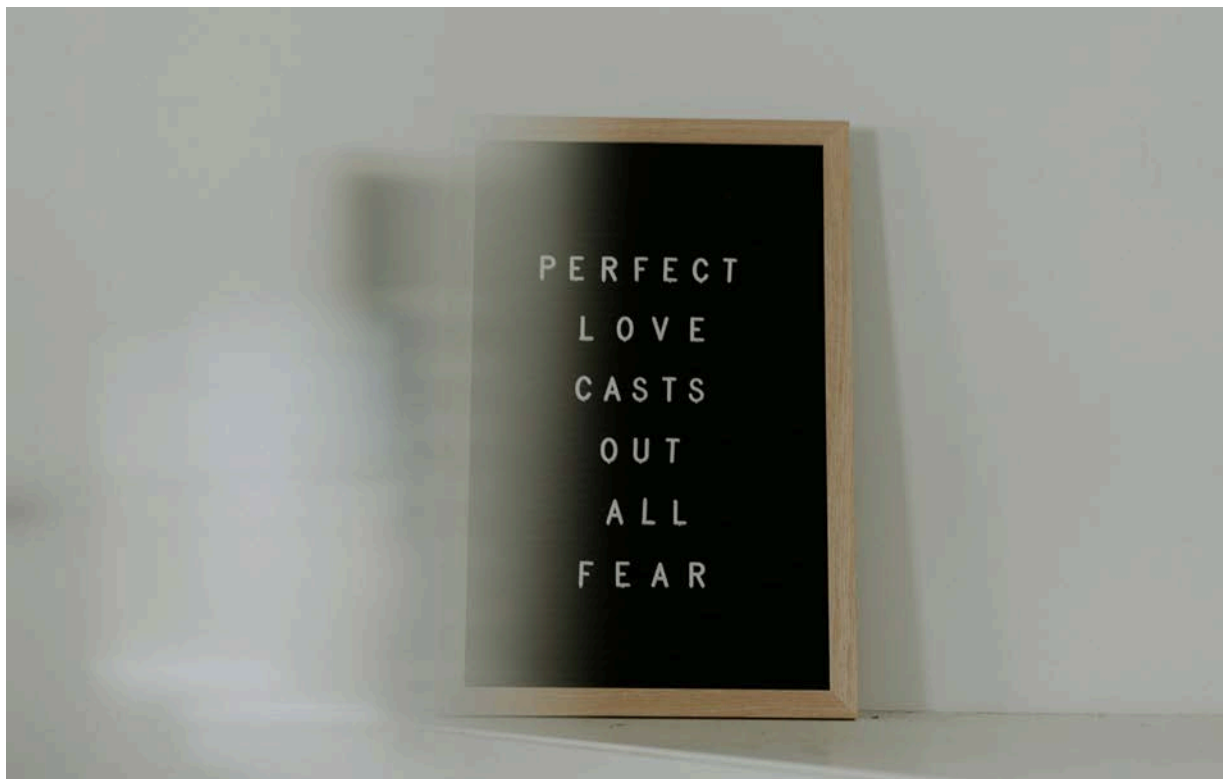
But as the night unfolds, Jesus looks toward the water. It is whipped into a fever pitch by a windstorm. Perhaps the moon is full; perhaps dawn is emerging. Jesus sees his friends straining to cross the lake. He walks down to the shoreline and begins to walk on the rough sea. We assume he will join his friends in the boat and help them. We assume he will quiet the sea.

But Mark surprises us: "He intended to pass them by!" "Why?" we ask. For their part, the disciples are frightened. They think he is a ghost and cry out in fear. Where is their faith? Can they not reason that the One who fed 5000 would also be able to walk on water or take care of a storm? (He has done that before in Mark 4:35-41).

This simple story raises questions we can't answer. We'll never understand everything Jesus does. We become afraid in overwhelming circumstances. Often, we don't even hold onto the faith we were given the last time we went through a similar crisis. What do we do?

Perhaps the best thing is to simply return to the words of Christ. Take heart: it is I. Do not be afraid. We can hold these words when we are deeply confused and scared. Christ is near, and he is with us. His reality is greater than any confusion and every storm. We will never be abandoned.

Tonight as you pray, thank Jesus that he is always present and always



able to help you. Submit by faith to what you do not understand. Ask him to strengthen your believing.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

help my unbelief...

THE THIRD WEEK
OF LENT

3



**Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor,
and you will have treasure in heaven;
and come, follow me.**





LUKE 18:18-30



And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.” And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.

SUNDAY MARCH 7



Brief Reflection

It is no coincidence that Luke tells this story on the heels of a story about the childlike faith that is required to enter the kingdom of God.

This man appears to have everything—wealth, an outwardly righteous life, respect and prestige. But he realizes he lacks something. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” he asks Jesus. He reasons that there has to be something he can do to enter the kingdom, some way he can measure up by keeping laws about religious behavior.

He approaches Jesus as a ‘good teacher’ but not as Lord. He is wrong about himself, about Jesus and about life.

In love, Jesus puts his finger on the young man’s misguided understanding. Entering the kingdom is not about looking or being good. The only way in is on bended knee, like a little child. Life in the kingdom requires absolute allegiance to God, the only one who is good. It is about loving him with heart, soul and mind. Substitute gods and idols will block us from entering the kingdom.

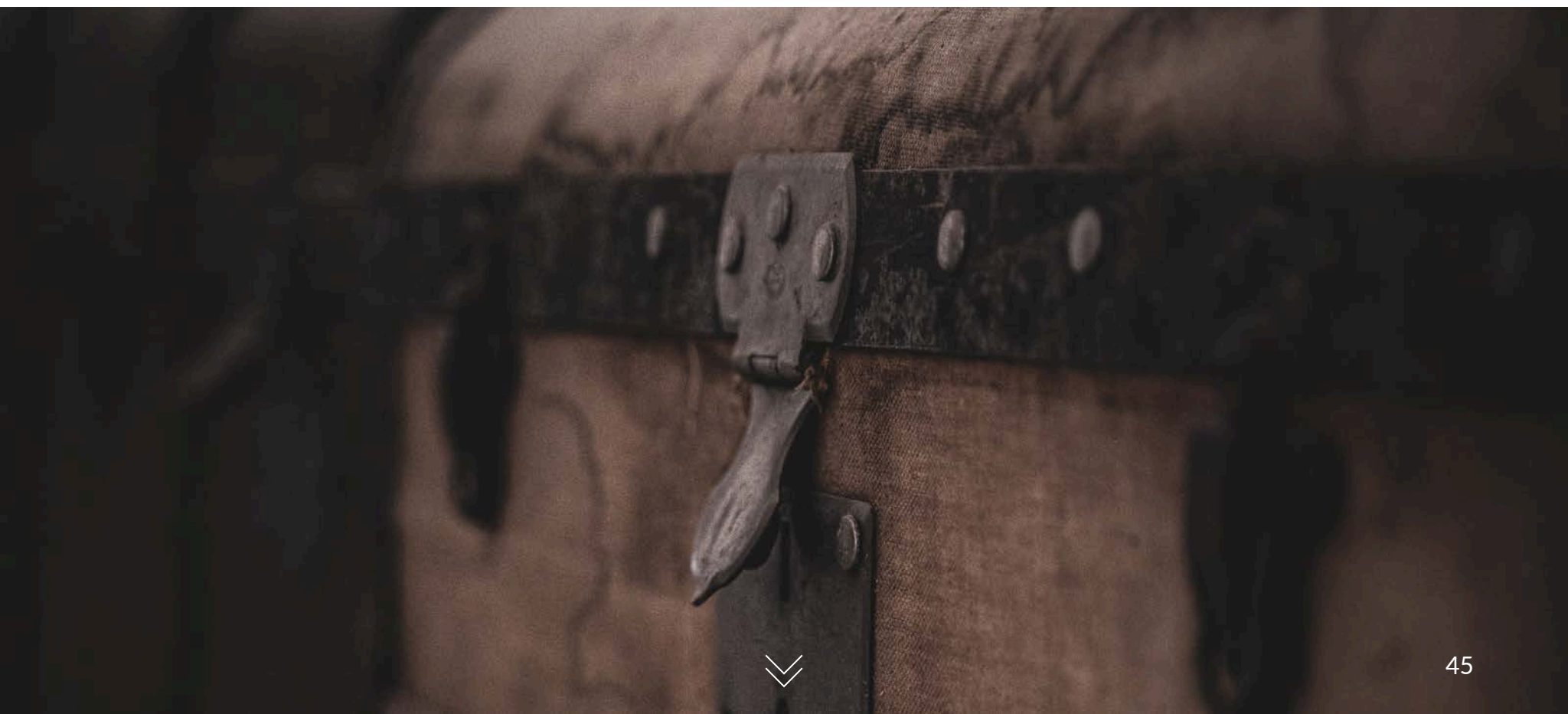
But instead of entering the kingdom in joy with a promise of eternal riches, this young man turns away in sorrow. His wealth has a grasp on his soul. He doesn’t want to lose what it gives him.

Jesus knows what is competing for your affection. Lent is a time to consider the things we love more than God, a time to repent and turn to the Father in childlike faith. Tonight as you pray, ask the Spirit to show you the things keeping you from the love of God. Turn and accept anew the grace Christ offers. Choose eternal riches, not the poverty of worldly gain.

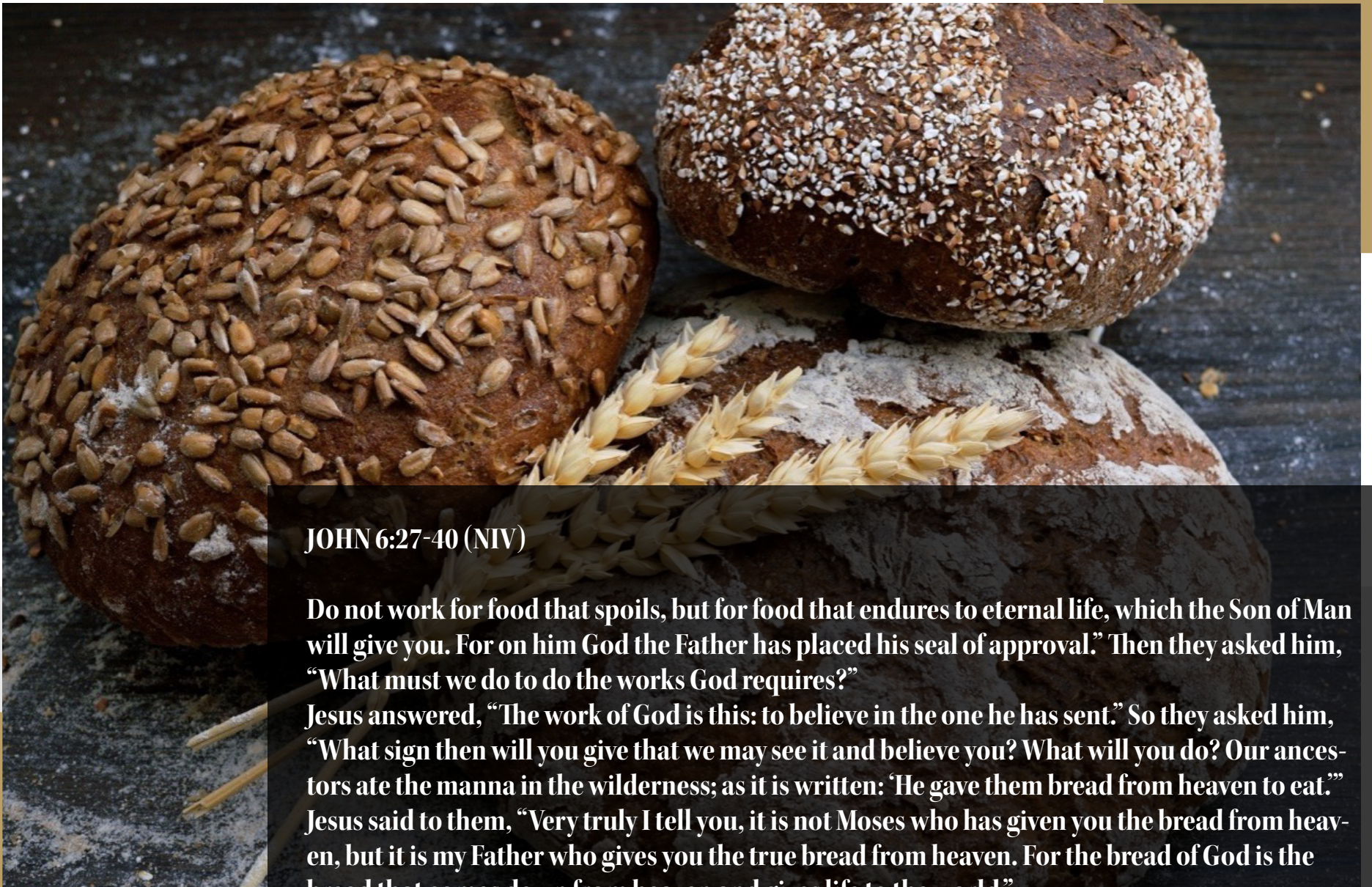
Recommended Closing Prayer

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
(Anglican Church in North America Book of Common Prayer)

you have prepared
for those who love
you such good
things as surpass our
understanding...



MONDAY
MARCH 8



JOHN 6:27-40 (NIV)

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

Brief Reflection

Do you hear the invitation in these words of Jesus? He tells us that he is the bread of heaven that gives life to the world. To believe in Jesus isn't an intellectual exercise where we give a mental nod to certain facts about our Savior. It's an acknowledgment of that gnawing, constant hunger inside of us and that deep desperation of knowing that we can't find true bread. And it's an embracing of Jesus as that one and only person who holds out the true feast—himself.

Are you starving tonight? Have these hard months revealed how little you can truly provide for yourself?

Go to Jesus. Embrace him as the only source of true life, and rest in his promise that he will never drive you away. He will keep you. He will hold you. He will love you. At the last day, he will raise you up to eternal life with him. His kingdom is inaugurated with a feast, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. One day, that gnawing hunger you know now will be fully satisfied.

Tonight as you pray, ask for fresh faith to know—in your head and your heart and your bones and your stomach—that Jesus is the bread of life. He is all we need, and we are his forever.



Recommended Closing Prayer

Jesus, you are the bread, broken, so that we may be whole. Let us feast and let us trust you, bread from heaven, our Emmanuel. Amen.

you are the bread,
broken, so that we
may be whole...



ISAIAH 30:15-18 (NIV)

**But you, Sovereign Lord,
help me for your name's sake;
out of the goodness of your love, deliver me.
For I am poor and needy,
and my heart is wounded within me.
I fade away like an evening shadow;
I am shaken off like a locust.
My knees give way from fasting;
my body is thin and gaunt.
I am an object of scorn to my accusers;
when they see me, they shake their heads.
Help me, Lord my God;
save me according to your unfailing love.**

**Let them know that it is your hand,
that you, Lord, have done it.
While they curse, may you bless;
may those who attack me be put to shame,
but may your servant rejoice.
May my accusers be clothed with disgrace
and wrapped in shame as in a cloak.
With my mouth I will greatly extol the Lord;
in the great throng of worshipers I will praise him.
For he stands at the right hand of the needy,
to save their lives from those who would condemn them.**

TUESDAY MARCH 9



Brief Reflection

In Psalm 109, the goodness and steadfastness of our ruling God is in stark contrast to the evil, lying leaders oppressing David. These men were so aligned with a life of wickedness that David says they wore cursing like a garment and displayed their shame as their outer garment. Because of their malice, David feels he is fading away like a shadow in the evening. He feels as insignificant as an insect.

But in the midst of these deep difficulties, David seeks the face of God. He calls on the Lord to act according to his character, according to his faithful love. Although these leaders curse, David calls on God to bless. Although these leaders oppress the poor and trod down the lowly, David names God as the one who stands at the right hand of the needy.

Rather than give in to despair because of their brutality and power, David recalls the supremacy of God. He pleads with the Lord of heaven and earth to bring justice against those who malign and abuse his people. He rests in the surety that he will praise God in a throng of worshipers. God will sit enthroned forever, long after all evil rulers are put to shame. His justice will shine like the noonday sun.

As you pray, take heart in God's reigning power. Yes, Lent is a time of sorrowing of repentance, but it is never a time of despair. Ask God to bring

justice and deliverance to this world.
Hope in his eternal throne.

Recommended Closing Prayer

With my mouth I will greatly extol
you, Lord;

in the great throng of worshipers
I will praise you.

