Christian Church in Ohio
Disciples of Christ
A covenant network of congregations in mission:
We are the Body of Christ gifted and called in covenant together as Disciples of Christ
to be centers of transformation on the new mission frontier of our own communities

Lenten Devotional Booklet 2021
February 17th

Ash Wednesday

*Please read Joel 2:1-2, 12-17*

God calls us to return with “all your heart” and to “Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.” The good news, church family, is that we are being called together (for we are too important to be left alone on this journey) again this Lent. Lent can be a very powerful time of renewal. A solemn and reverent assembly of God’s very own (infants, youth and those who have the Gift of Years) is given a call to worship. Thus holy Lent is a time of great gathering of Christ’s Church. The body of Christ is being consecrated and sanctified in the great anticipation of God’s grace and forgiveness. We are not just being called into a private time of reflection and examination, although this is never to be underestimated. This year let us be mindful that the community of the baptized is being called collectively to turn to God. Let us be open to all that God wants us to have and to experience. Even in the midst of a world that too often times makes no sense. Our God calls us home to grace, mercy, halted anger, abundant steadfast love, repentance and we pray a peace that passes all understanding. Together we are called towards God in these important and life giving holy days. Let us go together.

May we return to you Dear God with loving and trusting hearts. May we be made one and share this gift with your world and children everywhere.

Rev. Thaddaeus B. Allen
Your Visiting Regional Minister
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February 18th

Follow the Lectio Divina phases for your devotion today
Praying with Scripture falls into the following four phases. These phases are not air-tight compartments with rigid transitions between them. Lectio offers a natural flow from one phase to the next rather than a lock-step march.

Please read Isaiah 58:5

Phase One - Lectio: reading. - What does the text say?
TURN to the text and read it slowly, gently, out loud. Savor the reading, feel the words in your mouth, listening for the "still, small voice" of a particular word or phrase that says, 'I am for you today.'

Phase Two - Meditatio: meditation. What does the text say specifically to me at this point in my life?
TAKE the word or phrase into yourself. Slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Let your imagination engage the text. Images are not necessarily but invitations into dialogue with God.

Phase Three - Oratio: prayer. What does God say to me and what do I say to God through the text?
SPEAK to God. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. Experience this God-breathed word or phrase as a means to bless and transform the thoughts and images that God's Word has awakened in you. Give to God what you have found in your heart.

Phase Four - Contemplatio: contemplation. Being still, resting in God's presence, and letting God work through my mind and heart.
FINALLY, REST in God's embrace. Let go of words and images. Rejoice that God is with you in silence, spiritual rest, and inner receptivity.
SILENCE - LISTEN – DWELL – ABIDE

As you come up out of the depths of contemplation and prepare to resume your normal activities, first thank God for meeting you in this time. Then ask God to show you what difference can this text make in how you act? What possibilities does it open up? What challenges does it pose?
February 19th

Please read Psalm 25:1-10; Daniel 9:15-25a; 2 Timothy 4:1-5

“We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.” - Daniel 9:18

Lent is a time we join together with other Christians around the world to remember the source from which we come as we journey to the cross with Jesus. The first church I served as an associate minister, I clearly remember my first Ash Wednesday service. Senior Minister Scott Rollins and I administered ashes to each congregant delivering the words, “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.” At the end of the service, Scott turned to me and said this will be the last time we do this for some. Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.

I often say I love Lent because it is a time we remember that we will not live forever. In our death denying culture, we avoid talking about death, preparing for death, and thinking about death. But once a year, our faith helps us with a period in the church calendar where we choose various fasts to remind us of our own basic needs and our mortality. Most of all, this time of Lent reminds us we cannot live without God. If we admit to ourselves, each other, and to the world that our life is finite, we can begin to ask the real questions. Questions like - If we are only dust, then what is the purpose of this limited time on earth? - or - If we are only dust, then why does God love us so?

At the end of all the great questions are usually more questions. In today’s reading, Daniel cried out to the God he knew as creator, lover, and source of all life who had witnessed many Israelites killed (or become dust) and the destruction of Jerusalem. He seemed to be asking if God would forgive us for what we had done. Daniel said, “Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.” Daniel understood that we were dust but God was eternal. And for Daniel, our purpose was to bear the name of God on this earth. He believed we had made grave mistakes, but in his plea, he answered his own question: God’s eternal goodness and mercy would carry us forward despite our foibles.

At the end of the day, I am comforted by this. The fact is that I will not be here forever and in my time on this earth I will most definitely make mistakes. However, in my relationship with God, I receive invitation after invitation to learn and grow from those mistakes I make. Slowly, I learn to live as God calls me to live. And as much as I can follow God’s direction for my life, I can experience the fullness and love of God in this finite experience. Remember I was dust, but until I am dust again, I will live as well as I can bearing the name of the eternal God.

God, we thank you for the awareness of the ways in which we are limited. Incline our ears that we might rely on your words despite our limitations. Forgive us all the ways we thought we knew best and didn’t listen. Forgive us the ways we chose not to act but should have. Forgive us our egos when we think we need no one but ourselves. Forgive us for forgetting to leave room for an open mind and an open heart and in all things, to give charity. Thank you for your goodness and mercy all the days of our lives. We pray that we might continue to find ways to follow your desires for our lives in the time we have left. In the name of the one who walked with us that we might know and be your love as we walk on this earth that you so desperately love. amen.

Rev. Audrey Connor
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How Far Will You Go to Let Love Flow?

Nobody hungry, nobody thirsty, shade from the sun, shelter from the wind, For the Compassionate One guides them, takes them to the best springs.
– Isaiah 49:10

How far are you willing to go so that your family will not thirst? For Namanu Macharia, that distance was twelve miles. Twelve miles of walking with her children; twelve miles of the heat beating down on them; twelve miles of carrying empty five-gallon containers to retrieve water, then rolling those containers back to her home.

The prophet Isaiah declares that God’s people will neither hunger nor thirst. But for those living near Merille, in Kenya’s Marsabit County, hunger and thirst were a daily concern as water scarcity is a huge problem in this arid desert region. Obtaining water was once a crippling daily challenge, especially for the women and children responsible for walking long distances in search of streams and ponds. Even when they found precious sources, the water they brought home was contaminated, often making their families sick. Between illness and the sheer amount of time it took every day to find water, families were caught in a vicious cycle of increasing hunger and poverty.

That was the situation until the CWS Water for Life program helped our partners and the community drill a solar-powered borehole well and install a water system. More than 2,200 gallons of water are pumped through this well every hour – using one tap to supply purified water for safe cooking and drinking, while a second tap supplies water for washing clothes and caring for livestock.

Water kiosks like the one in Merille function like small shops, where people pay a modest fee for clean water. That money covers the operating and maintenance costs of the water system, ensuring it will be around for a long time to come. This system is powered by an ATM machine where people load “water tokens” onto debit cards, allowing them to get water whenever they need it. In addition to the 2,850 community members who use the kiosk, it also serves two schools, the local livestock market, and a health center which serves more than 4,800 people!

Namanu still walks from her home to retrieve her water. But now, the entire journey is less than one-third mile to the kiosk back. “I can leave my food cooking, fetch water, and be back on time,” she says. The new water system in Merille is a huge step forward in the fight against hunger, illness, and poverty in the area. For Namanu and thousands of her neighbors, it means freedom and peace of mind. It is the kind of comfort promised from a compassionate God who “takes them to the best springs.”

How far are you willing to go so that people in water-scarce regions no longer need to walk twelve miles to receive God’s promise of a life without hunger or thirst? The journey begins with Week of Compassion – sharing the compassion God places in each of us to care for our neighbors near and far; and sharing your generous gifts that support the CWS Water for Life program.

Week of Compassion
Mission Moment
For the original PDF version of this Mission Moment as well as more Week of Compassion resources, go to https://www.weekofcompassion.org/2021.html
February 21st

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Lenten message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking HERE.

Lessons from a Quarantine

But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, and the waters gradually receded from the earth. At the end of one hundred fifty days the waters had abated; and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

Genesis 8:1-4

The tale of Noah and the Ark is a familiar one to all of us. Even little children can tell you the story, and can draw a picture of Noah’s grand boat, a veritable zoo upon the waters, with two giraffes with their long necks sticking out of an upper porthole. I have been thinking about those ancient mariners in recent days because it occurs to me that they were the first family to go through what all of us have been going through—a shelter in place quarantine. And, it occurs to me, that there is wisdom in the story of Noah and the Ark that may be worth pondering while we are on a similar journey.

One thing I think we can learn from the experience of Noah and his family is do not rush your return.

If you ask those same little children how long Noah and his family were on the Ark they will likely respond “forty days and forty nights.” That is a good response, but it is not even close to their duration. The scripture says that it rained for forty days and forty nights. That is a long time. By then all the land was covered with water. The text says that 150 days after that the boat came to rest on a mountain, Ararat by name. And still they were not done. Forty days after that Noah felt comfortable enough to open a window and send out various birds as aerial scouts. That process took another three weeks, before it was evident that it was safe to disembark. All together it was a 7 ½ month voyage!

Wow. I suspect on the front end of that journey they had no idea how long this would last. How could they? It was unprecedented in their lifetime. So, too, our sheltering in our homes due to the coronavirus. Who could have imagined back in early March last year that we would be living as we are today nearly a year later?

You know 40 days and 40 nights of rain would be hard to take, but I suspect that the hardest part may have been after the rain when the skies turned blue and they were itching to get off the boat. Can’t you imagine Noah’s sons coming up to him and pestering him, “Is it time?” And Noah shaking his head, “No not yet.” Or Mrs. Noah giving him that look that says “Really?” and Noah with the shake of a head saying, “No.” Did you know that Noah is a direct ancestor of Dr. Fauci? It is true. Not everyone knows that.

Noah, wisely, waited, and compelled his family to do so until it was safe. And we should do the same. It is hard. Particularly when there are blue skies and a yearning within all of us to come back and be together. But you have to let the thing that caused the quarantine in the first place subside—in Noah’s case water, lots and lots of water, and in our case a virus that now has encompassed the whole world.

