

2024

# BY GRACE ALONE

Lenten Devotional



## EACH DAY CONTAINS:

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Scripture  
Devotion  
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## ABOUT THIS DEVOTION

A Message from Sarah Altenburg

Over the past two years, Trinity has been focusing on disability justice, disability theology, and ableism. Thusfar, we have focused primarily on physical disabilities and accommodations relating to those disabilities. This Lent we are shifting to focus more towards mental and cognitive disabilities.

As someone with a diagnosed disability in the mental health realm, I am excited to offer this devotional, which discusses what society still stigmatizes.

Thank you to the many, many writers.

At times we move forward by grace alone. But grace is always enough.

-Sarah Altenburg, Minister of Music and Youth and Family Ministries

# FEBRUARY 14, 2024 - ASH WEDNESDAY

## Scripture

**Psalm 103:14-18** For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust. As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

## Devotion - Pastor Krister Ulmanis

As we begin the journey through Lent on this Ash Wednesday, we are reminded by the cross on our forehead that we begin a journey of reflection and meditation. The quote from Nido Qubein is what really grabbed me as I am wrestling with this devotion.

Where does one begin a journey of 40 days of reflection and meditation? For me it begins with prayers. No matter where I am - on the mountain top or in the deepest valley in life, or as my reality is as I write this - in bed suffering the effects of Covid - the journey forward for me always begins with prayers.

Prayers - is there anything more wonderful? Is there anything more challenging?

Would it not be so much easier if we just got a phone call with an answer to our prayers than having said our prayers - be in with specific requests, or in gratitude for something that has lifted up our lives - and then there is this seeming silence. Silence that can be like a desert experience in life. Like ashes on our forehead that tells us so much, yet ask us so many more questions.

In spite of all that, prayer is our conversation with God. The time we set aside to have this one-on-one with God where we share the deepest thought, and give thanks for the highest joys. I find that this very act of prayer, with the certainty that God is listening, is a time of peace and calm in my life. It really helps determine where to go from where I am in the present moment.

This is a time to shut out all the noise around me and focus on my conversation with the One who has all the answers. The One who knows my sorrows and knows my joys. The One who sends people or events to make it clear that my prayers have been heard, and answered. Not always the way I want them answered, but always in the knowledge that God knows best.

The ash cross on our forehead this Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the journey. The journey through Lent. A time of reflection and meditation on how the grace of God impacts my life each and every day.

## Reflection Question

What is the thing you will focus the most on in your prayer life this Lent journey of 2024?

## Prayer

God of prayer, as we smudge our foreheads with ash in reflection of the journey ahead in Lent we give thanks to you for the gift of being there in our lives whom we can come to in prayer knowing that your ears are always open to hear them, and you will answer them, in your time not ours. Amen.

## Quote

“Your present circumstances don’t determine where you go; they merely determine where you start.” - Nido Qubein

*Song - This Dust by Kip Fox*

## Additional Devotion - Barbara Anderson

In Psalm 103, God “remembers all our dust,” but the love of God continues on from “everlasting and to everlasting.”

In Kip Fox’s song,  
To cover over this dust...  
Never good enough

“You[God] poured out Your love  
We are flesh and blood  
You poured out this love to cover this dust..”

“Wherever we are in life, our circumstances don’t limit where we go, but where we start.” This is an idea that Dr. Nido R. Qubein hung on to when he came to the United States from Lebanon with \$50 in his pocket and a few words of English. Today, he is an accomplished university president, author, and motivational speaker.

Wherever in life we are, we have God’s love at this new starting place.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER**

# FEBRUARY 15, 2024

## Scripture

**Matthew 6:16-18** “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

## Devotion - Kathy Schell

Fasting was an important religious practice in Jesus’ time, and for centuries many Christians practiced fasting as a spiritual discipline, especially during the penitential season of Lent. I think that fasting has generally fallen out of favor as a spiritual practice in our time because people don’t see it as particularly useful or helpful. In our day we don’t observe people exaggerating a dismal and weak appearance in order to appear virtuous or holy. Even the practice of fasting by eating fish on Fridays in Lent, instead of meat, has morphed into seeking out “all you can eat” local fish fries!