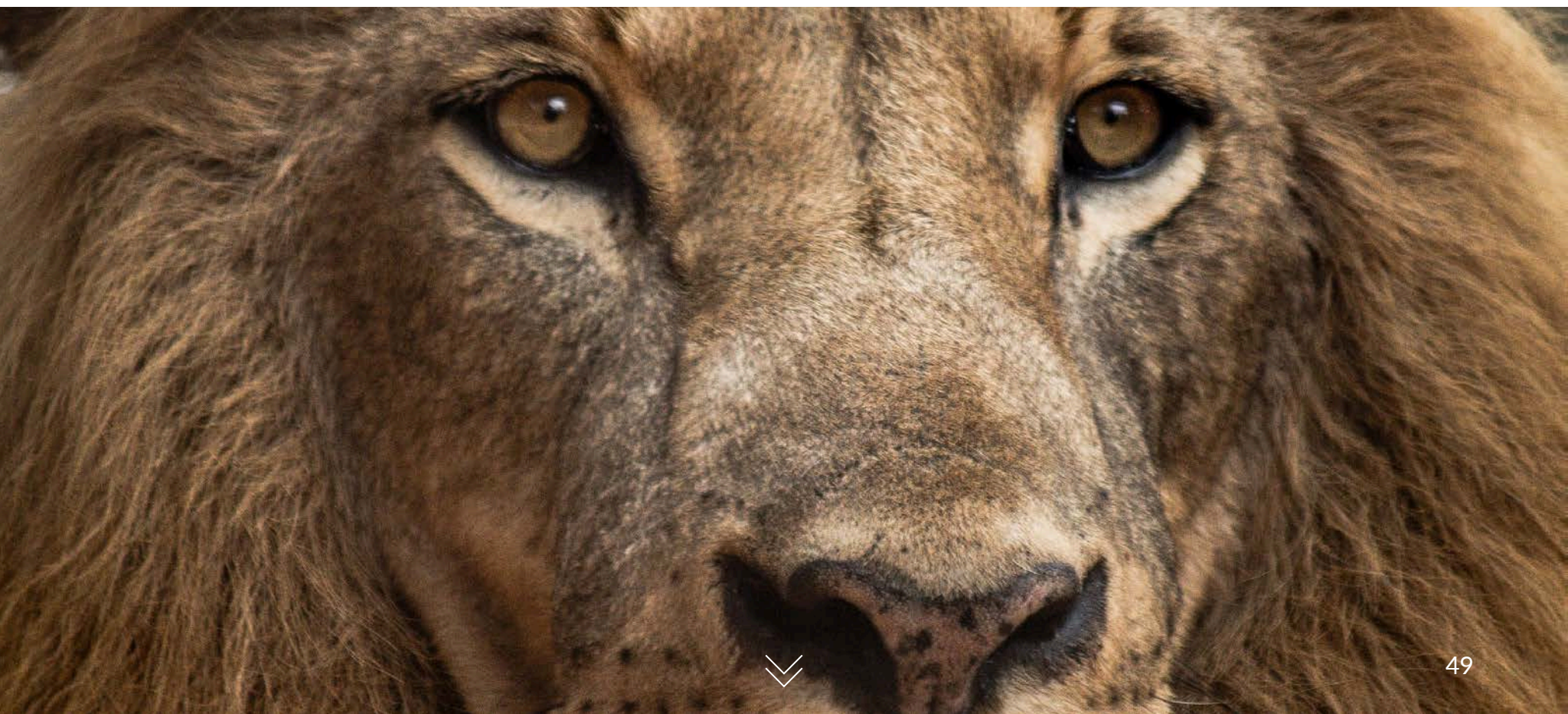
For you stand at the right hand of
the needy,

to save their lives from those who
would condemn them.

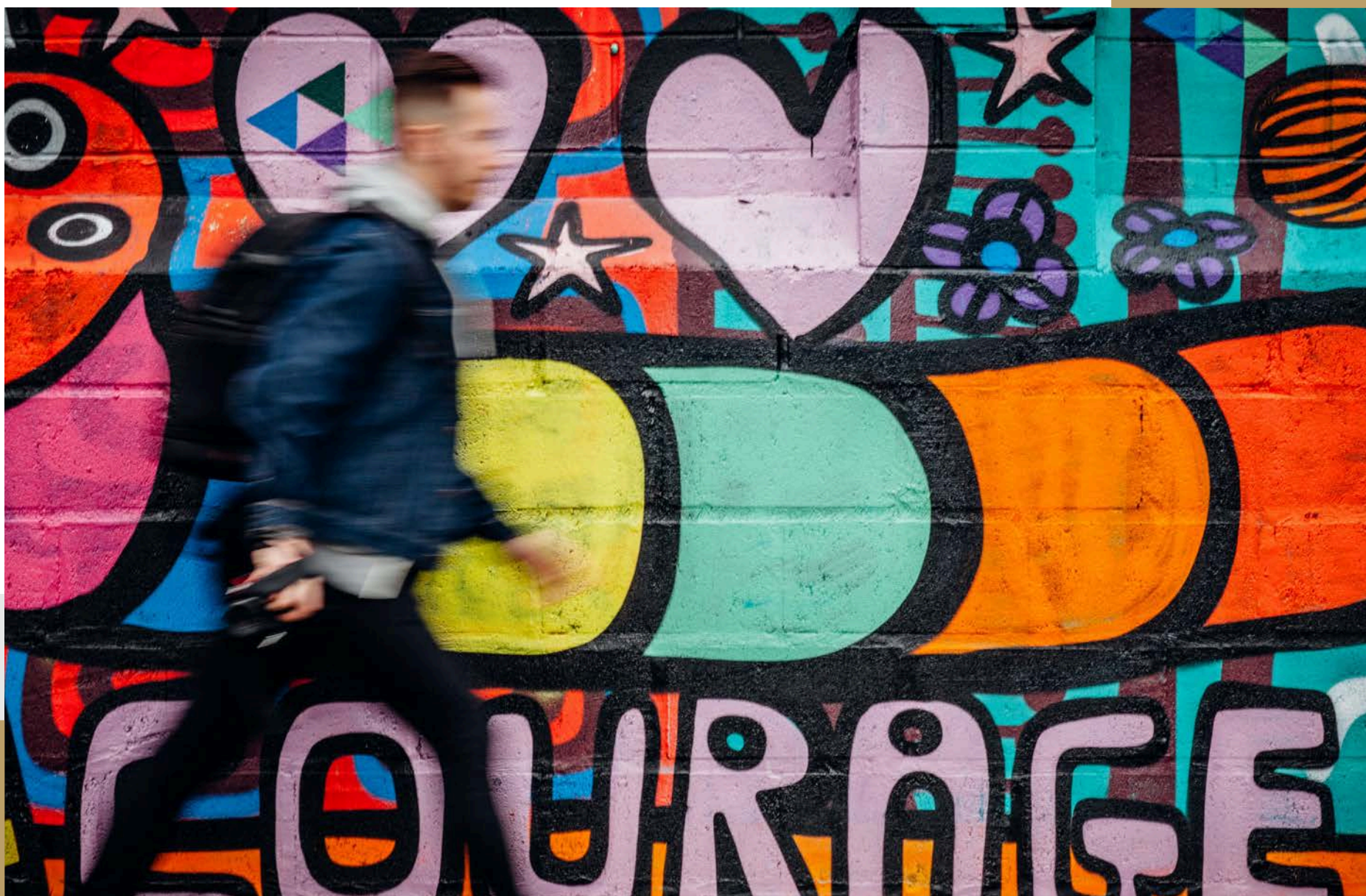
Amen.

(Psalm 109:30-31)

you stand at the right
hand of the needy,
to save their lives...



WEDNESDAY
MARCH 10



ISAIAH 43:1-4A

**But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be
with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not
overwhelm you;**

**when you walk through fire
you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
Cush and Seba in exchange for you.
Because you are precious in my eyes,
and honored, and I love you.**



Brief Reflection

Perfect love casts out fear, 1 John 4:18 promises us. What a profound mystery that love can displace fear. Most of us have known someone whose love made us feel safe. But even if we have never had that experience, our hearts long to be loved, to be held and to be protected.

There is indeed good news that banishes fear. The Triune God loves each one of us wholly. He is perfect strength and power, perfect wisdom, perfect kindness and compassion, perfect holiness. He is the God who fully sees us—in our fears, our sin, our brokenness and our doubt. And he is the mighty and merciful God who nonetheless fully cherishes and protects us.

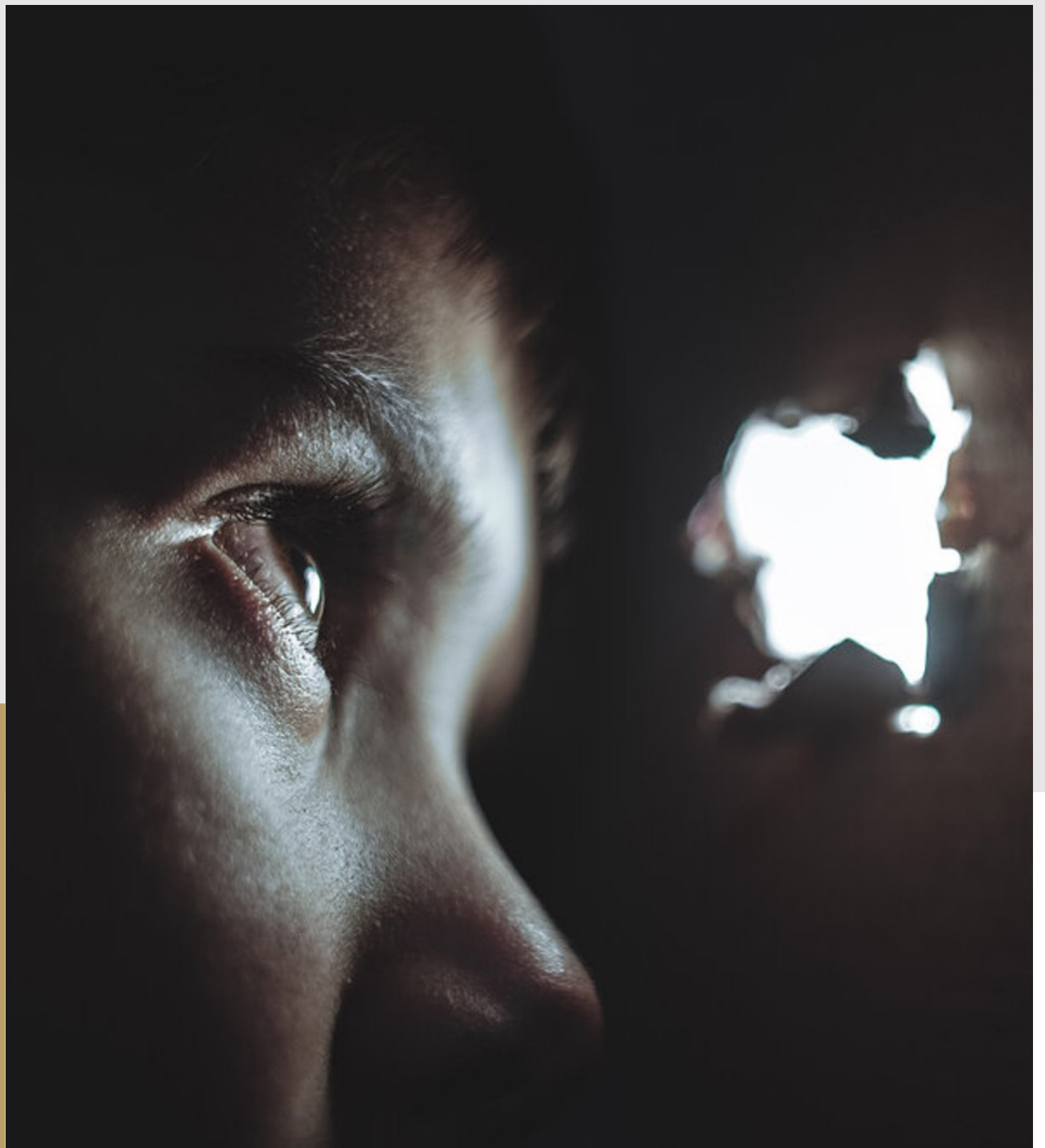
Where is your soul this night? Does it feel like the waters are rising around you? Turn to God as you pray—be honest about where you are. Then thank him. He declares, you are precious in my sight and I love you. Even before any feelings of being loved arise in you, thank him that he does indeed hold you in his love.



Recommended Closing Prayer

Most loving Father, you will us to give thanks for all things, to dread nothing but the loss of you, and to cast all our care on the One who cares for us. Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, and grant that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of that love which is immortal, and which you have manifested unto us in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Anglican Church in North America Book of Common Prayer*)

grant that no
clouds of this
mortal life may
hide from us the
light...



LUKE 18:35-48



As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” And he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

THURSDAY MARCH 11



Brief Reflection

Jesus is making his way through Jericho to Jerusalem—to the cross. He has just described in detail what lies ahead, but his closest friends are blind to his teaching.

Yet even though he is headed to the cross, Christ's heart is still full of compassion. For three years, Jesus has blessed people with countless miracles, beginning in northern Israel at a wedding in Galilee. Now this last miracle before his resurrection takes place on his journey to Jerusalem.

As he travels, Jesus is surrounded by loud throngs of pilgrims also on the way to Passover in Jerusalem. From the crowd a beggar cries out, "Jesus, Son of David!" The crowd tries to hush him, but he persists. The very fact that he calls Jesus "Son of David" would have startled the crowd. What makes this man think that Jesus is the promised Messiah?

We wonder as well, how does this blind man know the Messiah is on the Jericho road?

"Have mercy on me!" he cries out again. Jesus calls out for the blind man to come to him. A blind beggar believes, and his dead eyes are transformed by the power of Christ. Unlike the rich young ruler, who chose possessions over Jesus, this man throws away the only thing he has, a worn-out cloak, and runs to Christ.

Christ ask him a simple question: "What do you want me to do?"

His answer: "Lord, I want to see!"

As the crowd looks on, faith becomes sight. Seeing, he follows his Savior.

Take a moment to consider Jesus. The one he blesses in this story is a blind beggar. In first century Israel, he was an outcast at the bottom of society, rejected by family and dependent on charity from strangers. But in his blindness, he can see more than the disciples who've been with Jesus for three years. He sees with the eyes of his heart.

As you pray tonight, ask Jesus to open the eyes of your heart. Thank him for the miracle of new life in him and ask for renewed purpose to follow him well, not just during Lent, but for all the days of your life.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly, You have brought me to the valley of vision, where I live in the depths but see You in the heights; hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold Your glory. Let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, that to have

nothing is to possess all, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive, that the valley is the place of vision. Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells, and the deeper the wells the brighter Your stars shine; let me find Your light in my darkness, Your life in my death, Your joy in my sorrow, Your grace in my sin, Your riches in my poverty, Your glory in my valley. Amen.

the deeper the wells
the brighter Your stars
shine...



FRIDAY
MARCH 12

PSALM 126

And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

“Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

Brief Reflection

It's a paradoxical reality that the words we hear most often we begin to not hear at all. Repetition and familiarity can wear down the sharp meaning in a story, like a stone worn smooth in a riverbed. That's the danger we face when we hear the parable of the prodigal son.

Can you pause this evening and try to re-hear these words as if you'd never come upon this tale before? Can you imagine the searing pain of the father as he watches his son walk out? Can you sense the emptiness of the father's heart in the days that follow? Can you feel the younger son's pangs of hunger and his despair as he contemplates the pig slop? Can you see the tears brimming in his eyes as his father embraces him again? Can you experience the rage of the older brother as he hears the sound of feasting and laughter?

This story is so very human. It reminds us that we are all born with hungry souls. Like the younger brother, we have desires for fulfillment, pleasure, and freedom that can lead us to the most desperate and terrible places. It reminds us that like the older brother, we gravitate towards entitlement, bitterness, and anger.

Our hearts are like broken compasses that no longer recall true north, and so they fail us again and again. Whether our own hearts lead us to open rebellion and sinful living or to quiet self-righteousness and teeming hatred of our repentant brother, we all need the reorienting words of our Father.

Tonight as you pray, contemplate which words you need to hear. Do you need to know again the Father's loud shout of joy in your salvation, that you were lost and now are found? That he delights in you, his child? Do you need to hear afresh his call to you to abandon your hatred, to rejoice that all God has is yours in Jesus, and to join him



in his lavish invitation to others?

Recommended Closing Prayer

Father in heaven, please give us ears to hear anew these familiar words. Let us know your grace in both your call to renewed repentance and in your words of joy over your children, returned. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

Let us know your
grace in both your
call to renewed
repentance and in
your words of joy...



PSALM 20

May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble!
May the name of the God of Jacob protect you!
May he send you help from the sanctuary
and give you support from Zion!
May he remember all your offerings
and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices! Selah
May he grant you your heart's desire
and fulfill all your plans!
May we shout for joy over your salvation,
and in the name of our God set up our banners!
May the Lord fulfill all your petitions!
Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed;

he will answer him from his holy heaven
with the saving might of his right hand.
Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.
They collapse and fall,
but we rise and stand upright.
O Lord, save the king!
May he answer us when we call.