This has already stretched out longer than any of us could have predicted and it could go a long time more. But we should not rush it.

We will get back together again someday. We will hug and laugh and sing and share coffee and donuts and casseroles and the sacred elements of the Lord’s Table. We really will. But it is going to be awhile. So, we should be patient until the time is right and safe for all. So, do not rush your return. When you hear Dr. Fauci say be cautious, do not rush this, think of Noah.

Prayer—God give us patience in these days, even as we long for the time when we can be together again. Grant health and safety to all your children.

Richard L. Spleth, Visiting Regional Minister
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February 22nd

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Lenten message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking HERE.

*Please read Psalm 77. The Message translation*

I think I could have written a 2020 version of the first 7 verses of Psalm 77. My language would be much like The Message Translation – pretty raw. I could write this because beginning March 13 – the day that sheltering in place became pretty much our only plan of action not just for a month but for nearly a year now – I’ve exhibited all those behaviors. I’ve yelled. I dismissed any notion that everything will turn out all right. I’ve hung my head and wrung my hands. Some days I couldn’t even say what was bothering me exactly. I remembered better years gone by.

I should mention one major difference between me and the psalmist who directs his complaint to God. I confess I was more likely to complain to my beloved who was sheltering in place with me or to friends on the phone or I just left it to churn inside of me. Because after all, I wasn’t sick or jobless or about to lose my home so no one really needed to hear complaint from me.

Reading Psalm 77 has helped me to see that it would have been better to address my anger, frustration, loneliness, fear – you name it – directly to God as the Psalmist did. Perhaps I was hesitant to start a prayer with a complaint. If you went to the same school of how to lead corporate prayer as I did, maybe you learned to do an ACTS prayer. You begin with Adoration, move next to Confession, then Thanksgiving, and only after that do you ask for Supplication. The Psalmist would notice a glaring omission in that. What’s missing is Complaint. The Psalms tell us again and again that it’s OK to tell God how bad we feel, that singing the blues is a normal part of lives of faith.

Look at the progression in the Psalm for the reasons why we need to complain to God instead of each other or keeping it bottled up inside. The first 7 verses are getting it off your chest complaining. Followed by a few verses of rhetorical questions for God. *Are you just going to leave me here? Don't you love me anymore?* Just because he doesn’t expect an answer doesn’t mean they’re not serious questions. They are so serious that the psalmist says he’ll reflect on this awhile, think about when God has been active in his life. He promises to take a long loving look at what God has done in the past. That will lead him to another question, *so why aren't you intervening in our lives today?* That will finally lead to his acknowledgement that God’s actions aren’t always visible at the time. So, maybe just maybe God is leading us now. We just can’t see God yet.

The progression is clear. From *I* to You, *God*. From poor *me* to what *is it you would have me do*. We’ll never get to that point if we direct our complaints only to each other or stifle them inside ourselves.

Walter Brueggemann wrote a prayer that relates well, titled *Against a Closed Sky*. I hope you’ll read it in its entirety. For now, a quick summary. Brueggemann’s complaint is that: we are told from birth that we’re to trust in God, to rely on God in every circumstance, not realizing how hard that is because too often God is silent, even absent, seemingly indifferent, and frequently tardy. So we look for easier but less fulfilling ways to cope with life’s difficulties. Praying through all that, he closes with these words:

*We pray …*
*for fresh waves of resolve,*
*for courage, energy, and freedom, to be our true selves …*
*waiting in confidence …*
*We pray in the name of Jesus who trusted fully, and*
*who is himself fully worthy of our trust. Amen.*

Rev. Kristine Eggert
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February 23rd

1 Peter 3:8-9 NRSV

8 Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 9 Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.

Peter and his community offer challenging words in chapter 3. Having a “unity of Spirit” is challenging enough and being tender hearted and humble minded are anomalies these days. Each of these invitations offered to the early church would probably rock our communities from D.C. to Dallas if taken seriously in 2021, but that thoroughly Christ-like repayment plan is beyond understanding. “Do not repay evil for evil, abuse for abuse, but instead repay with a blessing”. The perpetuation of evil and abuse is ingrained in our culture, our media, family systems and faith traditions. When we are tired, afraid, hurting, sick it is very easy to be complicit in this pay it forward model of brokenness. Even in this very passage we can imagine that this verse and others like it must have been used by passive and violent abusers against those who were to be oppressed or subdued. Perpetuating the very evil it was designed to disrupt.

Perhaps disruption is the real invitation from 1st Peter. Be a blessing instead. Offer love instead. Be tender hearted instead. Be of humble mind instead. Be united in spirit and love instead. May we seek to disrupt the diseased patterns of racism, of unbridled consumption, of dehumanizing one another. You may not be the first to be disruptive. Has someone disrupted brokenness in your life, your family, your church or community? Who has built a legacy of love in you? How will you build a legacy of loving disruption this season and beyond?

Prayer: Loving God, we are facing pandemics of all kinds, environmental destruction, systemic racism and COVID-19. Our people, our families, our very bodies are tired, sick, outraged and grieved. Lord, offer us life giving rest. God disrupts the lies we tell ourselves and one another that drive us away from each other and wall us off from you. May we nurture instead a courageous capacity for truth, love, and wisdom so that we may build a legacy that is a blessing for all people and the planet. May it be so, Amen

Rev. Scott Hardin-Nieri
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February 24th

*Please read Psalm 77, Matthew 4:1-11*

The Psalmist (or Psalmists) prays for some awful things. Selfish, hateful things. We can be tempted to see the world that way, as a place where it is “me and God versus everyone else.” Judging others is something we do when we feel insecure about ourselves and are convinced that we are not enough.

I call out against the Psalmist’s prayers for violence, but I am blessedly interrupted by their unwavering praise for the righteous power, faithfulness, and goodness of God. I am reminded that I have room to bend because God is enough.

When I stumble: God is enough.
When the world falls short: God is enough.
When I cannot see across the distance between night and dawn: God is enough.
And even when identity and meaning are slipping through my fingers: God is enough.
God is enough.

That is what Jesus is telling the tempter in the desert over and over.

The tempter works at using fear and insecurity in an attempt to convince Jesus to be less than who Jesus is meant to be. But Jesus says, “I know who I am: I am with God. God is enough. So, I am enough.”

God is enough. God is with you. You are enough. The rest is noise, beloveds. The rest is just noise.

Rev. Seth Stout
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February 25th

Follow the Lectio Divina phases for your devotion today
Praying with Scripture falls into the following four phases. These phases are not air-tight compartments with rigid transitions between them. Lectio offers a natural flow from one phase to the next rather than a lock-step march.

Please read Romans 4:13-25

**Phase One - Lectio: reading.** What does the text say?
TURN to the text and read it slowly, gently, out loud. Savor the reading, feel the words in your mouth, listening for the “still, small voice” of a particular word or phrase that says, ‘I am for you today.’

**Phase Two - Meditatio: meditation.** What does the text say specifically to me at this point in my life?
TAKE the word or phrase into yourself. Slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Let your imagination engage the text. Images are not necessarily but invitations into dialogue with God.

**Phase Three - Oratio: prayer.** What does God say to me and what do I say to God through the text?
SPEAK to God. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. Experience this God-breathed word or phrase as a means to bless and transform the thoughts and images that God’s Word has awakened in you. Give to God what you have found in your heart.

**Phase Four - Contemplatio: contemplation.** Being still, resting in God’s presence, and letting God work through my mind and heart.
FINALLY, REST in God’s embrace. Let go of words and images. Rejoice that God is with you in silence, spiritual rest, and inner receptivity.
SILENCE - LISTEN – DWELL – ABIDE

As you come up out of the depths of contemplation and prepare to resume your normal activities, first thank God for meeting you in this time. Then ask God to show you what difference can this text make in how you act? What possibilities does it open up? What challenges does it pose?
**February 26th**

Bethany Christian Church in Columbus’ Annual Fast was scheduled for the 2nd and 3rd weeks of February 2020.

Our beloved pastor had been soliciting as much participation as he could muster. During the weeks preceding the fast he reminded us of the reasons God calls for us to fast and pray. He encouraged us to join the fast and pray for a better relationship with God and with each other. Fasting and praying can help lift the heavy burdens of sin that too many of us carry around for too long and can help all of us with spiritual problems.

And so the fast came and went much as It had in previous years. Little did we realize that we would soon be quarantined by Covid 19, in a global pandemic.

God has seen us through difficult times before so we know from whence comes our strength. The Bible is a blueprint for how we should live if only we will listen and be obedient. Fasting and prayer helps us to be quiet and discern God’s will. At such a time as this it gives us greater awareness of God’s presence and his plans for us to overcome and to prosper.

Prayer
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear. Thank you Heavenly Father for giving me the strength to fast and pray. Help me to be obedient to your will in my life.
Amen

Elder Gena Stone Phillips, Co-President, Disciples Women Fellowship
Dr. Elder Patricia Dimmy Brown, Co-President, Disciples Women
February 27th

Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-17

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, “Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”

“Small Wire” by Anne Sexton is one of my favorite poems. It begins, “My faith is a great weight hung on a small wire,” and poetically navigates worrisome concern for small and thin containers alongside confidence in the things that cannot be concealed.

“Love and a cough cannot be concealed.
Even a small cough.
Even a small love.
So if you have only a thin wire,
God does not mind.”

Laughter is typically an unplanned, involuntary expression, whether it’s a hearty giggle or we are only slightly tickled. Like love and a cough, it cannot be well concealed. Abraham chose not to conceal his laughter, and the writer chose to include his laughter in the narrative. His laughter is not a mocking or dark exclamation but an expression of awe in response to an extraordinary new covenant.