However, fasting may still have a place in our spiritual lives if we approach it in a different way. Could we “fast” from putting others down? Or fast from complaining about our work colleagues? Or from comparing ourselves with others? Or even from beating ourselves up when we make all-too-human mistakes? Perhaps our Lenten “fasting” could take the form of doing something extra, such as more random acts of kindness, or reaching out to someone who may need help.

## Reflection Question

What sort of “fasting” might help myself and others this Lent?

## Prayer

Dear God, I know that you love me. Help me to see myself as your beloved child, and to choose a spiritual practice this Lent that will help me to live and grow as your beloved child. Amen.

## Quote

“Be dedicated to change the way in which people see mental illness at all levels of society. If not for yourself, advocate for those who are struggling in silence.” - Germany Kent

*Song - Dust We Are and Shall*  
*Return - The Brilliance*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: PANIC DISORDER**

# FEBRUARY 16, 2024

## Scripture

**Psalm 23:1-3** The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; and leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

## Devotion - Barb Sturms

Psalm 23, one of the most beloved psalms. So reassuring, especially the line, “He leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul.” Over and over our Lord will do that for us. He is there holding us up, calming and reassuring us of His love. However, for those with a mental disability is so difficult at times to see or understand the calmness that God offers. The mind is jumbled, not firing right, so to speak. It is hard to comprehend God’s calmness and safety that is spoken here.

My oldest son, who himself suffers from chronic depression, works as a para educator with high school aged youths, most at a lower cognitive level. Many suffer from a variety of physical along with cognitive disabilities. Many are autistic as well. I feel the Lord has put him in this position for a reason. He has worked hard through his affliction and has been a shining example of the quote Dan Millman put so well, “You don’t have to control your thoughts. You have to stop letting your thoughts control you.” His favorite saying is “It is what it is.” This gives him the ability to move on and be a very compassionate caregiver to these troubled youths, showing God’s compassion over and over to those who can’t understand or feel the calmness in their heads. May we all be so compassionate and not look at those, who cannot control their thoughts, with disdain but with the love God has so generously given to each and everyone of us.

## Reflection Question

What does “leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul” mean to you?

## Prayer

Dear Father, please look upon those with mental afflictions with extra gentleness and care. Help those of us, who can feel Your love share, it with those whose minds are clouded and in dark places. I ask this and everything in Jesus’ name. Amen.

## Quote

“You don’t have to control your thoughts. You just have to stop letting them control you.” - Dan Millman

*Song - Beautiful Things*  
*- Gungor*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER**

# FEBRUARY 17, 2024

## Scripture

**Psalm 34: 17-18** When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

## Devotion - Paul Harms

“When the righteous cry for help...”

How do you feel when you ask for help in your personal or professional life? Sometimes it's a quick question or small favor, no big deal. Sometimes it's uncomfortable, embarrassing. We wonder what the person will think of us, if they will help, or what they might ask for in return. If you're like me, you might have felt a lot of different things when you've asked for help, but “righteous” has never been one of them!

All of this becomes much more difficult when people need help with their emotional and mental health. They might feel ashamed and undeserving. They worry about how facing the diagnosis will affect their relationships and financial wellbeing. They might lack awareness or acceptance of their condition. Perhaps they feel that nothing effective can or will be done. Many simply lack access to the services they need. The cry for help can seem weak, and perhaps pointless.

But, what does it mean to be righteous, anyway? The word might remind us of our shortcomings, or maybe holier-than-thou stereotypes. But I think it simply means trying to act as God would want us to. God wants to ease our troubles. When you or a loved one is not okay, when the pain is too much, when you just can't make it through...in such times, we do not need to ask who is righteous, or deserving. In such times, we all are. The cry for help is not weakness. It is righteous. It is right. And God is near, and hears.