SATURDAY MARCH 13



Brief Reflection

This is the prayer of a people at war who are united behind their king. It would have been sung on the day of battle, starting with the people of Israel united behind King David. Today, we pray this with our eyes fixed on the Lord's anointed, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the focal point of the action in heaven and on earth. His battle against evil is the most important conflict. When we pray, "Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed," we understand that the resurrection is the best evidence that the Lord saves Christ.

Consider this: "May God grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans!" If you read this out of context, no doubt you would take it differently. But, in context, this verse doesn't refer to our desires but to those of our king. Jesus similarly teaches his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

How would it feel to pray this way? Our responses can vary, from fear at our loss of control to sweet relief at no longer having to pretend to be a ruler. Do you resist praying this psalm, or is it like a song drifting to you from a land you would love to visit and remain in forever, the land where Christ rules?

Begin tonight by worshiping God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Call on the Lord for victory in our own battles, and ask that our Lord's kingdom would come. Plead for God's will to be done,

not only in the world outside, but in our own lives.

Recommended Closing Prayer

O Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things, Treasury of good things, and Giver of life: come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every sin, and save our souls, O gracious Lord! Amen.

Treasury of good things, and Giver of life: come and abide in us...



THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

4



**For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven,
when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.**

**The day that is coming shall set them ablaze,
says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them
neither root nor branch.**



SUNDAY
MARCH 14



MALACHI 4

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts. “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

Brief Reflection

Pride and evil vanishing, until no darkness at all remains. All wrong done away with, so all that is left is like the powdery dust that remains from a fiercely hot oven. Your health and energy restored so you feel eighteen years old again, ready to tackle anything. A true-north orientation for your whole life because the ancient words God gave Moses make sense to you. Families restored, so fathers love and sacrifice for their children and children are filled to the brim by the attention of their fathers. Could all these good things possibly come true?

Malachi is not daydreaming. He is declaring God's promises to us. A day is coming when one good thing will overtake the next. This coming day will be more than a new era. It will be life itself.

Wonderfully, Malachi doesn't say, "Work to make these things happen." That ought to relieve us. The complexity and brokenness of our world is everywhere. We know we can't manufacture or legislate a societal change of this magnitude into being.

So what's our response to the problems we live with as we seek to hold on to the promises of God? Do we do nothing until God sets things right?

Not at all. Today matters. As the Apostle Peter puts it, "Since everything here today might well be gone tomorrow, do you see how essential it is to live a holy life? Daily expect the Day of God, eager for its arrival." (2 Peter 3:10-11).

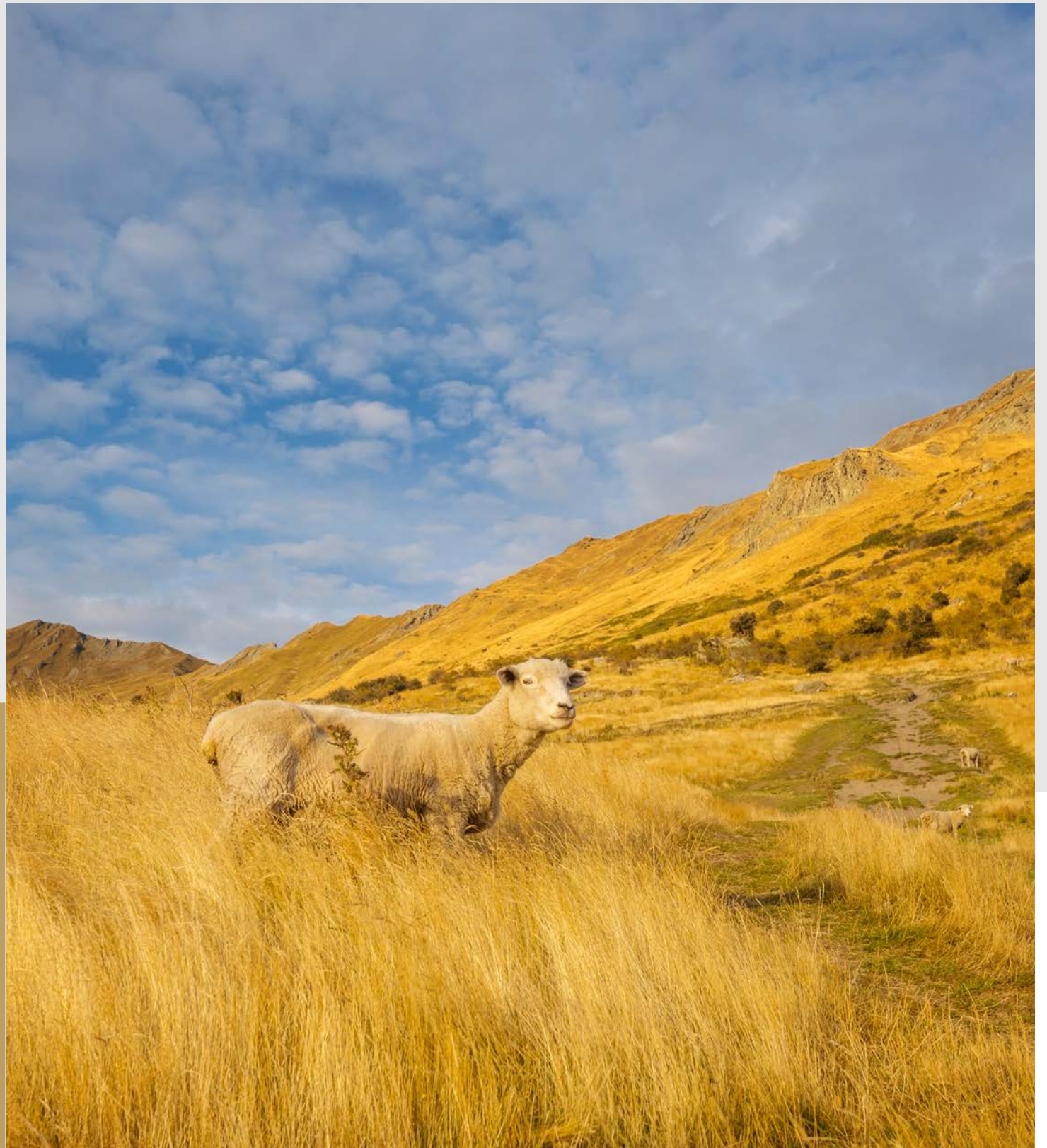
As you pray tonight, thank your Heavenly Father that one day all will be utterly made right. Then ask him to show you how to live a holy life that anticipates his coming. Ask him to show you during this Lenten time just one thing that you can repent of and do differently.



Recommended Closing Prayer

Oh Lord, Help me to live this day for that day. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

help me to live
this day
for that day...



LUKE 19:1-10



He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

MONDAY MARCH 15



Brief Reflection

Zacchaeus is not a cute little man who climbed a tree to see Jesus. He's a crooked tax collector. He's a white-collar criminal, an expert at defrauding his neighbors to grow his own wealth. He's a sinner and a traitor, and his own people despise him. He has sunk to the bottom rung of society by dishonestly climbing the ladder of success. If you had lived in Jericho, you would have written him off.

Jesus encounters Zacchaeus as he is on his way to Passover in Jerusalem. He knows that at this particular Passover, he will be offered up as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He alone is the true Passover lamb.

But before he reaches Jerusalem to suffer and die, he pauses to seek out Zacchaeus. Jesus has not written this man off, instead he is drawing him to himself.

The message of the story of Zacchaeus is powerful. Mercy and grace are offered freely, even to hardened and evil people. And the placement of this story in the gospel narrative highlights that message. It follows the encounters with a blind beggar trapped in poverty and with a rich young ruler trapped by his wealth. This is the last personal conversation we see Jesus having before the Passion Week unfolds.

The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. We are all lost without him. This is the Gospel. Jesus to the rescue. It's why he came.

The disciples have asked in Luke 18, "who can be saved?" These three encounters answer that question. Only those who acknowledge they are lost. They are the ones who turn to Jesus and find everlasting life in him.

Your sin is not a barrier to Christ seeking you; he is the friend of sinners. He offers you his perfect love and mercy. Will you let his divine love take root in your heart and change your life?

As you pray, acknowledge your sin before Christ. Thank him that he came to seek and to save. Open your heart to God. He sees you and knows you. In humility, receive his forgiveness and let his divine love change you.

Recommended Closing Prayer

O God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd of your people: Grant that, when we hear his voice, we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Anglican Church in North America Book of Common Prayer)

when we hear his
voice, we may know
him who calls us each
by name, and follow
where he leads...



TUESDAY
MARCH 16



PSALM 7:10-17 (NIV)

**My shield is God Most High,
who saves the upright in heart.
God is a righteous judge,
a God who displays his wrath every day.
he does not relent,
he will sharpen his sword;
he will bend and string his bow.
He has prepared his deadly weapons;
he makes ready his flaming arrows.
Whoever is pregnant with evil**

**conceives trouble and gives birth to
disillusionment.
Whoever digs a hole and scoops it out
falls into the pit they have made.
The trouble they cause recoils on them;
their violence comes down on their own
heads.
I will give thanks to the Lord because of his
righteousness;
I will sing the praises of the name of the
Lord Most High.**



Brief Reflection

We like to meditate on a God of love more than one of justice. We like to consider forgiveness and mercy, and we can feel uncomfortable reading passages like this one. Here we see God sharpening his sword and stringing his bow, readying deadly weapons to wield against those who love evil and perpetrate injustice.

But the psalmist takes refuge in the justice of God. He calls God a shield because God saves the upright in heart and will ultimately destroy those who persist in rebellion and opposition to his goodness.

When we witness widespread injustice, when we encounter evil men and women thriving, when we see the innocent trodden down, and the wicked plotting more destruction, we need a deep, weighty belief in God's commitment to justice and goodness so we don't despair. We need to contemplate these images of God and take them up as our shields against hopelessness in a dark world.

And in God's righteousness, we need to fear him in the way that leads to life. When we rightly fear him, we are not cowering before a capricious deity. Instead, we are acknowledging with our whole heart that our sin is utterly sinful and his holiness is utter perfection and beauty.

God is opposed to the wicked, including the wickedness lurking in our own hearts. If we believe in Jesus, we have been made upright through the cross, and we are being made upright through sanctification. But still, we are far from perfect. God's holiness draws us to stand in awe of him, to confess our sins, and to live in gratitude to him and humility with each other.

Tonight as you pray, reflect on the justice of God. Do you need to see God's justice as a banner of hope, as his commitment to righting a wrong world in his good time? Do you need

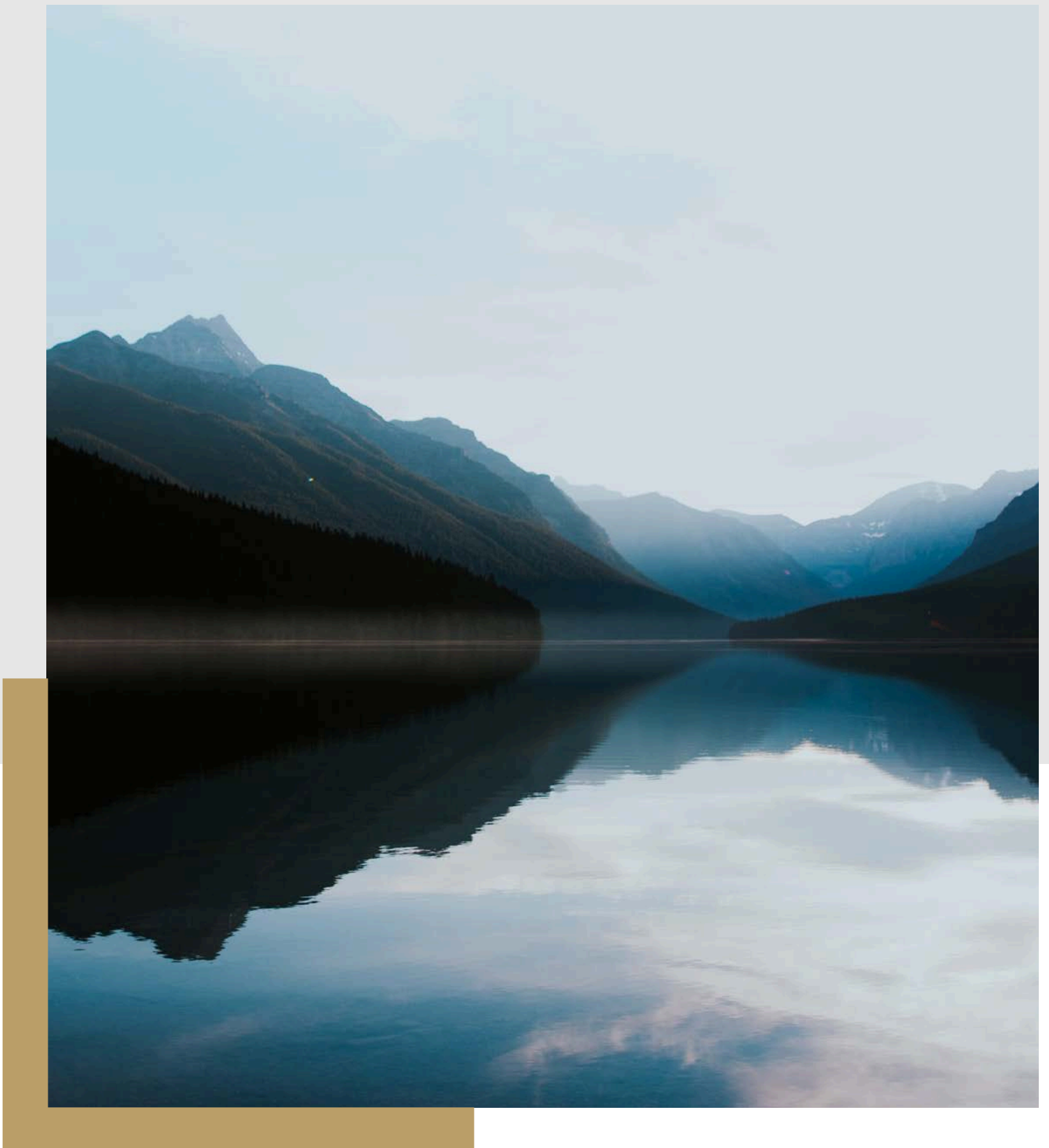


to grasp his righteousness as a warning to your own wayward heart? Ask the Lord to use his word and his Spirit to convict, to change, and to strengthen you tonight.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Oh Father, thank you that you will bring about justice in the world. Let us remember your holiness. Thank you, Christ, that by your blood we are made righteous. Give us hearts that trust and hope in you above all things. Amen.

you will bring
about justice in
the world. Let us
remember your
holiness...



PSALM 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.



WEDNESDAY MARCH 17



Brief Reflection

Psalm 23 offers us an answer to a question we all have. What would happen to me if I quit trying to be the master and chief provider for my own life? What would it be like to trust God instead? What would it be like to let him lead us?

We will never know the answer to those questions unless we begin by acknowledging that we are but sheep.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus and his disciples preach the “gospel of the kingdom” and proclaim that the kingdom of God is near. It is good news that the kingdom of God is near because in this kingdom, we can be mere sheep who receive rest, sustenance, and protection.

Psalm 23 is a realistic psalm, taking us from rich pasture and sweet flowing water through the shadow of death, from God’s comfort and salvation to our anointing in the Holy Spirit, from an easy path to a place where, although our enemies surround us, God himself feeds us.