The substance of a former vision, the promise of a new covenant, is heralded by the appearance and proclamation of the Lord to Abram. At a moment when Abram least expected the promise of progeny, at the age of ninety-nine, he receives it. At a moment when Sarai least expects to conceive a son, conception is realized. Together they are not paragons of vitality or traditional candidates for the production of offspring, yet this everlasting covenant includes their long awaited hope.

Abram is not alone in this new covenant. The promises of God are made to Abram and Sarai, and fundamentally change their identity. Exponential transitions will ensue. Their names change, their family will expand, and they will give rise to nations. Together they are called to wider address, and abiding responsibility and care for generations of persons, communities, and nations they will never personally know. In response, Abraham does not request further elaboration or grow fearful, he laughs.

We may not welcome an invitation to a new covenant amidst COVID fatigue, cabin fever, compassion fatigue, the rigors of winter, and church fatigue in our wider culture. A new covenant may not feel like much of a choice during this moment of on-going and extraordinary transitions, when a new social contract replete with masks and physical distance has been mandated. The scarcity and fragmented relations described in former chapters could’ve impaired Abrams capacity to hear and respond. Yet a covenantal love that would not be concealed was met with an expression of commitment (i.e. circumcision), and he fell on his face and laughed.

During this season of unusual and holy promise, may “the fast we choose” be a new covenant with ourselves and renewed relation with the God of all creation. May it move us to resist the urge to bargain for former covenants with ourselves and lesser promises, and move us to rediscover awe as we walk humble and blameless. May the fast we choose today move us to love, laughter, and contemplation, and the future they bless between us.

Rev. Yvonne T. Gilmore
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Letting Love Grow in Nicaragua

Nobody hungry, nobody thirsty, shade from the sun, shelter from the wind. For the Compassionate One guides them, takes them to the best springs.
– Isaiah 49:10

Imagine not knowing where your next meal will come from. Imagine the constant fear of political unrest. Imagine working hard to produce crops to feed your family and earn a living, but constantly battling the effects of climate change threatening your ability to bring those crops to harvest. Imagine all of these things happening at once.

It might be difficult for our siblings in Nicaragua to believe there will ever come a day when they do not hunger or thirst. For them, food security can seem like an unattainable goal. But through a partnership with Growing Hope Globally and respected local organization CIEETS, Week of Compassion partners have teamed up with 220 families in eight communities to thrive despite such adversity. Your continued support is helping these farmers plant new types of crops, find new ways of earning extra money, and sustainably care for the natural resources around them. These are just a few stories of hope from some of our partner families...

René Bermúdez and Iris Mercedes Canales are active participants in the CWS-supported program, taking on new initiatives and enterprises. They are working hard to ensure that their family always has enough to eat and a way to earn a living. Rene is raising stingless Melipona bees, which produce medicinal honey that he can sell. He learned about poultry raising and has started raising chickens – and now has forty hens that produce eggs, plus another 140 that he is preparing to sell! Iris says that her family’s nutrition has improved through the program. They have begun to eat a more diverse diet.

Claudia Palacios is a single mom who has struggled to take care of her children. Even though she owns a little bit of land, she has lost several harvests to the effects of climate change. “A lot of people in this community are in the same situation. When it rains too much, the crops die from disease or they’re washed away. When it doesn’t rain enough, they dry up. Either way, us farmers lose everything.” But now, Claudia is participating in the CWS-supported farming program. She’s planted beans and is working with program technicians to improve her harvests.

“We’re here, thanks be to God. And we are blessed by CLIEETS and CWS with this project. It’s a blessing for us, for El Tigre, San Gregorio, Los Ranchos, San Vicente, San Antonio, all of us here. God willing, we’ll continue this work for the benefit of everyone. We are getting big changes in the weather, the climate, the rain is irregular... CLIEETS has helped us a lot to adapt to the changes. We can’t rely on the sort of agriculture that we used to rely on.” – Pastor Adan Garcia Diaz of the Nazareno Church in El Tigre

Your generous gifts through Week of Compassion will help these families and many others continue to build a sustainable life – without hunger or thirst – as they learn new ways to produce food and income. Please give generously so they will continue to reap the harvest of God’s love growing in their communities.

Week of Compassion
Mission Moment
For the original PDF version of this Mission Moment as well as more Week of Compassion resources, go to https://www.weekofcompassion.org/2021.html
March 1st

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Lenten message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking HERE.

Greetings! I am the Rev. Allen V. Harris and I am once again honored to have been asked to offer a devotion for the Christian Church in Ohio this Holy Season of Lent. The Revised Common Lectionary text for today is from the New Testament book, the Acts of the Apostles, which is the chronicle of the development of the Church following the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let us hear today’s text:

Acts 10:23-33

So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging.

The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. On Peter’s arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshipped him. But Peter made him get up, saying, ‘Stand up; I am only a mortal.’ And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; and he said to them, ‘You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?’

Cornelius replied, ‘Four days ago at this very hour, at three o’clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. He said, “Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.” Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.’

We pray that God may give us wisdom and understanding to not only hear this holy word but to live it out in faith and action. Amen.

I have always been drawn to this text, actually to the much larger storyline of which it is a part, because of its game-changing nature for the life of the early church. Today’s text is really part 2 of a 3-part story. In the verses prior to this we read of the Apostle Peter’s mystical vision of a broad sheet of cloth coming down from the heavens containing foods of all types, including those that are forbidden by Jewish rules about what foods are kosher to eat and what are not. It contains that dramatic command from God, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” Peter interprets this to mean more than just what he should eat and drink, but a dramatic shift in what he should consider sacred and profane, about *who* he should consider as an insider and who he should consider as an outsider.

Today’s text is the meeting of those two worlds as God has also given a vision to Cornelius, a gentile who lived in Caesarea. Cornelius was told to call for a certain person by the name of Peter to join him in his house. Peter now discerns that God spoke equally to both Cornelius, a non-Jew, and himself, a Jew, and that this was a way to embody the dream he was given. The next text after today’s includes Peter’s newfound truth, echoing Isaiah 56:1-8: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God.”

Continued on the next page
March 1st continued

Many of you know that I am one of the co-founders of the Open & Affirming Ministries Program of the Disciples LGBTQ+ Alliance, along with the Rev. Laurie Rudel. This program seeks to help clergy, lay leaders, congregations, and institutions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to not only engage in Bible study, faithful discussion, and spiritual discernment about the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning persons in the life and leadership of the church, but to embody this truth in real and tangible ways. The Open & Affirming Ministries Program takes seriously Peter’s life-changing, course-directing, spiritual “knock-me-over” realization that “Truly… God shows no partiality, but… anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God.”

In my own life and ministry I have come to realize, however, that simply working to bring this awareness of the open invitation into the church for LGBTQ+ persons isn’t enough. I have been convicted to acknowledge my own racism and white supremacy, my own biases toward ableness, and my own misogyny and gender bias. We must hear God's words to Peter and Cornelius as a call to embody God’s impartiality to ALL who fear God and do what is right. This means just being Open & Affirming isn’t enough for a church. This means committing yourself only to being a fully Pro-Reconciling/Anti-Racist church isn’t enough. This means just making your church facilities accessible to all people isn’t enough. God’s vision given to Peter is a call to FULLY EMBODY the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We call this awareness of the interconnectedness of God’s impartiality as “intersectionality.”

And I am well aware that this call to multiple-embodiment can be overwhelming, especially in a time of global pandemic, racial justice uprisings, and political unrest. I get it that congregational leaders are struggling to simply pay the bills and keep people connected virtually. But I am also aware that faith leaders and faith communities who have taken to heart the gospel call to embody God's impartiality have found the effort lifegiving, the spiritual openness that comes is transformative for individual lives and communities. Does it pay the bills or make Zoom meetings more interesting? Not necessarily. But God didn’t call Peter and Cornelius to worry about those things, only to make sure God’s will was done and all were included in Christ’s community of faith. Can we do any less?

Amen

Rev. Allen V. Harris, Cleveland, Ohio
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March 2nd

“I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be their slaves no more; I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.”
Leviticus 26:13

My hands hold the thirty-eight-inch-long double yoke securely in my lap. Family lore says that it was made for my great-great-grandfather’s oxen by my great-grandfather when he was a young man and learning the craft of farming from his father. Now the wooden yoke finds its home above the fireplace mantel in my sister’s house. A heavy, gently curved wooden bar holds in place the two irregular ovals that awaited the oxen’s necks. A sturdy iron yoke ring lies between the two ovals. The yoke’s notable feature is that one of the oval hickory stanchions is smaller than the other, no doubt designed for a younger ox to be placed next to an older and more experienced oxen team worker.

As I hold the yoke close, I am transported to another era. An era where care of the land matters and abuse of the earth’s resources has not yet reached fever pitch. An era where small farmers sustain their families and huge agricultural conglomerates do not abscond with all the farm profits. An era where heavily laden semi-trucks do not crowd the major highways that speed motorists off in all directions. An era where neighbor knows neighbor, no matter how far apart they are in distance or in thought.

And then I think of the double yoke’s purpose as a teaching tool. Where the younger learns to perform tasks from the more mature. Where the teammates learn to work side by side. Where the duo learns that teamwork gets the job done. Where community is about coming together to tackle the difficult plowing task at hand. And then I think how the yoke often has held back the yoked creatures. The movements of the pair are limited by the strict wooden collar. The occupants of the yoke are led along more easily, or is ‘manipulated’ a better descriptive word? The yoked are trapped by the wooden ovals and cannot get out on their own. The yoke is heavy on their necks. Indeed, freedom is only a dream.

I did not want to write about this yoke, but my pen took off as the object was held in front of me, touching me, conveying its message to me. In the days of the prophecies found in the book of Isaiah as in the days of my great-great-grandfather William, when the yoke came out it meant there was work to be done. And sometimes that work has been about being yoked together to accomplish large and small tasks in God’s name. And sometimes that work has been about breaking the yoke, making the dream of freedom a reality for those held in any bondage.