## Reflection Question

What would make you more comfortable to ask for help? How do you be that calm presence for others?

## Prayer

Holy One, hear our cries - silent and aloud. Sooth our souls and calm our spirits. Amen.

## Quote

“Anyone can be affected, despite their level of success or their place on the food chain. In fact, there is a good chance you know someone who is struggling with it since nearly 20% of American adults face some form of mental illness in their lifetime. So why aren't we talking about it?” - Kristen Bell

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
**NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON**  
**MENTAL ILLNESS**

*Song : Brokenness Aside*  
*All Sons and Daughters*



# FEBRUARY 18, 2024

## Scripture

**Isaiah 41:10** "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

## Devotion - Mary Lewison

Peter and Silas were stripped, severely beaten with rods, and thrown in a dank, dirty cell with their feet in stocks -Acts 16. They suffered greatly - maybe they were even bleeding - but they turned their hearts and minds to You with hymns and prayers. You blasted open the jail doors. Peter, Silas, and the other prisoners stayed where they were - their hearts and minds with You, following Your Lead. Even in their suffering - or maybe because of it - Peter and Silas witnessed to Your Salvation - a much greater Gift than merely escaping from jail - bringing the jailer and the other prisoners into the Light of Your Love. Father, Your "Righteous Right Hand" is Jesus - my connection back to You despite myself. You don't want me to perfect myself because that focuses me on me. You want me as I am. You Desire Relationship, Dependence, Collaboration, and Love. You want to walk with me and Show me Your Way. Walking with you Lord is like walking between the raindrops.

## Reflection Question

Where are my heart and mind focused - especially in the trials and tribulations of this life?

## Prayer

Lord, Forgive me when I stray. At those times, gently Shepherd me back into Your Presence. Help me to cast my whole lot in with You - relying on You in every situation, no matter how dire or dark. Remind me to sing hymns and pray even in the depths of my sorrow, so I may share the load of my burdens with You instead of trying to go it alone. Then You will Blast away barriers and Lead me in Your Paths of Righteousness, out of the valley of the shadow of death.

## Quote

"There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." - Leonard Cohen

*Song - Down to the River  
to Pray - Alison Krauss*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: SOCIAL PHOBIAS**

# FEBRUARY 19, 2024

## Scripture

**Matthew 11:28** "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

## Devotion - Peggy Deames

Recently I moved a bookcase in sections to my second floor apartment. While the individual sections were not particularly heavy to me, the multiple trips up and down the stairs were exhausting. I found myself short of breath. Stopping and intentionally taking some deep breaths restored my energy.

While the above was an example of a physical burden, mental and emotional burdens can be just as exhausting. Slowing down and breathing deeply can be just as helpful for our mental and emotional health as well as our physical well being.

Slowing down and breathing gives all of us humans a chance to regroup and remember who holds the universe and allows us to breathe in the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

## Reflection Question

Have you ever pondered the word "inspiration"? Inspiration can refer to the physical act of breathing in as well as the act of receiving the Spirit which can enlighten our lives to new ways of being.

## Prayer

Holy Spirit, thank you for lightening our burdens and enlightening our paths. Embolden us to be lights to our neighbors. Amen.

## Quote

"Slow breathing is like an anchor in the midst of an emotional storm: the anchor won't make the storm go away, but it will hold you steady until it passes." - Russ Harris

*Song : Be Still - The Fray*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: AGORAPHOBIA**



# FEBRUARY 20, 2024

## Scripture

**Matthew 5:13-14** “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot. “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

## Devotion - Roger Harms

More than ten years ago, I was moving from serving one congregation as an Intentional Interim Pastor to another congregation. It is always difficult to leave one congregation after 12 to 18 months, forget them completely, and learn about a whole new congregation of people. I became chronically anxious. When I started at the new congregation, I was not sure how I could even be a pastor to them. But a doctor gave me some medicine. I also talked to an assistant to a synod bishop who helped me to realize God’s love for me through Jesus. I learned to do yoga exercises and to quietly meditate to calm my mind with God’s presence.