Two promises hold us in hope and security. “You are with me.” And, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Begin your prayers tonight in humility, as a sheep looking to your shepherd. Acknowledge your dependence

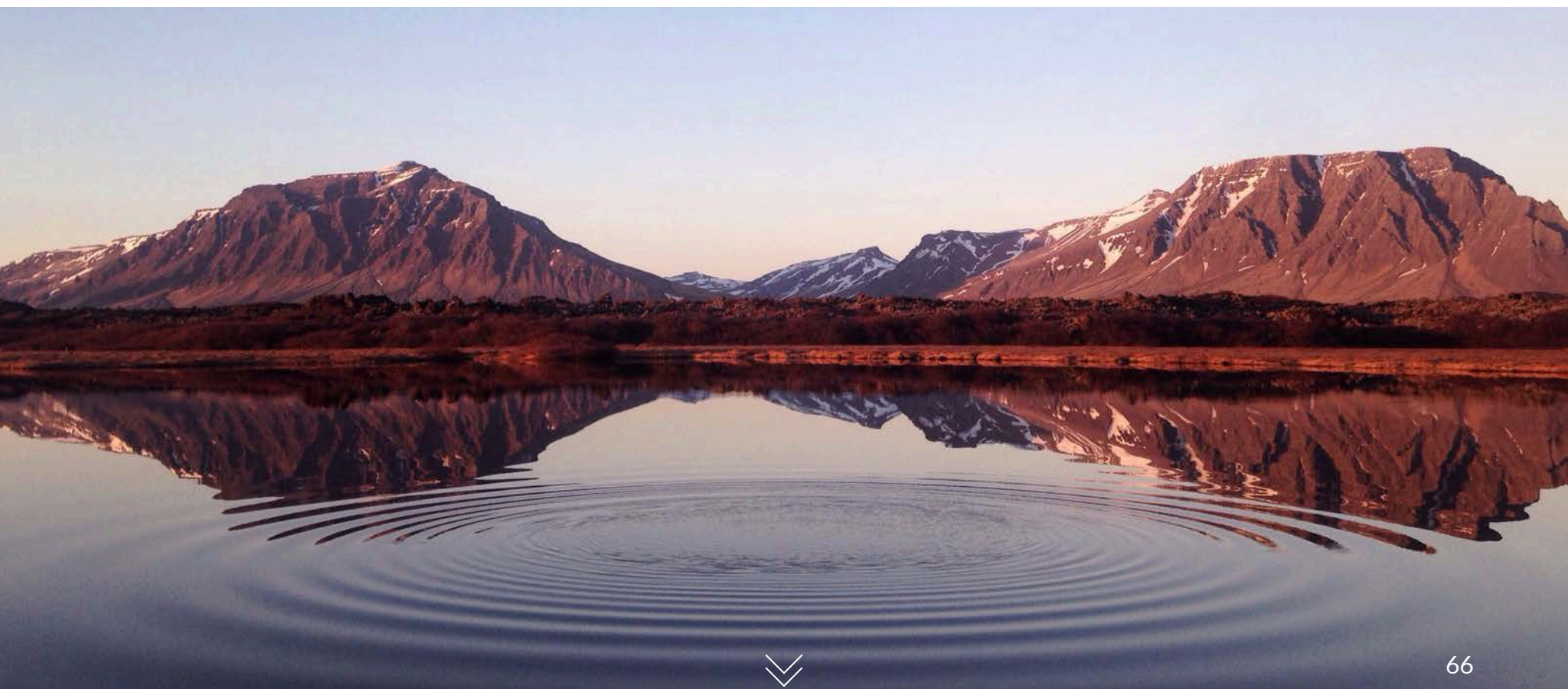
on his hand. Ask that Christ’s will would be done in your life now and forever. Finally, let your requests give way to hope, thank God for his salvation and express your wish to dwell in his house forever.

Recommended Closing Prayer

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Anglican Church in North America Book of Common Prayer)

good shepherd of
your people: Grant
that when we hear his
voice we may know
him who calls us each
by name...



THURSDAY
MARCH 18

COLOSSIANS 1:1-20 (MSG)

Be assured that from the first day we heard of you, we haven't stopped praying for you, asking God to give you wise minds and spirits attuned to his will, and so acquire a thorough understanding of the ways in which God works. We pray that you'll live well for the Master, making him proud of you as you work hard in his orchard. As you learn more and more how God works, you will learn how to do your work. We pray that you'll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul—not the grim strength of gritting your teeth but the glory-strength God gives. It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us.

God rescued us from dead-end alleys and dark dungeons. He's set us up in the kingdom of the Son he loves so much, the Son who got us out of the pit we were in, got rid of the sins we were doomed to keep repeating.

We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.

He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.

Brief Reflection

Listen to the concluding words in this passage one more time:

He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he’s there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.

What about this world would you love to see changed? What have you had enough of? Be honest as you listen to your own heart. We live in a stressful world that keeps hearing more of “the same bad” at every turn of the news cycle. Is there a way out of this mess?

Perhaps we need to take ten steps away from the latest crisis or dire prediction and remind ourselves of the big picture. Colossians says Jesus was supreme in the beginning and will be supreme in the end. We, on the other hand, are in the middle of deep difficulty and struggle. Our strength will come from seeing the whole story and living into that. It won’t come, as the Message puts it, “from the grim strength of gritting our teeth.”

What is the real story? The Triune God has always been and will always be. As Jesus himself declares in Revelation 1, he is Alpha and Omega. In his great goodness, he created a beautiful cosmos where his kingship would bless everything he made. But rather than responding with gratitude, we chose mutiny and rebellion. Our rejection of his kingship still spreads out like shock waves from an earthquake. The result? We live in a broken and dislocated universe where little knows its meaning or place.



But Paul is not in despair. In Jesus, as J.R.R. Tolkien so beautifully puts it, “Everything sad is becoming untrue.” In Jesus, God is rescuing people who will join him in this work of reestablishing the rightful rule of King Jesus.

It sounds so cosmic (and it is), but it is also personal and ordinary. It is you, listening to someone you disagree with. It is you, acting with compassion rather than ignoring the need of another. It is you, responding with kindness when insulted. It is you, choosing humility rather than standing on your rights. It is you, delighting that the king is near and will one day come in fullness.

Today—this another-day-in-the-middle—matters. Live this day for that day, when the king will come in fullness.

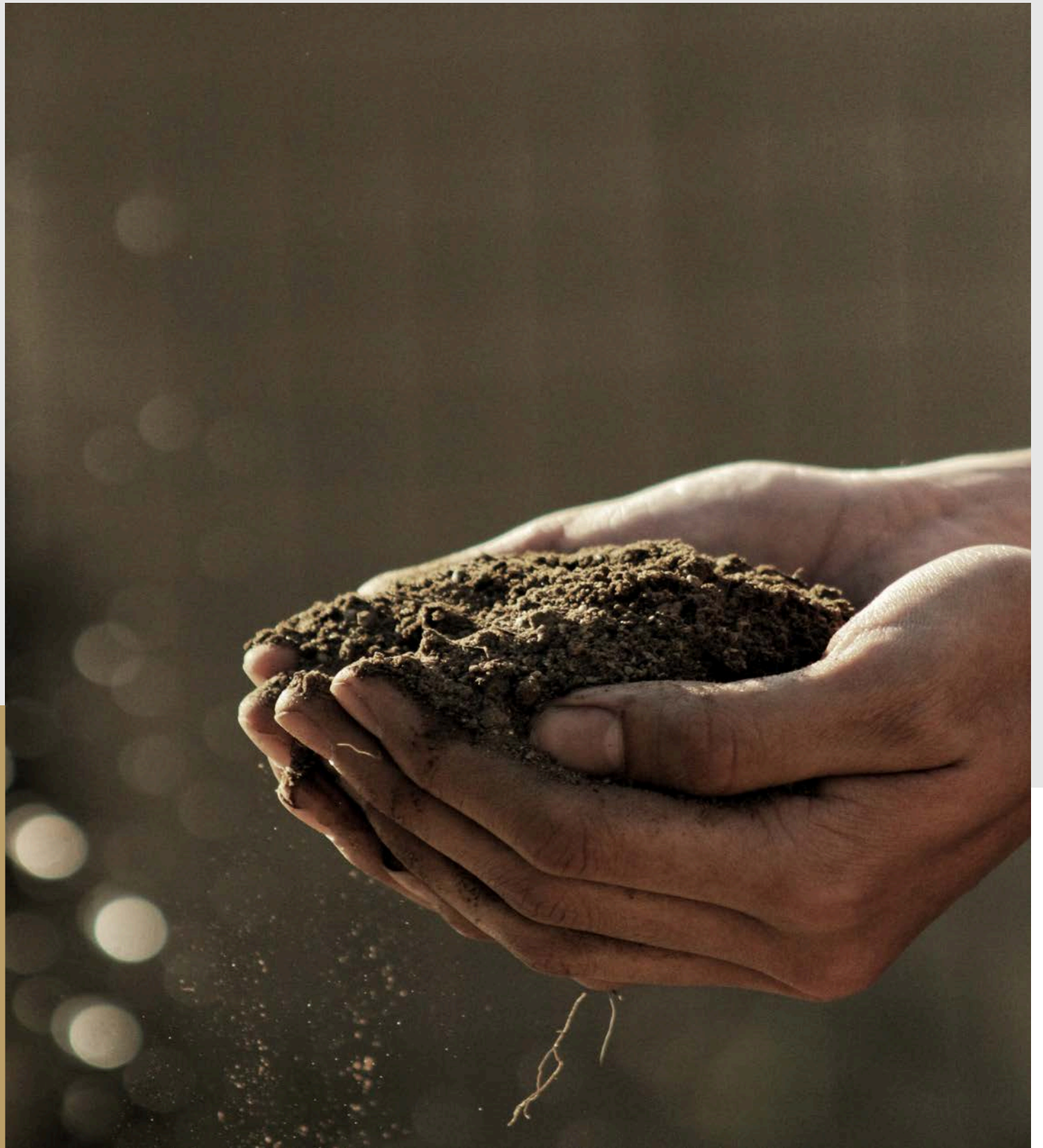
Tonight as you pray, ask God for one specific way you can live out the prayer: Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Prayer of Francis of Xavier:

O God, grant that we may desire you, and desiring you seek you, and seeking you find you, and finding you be satisfied in you for ever. Amen.

grant that we may
desire you, and
desiring you seek
you, and seeking
you find you...



MATTHEW 5:3 (NIV)



“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

FRIDAY MARCH 19



Brief Reflection

The Beatitudes describe a life God blesses. They are not a qualification for salvation. They are not a list of things to do, but a way to be.

It's fitting that this first Beatitude, the foundation for all that follow, deals with the state of our hearts. This first Beatitude begins a spiritual sequence that leads us down step-by-step, then up into life in God's kingdom.

There is no entry into this kingdom apart from poverty of spirit, from humility. We must go down to go up. How are we to understand this in a world that tells us self-sufficiency, self-confidence and self-expression are imperative for a successful life?

We have only to look at a holy God and imagine standing before him to understand how small and insignificant we are.

We have only to look at Jesus and contemplate the cross, where he died for us, to turn the tables on our worldly pride, the sin behind all sin.

In describing the Christian life, theologian John Stott said, "Our greatest foe is pride and our greatest ally is humility...Nothing in history or the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. At the foot of the cross, we shrink to our true size."

When we are "right-sized" and pride

is forced to flee, there is room in our hearts for God's Spirit to fill us.

Tonight as you pray, contemplate a holy God. Be honest about the pride that infects your heart.

Lift your eyes to the One who wears a crown in heaven because he wore a crown of thorns. This Jesus, who hung on the cross for you, welcomes you into his kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. In true humility, enter in.

Battling pride is a daily chore to be fought in the power of the Spirit by acknowledging our need for God and expressing gratitude to him.

Pride wilts in a thankful heart, but humility flourishes in the soil of spiritual disciplines: prayer, the study of God's word and worship.

As the Message's version of Matthew 5:3 tells us, "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule."

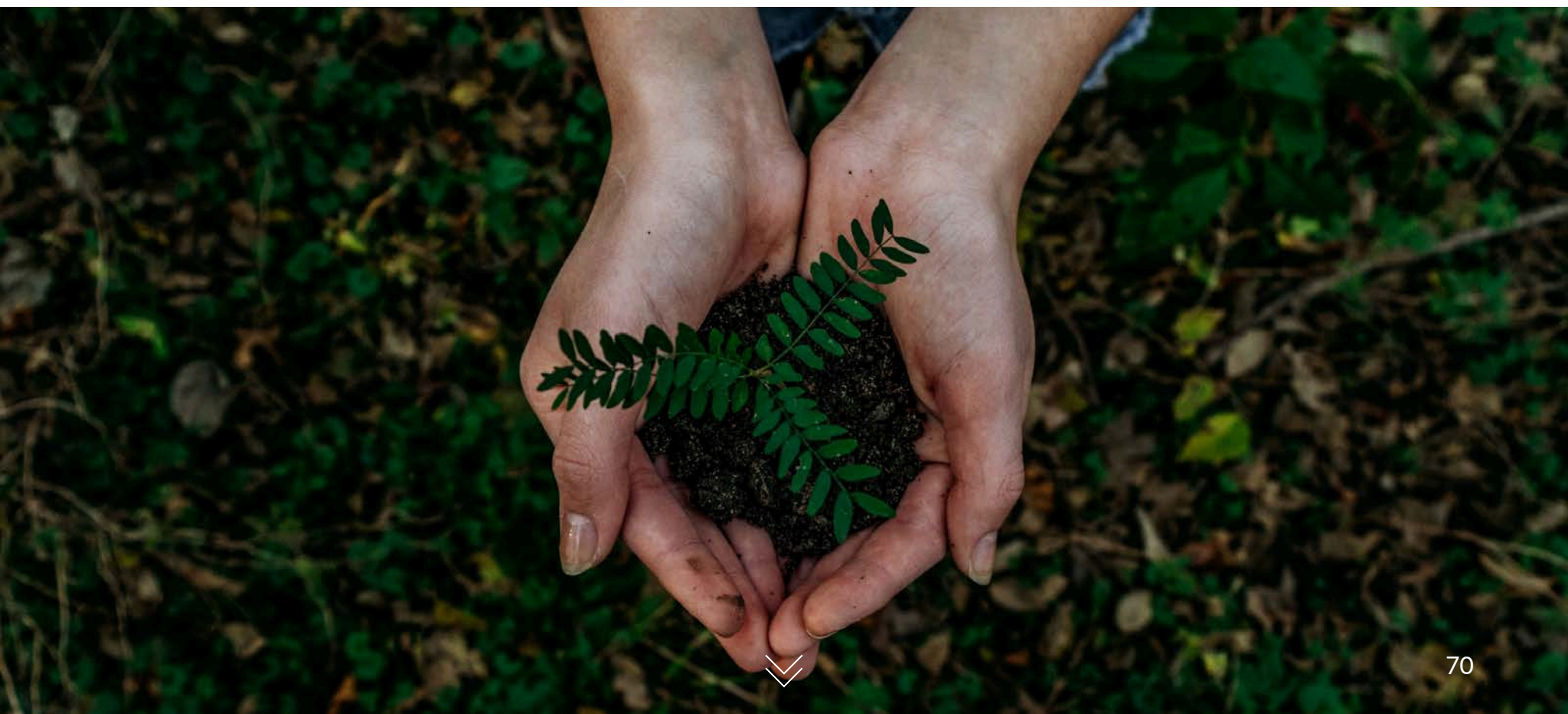
In these trying times, you may feel as if you're at the end of your rope. In God's mercy, that's a good place to be. Less of you, more of God. Poor in spirit, rich in the kingdom of heaven. Rejoice.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Father God, I yearn for poverty of spirit so your kingdom can be my forever home. I abhor and turn from pride that closes the door to life with you.

Help me in all my
doings to put down
sin and to humble my
pride...

Help me in all my doings to put down sin and to humble my pride. Right-size my life so that you might be glorified. In Jesus' name, Amen.



SATURDAY
MARCH 20



LUKE 14:25-33 (NIV)

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.”



Brief Reflection

We are quick to mitigate the words of Jesus. We desire to sidestep difficult, uncomfortable passages like this one, where he commands us to hate our families and ourselves and to take up a symbol of cursed, horrific torture.

If this feels harsh to us in our current cultural context, how much more so for the largely Jewish audience of Jesus' day, who honored and prized family so highly? These Jewish people knew the Old Testament words, "Anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse" (Deuteronomy 21:23). They had likely witnessed the horrendous spectacle of Roman crucifixion firsthand.

It is good to take the whole counsel of scripture and to understand that Christ is not actually commanding us to hate ourselves or to hate our brothers and sisters. In other passages, Jesus clearly says that the whole of scripture can be summed up in the first two commandments: love God and love your neighbor. At the same time, we cannot let these words lose their shock value. Christ purposefully chose these statements to shake us from comfort and lethargy. Who of us hasn't hesitated to follow Jesus when we've realized it will inconvenience us or cause us to lose our place in this world?

Jesus wants us to understand clearly the cost of following him. That cost may be so vast, the love required of us in obedience so great, that by comparison, our earthly loves will look like hatred. And those who desire to know him, must follow him "outside the camp" and share in his sufferings. Do not be deceived. The cost of discipleship is real and greater than we like to believe.

And yet, hear the mercy of God in Christ's words. He desires to work in us a lifetime habit of relinquishing ourselves to him. In God's economy, nothing freely given over to him will ever



be lost. And in the laying down of our lives, as seeds dying in the earth, we will find more life and fullness, as beloved disciples of Jesus, than we could ever dream possible. We will be as new shoots of the new humanity growing up to be like him.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Jesus, let us count the cost of discipleship and find your friendship worthy of any sacrifice. Give us pure hearts and right affections. Enable us to live lives of faithfulness, for that is a work that only your Spirit can do in us. In your precious name and by your blood we pray, Amen

let us count the cost...