This Lent I will hold the yoke’s image before me as I vow to work together with others in God’s name so that those who are in bondage may be set free. This is the fast I choose.

Prayer: God who works with humanity and God who brings freedom, thank you that you call your people to learn from each other as we toil together in the messy business of winning release for those held captive in any way. Strengthen us in our endeavors and lead us in your ways we pray. Amen.

Rev. Cynthia Klingemier
Regional Elder District 4 and Commission on Ministry Team 1 Leader
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Scripture for Reflection: Joel 2:12-13

“Yet even now,” says the LORD,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend your hearts and not your clothing.”
Return to the LORD, your God,
for God is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.

Prayer Points:

• How might I return to God with all my heart?

• How might I rend my heart?

• Show me this day how I can be gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love.

• Help me to be slow to anger about the past, so that I can look to the future.
March 4th

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Lenten message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking HERE.

The Journey toward Christ’s Marvelous Light

1 Peter 2:9-10 (NRSV)

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Have you ever experienced that anxious feeling as a young person on the playground when people are being chosen to play on a team? If it was not a game where I was disciplined nor skilled, I fretted being the last to be chosen. I learned early on, that the kid who has the privilege to choose first or be chosen first had an obvious advantage. Today’s text eases our anxiety, reminding us that our advantage rests in the One who chose us from the beginning. While we were yet sinners, when we were not a people nor the ones who gave or received mercy, God was choosing us, reconciling the world through Christ Jesus.

Our text invites to reflect on the nuances of being chosen. We are not like those who stumble due to their lack of faith. Instead, because of our faith, we choose to witness to the way of Christ, modeling Christ ministry of grace, mercy, and reconciliation. Because of our faith, we acknowledge that we need mercy as much as we need to extend mercy.

Here in the season of Lent, we choose to be still, to sacrifice, and to welcome the silence in order that we can be strengthened to resist the darkness. If we are to resist the darkness of racism, our healthy faith practices will inform our advocacy for the mattering of Black Lives, for speaking up and out against anti-Asian violence, and for standing up for compassionate immigration reform. We choose not to oppress nor to allow it to prevail. Instead, we turn inward in this season, honing the habits of our faith in Christ Jesus, that we might be emboldened in our embodiment of Christ’s marvelous light. May it be so...

Rev. April G. Johnson (she/her/hers)
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March 5th
Sharing in God’s Abundance

Please reflect on this Responsive Reading from Global Ministries

John 10:10

10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Leader: The essence of God's nature is love and righteousness. There is no division with God. God does not abandon people.

Respondent: I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Leader: God acts to destroy oppression. God summons everyone—you, me, the world, the church community—to freedom and accountability.

Respondent: I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Leader: To proclaim the Kingdom of God is to do battle with every setting and every structure which rob people of their humanity.

Respondent: I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Leader: Can you imagine a world that does not pursue the division of humankind—with an invisible line that separates God creatures?

Respondent: I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Leader: Can you imagine what our society would look like if we as human beings would utilize the nature of God that is part of our existence, which is part of our humanity?

Respondent: I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Leader: Each group, any person, every culture has something of worth necessary to establishing, maintaining, and enhancing our humanity.

Respondent: I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Leader: Let’s stop creating lines of oppression that divide humanity and suppress God’s creative activity. Let’s begin to use this day and every day that God gives us to reflect God’s nature.

All: I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
March 6th

Follow the Lectio Divina phases for your devotion today
Praying with Scripture falls into the following four phases. These phases are not air-tight compartments with rigid transitions between them. Lectio offers a natural flow from one phase to the next rather than a lock-step march.

Please read John 2:13-22

Phase One - Lectio: reading. What does the text say?
TURN to the text and read it slowly, gently, out loud. Savor the reading, feel the words in your mouth, listening for the “still, small voice” of a particular word or phrase that says, ‘I am for you today.’

Phase Two - Meditatio: meditation. What does the text say specifically to me at this point in my life?
TAKE the word or phrase into yourself. Slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Let your imagination engage the text. Images are not necessarily but invitations into dialogue with God.

Phase Three - Oratio: prayer. What does God say to me and what do I say to God through the text?
SPEAK to God. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. Experience this God-breathed word or phrase as a means to bless and transform the thoughts and images that God’s Word has awakened in you. Give to God what you have found in your heart.

Phase Four - Contemplatio: contemplation. Being still, resting in God’s presence, and letting God work through my mind and heart.
FINALLY, REST in God’s embrace. Let go of words and images. Rejoice that God is with you in silence, spiritual rest, and inner receptivity.
SILENCE - LISTEN – DWELL – ABIDE

As you come up out of the depths of contemplation and prepare to resume your normal activities, first thank God for meeting you in this time. Then ask God to show you what difference can this text make in how you act? What possibilities does it open up? What challenges does it pose?
March 7th

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Lenten message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking HERE.

Psalm 19: Heart Happy Laws

“The law of the Lord is perfect...rejoicing the heart.”
(Psalm 19:7-8)

Hello—and warmest greetings in this chilly season to you all in the Christian Church in Ohio. I am Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, and I'm deeply grateful to work with Disciples Home Missions as your Director of Refugee & Immigration Ministries for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) PLEASE come (as many of your youth have in the past) to our office in DC to work together—and I pray to be again in Ohio with many of you soon, too! Our devotion for today takes us to Psalm 19.

“The heavens are telling the glory of God” says the psalmist—because of the sun in the skies and because “the LAW of the Lord is perfect.” “The Lord's is a law,” says the psalmist (who may have been King David himself, who knew well about setting and building many laws) “that lifts up your soul.” The heavens sing because God’s rules are “right”; making your heart happy. And God’s commandments and ordinances are TRUE in a way which (we might say in our time) “really make your eyes SMIZE!” As the psalmist technically puts it, God’s laws “enlighten the eyes.”

It feels amazing, doesn’t it—especially when we live in a society and time of such divided perspectives and bickering over what is or isn't truth—that we can know we, like the Psalmist, are able to be confident, and have full certainty that there IS a direction we can look to where laws are completely trustworthy. That direction is towards God’s ways. For with God, there is FULL JUSTICE and LOVE included in each regulation. Because that is so, the Psalmist prays deeply that he would “consider himself warned”—that he might not ever be caught at fault in breaking God’s laws.

This season of Lent interestingly began with the prophet Joel in chapter 2 on Ash Wednesday saying “Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble...and RETURN to me with all your heart, with fasting,” and in a way that respects the call to justice for the oppressed that is desired by God. Joel’s call was for obedience from the nation of Israel. Now, the Psalmist in Psalm 19 calls us each as individuals to never be arrogant or guilty in disrespecting God’s laws.

In my work with refugee and immigration ministries, in working with you to build connections with asylum seekers and farmworkers, each day is FILLED with persons who've NOT experienced justice in laws around them. Claudia has worked in the US as a farmworker growing food for us all for 20 years, but she's not been provided any financial or health supports thru COVID. Ramon’s kids were mostly born in the US and he tried to stay to support them, until his hope to support became dwarfed by laws that chose to arrest and deport him on the way to work—despite him being no danger, and being a leader in his Disciples church. Alberto has spent years as a DACA recipient with an excellent high school record, but now is not allowed to attend college. Keo has waited decades for his wife to reunite with him in the US. Rebekah is held back from the border by policies that will not allow for due processing of her asylum claim after her husband was killed and the children were threatened and beaten until they fled in terror.

Every one of them knows well the difference between God’s perfect laws, and the often unjust policies that daily affect their lives. They know, as the Psalmist knew, that joy that is brought into our hearts and eyes when laws are JUST—when both as a nation and as individuals, we seek to follow and to build laws that are fair, and trustworthy, and rooted in LOVE like God’s. May all experiencing unjust laws in their lives be blessed by the joy of justice! And may any of us who have NOT had to live in circumstances of being pushed out of our own homelands likewise WORK as faithfully as we can to build righteous and trustworthy laws, as well.

Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea
Director, Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries
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March 8th

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Lenten message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking HERE.

Hello everyone and a blessed Lenten Season to all of you.

The Scripture today is 1 Corinthians 3:16. Listen, Listen, Listen for a word from God.

*16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*

Working from home all these many months has been a mixed blessing. I get to be close by to all the things I might need during the day. Since my kids are doing school online, I get a chance to help them with their homework and see them throughout the day. But there's a downside too. I've found that my “office” is slowly spreading throughout the house. Mail on this end table. Computer in the corner. Mics and tri-pod in the spare room. A pair of headphones here and another one there. In other words, my work life is spilling out all over the house. For many of us, personal life and work life are colliding in challenging and messy ways. Part of this is a natural outflow of this time we are living in...part of it is my need for more organization...but in either case, I'm realizing that cluttered spaces—for me—are much harder to work and concentrate in.

As I read our passage today, I wondered what kind of feeling God has dwelling inside of me. Is there a lot of space for God to spread out and do God's thing. Lots of room for God to work as I live and move and have my being in the world. Or is God finding a lot of clutter in there? Is God finding idols in the cushions. A little bit of slothfulness here, a little of consumerism there? Am I crowding God out with all the other STUFF I'm focusing on in my life? Paul asks, “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?” If I really believe that’s true...what would change? How would I clean up? Rearrange the furniture? What would be different about that space inside of me that is supposed to be reserved for God?

Prayer
To close, I want to share with you a part of a beautiful prayer written by Arianne Braithwaite Lehn from her wonderful book “Ash and Starlight: Prayers for the Chaos and Grace of Daily Life.” I highly recommend it to you.

When I want to numb, avoid, and block
Patient, gentle God,

There are many ways to swallow the echoes of hollowness... Fill the house with unneeded stuff, Fill the wallet with money, Fill the garages with spares of this and that, Fill the belly with more and more food Fill the mind with whatever distractions can be found, Fill the time with busyness...

Give me the courage, God, to clear this clutter! To see in this empty space a sacredness, a needed gift, a place you will come and get to work...Amen.