The psalmist in Psalm 46 talks about God being “our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”. And that “the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” My problems are not completely gone, but God is with me. The people of God are with me. I pray that I can also be with others around me to bring them the peace, calm and presence of God that I feel. Maya Angelou says that “History ... need not be lived again.” My problems will never completely go away. But I can go forward in life, as I also assist others in moving forward.

The psalmist says God’s word to us, “Be still and know that I am God.” I will be quiet and listen to God’s word of love. The song reminds me of the words of “blessed hope, blessed rest” that come from God to me. Then with God beside me I can say, “It is well, it is well with my soul”.

## Reflection Question

How can I go forward in life with God, and assist others to do the same?

## Prayer

Holy One, be present in our words and actions. Amen.

## Quote

“I think it’s really important to take the stigma away from mental health... My brain and my heart are really important to me. I don’t know why I wouldn’t seek help to have those things be as healthy as my teeth.” - Kerry Washington

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: CLAUSTROPHOBIA**

Song: Salt and Light  
Lauren Daigle

# FEBRUARY 21, 2024

## Scripture

**Genesis 3:1-6** “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden’?” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

## Devotion - Sarah Mayer-Flatt

The writer of Genesis 3 was trying to make an impact on their readers by using different words in similar sentences. The crafty serpent tells Eve she will end up “knowing” good and evil. But in the next sentence, we read that she believes the tree will “make one wise.” So what exactly is the difference between knowledge and wisdom, and what does it mean during Lent?

We “know” what to do during Lent -- give up something or take on a new spiritual practice. We are to be more solemn in our worship. We are journeying toward the cross on Good Friday. We know we are to repent, which is a literal returning-to-face-God. These practices of our faith separate Lent from the rest of the church year just as these practices move us to a deeper relationship with God.

The wisdom of Lent is found within our hearts as our God continues to call us to care for our neighbors, love the stranger, offer refuge to the immigrants and refugees, feed the hungry, and so on. We practice our Lenten disciplines because they are just that -- moments of practicing our faith.

## Reflection Question

Do we have the wisdom to practice our Lenten disciplines without becoming self-righteous?

## Prayer

God of Wisdom and Knowledge, give us the courage to practice our Lenten journey with grace and love for our neighbor. Amen.

## Quote

“It is not the bruises on the body that hurt. It is the wounds of the heart and the scars of the mind.”  
- Aisha Mirza

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:  
THE TREVOR PROJECT**

*Song: Eve's Lament (Genesis)*

*Caroline Cobb*

# FEBRUARY 22, 2024

## Scripture

**Philippians 4:8-9** Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you.

## Devotion - Valerie Brader

In Lent, a season of penitence, we often focus on our sins. But the Bible reminds us that Jesus also wants us to focus on what is pure, and pleasing, and commendable. When we focus on the good we can do, that is an important way to show our love and is a restorative practice. It is also a pathway to the peace God wants for all of us, a peace that passes all understanding. Today, let us dwell on what we can do in the world that will make all we have learned, received and heard from Jesus a little more real for others and ourselves.

## Reflection Question

What is something you have noticed about what Jesus did that you can also do in your life?

## Prayer

Dear God, as you helped Martin Luther see that you are a God of love who knows our sins but sees us as worthy of his grace, help us to focus on what is pure, pleasing, and commendable, and find ways and moments where we can be that for you.