THE FIFTH WEEK
OF LENT

5



**“A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.”
And he could do no mighty work there...**





MARK 6:1-6



He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.” And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching.

SUNDAY MARCH 21



Brief Reflection

Mark takes pains to show us how much rejection Jesus faces: the skeptical scribes as he offers forgiveness and healing to a paralyzed man, John's disciples and a group of Pharisees who question if Jesus is truly righteous, the murderous opposition of both the Pharisees and the Herodians (the people of political power), the unclean spirits who try to expose him, doubts of his sanity within his own extended family, the scribes' accusation that he is demon-possessed, his own disciples' complaint that he doesn't really care about them, and the banishment imposed on him by the Gerasenes.

Mark gives us a snapshot of all Jesus endured, long before the cross.

This rejection continues in tonight's passage. Jesus has gone home to Nazareth. Indeed, the reports of the miracles he has done suggest he is far more than a rabbi. Surely in Nazareth he will be welcomed?

After all, the people in Nazareth are his kinfolk and neighbors. They have bargained and traded with Jesus for him to build them a table, a house, a new yoke. Jesus has been a working man like all of them. They know his character. He has never been false, never misused anyone, never pawned off shoddy workmanship, and never erupted in anger, or drunkenness or greed. Even in his youth, he was truly a good person. How could they not

believe? But Mark makes it clear. Their astonishment that their local boy is no longer simply a carpenter turns to contempt and resistance. They don't want to listen, to believe or to receive his help.

Tonight, as you pray, thank Jesus for enduring your own hostility toward him, for being patient with your doubt, and for forgiving your contempt. Ask Christ to give you a child's welcoming heart—eager to believe him, to trust him, and to follow him.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Almighty God, give us the increase of faith, hope, and love; and, that we may obtain what you have promised, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Anglican Church in North America Book of Common Prayer)

give us the increase
of faith, hope, and
love; and, that we may
obtain what you have
promised...



MONDAY
MARCH 22



PSALM 100:1-5 (NIV)

**Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his
pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving**

**and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the Lord is good and his love endures
forever;
his faithfulness continues through all
generations.**



Brief Reflection

Gladness is in scarce supply these days. But this psalm says choose gladness and exuberant joy. Shout out how good things are. Sing joyful songs to God. Come near to him with praise and thanksgiving.

Psalm 100 and Psalm 23 endure as the two most beloved of all psalms. Could it be that at the core of our beings, we need to know we are cared for by the Good Shepherd and that we need deep gladness?

The seriousness and distress of our world scoff at the idea that joy is meant to have a central place in our lives. But the truth is, we were made for joy. The work of being changed into the likeness of Jesus is growth toward joy. Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 1:24, "We work with you for your joy."

Could it be that the mark of true Christlikeness is not just love and peace but joy? Could we dare hope that the trajectory of a life of faith is a movement toward greater and greater joy?

Perhaps the paraphrase that we sing of this psalm can help us understand. Listen to these words:

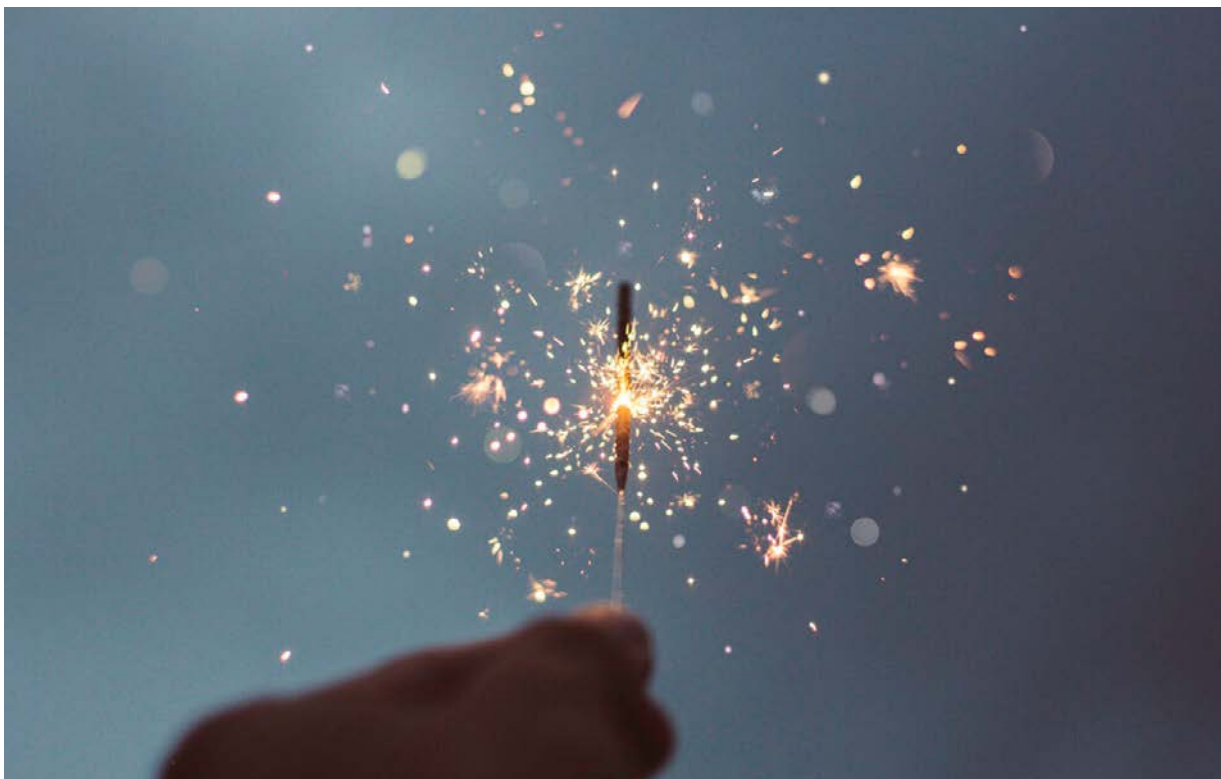
The Lord, ye know, is God indeed;
Without our aid He doth us make
We are His folk, He doth us feed;
And for His sheep He doth us take.

God made us. Think about the things you have made. A birthday meal, a painting, a table, or a new flower bed. What do you feel when things turn out well? Pride? Delight? Joy? God has that same connection to us as his creatures.

We are his folk. We belong to him.

He doth us feed. He takes care of us. We are safe.

He takes us for his sheep. He chooses us. We are beloved.



Belongingness, Safety, Belovedness. If our life with God is our deepest reality, everything is indeed okay.

Will you let joy find you? As you pray tonight, let this psalm lead you into joy, thanksgiving, and praise.

Recommended Closing Prayer

O heavenly Father, you have filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your works; that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Anglican Church in North America Book of Common Prayer)

Open our eyes
to behold your
gracious hand in
all your works...



MATTHEW 5:4 (NIV)



Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

TUESDAY MARCH 23



Brief Reflection

Lent is indeed a time to mourn. In this season of sadness, we know what it is to mourn and to long for comfort. As Jesus leads us toward life in his kingdom, he invites us to mourn, not just the things that are broken in our world, but what is broken at the center of our hearts.

In the first beatitude, we are told that poverty of spirit is the entrance to life in God's kingdom. If poverty of spirit is understanding God's holiness and man's sinfulness, this second beatitude invites us to feel the pain that sinful brokenness brings.

If we let this pain touch us, it will break our hearts just as it breaks the heart of Jesus. Blessedly, as we come to him in sorrow, he comes to us as Comforter. It's a divine exchange. He gives us his Spirit, and his Spirit knows us so intimately that he knows how to comfort each one of us.

Listen to Jesus' promise: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever..." (John 14:16).

Seven centuries before the incarnation, the prophet Isaiah pointed to a Savior who would bind up the broken-hearted and comfort all who mourn. Prophecy became reality as a carpenter from Nazareth opened up a scroll and began his public ministry.

Tonight, in your weakness and in your sadness, open yourself to the comfort, strength, and power of Christ. Jesus doesn't just mourn sin; he conquers it. As he does, he invites us into this upside-down kingdom where those who truly mourn sin will be blessed with the comfort he himself gives.

As you pray, pause to consider your moral bankruptcy before the Lord. Let this reality descend down from your mind and settle in your heart. Mourn it. Push back against a world that tells us grieving sin is repressive and restrictive. Press back against a culture that says, "Don't worry. Be happy."

As you finish praying, rise in thanksgiving that our Lord does not leave us as mourners. Listen to these promises from scripture. Pray them for yourself and those you love:

"This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life."
(Psalm 119:50)

"Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted."
(Isaiah 49:13)

Recommended Closing Prayer

Father, we confess our sin to you. We confess that we have so far to go in our journey of sanctification. Please forgive us things done and things left

Let us once again
embrace the cross ...

undone, forgive us our thoughts, words, and deeds of darkness. Let us know the depth of our sin. And now, Father, strengthen us with your grace and comfort. Let us once again embrace the cross as our place of full and free forgiveness. Give us fresh amazement and fresh gratitude and let us walk in the light of the gospel. For Jesus' sake and in his name, Amen.



WEDNESDAY
MARCH 24



LUKE 12:4-7

“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”



Brief Reflection

Do not fear those who kill the body. Christ gives this command as the shadow of Golgotha looms large, as those who plot to torture and crucify him conspire behind closed doors. The power of those who can kill the body will soon be on full display on a hill outside Jerusalem.

In light of what is to come, Christ knows that his listeners need a reorientation of their fears. He tells them: don't fear people whose power ends at death, fear a holy God who has the power to cast souls into hell. In this passage he says it twice: fear this powerful God!

But he has even more comfort for his listeners. He assures them that this God, mighty ruler of all, never forgets a sparrow. This God, with all creation at his feet, knows the number of hairs on your head. Fear God, and yet you are of great value to the Father, so fear not.

Because Jesus didn't fear those who kill the body, because he feared a holy God who would cast unrepentant souls into hell, because he shared his Father's deep love for his people, lost in sin, Christ bled out on that hill outside Jerusalem. His longing was that we might fear God, and because of that, we would not fear anything else.

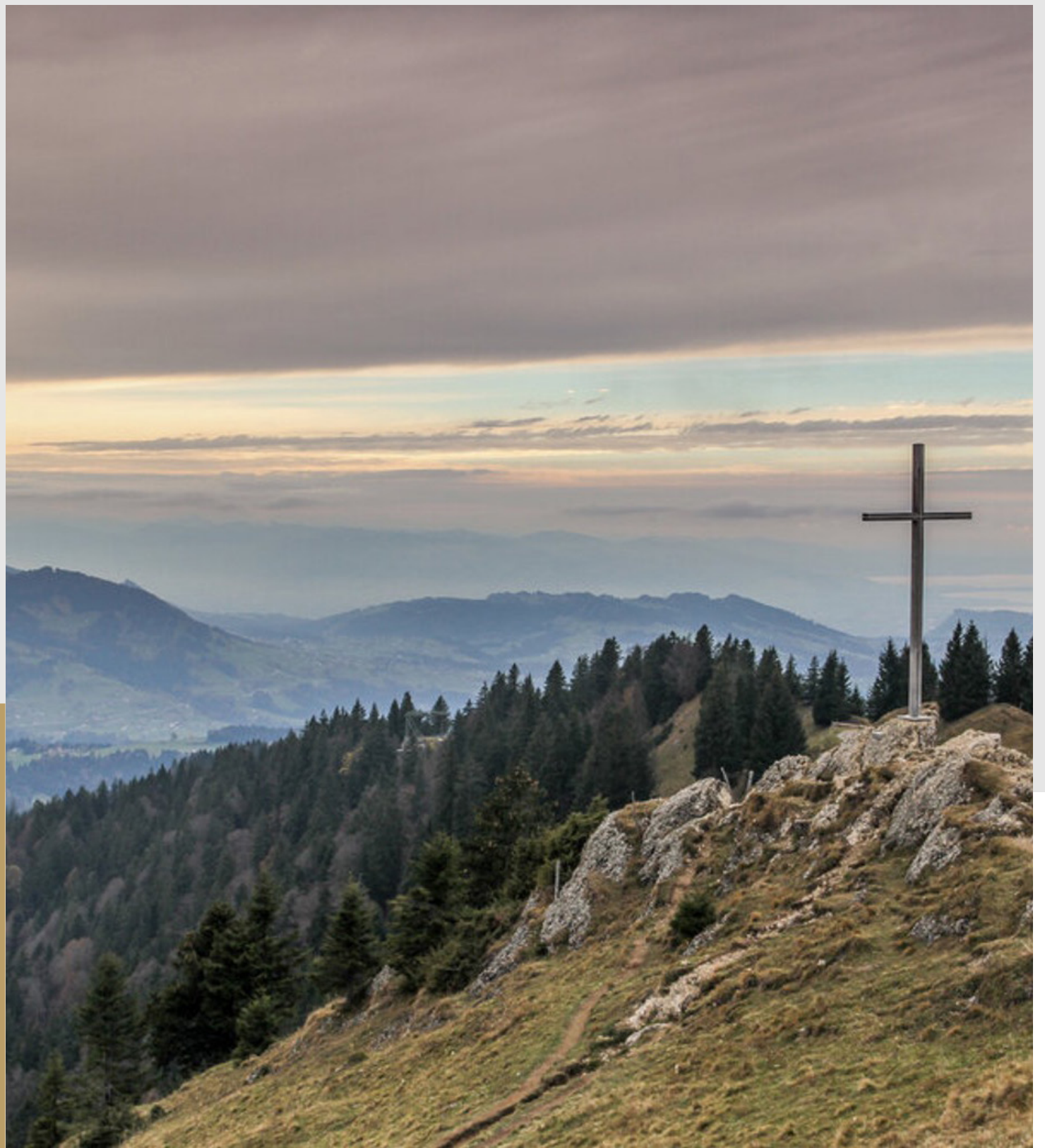
Tonight as you pray, ponder the power, the holiness, and the love of God. Let these truths make you brave in a world full of lesser realities.



Recommended Closing Prayer

A Prayer of St. Augustine: Oh Lord, command what you will and give what you command. Amen.

command what you will...



THURSDAY MARCH 25

PSALM 145:1-12

**I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and
ever.
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be
praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable.
One generation shall commend your
works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.
On the glorious splendor of your
majesty,**

**and on your wondrous works, I will
meditate.
They shall speak of the might of your
awesome deeds,
and I will declare your greatness.
They shall pour forth the fame of your
abundant goodness
and shall sing aloud of your
righteousness.
The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in
steadfast love.
The Lord is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he**

**has made.
All your works shall give thanks to you,
O Lord,
and all your saints shall bless you!
They shall speak of the glory of your
kingdom
and tell of your power,
to make known to the children of man
your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of your
kingdom.**



Brief Reflection

David's last recorded psalm extols the greatness and goodness of God and calls us to praise. We find ourselves in a world and in a time where real goodness and true greatness seem in short supply. Incivility and violence abound. Fires, floods, a pandemic, and myriad natural disasters spread around the globe. Confidence in the stability and goodness of governments is at a low ebb.

Psalm 145 calls us to turn our eyes away from a world that is broken and to look at a God of unsearchable greatness who does good because he is good.

We see evidence of God's greatness as we meditate on his wondrous works in creation. Stop to consider the glorious things God has made. Speak them out loud. Now declare the greatness of the one who made them.

As you pray tonight, turn your thoughts to God's goodness. He is righteous, kind, gracious and merciful. Because of his great love for us, he gives us what we don't deserve and what we could never earn. And blessedly, unbelievably, mercifully, he doesn't give us what we do deserve. This kind of grace and mercy, displayed at the cross of Christ, is where the steadfast love of God pays sin's penalty as our undeserved ransom.

Love toward sinners demonstrates

God's goodness. Stop to consider this goodness poured out for you. Speak it out loud. Declare the goodness of the one whose perfect love, kindness, mercy and generosity paid your entrance into his everlasting kingdom. Thank the one who raises you up when you fall, upholds you when days are hard, and satisfies your deepest desires when everyone and everything else falls short. Thank him that he has heard your cry and has saved you.