Rev. Chad Delaney
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March 9th

March 9, 2020 seemed like a normal Monday until my phone rang on the way to Bible study. It was my daughter telling me the Governor had declared a State of Emergency. Even after I heard the news and looked it up on the internet I had no idea what that was going to mean for the next year. We were in for a completely new journey! Quarantine, digital worship, Covid19 life complications and change became normal things over the next year. Then the world added Racial tensions and Political drama to the chaos. The world of March 8, 2020 was gone after March 9th. We were on an unchosen fast!

We closed our buildings and learned the strength of church beyond our walls. We have watched family, friends and loved ones die and all too often die alone without family and without funerals. We have watched events cancel and we’ve been asked not to spend time with people. We have worshipped at home in pajamas with coffee instead of communion and learned zoom and social distancing with masks. People have stayed home rather than a million things. It’s been an emotional roller coaster that seems to take a strange turn just when we think things are stable in the chaos.

BUT! it’s a big but. God has been gloriously present. The picture was a place Michael and I walked throughout the year in all of the seasons. It was where we went to find the Holy and not be immersed in the losses of the day. It’s the path that probably saved our faith, our marriage and our ministries. We hurt badly from all the world offered in the past year and yet God found us in the depth of our worldly hurts and sorrows. In the midst of everything finding God became so easy when we were on that path.

\[\text{Psalm 40:28-31}\]

Sometimes the fast isn’t one we choose, but it can be incredibly powerful and life-shaping as we walk through it. Walking the unchosen fasts of life are difficult and oftentimes incredibly painful. I know there are moments of joy sprinkled in them, but the pain is incredibly real. The past year has held a great deal of pain and I’m sure it will be a long time before we fully understand all of the ways we have been changed during this unchosen fast. But, God has been present! God has not given us strength and has lifted us to soar. Remember, God Wins!

May you know the Lord is Everlasting giving us strength!

Rev Heather S. Schimmel
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The Chosen Fast

Is it such a fast that I have chosen? - Is this such a manner of fasting that I have picked and approved?

A day for a man, to distress his soul for a day. The reading in the text is the more correct; and the idea is, that of pain and awkwardness, experienced by the self-restraint, was not the purpose in fasting. This appears to have been the mistake which they made, they assumed there was something admirable in the pain experienced by such self-restraint. Do we not often feel that there is something commendable in the difficulties we experience in our feats of self-denial? The crucial idea in the passage is, that the pain and difficulty which we may endure by the rigorous fasting, are not commendable in the sight of God. God aims at justice, truth, kindness, holiness Isaiah 58:6-7; and he regards the act of fasting as it will be the means of directing us to reflect on our faults, and to change our lives.

Is it to bow down his head like a large reed that grows in marshy places? One without knots or joints. In the midst of water, it grows luxuriously; yet the stalk is not solid like wood, and not being reinforced by joints, it easily bends over under its own weight. It thus becomes the insignia of a man bowed down with grief. Here it refers to the smugness of a hypocrite when fasting - a man without genuine sentiment who puts on an air of pretentious thoughtfulness and give the impression to others. Against that the Savior warned his disciples, and directed them, when they fasted, to do it in their ordinary dress, and to maintain an aspect of cheerfulness Matthew 6:17-18. The hypocrites in the time of Isaiah seemed to have supposed that the object was gained if they undertook this affected seriousness. How often do even Christians believe, on more formal occasions of religious observance, a complacency of manner. Nothing more wounds the cause of religion than complacency, gloom, reserve, coldness, and the conduct and posture which, whether right or wrong, will be construed by those around us as mocking.

On the meaning of the word ‘sackcloth It was commonly worn around the loins in times of fasting and of any public or private calamity. It was also customary to sit on sackcloth, or to spread it out for someone to lie on, or to kneel on in times of prayer, as an expression of degradation.

The participants of Isaiah’s audience were fasting for all the incorrect reasons! They fasted to get things from God and appear righteous. God says, though, that we should fast to free others from understand His will. Fasting is a tool of godly love we are to use for the good of others, and any helps we derive from it are wonderful blessings!

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March 11th

*Pease read Psalm 55:22-33*

Reflect on the Hymn “If You Will Trust in God to Guide You” by Georg Neumark

If you will trust in God to guide you,
and hope in God through all your ways,
God will give strength, whate’er betide you,
and bear you through the evil days.
Who trusts in God’s unchanging love
builds on the rock that will not move.

God will embrace your pain and weeping,
your helpless anger and distress.
If you are in God’s care and keeping,
in sorrow will God love you less?
For Christ who took for you a cross,
Will bring you safe through every loss.

Sing, pray, and keep God’s ways unswerving;
so do your own part faithfully,
and trust God’s word; though undeserving,
you’ll find God’s promise true to be.
God never will forsake in need
the soul that trusts in God indeed.

Chalice Hymnal 565
CCLI #225547

**Reflection Questions:**

How do these words feel as you reflect on Lent 2021?

What phrase stands out to you when you look over these lyrics?

If you read/sing these words aloud, what word stands out to you today? Why?

Do these familiar words seem different for you this year? If so - why? If not - why not?
March 12th

"Good Questions"

Here we are in the middle of our Lenten Journey. So, how’s it going? How’s those Lenten disciplines working out for you? Did you choose something that would improve your relationship with Jesus Christ? Hopefully, each of us is journeying on a road that will lead us to a greater understanding of our faith. And it’s very natural that it be a time of questioning. You see, questions are important! Without questions the learning process develops no depth. And when there are no questions concerning a person’s faith, it becomes a Blind Faith, a weak faith, one that is easily distracted or easily mislead.

Questions are important, yet it’s true that some questions can be loaded, while others are pure and simple. However, no matter what the question is, questions do have a way of revealing a lot about the questioner.

Just suppose Jesus Christ stood before you in the flesh and you had a chance to ask him just one question. What would it be? Well, there’s a place in the Gospel of Mark which describes just such a setting in the 12th chapter, verses 28-34. (You can pause here and read it.) So, Jesus was in the midst of a crowd of people, having a question and answer time. Undoubtedly, they asked many questions that day, but let’s look at this one.

First, we need to understand that in this Q & A time, and others, Jesus didn’t dismiss some questions as irrelevant, or dumb, or pointless, though it may be true that some of them were just that. He honored every question because he honored every questioner. That’s because any kind of question is okay to bring before God.

Now occasionally we bring honest questions which also reveal a misunderstanding of the way God works. As in the student who asks, ‘If I pray hard enough, will God see that I pass my English Test?’ What’s the right answer here? A simple yes won’t do. Because the way God works is to put you to work, to encourage you to use your mind to learn. God will see you pass your test, but not without your hard work. We have to guard against this kind of questioning.

So, will we focus on the smaller questions of faith like: ‘Where did Cain’s wife come from?’ ‘What does the Mark of the Beast mean?’ ‘When will the end of the world come?’ Of course, all of these are legitimate questions, but Christ might respond to us with equal impatience. Will he not measure us by the size of our questions, and say, ‘In this world of great need, of people crying out for God’s love, is this really the question you want to ask? Is it what concerns you the most?’

The purpose of a good, healthy, faith is to grow bigger questions. If our faith is vital and moving, it’s going to cause our question to grow, and us with them. A mind, a faith, is stretched and expanded by questions that lead us out to the far edge of knowledge and commitment. Our faith will take us just as far as our questions direct. The man who asked his question in today’s Scripture found this out. His question was as wide as the world of faith, “Which commandment is first of all?” And after an exchange of comments on this great question, Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” (Mark 12:34)

It’s that kind of statement that makes it worthwhile to grow bigger questions. Remember, an effective Christian faith does not answer every question, but it does lead to bigger questions. Every one of us can, in a real sense, measure our faith by the size question it requires that we ask. Ask little questions and we will get little answers. Ask big questions, and we find ourselves, as Jesus said, “… not far from the kingdom of God.”

The value of asking questions is not in the answers that come, but in the assurance and growth that comes from asking them.

Therefore, as we continue in our Lenten Journey, let it be A Time of Questioning. Let us dare to ask “Good Questions” of our Lord, so that our faith might grow.

Prayer: Lord, help us to not be afraid to ask good questions, and be open to the questions that you ask of us. Pour out your wisdom and grace upon us. Amen.

Rev. Ralph S. Wearstler, Regional Elder (District 15)
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March 13th

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Lenten message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking HERE.

It wasn’t so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn’t know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It’s a wonder God didn’t lose God’s temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, God embraced us. God took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. God did all this on God’s own, with no help from us! Then God picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.

Now God has us where God wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all God’s idea, and all God’s work. All we do is trust God enough to let God do it. It’s God’s gift from start to finish! We don’t play the major role. If we did, we’d probably go around bragging that we’d done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. God creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join God in the work God does, the good work God has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing. Ephesians 2:1-10 (The Message)

Our relationship with God is a gift from God. There is nothing we do to earn it, nothing we can do to deserve it. And yet, we are called to live out our gratitude for the gift, to share with everyone, every person, the depths of love and grace we have been shown out of the love of God.

Don’t we get hung up on one pole of this tension or the other? Either our understanding of the grace and compassion of God leads us to mistreat, even abuse, those whom God calls us to love, or we get so caught up in having to prove ourselves worthy that we suffer from fear and self-abuse, waiting for the shoe to drop because the good news is too good to be true.

My friends, allow God to set us free from these extremes. Let the radical part of our lives be found in the way we love our neighbor as an expression of our love for God. When we remember the focus of this whole Lenten experience—“Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?”—we also remember the answer is NO! The fast God chooses is a fast of justice, freedom, and compassion! Why? Because these are the signs of God’s rule breaking into God’s world! Thanks be to God! We are welcomed into that rule and called to live out our place in it. We are repairers of the breach, restorers of streets to live in!

Rev. Michael Doerr
Pastor, First Christian Church, Wauseon
pastordoerr906@gmail.com
March 14th

Scripture for Reflection: Psalm 51:1-10

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

Prayer Points:

- Create in me a clean heart, O God.