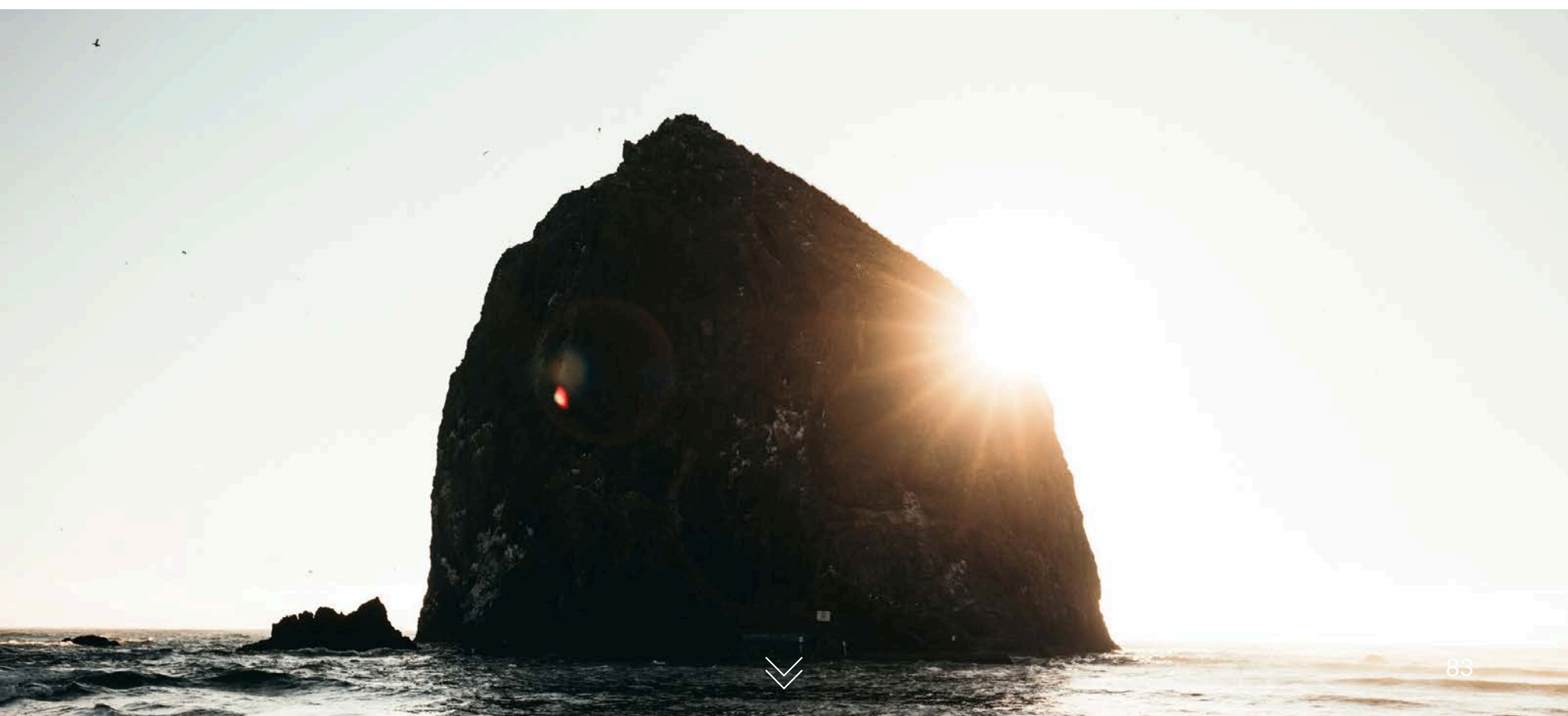
When Moses asked to see God's glory, God said, "I will cause my goodness to pass before you." God's goodness is his glory.

Our God is great, good and glorious. He is worthy of our praise, every day and into eternity. Praise Him.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Holy, gracious, merciful Father, I praise you that you are great, you are good and you are glorious. Thank you for your love poured out to me on the cross. Amen.

you are great, you
are good and you are
glorious...



FRIDAY
MARCH 26



LUKE 7:18-23

The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’” In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”



Brief Reflection

Our faith is not steady.

In the beginning of John's gospel, we hear John the Baptist bellowing, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Then in Luke 7, Christ says, "Among those born of women none is greater than John." (Luke 7:28).

And yet here in this same chapter, Luke tells us that John wavered in his conviction. He sends his disciples to Christ for confirmation. He asks of Jesus, "Are you really the one we've been waiting for?"

Are you familiar with the kind of lingering doubt that John expresses? Do you wrestle with similar misgivings, even if you will not say them aloud?

Jesus, are you truly who you say you are? Are you our Messiah, our rescuer, our savior? Will you repair the ruined road that leads to friendship with God? Will you keep me until the end? Will you never leave, never forsake? Will you remake the world?

Let this passage teach you. John lays his question at Christ's feet, and Christ answers: Look around. The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the lepers dance, and the dead breathe again. If you aren't offended by me, if you accept my words and my lordship, you will know the very blessing of God.

Jesus doesn't crush John in his wavering. As Isaiah assures us, "a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench." (Isaiah 42:3).

No, Jesus reaches out and straightens the stalk. He fans the flame of John's faith into brightness again by his words and actions. He tells John to listen to the shouts of surprise and joy, to see the tears of gladness, and to taste these first fruits of his coming blessed reign. Yet in the mystery of



his goodness and sovereignty, he does not promise John's release from prison. Instead, he holds out to him a call to learn a deeper trust.

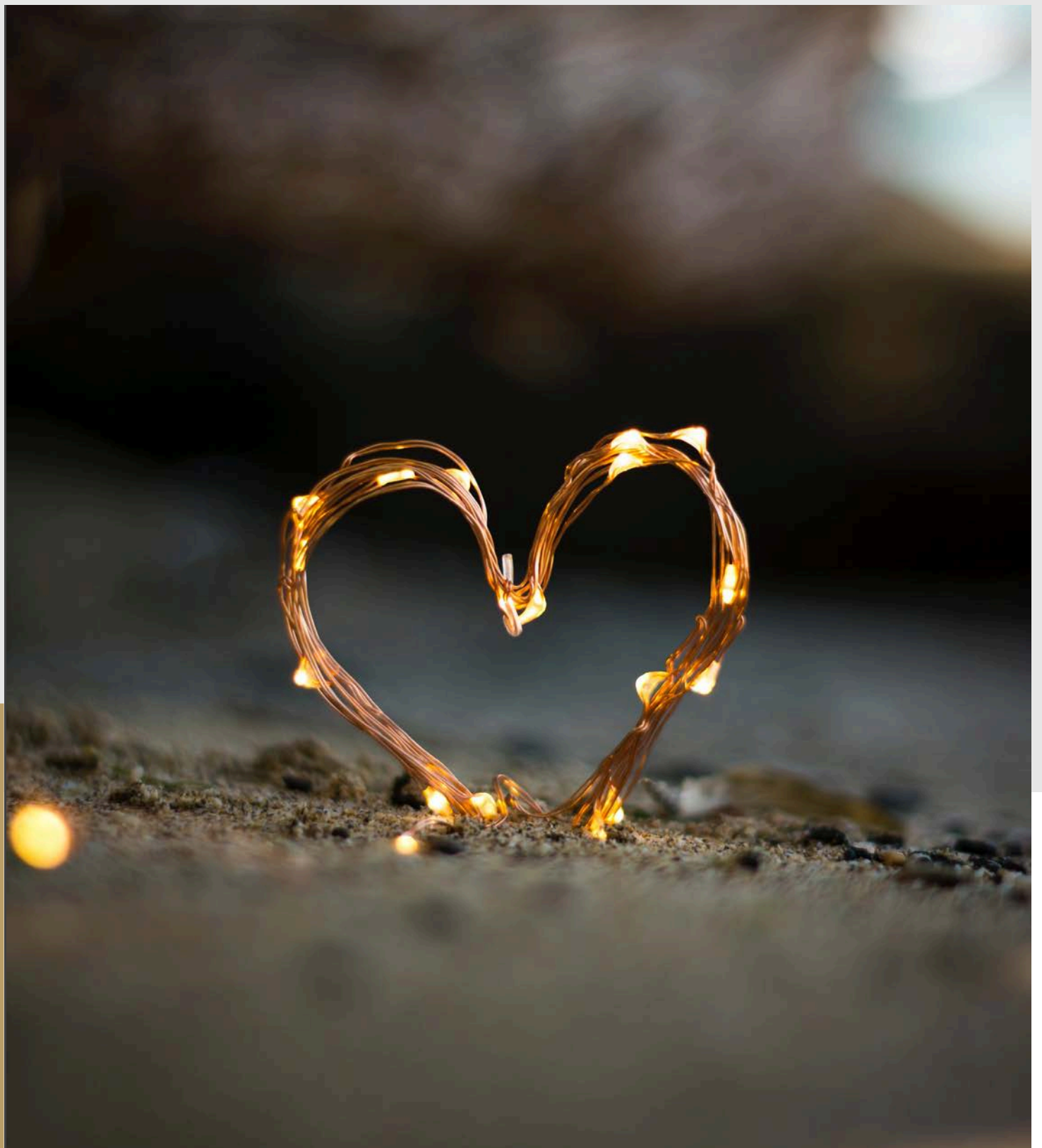
Christ invites us to learn that same trust. The gospels promise a coming kingdom where all disease will be undone and death will be trampled. In this present world, some of that good work is already taking place, but we know much remains deeply broken. Christ calls to us, "Don't be offended. Trust me."

Tonight as you pray, voice your doubts to the Lord, and then listen for his invitation to learn a deeper trust. Sit long with the gospels and let Christ's works of powerful grace permeate your imagination and your soul. Hold fast to Jesus. And be blessed.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Oh Christ, we believe, help our unbelief. We are bruised reeds and smoldering wicks. Be gracious to us. Give us the courage for honest prayers and the patience to meditate, long and slow, on scripture. Let us consider you, Jesus, and be renewed. Give us the deep faith that holds to you always. Amen.

We are bruised
reeds and
smoldering wicks.
Be gracious to
us...



1 JOHN 2:7-10

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

SATURDAY MARCH 27

Brief Reflection

“What’s the goal of life?” All sorts of answers rise up in us when we ask that question: To be free of our struggles, to find someone who really understands us, to have kids, to find an interesting job, to make a bucket of money, to be a better person, to have our doubts about God finally end, to be rid of the anxiety we carry, to get even with the people who have hurt us, or at least to hear them apologize.

We want a life that has meaning and a life where we belong.

But in this passage, John lays out a different goal: to grow in keeping the greatest commandment. That commandment is a seamless call to love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength and to love your neighbor as you love yourself. John heard Jesus speak about this greatest of all commandment in his teaching and then again in the upper room right before he was crucified. He heard Jesus say the same thing over and over—learn to love.

Our world runs on the notion that position, power, and privilege are all that matter. We are destroying our cities, our cultures and our relationships with the insistence that we are right and the whole world needs to bow to our beliefs. Everyone is afraid to simply love.

Tonight, would you be willing to

pray, Lord, teach me to love like you love? Will you receive the reality that you are deeply loved by God? Will you let his love touch you so deeply that you are set free to love others?

Recommended Closing Prayer

Oh Lord God, teach me to love like you love. In Jesus Name, Amen.

teach me to love like
you love...



PALM SUNDAY

6



**This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet,
saying, “Say to the daughter of Zion,
‘Behold, your king is coming to you...**



SUNDAY
MARCH 28



MATTHEW 21:1-5

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethpage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

Brief Reflection

In the western church, today has historically been observed as Palm Sunday—the celebration and remembrance of Christ’s Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. In truth, it’s only a pause on the road to the cross, but it resounds with meaning. Jesus is the humble king. As John 12 says, we no longer have to be afraid. As Mark 11 reminds us, the coming kingdom of our father David is blessed.

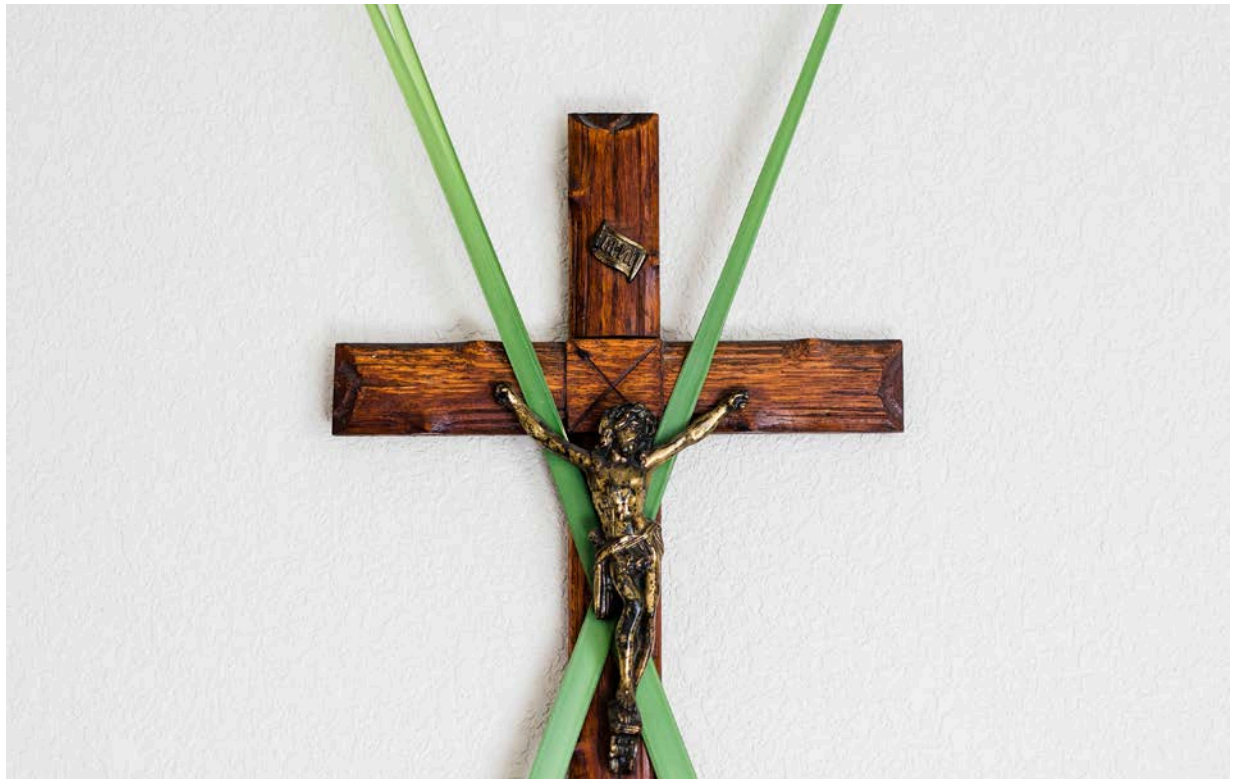
But pause with Jesus one more time on that high place of the Mount of Olives, look down into the Kidron Valley and then lift your eyes with him to see the city of Jerusalem. Jesus must descend and then climb before he enters the Holy City. Is this panorama a picture of the real descent he will make? The walk through the valley of death that leads to the cross?

On that morning, how did he endure the thought of all that lay ahead? Hebrews 12 says the joy set before him strengthened him. That passage concludes with this encouragement to us: our ultimate destination is the city of joy that cannot be shaken, the city where all who belong to God are gathered together. Angels in party clothes will celebrate alongside us in that place.

Listen:

“You’ve come to Mount Zion, the city where the living God resides. The invisible Jerusalem is populated by throngs of festive angels and Christian citizens. It is the city where God is Judge, with judgments that make us just. You’ve come to Jesus, who presents us with a new covenant, a fresh charter from God. He is the Mediator of this covenant. The murder of Jesus, unlike Abel’s—a homicide that cried out for vengeance—became a proclamation of grace.

So don’t turn a deaf ear to these gracious words...Do you see what we’ve got? An unshakable kingdom! And do you see how thankful we must be? Not only thankful, but brimming



with worship, deeply reverent before God.” (Hebrews 12:22–25, 28).

What lies ahead of us on this Lenten evening? Most likely a further descent into the valley of suffering. But we are never abandoned there. As Psalm 23 reminds us, in the darkest valley, the truth is still the truth. Christ is Immanuel, God with us, no matter where the road heads.

And it is not just that God walks with us, he is indeed leading us to the city that endures forever, the new Jerusalem, that comes down from heaven. His alone is the unshakeable kingdom, the dwelling place of joy, where God wipes away every tear, heals every disease, dispels every fear and makes all things new. We can endure.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, in your tender love toward us you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take on our flesh, and to suffer death for our sins upon the cross. Mercifully grant us to join in his resurrection from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit and to follow him all our days. Give patience and strength to those who are serving others during these days of hardship. Bring comfort to those who are suffering, and let all turn unto you for everlasting life. Amen. (modified from The Anglican Church in North America Book of Common Prayer)

Mercifully grant
us to join in his
resurrection from
the dead...



MONDAY MARCH 29

JOHN 12:20-28 (MSG)



There were some Greeks in town who had come up to worship at the Feast. They approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee: “Sir, we want to see Jesus. Can you help us?”

Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip together told Jesus.

Jesus answered, “Time’s up. The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you’ll have it forever, real and eternal.

If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you’ll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment’s notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me.

Right now I am storm-tossed. And what am I going to say? ‘Father, get me out of this’? No, this is why I came in the first place. I’ll say, ‘Father, put your glory on display.’”

A voice came out of the sky: “I have glorified it, and I’ll glorify it again.”



Brief Reflection

It's Passover week. Jesus has entered Jerusalem in triumph, but the acclamation he received just days before is deteriorating. The Jewish leaders who serve as enforcers for Roman rule have decided that Jesus has to die. They think he's stirring up rebellion. If they can't stop him, the Romans will cast them aside and find other ways to control the Jewish people. If you are in with the in-party, you do everything you can to keep the status quo.

In that context, the story of Greeks wanting to meet Jesus seems like a sidebar event, not one to make the front page. But in truth, it is the real story. Jesus' mission is so large, God's compassion for all the world so great, that the container of the Jewish nation cannot hold it any longer. It is spilling over to the Gentiles.

That is good news and sobering news. Christ knows this outpouring of God's mercy requires his death. "I'm storm-tossed," he says. "I want to pray for God to let me out of this, but I know I was called for this hour."

Jesus doesn't explain his coming crucifixion in this passage. He illustrates it. A seed has to be put in the ground and die or it will never be more than a seed. But if it dies, it reproduces itself. In the world of farming, one wheat kernel planted in the ground gives birth to 300-500 new seeds. Jesus knows his death opens the door to life for count-

less others.

As Christ continues in John 12, he turns the focus to us: "In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal. If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me."

Do we insist on holding on to our life as it has been? Is it even possible? What would it be like to live a life of reckless love, following Jesus wherever he leads us?

It's fairly clear that few of us have the power to keep our lives from changing. What will we do? Try to salvage all we can for ourselves? What good would that bring?

Will you pray this night for your own willingness to follow Jesus into this chaotic and deteriorating world? Will you let die what he asks you to let die? Will you ask him to help you love like he loves? Will you give your fears and sadness to him?

Pray. We are up against more than we can solve on our own. But the mighty, eternal God is with us.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for this time to praise your name and call upon you for help. There are so many hurting right now, not only where we live but around the world. Please bring-

We look to you for
complete help and
salvation. Deliver us...

your swift rescue to the sick, the sorrowful, and the wounded. Your salvation goes beyond temporary security and health. We know that there are places you want to reign in our lives but where we are reluctant to let you step in. We look to you for complete help and salvation. Deliver us from our desire to control our world. We look to you for complete and total rescue, and we declare you to be Lord of our lives. Please save us. Amen.



TUESDAY
MARCH 30

ISAIAH 50:4-11

The Lord God has given me
the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain
with a word
him who is weary.
Morning by morning he awakens;
he awakens my ear
to hear as those who are taught.
The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious;
I turned not backward.
I gave my back to those who strike,
and my cheeks to those who pull
out the beard;
I hid not my face
from disgrace and spitting.
But the Lord God helps me;
therefore I have not been
disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like a
flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to
shame.
He who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.

Who is my adversary?
Let him come near to me.
Behold, the Lord God helps me;
who will declare me guilty?
Behold, all of them will wear out
like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.
Who among you fears the Lord
and obeys the voice of his servant?
Let him who walks in darkness
and has no light
trust in the name of the Lord
and rely on his God.
Behold, all you who kindle a fire,
who equip yourselves with burning
torches!
Walk by the light of your fire,
and by the torches that you have
kindled!
This you have from my hand:
you shall lie down in torment.

Brief Reflection

These words from Isaiah 50, written centuries before Jesus' birth, paint a picture of a person responsive to the Father's voice. Morning by morning, the prophet tells us, he lets God wake him up, so he can listen and be taught.

Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah 50. He is the eternal God-Man. As a man, he lived this listening-to-God life. He submitted to the process of being taught and of learning obedience. He determined he would not turn away or rebel. He chose to submit to injustice, disgrace and pain.

It's Holy Week when we are encouraged to remember the events of that last week in Jerusalem before Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus will know this week what it means to suffer, to be worn out, to be mocked and mistreated, to have the light of God's presence with him snuffed out and to die. That listening obedience shapes his earthly life all the way to the cross.

As you walk through this week with Jesus, be assured he will help you. His listening obedience and his endurance haven't turned him into a tough drill sergeant, impatient with your stumbling and your doubts. He overflows with compassion. He is able to help you when you are weary. He will sit in the darkness with you until God brings light.

Our world is reeling. Who can end this pandemic, this raging political divide, this economic crisis? Are we as God's people being called to experience the cost of discipleship in new ways as we suffer with the rest of the world?

Perhaps Jesus is inviting you into this Holy Week to follow him in new ways. Pray for the state of your own soul. Will you let yourself be awakened to God's word morning by morning? Will you accept the hardships and injustices life is bringing your way? Will you choose to trust? Will you lay down



your life in the particular ways Christ calls you to?

Christ sits with you in this darkness. Are you willing to wait with him for the light only he can bring?

Pray God gives you the heart of a disciple, and pray he makes you eager to listen and to obey. Ask him to calm your heart, so you can wait in the darkness with Jesus. Ask him to calm the hearts of those you know who are fearful and weary. Ask him to make you a person of peace for others.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Lord, we come to you because you are true life. Though we see only death around us, when we look upon your Son we can finally rest. Give us the energy and strength that come from your life, leaving our fear and sadness behind. Jesus bore the unimaginable weight of the sin of the world. Please give us, your feeble children, the strength to bear whatever burdens we face. Your eternal life stretches out before us uninterrupted by our present dangers, and we hope in You. Amen.

we come to you
because you are
true life...



2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-12

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 31

Brief Reflection

How did we ever get it into our heads that the way to the life we really want would be an easy journey?

The universe reminds us that life is born out of death. There is a rhythmic dying hidden in each season: the loss of the safety of the womb through the risk of birth, the laying down of one's independence and autonomy for the good union of marriage, the seeds that die for vegetables and flowers to grow, and the peach blossoms that wither and fall to the ground so bubbly-hot peach crisp can crown a summer supper. Death is the door to life.

It's almost Easter, the yearly celebration of the Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. The resurrection is God's lived-out-in-history proclamation that life is stronger than death, and it is the reminder that in God's mystery, life must pass through death if it is to offer life to others. A Jesus who never died would be only a paragon of virtue, not the Son of God whose death gives life.

Paul knows that reality for himself as he writes to the Corinthians. He knows that the death of Jesus destroyed death and opened the door to life, and he knows that his own daily dying is a door to life for other people.

What has been dying in you in this difficult time? Your expectations of a large retirement? Vacation plans? A

job? A joyous wedding celebration? A quiet moment alone in your house where you set your own schedule? Your circle of friends that gather once a month? Your sense of safety? The comfort and grace of weekly worship and shared Eucharist?

God promises to bring real life out of what dies.

As you pray tonight, can you hold up what you love, what you count on, and what gives you joy as offerings to God? Pray that the deaths you die may bring life to others. Pray that God will give you a heart and vision for the kind of dying that can bring life to others.

Ask God to show you something life-giving you can do for someone who is hurting or alone.

As you pray, call to mind someone whose losses and grief are far greater than your own. Pray that over time, the Holy Spirit will help them see life emerge from the death they are experiencing.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Father, there is death at work in us, pulling us toward despair. Our attempts to comfort ourselves and to ignore our condition have not worked. And so, we lay down our lives before you now, acknowledging you as master and Lord. Purge sin and death from us, both in the depth of our souls and also in our daily decisions. Keep us

We embrace the true
life that comes to us
through the death and
resurrection of Jesus
Christ...

from living to make ourselves happy. We embrace the true life that comes to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the ways large and small, may we die to ourselves and know your immovable peace and energizing joy. May you be glorified in our lives, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



THURSDAY
APRIL 1



PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.



Brief Reflection

The church calls this day of Holy Week Maundy Thursday. It's the day when we remember the last Passover that Jesus celebrated with his disciples before his crucifixion. John 13-17 tells that story in detail. Traditionally, foot washings are part of the church's worship on this night.

In the ancient world, foot washing was a necessity. Roads were dusty and muddy, and animals walked the same paths and roads as people. Not everyone wore shoes, and most shoes were only sandals. It was a matter of hygiene as well as comfort to provide a way for people to wash their feet when they entered a home. If you had any means, you provided a servant to do the job for your guests or family.

But at that last supper, the Eternal Son of God strips down like a servant to wash his disciples' feet even as they are jousting among themselves over who deserved first place with Jesus.

Peter protests that Jesus will not wash his feet. Jesus insists. Then, as he finishes and sits down among his stunned and chastised disciples, he explains what he has done. "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."

The command for us—whether or not we practice foot washing or even celebrate Maundy Thursday—is to follow Jesus and take a servant's place.

Look around you. You will see the presence of Christ being lived out in choices other people are making.

Doctors and nurses are serving the sick. People are cleaning hospitals. Grocery store employees are stocking and restocking shelves and manning cash registers. Delivery people are showing up at your door, so you



don't have to go in a store. Roommates or families are crowded in a small apartment high-rise, serving others by staying home, washing hands, and wearing masks. Parents are serving their children. Leaders in every field are seeking to help and being criticized at every turn.

Will you pray in thanksgiving for those who serve as Christ serves?

When you chafe against life as it is, will you pray and ask God for specific ways you can serve during the multiple crises that plague our world just now?

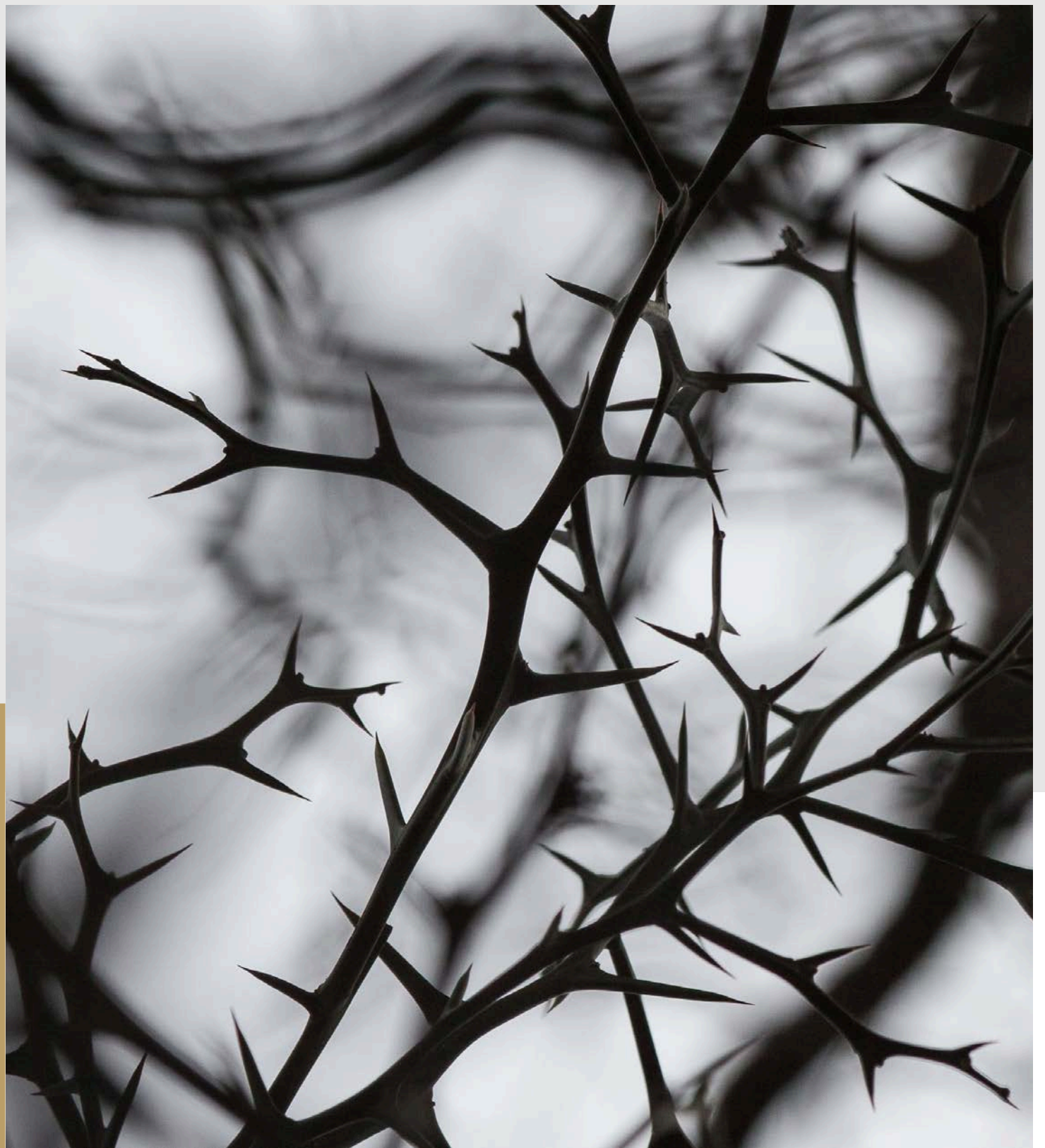
Will you hold Christ's words and pray he makes your heart like his? For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45).

Recommended Closing Prayer

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Anglican Church in North America Book of Common Prayer)

Give us grace to
accept joyfully the
sufferings of the
present time...



ISAIAH 53:2-6 (MSG)

The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling,
a scrubby plant in a parched field.
There was nothing attractive about him,
nothing to cause us to take a second look.
He was looked down on and passed over,
a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand.
One look at him and people turned away.
We looked down on him, thought he was scum.
But the fact is, it was our pains he carried—
our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us.
We thought he brought it on himself,
that God was punishing him for his own failures.

But it was our sins that did that to him,
that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins!
He took the punishment, and that made us whole.
Through his bruises we get healed.
We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost.
We've all done our own thing, gone our own way.
And God has piled all our sins, everything we've done
wrong, on him, on him.



FRIDAY APRIL 2



Brief Reflection

Most likely, we have all wanted to blame someone else for our difficult circumstances. Maybe they didn't create the problem, but we are pretty sure they have made it worse.

Blaming. We do it again and again. And it gets us no closer to a solution.

Knowing how often we shift responsibility, the truth of Good Friday startles us. The one who deserves no blame has taken all shame, all sin and the whole weight of our brokenness on himself. That burden took him to the cross. But unless we pause and let the truth touch us, we will not be able to see the beauty of the sacrifice Jesus made for us. What he did heals us and brings us home. We become part of his family by giving our yes and our thank you to what he did for us. If you have never said your own "yes and thank you" before, make this Good Friday the night you join God's family.

The prayer below is a form of an ancient liturgy. It is full of Old Testament history and images, but as you read it, you are not simply recounting the sins of the Jewish people, you are confessing your own sin.

As you enter into this Good Friday confession, receive the gift of what it means to trust Christ for your healing, your forgiveness and your salvation. If you are with others, have one person read the reproaches and the other person the prayers for mercy. If you are alone, call a friend and ask them to share the reading with you.

The Reproaches

My people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Speak against me, if you can. I brought you forth from the land of bondage, and led you through the waters of salvation, and you have prepared a Cross for your Savior.

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have mercy upon us.

I led you through the desert forty years, and fed you with the bread of heaven; I brought you into the land of promise, and you have prepared a Cross for your Savior.

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have mercy upon us.

What could I have done for you that I have not done? I planted you, my vineyard, to bear sweet fruit; but you have become very bitter to me, and gave me vinegar for my thirst.

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have mercy upon us.

I passed over your first-born and delivered them from death, and you have delivered me into the hands of my enemies; I led you in the pillar of cloud, and you have led me into the judgment hall of Pilate.

O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Speak against me if you can.

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have mercy upon us.

I struck down the kings of the Canaanites for your sake, and you struck my head with a reed; I gave you a royal inheritance, and you have crowned my head with thorns. O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Speak against me if you can.

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have mercy upon us.

I opened the rock and gave you to drink from the water of life, and you have opened my side with a spear. I raised you on high with great power, and you have hanged me high upon the Cross. O my church, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Speak against me if you can.

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have mercy upon us.

Amen.



SATURDAY
APRIL 3



JEREMIAH 8:20-9:1 (NIV)

The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved.
For the wound of the daughter of my people is
my heart wounded;
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold on me.
Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of the daughter of my
people

not been restored?
Oh that my head were waters,
and my eyes a fountain of tears,
that I might weep day and night
for the slain of the daughter of my people!



Brief Reflection

For the western church, today has been Holy Saturday. Lent is almost over. Ash Wednesday, the day that began Lent, is long past. But even as we have walked through these six weeks, has anything really changed?

In our world right now, we wait and wait for answers and solutions that haven't come. Who has fought this infection the best way? Why can't the government solve the issues we face? Who is delivering to us the most accurate and unbiased news? Where will I find a job? What will happen to my business, my health, my home and those I love? We lament with Jeremiah, "We are not yet saved."