- Before I can move forward, I need a new and right spirit.

- What is my own sin? From what do I need to repent?
March 15th

Follow the Lectio Divina phases for your devotion today
Praying with Scripture falls into the following four phases. These phases are not air-tight compartments with rigid transitions between them. Lectio offers a natural flow from one phase to the next rather than a lock-step march.

Please read Psalm 107: 1-22

**Phase One - Lectio: reading. What does the text say?**
TURN to the text and read it slowly, gently, out loud. Savor the reading, feel the words in your mouth, listening for the “still, small voice” of a particular word or phrase that says, ‘I am for you today.’

**Phase Two - Meditatio: meditation. What does the text say specifically to me at this point in my life?**
TAKE the word or phrase into yourself. Slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Let your imagination engage the text. Images are not necessarily but invitations into dialogue with God.

**Phase Three - Oratio: prayer. What does God say to me and what do I say to God through the text?**
SPEAK to God. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. Experience this God-breathed word or phrase as a means to bless and transform the thoughts and images that God’s Word has awakened in you. Give to God what you have found in your heart.

**Phase Four - Contemplatio: contemplation. Being still, resting in God’s presence, and letting God work through my mind and heart.**
FINALLY, REST in God’s embrace. Let go of words and images. Rejoice that God is with you in silence, spiritual rest, and inner receptivity.
SILENCE - LISTEN – DWELL – ABIDE

As you come up out of the depths of contemplation and prepare to resume your normal activities, first thank God for meeting you in this time. Then ask God to show you what difference can this text make in how you act? What possibilities does it open up? What challenges does it pose?
March 16th

God who has promised living water to all who will ask has called us to draw near and make our needs, our hopes, our desires known, that we might be transformed, and that our truest desires might be to live in closer communion with Christ and his people. Let us pray.

For the word of hope that pours over us like living water, for the word of grace that leads us to encounter the living Christ, we offer you our thanks, O God. You are our hope. We have often lived as though you were so distant, so uninvolved with us, and so aloof. Yet in Christ you have shown us just how near to us you are—walking by our sides, risking all to be near to us—so much that you would come to be our servant, our Savior and our friend.

Hear our prayers for those for whom we should take such risks, as we lift to you the yearnings of our hearts for your creation and its peoples. Help us as stewards of your many gifts to care more diligently for the brokenness of your world. May our lives honor you by caring for the earth and all of your creatures. May we be renewed and reconciled to live in peace with all people.

Many and great are the needs of those around us, Lord. Help us to better remember the poor, the homeless, the needy of our world, by serving those of them that live nearby—those we might too easily pass by on the streets. Teach us the meaning of prayer for the lost, the lonely and the grieving through the consolation of our encounters with them in everyday life. Empower us to heal the hurting, the sick and the dying by the touch and the love of Jesus who lives in us, his body. We especially lift to you those dear to us along with our own needs in silence.

Raise up your people again to lives of deeper prayer through more ready service, that we in this community of faith might be joined with Christ in his suffering and in his resurrection, for it is in his name and by his faith that we lift our prayers to you.

Taken from Life in Liturgy, a ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in West Virginia.
March 17th

Bread and Justice

O God, just as the disciples heard Christ’s words of promise and began to eat the bread and drink the wine in the suffering of a long remembrance and in the joy of a hope, grant that we may hear your word, spoken in each thing of everyday affairs:

Coffee, on our table in the morning;
   the simple gesture of opening a door to go out, free;
   the shouts of children in the parks;
   a familiar song, sung by an unfamiliar voice;
   a friendly tree that has not yet been cut down.

May simple things speak to us of your mercy, and tell us that life can be good.

And may these sacramental gifts make us remember those who do not receive them:
   who have their lives cut every day, in the bread absent from the table;
   in the door of the hospital, the prison, the welfare home that does not open;
   in sad children, feet without shoes, eyes without hope;
   in war hymns that glorify death;
   in deserts where once there was life;

Christ was also sacrificed; and may we learn that we participate in the saving sacrifice of Christ when we participate in the suffering of his little ones. Amen.

Rubem A. Alves
20th Century Brazilian Philosopher
March 18th

Silent Centering Prayer

In silence, we come to know God.

Today for the devotion, we would like you to take a few moments out of your day for Silent Centering Prayer.

1. Choose a word or two that represents to you letting God into your heart during this time of silent reflection. It can simply be the word Silence, or words like Amen, Peace & Love, or Be Still.

2. Take a seat and get comfortable. Silently and clearly introduce the word into your thoughts.

3. Repeat the word with sincerity, letting it fall down into the stillness of your body. Breathe. Silently repeat the word again.

4. When you notice yourself drifting off into other thoughts, gently reintroduce the word.

5. Conclude by resting in the silence of the body for a few minutes. Before getting up say a closing prayer of thanksgiving.

We hope that a few moments of silent reflection during your day is a blessing to you this Lenten season.
March 19th

Reflect on the Hymn “How Long, O God, How Long?”

How long, O God, how long?
The ancient cry is ours.
We wait in grief and ask how long before we feel your powers.

And why, O God, and why?
We ask with every age
And throw against your distant sky the force of grief and rage.

The cross, O God, the cross!
We think about your Son:
You know the weight and edge of loss, your tears and ours are one.

Your hand, O God, your hand!
We need your hand to hold,
To walk this dark uncharted land where solid meanings fold.

We trust, O God, we trust
In time our grief shall mend.
Transformed by love that shaped our dust, your love that knows no end.

Chalice Hymnal 642
CCLI #225547

Reflection Questions:

How do these words feel as you reflect on Lent 2021?

What phrase stands out to you when you look over these lyrics?

If you read/sing these words aloud, what word stands out to you today? Why?

Do these familiar words seem different for you this year? If so - why? If not - why not?
March 20th

Let Love Flow

To be inundated is typically not a good thing: the word carries a sense of too much. Water, a necessity for life, can at times be soothing, as a gently moving river or a placid sea reflecting blue skies above. Yet it also has the power to overwhelm, as when that same river overflows its banks or when an ocean surge is pushed before a storm. Too much water can inundate a riverbed, a floodplain, a surrounding community.

This is what happened in September 2018 as Hurricane Florence dropped record amounts of rainfall across North and South Carolina. Pamlico County, North Carolina, was among many places where a combination of storm surge and swollen rivers led to widespread flooding. Compounded by significant wind damage across the county, the devastation was severe. More than 40% of homes sustained significant damage, along with businesses and infrastructure.

In the midst of this chaos, the staff at Camp Caroline began helping neighbors and inviting Disciples in North Carolina to join their response. A ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in North Carolina located in Pamlico County, Camp Caroline’s staff did what seemed natural: through existing relationships, they began to identify needs and solicit help. This process and partnership continued as they connected with Week of Compassion and Disciples Volunteering.

While their early response was unfolding, Pamlico County Disaster Recovery Coalition (PCDRC) was formed to offer a centralized organization for countywide recovery. Week of Compassion extended an operational grant to facilitate recovery coordination, and the deepening relationship soon brought other partners to the response through the Disaster Recovery Support Initiative.

A second Week of Compassion grant provided a 10% match necessary for PCDRC to obtain significant funds from a local foundation. The funds from Week of Compassion not only directly provided for repairs of eight households, but also provided access to funding for muck-out or repair for an additional eighty homes. The cooperative relationship between Week of Compassion, Disciples Volunteering, and PCDRC enabled them to apply together and receive two additional grants, this time from Lowe’s via National VOA. Camp Caroline has hosted mission groups throughout the recovery, even as the collaborative adapted to provide safe services in light of COVID-19, helping the PCDRC make the most of their available funds.

Where storms rage, oceans surge, and rivers flood, the inundating power of these combined forces can be devastating. To counter such forces in recovery requires a similar, cumulative response. Through generosity, service, and prayer, love flows beyond the banks in Pamlico County, surging into places of need. Because of your gifts to Week of Compassion, love flows. Love, of which there can never be too much, now inundates devastated spaces and places and brings healing, hope, and recovery.

Week of Compassion
Mission Moment
For the original PDF version of this Mission Moment as well as more Week of Compassion resources, go to https://www.weekofcompassion.org/2021.html
Scripture for Reflection: Ezekiel 37:1-6

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

Prayer Points:

- The Lord God gives us hope of resurrection. God will cause breath and thus life.

- The promise of resurrection is for new life, not restoration of an old life.

- Let us rejoice in knowing that God is the Lord!
March 22nd

“Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me, there is no savior!” – Isaiah 43:10-11 NRSV

In these words, we find glimmers of hope in the grim reality of Babylonian exile (586-538 BCE) and an astounding theological breakthrough born of deep spiritual crisis.

Exile is a devastating experience for any people anytime, but it took an especially heavy spiritual toll on Judeans exiled to Babylonia when Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed in 586. In the ancient Near East, gods were thought to have particular jurisdictions on earth. YHWH (usually translated, “the LORD”) was the God of Israel and Judah and the land they occupied. Where does that leave the people when they are forcibly taken from the land where YHWH had authority and power? The words of Psalm 137:1-4 express a real theological question asked by those in exile:

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. On willows in the midst of it, we hung our lyres. For there our captors asked us for songs, those who made us wail asked us for joy: ‘sing us a song of Zion!’ How can we sing YHWH’s song on foreign soil?”

Our verses today offer a profound answer to that deep crisis of faith: “before me no god was formed; nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior!”

Before the exile, the predominant view in Jerusalem was either polytheistic – the worship of many gods – or “henotheistic” – the exclusive loyalty to one god (YHWH) among the many possibilities.

But exile prompted a radical rethinking. This world-shattering crisis was the ground that gave birth to a profound new insight: we can sing YHWH’s song on foreign soil, we can find confidence and hope in times of uncertainty and despair because YHWH is the only God there is, the One, Universal God of all lands and peoples. It is a bold, counter-intuitive claim that would reshape the course of human history and leave a definitive stamp on the world even still today.