Holy Saturday is about waiting and sitting in darkness. With all that happened in 2020, we still wonder, have we hit the lowest point or does more hardship lie ahead? With Psalm 74, we find ourselves crying out, "How long, O God?"

On that Sabbath after Christ's crucifixion, those first Jewish followers found their day ending as it began—in fear, in broken-heartedness and in confusion. What could be holy about a day like that?

In truth, it was the perfect Holy Sabbath. Jesus, in his death, fully entered Sabbath rest. The work of his life and the work he did on the cross were finished, as he himself declared as he died. Everything for our salvation and the redemption of the world had been accomplished. Jesus rested.

For us, it is a Holy Saturday as well. As we enter in with those first disciples, we are forced into the corner called waiting, called hope, called faith in the Lord God, the one who is good and wise and all powerful. The One who loves us even when life has gone pitch-black.

As you pray tonight, confess your own longings and fears with a ruthless



honesty. Pray you will become a person who is willing to wait, to watch and to hope.

End your prayers with the waiting words of Psalm 130.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!
O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!
If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities. Amen.
(Psalm 130)

out of the depths
I cry to you...



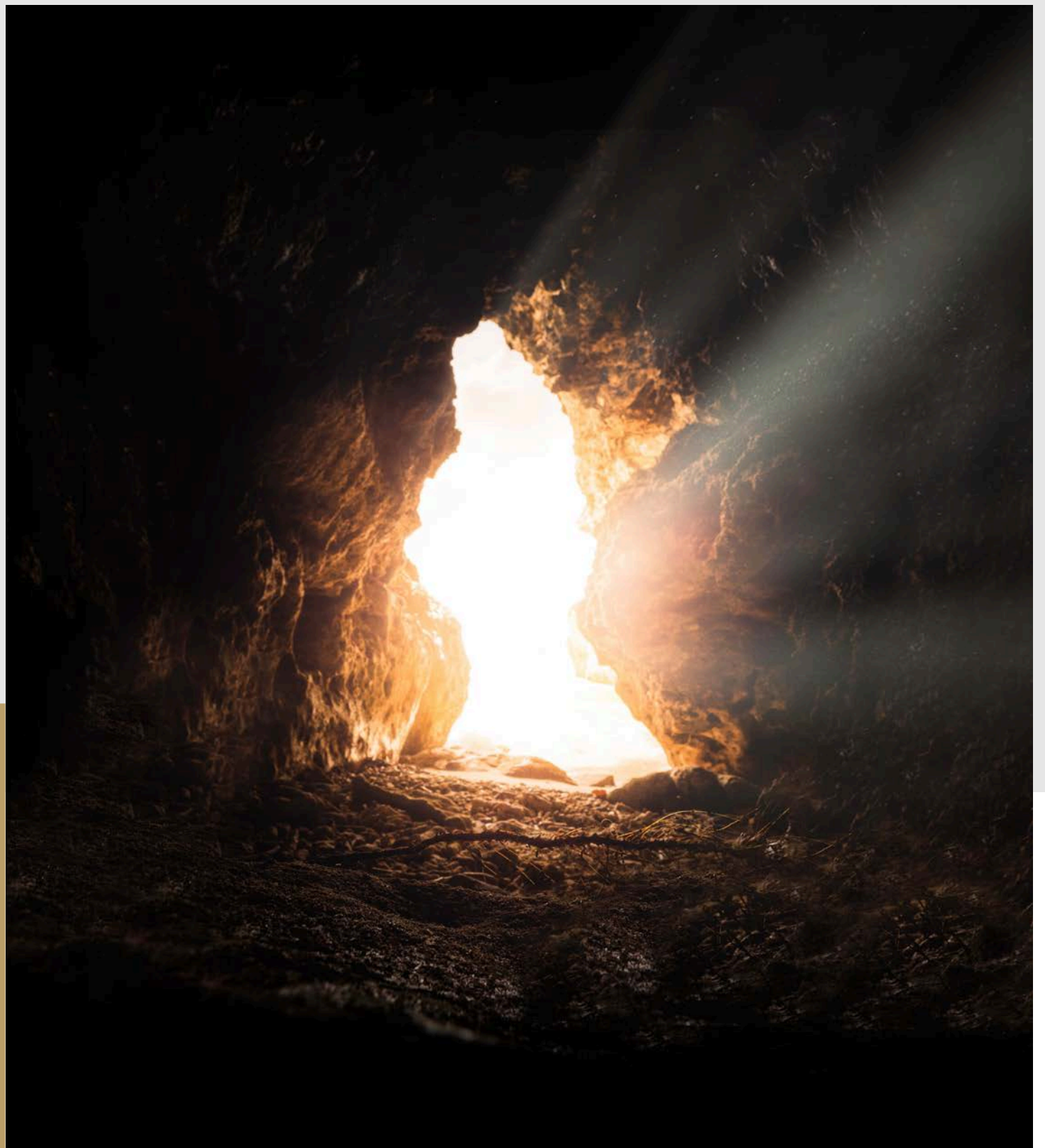
EASTER WEEK

7



**Why do you seek the living among the dead?
He is not here, but has risen.**





LUKE 24:1-10



But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles.

EASTER SUNDAY,
APRIL 4



Brief Reflection

Good news hasn't made the headlines in a very long time. We may have personal good news. Our daughter found a job, our friends are moving next door, or his surgery went well. But corporate good news? It doesn't exist.

But indeed, it does. Go back to the birth of Jesus. Here people and angels handed out extravagant promises like party favors. A brilliant future was in store where longings would be met, mercy poured out, the strong shamed, the downtrodden exalted, those sitting in fear and the shadow of death visited by sunrise from on high. Those promises were so plentiful, they jumbled together. Perhaps they are best summed up in the words the angels gave the shepherds the night Christ was born. Good News. Of Great Joy. For All People.

But for the 30-something years of Jesus' life, corporate good news was still scarce. Yes, Jesus healed, raised some from the dead, released others from demonic bondage, extended forgiveness, calmed storms and fed thousands. But none of that touched everyone, and none of it lasted. Then he was crucified. It was over.

But it's not over. It is Easter. Jesus is raised. The good news of great joy for all people has been fully accomplished. As Hebrews 7 says, death no longer rules, and the indestructible life of Jesus saves us to the uttermost.

The exchange between Sam and Gandalf in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Return of the King* speaks the longing we all know so well:

"'Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?'

'A great Shadow has departed,' said Gandalf, and then he laughed and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count."

The Lamb Who Was Slain now lives forever as the eternal Son at the Father's right hand. He has met that longing. He has met it with extravagant abundance. He invites you to trust him.

Will you do that tonight?

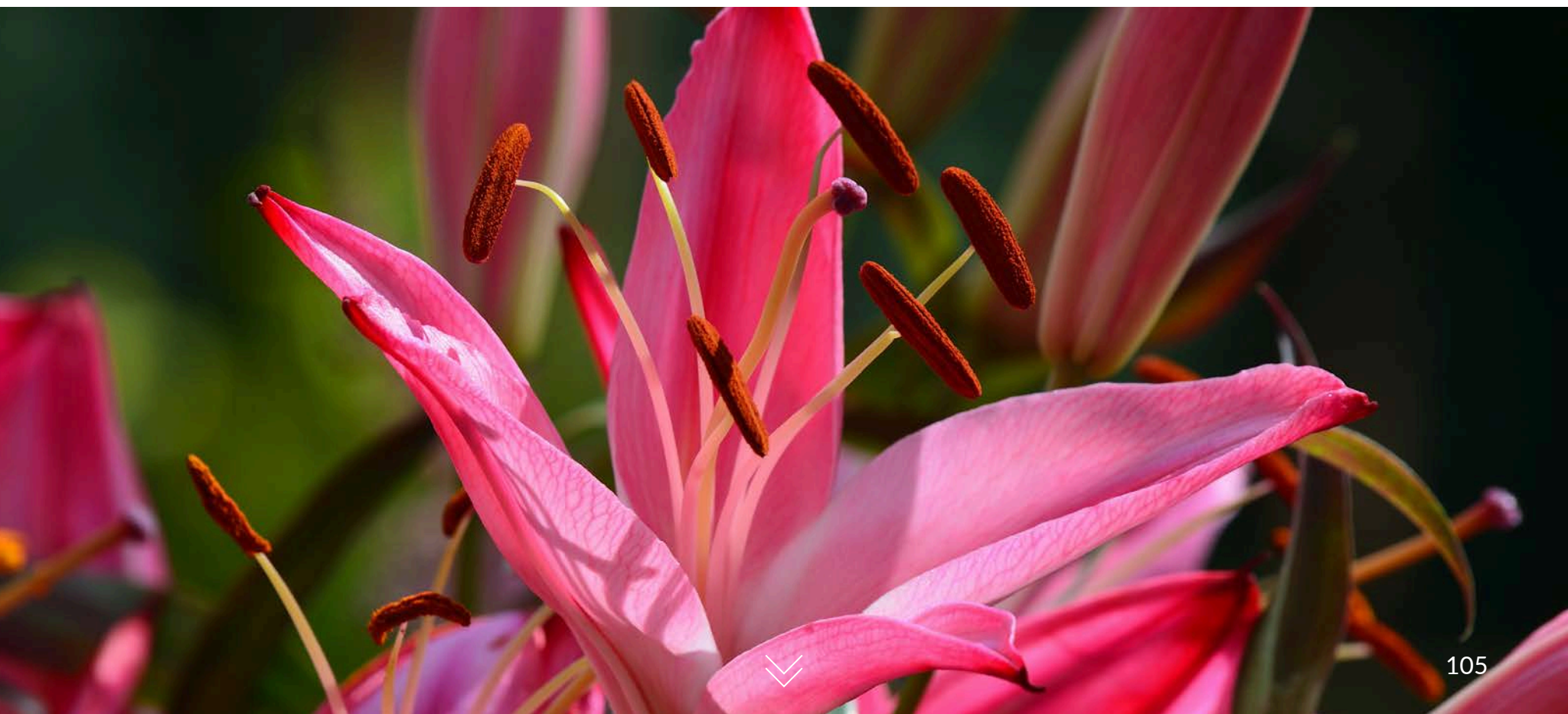
Our churches still feel so empty this Easter of 2021. But that is not the real story. The real story is that the tomb is empty.

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!
Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Let your prayers this night be praise, adoration and thanksgiving.

Recommended Closing Prayer

Our Heavenly Father—we praise your name! You have caused us to be born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. For surely we were once dead—our hearts were barren, our sin was great, our betrayal of you was undeniable. Yet you took upon yourself our weakness and treason, and in your tender mercy from on high you gave your only begotten Son. And so now, we pray as did your servant Simeon: "Sovereign Lord, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." Amen, Alleluia.



EASTER MONDAY,
APRIL 5



REVELATION 21:1-8

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Brief Reflection

Lent is over, finally. The resurrection of Jesus has broken apart the old inevitable cycle of death. That very first Easter evening, the resurrected Christ made himself visible and recognizable to Mary, to his friends walking the Emmaus road and to his locked-in-a-room-in-fear disciples.

And now it is Easter Monday. A day to breathe a sigh of relief. Christians sometimes call this Monday the Eighth Day, a reminder that we no longer live in the old creation, with its seven days repeating themselves again and again. We live instead in the new order.

In times like ours, this new order reality may seem dim. Who can really believe it when we fear what will happen next, when the economy lurches and falls, when the possibility of contagion rises up in everyday choices? These things are true—but they are not all that is or will be.

The real and ultimate truth is the future that Revelations 21 paints. The earth is remade and restored, and the barrier between heaven and earth is removed.

Will you choose to live as an Eighth Day person in a world staggering with troubles? The promises God has given us are real. Will you learn them by heart and not just with your head?

A woman whose daughter lived 88 days wrote these words a week after her little girl died on December 28th. “Eight is the number of completion, of new creation, of salvation and enlightenment, of harmony between the material and spiritual worlds. I don’t know what to make of any of it yet. I accept.”

No matter how deeply death and grief have touched you, the Eighth Day has arrived. Will you accept both tonight—the reality of the world you live in and the goodness of Christ’s coming reign on earth?

As you pray tonight, take time to speak aloud what you most look forward to in that Eighth Day world. Pray in thanksgiving for what is already true and what will one day arrive in fullness.

Pray for those who grieve. Pray that



alongside their grief, they experience a sure sense of the hope that lies ahead. Pray they are comforted and strengthened by the Risen Christ.

Recommended Closing Prayer

This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it! O Lord, we thank you that we are alive now in a new world. We see the passing of sin and death, and we taste the fruit of Christ’s resurrection. We are hurting and we lament as we behold the toll of this world’s fall away from you. Yet we rejoice as we rest, seeing how you have pursued us and will never let us go. Please comfort the afflicted tonight. Give them tender relief and hope in your salvation. Preserve us and help us to never forget what you have already done. Amen.

this is the day that the
Lord has made. We will
rejoice...

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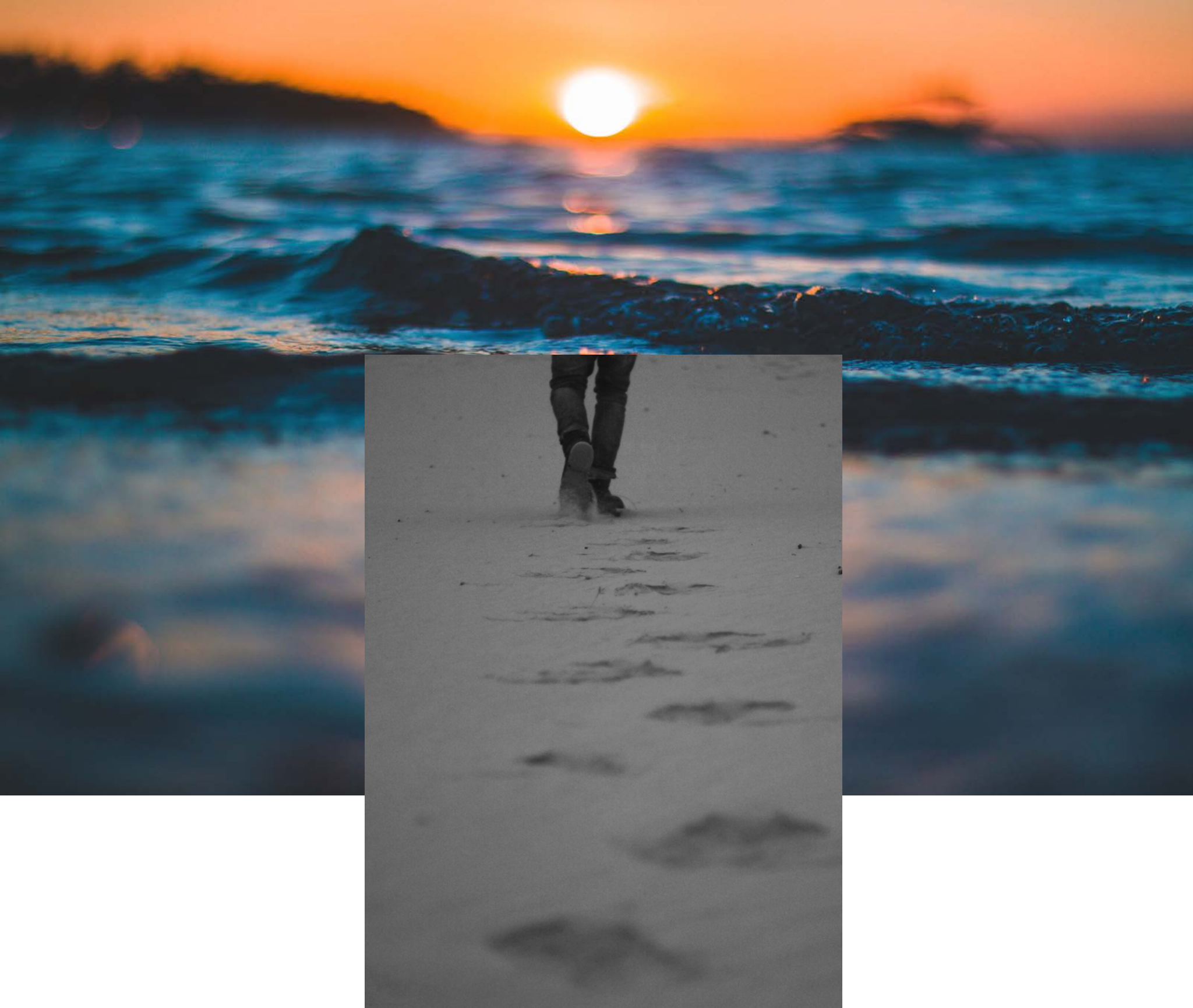
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