In cultural and political strife, ecological crisis, and global pandemic, we can rest in the knowledge that there is One God of all the earth who is ever present and ever working to rescue and save. And we can act with boldness to fulfill our calling to be a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

O God, help us rest in the assurance of Your all-embracing presence and love and help us act with boldness to build the just and peaceful world of your desire. Amen!

Rev. Dr. Rick Lowery
President, Disciples of Christ Historical Society
rlowery@discipleshistory.org
March 23rd

Loving God, through Jesus Christ you bring light and life to a dark and dying world. We give you thanks and praise for your love which he reveals to us, even today, and for the hope which his life and death and resurrection unfolds for our world. Even as you love the world so greatly and sacrificially in Jesus, help us in his spirit to live and to love your world today, especially as we lift to you the lonely, the hurting, the sick and the dying.

Where there is injustice, renew our mission to do your will and bring about reconciliation, healing and peace. Where there is pain, make us agents of your regenerative power and your healing caress. May we discover and shed abroad your great love among those we encounter who are alone, or grieving or lost. Make us, as your church, your hands and feet and voice in this world, especially as we pray for those whose lives are closely linked with our own and for the needs we bring with us this day which we offer to you in silence.

As we celebrate your presence with us this day and commit ourselves to you afresh within the covenant of your love, help us to be a willing church—ready to do whatever the day demands, in order to bring the joy of your resurrection to those of our world who have no cause to celebrate. In this Lenten season, awaken us, empower us, renew us, to be faithful to you in the Spirit of Christ.

Taken from Life in Liturgy, a ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in West Virginia.
March 24th

Follow the Lectio Divina phases for your devotion today
Praying with Scripture falls into the following four phases. These phases are not air-tight compartments with rigid transitions between them. Lectio offers a natural flow from one phase to the next rather than a lock-step march.

Please read Psalm 45

Phase One - Lectio: reading. - What does the text say?
TURN to the text and read it slowly, gently, out loud. Savor the reading, feel the words in your mouth, listening for the “still, small voice” of a particular word or phrase that says, ‘I am for you today.’

Phase Two - Meditatio: meditation. What does the text say specifically to me at this point in my life?
TAKE the word or phrase into yourself. Slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Let your imagination engage the text. Images are not necessarily but invitations into dialogue with God.

Phase Three - Oratio: prayer. What does God say to me and what do I say to God through the text?
SPEAK to God. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. Experience this God-breathed word or phrase as a means to bless and transform the thoughts and images that God’s Word has awakened in you. Give to God what you have found in your heart.

Phase Four - Contemplatio: contemplation. Being still, resting in God's presence, and letting God work through my mind and heart.
FINALLY, REST in God's embrace. Let go of words and images. Rejoice that God is with you in silence, spiritual rest, and inner receptivity.
SILENCE - LISTEN – DWELL – ABIDE

As you come up out of the depths of contemplation and prepare to resume your normal activities, first thank God for meeting you in this time. Then ask God to show you what difference can this text make in how you act? What possibilities does it open up? What challenges does it pose?
March 25th

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise God, my help and my God.” Psalm 42:5 and Psalm 43:5

This Lent I choose to fast from Despair and will instead hang out with Hope. This Lent I decide that my Hope cannot be taken from me by Despair. I say to Despair these things: “Despair, you can steal my home but you can’t have my Hope. Despair, you can have my health, but I’m holding onto my Hope. Despair, you can eat into my thoughts, but you can’t take over my thinking. Despair, you can haul me off to a dark place, but you can’t close the door that lets in the light of Hope.”

And when Despair does clamp its icy grip around my wrists and clamor annoyingly in my head, as I know it will, I will greet Despair cordially and then introduce it to Hope. I will invite Despair in to my lodgings and together we will sit hospitably with Hope. I will say to Despair, “Despair, you are welcome in my house but you must cohabit here with Hope and learn from her. You must agree to respect Hope, to converse with Hope, and most importantly you must concede your lesser authority to the more powerful Hope.”

And this Lent I vow that when I despair of the work of loving or the absence of love, I will make room for Hope. And further I vow that when I despair of a right relationship with God or a human relationship gone wrong, I will invite Hope to settle once again in my soul.

With Despair I may sit and with Despair I may dance, but it is with Hope that I make my forever home. This is the fast I choose this Lent.

Prayer: God of All Hope, When we are overcome by despair, lead us to that place where even a small spark of hope illuminates the path you place before us. And then lead us forward to do the work you have called us to do. This is our prayer. Amen.

Rev. Cynthia Klingemier
Regional Elder District 4 and Commission on Ministry Team 1 Leader
revckdoc91@gmail.com
March 26th

Please read Matthew 21:8-11

Reflect on the Hymn “All Glory, Laud, and Honor”

All glory, laud and honor
to you, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring.
You are a child of Israel,
Great David's greater Son;
you ride in lowly triumph,
Messiah, blessed One!

The company of angels
are praising you on high,
and, we with all creation
in chorus make reply.
The people of the Hebrews
with palms before you went;
our praise and prayer and anthems
before you we present.

To you, before your passion,
they sang their hymns of praise;
to you, now high exalted,
our melody we raise.
As you received their praises,
now hear us as we pray.
Since you delight in goodness,
rule in our hearts today.

Chalice Hymnal 192
CCLI #225547

Reflection Questions:

How do these words feel as you reflect on Lent 2021?

What phrase stands out to you when you look over these lyrics?

If you read/sing these words aloud, what word stands out to you today? Why?

Do these familiar words seem different for you this year? If so - why? If not - why not?
Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. 3 If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” 4 They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, 5 some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” 6 They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. 7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. 9 Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” 11 Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

A Cheering, Chanting, Dizzy Crowd

A cheering, chanting, dizzy crowd had stripped the green trees bare, and hailing Christ as king alone, waved branches in the air

They laid their garments in the road and spread his path with palms and vows of lasting love bestowed with royal hymns and psalms.

When day dimmed down to deepening dark the crowd began to fade till only trampled leaves and bark were left from the parade

Lest we be fooled because our hearts have surged with passing praise, remind us God, as this week starts where Christ has fixed his gaze

Instead of palms, a winding sheet will have to be unrolled, a carpet much for fit to greet the king a cross will hold.

Thomas H. Troeger, 1985
Matthew 21:1-11

Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

21 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village ahead 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, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.”

This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

“Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

We raise our voices and wave with joyful hope the palms of deliverance of God’s people.

Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David!
Our hearts are filled with expectation as we welcome the coming king.
Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
We receive into the crowded streets of our lives the one who is Savior, not only of us, but of all the earth.
Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest heaven!

Loving God, you taught your disciples love for one another—love which would manifest itself in selflessness and servanthood. Hear the prayer of your people for our world and all who dwell in it.

We lift to you the nations, that they may be rebuilt in justice and in peace, and especially this nation and its leaders. Hear our prayers for the nations.

We lift to you this earth, which you so lovingly created, that as stewards of your gifts we might thankfully use its resources for the good of all. Hear our prayers for your creation.

We pray for this city and for cities and villages around us, that all might work together to strengthen and improve the lives of their citizens. Hear our prayers for the cities.

We pray for your church—both here in this faith community and around the world—that this season of Lent might be a time of renewal in faith and mission on your behalf, and that together we may learn the path of servanthood toward all humanity. Hear our prayer for your church.

We pray for ourselves and our own needs, and the needs of those around us, whose lives are closely linked with our own… To those who are sick and sorrowful, bring your healing and hope. To the grieving, bring your peace. And to the dying bring the joy of your promise to us of eternity with you. For these and all our prayers we offer you, trusting in your goodness and your strength, in the name and spirit of Jesus the Christ.

Taken from Life in Liturgy, a ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in West Virginia.
March 29th

Scripture for Reflection: Mark 1:16-20

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Prayer Points:

- Like the fishermen, Jesus calls us to follow him.

- How am I called to follow Jesus?

- What new identity is Jesus calling me to?

- Help me to leave the past behind in order that Jesus may lead me to a new place.
March 30th

Reflect on the Hymn “What Wondrous Love Is This”

1 What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul,
what wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul!

2 When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down,
when I was sinking down, sinking down;
when I was sinking down beneath God's righteous frown,
Christ laid aside his crown for my soul, for my soul,
Christ laid aside his crown for my soul!

3 To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing,
to God and to the Lamb I will sing!
To God and to the Lamb, who is the great “I AM,”
while millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing,
while millions join the theme, I will sing!

4 And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
and when from death I'm free, I'll sing on!
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be,
and through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
and through eternity I'll sing on!

Chalice Hymnal 200
CCLI #225547

Reflection Questions:

How do these words feel as you reflect on Lent 2021?

What phrase stands out to you when you look over these lyrics?

If you read/sing these words aloud, what word stands out to you today? Why?

Do these familiar words seem different for you this year? If so - why? If not - why not?
March 31st

Isaiah’s Fasting Plan

In 1968, trumpeter Louis Armstrong released the timeless anthem, “What a Wonderful World.” This song’s message of hope and optimism makes me smile and think to myself, as Armstrong’s refrain goes, “What a wonderful world.”

Hope and optimism. They form the vaccination that blocks fear and despair, and the requirement for persons to believe that if somehow forced to lie down, one day they will sit up; if they can sit up, one day they will stand up; if they can stand up, one day they will walk; and if they can walk, one day they will run! Hope and optimism: the higher society’s walls, the higher we’ll climb!

The hard truth is that for many, the world really isn't wonderful. Hope and optimism seem reserved for the well-connected and guarded by policies that allow the privileged to cut line. The swollen river of hopelessness is flooding the lives of scores of us, whether we’re in rural or urban settings; whether we’re quarantined or out of the house; whether we’re red or blue. There is no escaping the fact that hopelessness is all around us and sometimes, in us. The stream of hopelessness and despair can even be found to have seeped through the levees and firewalls of the church, causing many Christians to retreat from social and global responsibility and adopt practices that late Civil Rights leader Rev. Dr. Joseph E. Lowery once said reflected insidious insensitivity and invidious individuality.

How unfortunate it is when faith communities lack faith! How perplexing it is when people labeled as salt of the earth and light of the world lose both taste and visibility. Perhaps for many in the church, faith is a private matter, “between my God and me,” as a congregant remarked after hearing my stewardship sermon. One troubling result of privatized faith is the under dependence on God whose faithfulness gives us new mercies every morning, and an over dependence on ill-gotten privilege and political ideologies that offer great quantities of nothingness with respect to sustainable hope, renewable optimism, and urgent call for love’s visible expression: justice.

Privatized faith was a problem for Isaiah’s people. In the traumatic year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah was called to ministry, to be God’s spokesperson who would summon the people of Israel to break their allegiance to superficial, self-serving worship and fasting, and instead be faithful to God and live up to their true identity as God’s people. Rev. Isaiah tweeted that a true fast, one that glorifies God and draws people closer to God, is one that involves loving service to humanity that breaks the chains of social and political wickedness, unties the thongs of mass incarceration and executions, and liberates the oppressed. Oh, but there was more.

Standing behind his prophetic pre-Zoom pulpit, Isaiah preached that true fasting involves people sharing bread with the hungry, bringing the homeless poor into their houses instead of shelters, and placing their too tight, gently-used, and pre-dry rotting clothes that have not been on their bodies in years onto poor bodies. Isaiah unmuted himself and told the people that when they fasted like this, God’s healing presence would be with them with righteousness leading them and the glory of the Lord following them.

When we consider Isaiah’s fasting plan, we must immediately rethink contemporary Lenten fasting plans often created as bodily weight reduction systems. To what extent does our fasting draw us closer to God and help reduce society’s bloated weight of systemic racism, institutional oppression, and economic exploitation?

I suppose that in times of crisis and scarcity of resources – real or imagined – it is easy to become inwardly focused. Many accept the myth of rugged individualism or the scandal of autonomy as identified by the late Disciples ecumenist Dr. Paul A. Crow, Jr. Both masquerade as valid life choices for Christians, even as in Christ we are one, and are called to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

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**March 31st continued**

Isaiah's call for true fasting and true faithfulness indicates to us that the recovery of hope and optimism which leads to social healing, righteousness, and the glory of God, does not come through embracing private or nationalistic faith. Instead, this recovery comes when we engage in loving service, in the ministry of social justice, in making peace with our neighbors locally and globally, and in challenging the prevailing attitudes that say, “things can never change.” Each time someone says this, we must rise up and say emphatically and unapologetically, “O yes they can, because we have faith and the faith has us!

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**April 1st**

**From a Distance, Still Together**

*Please read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you...”

Paul was not with Jesus and his disciples to celebrate the Passover with them. Yet, he describes for the fellowship of believers at Corinth some of the events of that evening. The Corinthian believers weren't there, either, but they receive the story. Someone told the story to Paul, and he in turn relayed it to the church: This is the story as I heard it, so now I'm telling it to you.

Every time we gather for worship as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we tell the story again. Sometimes we use these words from Paul. Sometimes we relay the account of one of the gospel writers. Whatever words we choose, the effect is the same. We pass the story along to one another. We share the story from generation to generation.

By the time this devotional reading surfaces, it will have been more than a year since the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped our understanding of what it means to be the gathered community. The coming together for worship and fellowship that once was centered in buildings with sanctuaries and fellowship halls now takes place across a number of settings. Our gatherings now bring together a variety of different venues.

Still, we gather at the table, and when we are gathered in worship, we tell the story again of what Jesus did on that night he was betrayed. We may not be physically present with one another. We may not be in a three-dimensional gathering, but we are still the assembled community of believers. We are still the church.

Paul was not present with the church at Corinth when he wrote those familiar words. He wrote to the church from a distance and used the opportunity to remind the church what it means to be the gathered community. He points out that as the fellowship of believers, we share with one another just as Christ shared with us.

Paul sets the story in the context of a ritual of the church almost as old as the sharing of communion, the potluck dinner. One of the griefs that COVID-19 dealt us was losing the sense of the potluck dinner around communion. It feels different not to come to the table or to share the elements with one another.

However, even as we long for the smell of fried chicken, broccoli casserole, and pound cake, we are still the gathered fellowship of believers. From our variety of venues, we still gather at the Lord’s Table. Perhaps the pandemic, like Paul’s word to the believers at Corinth, has reminded us what it means to be the church.

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April 2nd - Good Friday

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Lenten message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking [HERE].

Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing. Luke 23:34

I have had the occasion several times over the years to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. This massive church dates from the 4th century and is built over the site that is believed to be Calvary, or Golgotha, the place of Jesus’ crucifixion and the tomb where his body was laid to rest. It is a very ornate building with a Medieval décor, filled with great hanging lamps and burning candles. Today it looks nothing like the place, outside the city walls, where Jesus was led to his death. If you go there you have to use your imagination to make the place fit the narrative of Jesus’ final day we read about in the Gospels, the day we call Good Friday.

Good Friday always involves imagination. It does not make sense to his disciples then or now that Jesus should die. His arrest and trial seem clearly a sham that is overlaid by political maneuvering and gamesmanship. Jesus is mocked, abused, and taunted by his captors. But if the “last words” he spoke are close to the ones recorded in the scriptures, somehow he mustered an inner peace and strength that empowered him, even as his life came to an end.

Standing in the middle of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with pilgrims from around the world it is a little hard to picture it. One odd thing helps make it real. The church today is the shared property of a variety of groups: the Greek Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, Armenian Christians, Coptic Christians, Syriac Orthodox, and Ethiopian Orthodox. No one of those groups may alter the property in any way without the consent of all the others. Agreement is often elusive. To preserve the peace the key to the building for the last 800 years has been entrusted to a Muslim family.

The Bible says there was squabbling at the foot of the cross, a struggle for Jesus’ belongings, and the abandonment of many of his followers who were filled with fear. Sadly, that discord is lived out today in real time by his later day followers who struggle to get along in the church built at the place he died. And, sadly, in churches erected in his name all around the globe. If you use your imagination you can hear Jesus’ final words echoing through the centuries, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Prayer—Forgive us God for the friction we perpetuate in the name of Jesus with sisters and brothers who you have created and love. Grant us the will and ability to foster peace.

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April 3rd

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Lenten message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking **HERE**.

Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24 (Inclusive Bible Translation)
I am the one who has known grief under the rod of Most High’s anger. I am the one who was led away – left to walk in the night, far away from the light. The hand of God has been turned against me again and again, both day and night. God has torn away my skin and muscle and broken my bones. God has surrounded and besieged me with bitterness and calamity. God has cast me out into the darkness like those long dead. God has walled me in – there is no escape and has weighed me down with shackles. Even when I call out for help, God ignores my plea. God has obstructed my path with huge boulders and blocked my ever step. I remember my woes and wanderings – the wormwood and the gall. Those memories are so clear to me, and they fill me with despair. Yet it is because I remember all this that I have hope. YHWH’s favor is not exhausted, nor has God’s compassion failed. They rise up anew each morning, so great is God’s faithfulness. “YHWH is all I have!” I cry. “So I will wait in patience.”

It feels like we are so close to the end. Maybe some of you have already been vaccinated. Maybe you have slowly begun to venture back towards “normal” life. Maybe you have your vaccine scheduled. Maybe you are looking ahead and making plans to when this is all over.

Tomorrow is Easter. We are so close to the joy of resurrection, the elation of the risen Christ, the glee of the conquering of death!

But it is not yet.

It is not yet Easter. Easter is tomorrow.

And if we anticipate things will go back to “normal” after this pandemic, then we are missing out on the truth that the world is forever changed. If the early followers of Christ had anticipated that things would go back to “normal” then Easter would not have the power that it does.

Like the writer of Lamentations, I imagine they felt they (Paraphrasing here) –“ Have you felt great grief? Have you felt led away to walk in the night? Have you felt as though God’s hand was turned against you again and again? Have you felt walled in – with no escape! Have you cried out for help and felt ignored?

If you have, then you might be ripe for resurrection. You might be more capable of fully living into God’s new life. To live into new life, we have to go through death, and then choose resurrection.

The focus of Lent this year – the fast we choose – is so important because for us to fully live into this season of Lent, this time of change in our lives, we have to choose how we move forward. We may feel as though we’ve already been giving up so much in our lives – we haven’t been able to have church like we normally do, celebrate weddings or births, have funerals, go to work or school – nothing has been normal for a long time and we have been “fasting” from our way of life for over a year now!

These fasts, however, have largely been involuntary.

*Continued on the next page*
April 3rd continued

So then, what is the fast we choose? Not what more do we lose or give up, but what is the fast we choose? Can we choose fasts like the one brought up in Isaiah – fasts to share food and resources with the hungry and the poor? To loose the chains of the oppressed? If we choose these fasts, then Easter comes to us every morning, and we move closer to ending not only this current pandemic, but the ones of racial and economic injustice that plagues us as well. We have to choose though, and we have to choose today before we can expect Easter tomorrow.

The poet of Lamentations knows – “It is because I remember all this that I have hope. YHWH’s favor is not exhausted, nor has God’s compassion failed. They rise up anew each morning, so great is God’s faithfulness. “YHWH is all I have!”

Prayer: Oh God, May we wait in patience, but as we do so, may we acknowledge the despair of this season. Although we know you do not cause or create our pain, may you be at work in our lives to transform it into bringing about new life and new hope. O God, it has been a long night, and there are many more long nights to come. But as this night comes to an end, may tomorrow morning be a blessed one. Amen

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We hope and pray that this year’s Lenten Devotional booklet has been a blessing to you. We extend a heartfelt thanks to all who contributed.

A full playlist of the video devotions can be viewed by clicking HERE.

Please prayerfully consider a gift to the Easter Special Offering.