## Quote

“Mental health is not a destination, but a process. It’s about how you drive, not where you’re going.”  
- Noam Shpancer

*Song: Trinity Song.*  
*Sandra McCracken*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER**

# FEBRUARY 23, 2024

## Scripture

**Matthew 6:9-15** “Pray, then, in this way: Our Father in heaven, may your name be revered as holy. May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

## Devotion - Rita Paye

As we pray this prayer that Jesus gave us, we focus on each petition as it jumps out at us in the moment. If we're hungry we see bread. If we're struggling to pay a bill we wish the company would give us a break.

But how should we focus on our promise to forgive? We say we will not ask whom we will forgive. We promise to forgive. As we look beyond our family and church family, do we forgive the parent who bought the gun for the school shooter? The company that spoiled our water?

We ask for forgiveness and we promise to forgive those who trespass against us. We do not promise to seek revenge. Forgiving, while a hard process, allows us to move on by taking actions that Jesus said are required.

We do not promise to not prosecute. We do not promise to prevent the consequences of their trespass. We are to try to get them baptized, help them in their faith journey, feed them, and visit them in jail.

## Reflection Question

When is forgiveness extra difficult? What is God calling us to do by forgiving? How do we protect our own mental health while still offering forgiveness?

## Prayer

Saving God, help us to forgive as you call us to forgive. Help us to know our own boundaries and self needs in the process. Amen.

## Quote

“Not until we are lost do we begin to understand ourselves.” - Henry David Thoreau

*Song: Wake Up*  
*All Sons and Daughters*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: THE DEPRESSION AND BIPOLAR**  
**SUPPORT ALLIANCE**

# FEBRUARY 24, 2024

## Scripture

**John 3:16** “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

## Devotion - Judith Moldenhauer

John 3:16 is one of the most quoted verses in the Bible and is sometimes cited to be the Gospel in a nutshell: believe in Jesus and be saved. Christianity’s central concepts – love, faith, redemption – are contained in this single sentence, but the power and efficacy of those concepts come from the connection between two words in the sentence: “everyone” and “believe.” God comes to us in ways that are unique to each person; your interaction with God is framed by who you are and what you have experienced in your life. God’s grace is indeed for everyone, but it is not generalized or scattershot – it is crafted to reach each of us in ways that speak to our individual needs and hopes. Likewise, our relationship to God and how each of us lives into the love of Jesus (i.e., our faith journey) is, as today’s quote says, our “individual story to tell.” When we feel that things are not going well or feel insignificant or feel like giving up, each of us needs to remember that we “have a name, a history, a personality”; Jesus loves us just as we are and is with us in our pain, doubt, and uncertainty. We belong to God, embodying – each in our own way – the love, faith and redemption that are Jesus’s gifts to us.

## Reflection Question

How does God speak to you? How do you experience God’s grace and presence in your everyday life, especially during emotionally difficult times? What one thing can you do this Lent that help reverse the usual power, expectations, and values of mental ableism and make a difference in the life of someone dealing with anxiety or some other emotional pain?

## Prayer

Lord God, thank you for sending Jesus to be with us in ways that are meaningful for each individual and to assure us that we are loved and valued as we are. Thank you, Jesus, for being our example for confronting our mental ableism assumptions and all other ways society would separate us from one another. Grant us the grace to support one another and, like Jesus, “be there” for each other.

## Quote

“You are not your illness. You have an individual story to tell. You have a name, a history, a personality. Staying yourself is part of the battle.” - Julian Seifter

*Song: Give Me Jesus*  
*Sarah Watkins*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER**

# FEBRUARY 25, 2024

## Scripture

**Psalm 107: 8-9** Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.

## Devotion - K. Page Boyer

Who among us does not know what it is to walk through the valley of the shadow of death? Doing so is a universal human experience, no matter one's age, race, gender, or creed. While the physical realm of Disability Justice and Ableism are more easily seen—and therefore more tangible for us to grasp and with which we may more readily empathize—mental health and mental health disabilities are unseen and abstruse.

As Stacy Lantz writes in her song *What Wondrous Love Is This!*, “When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down, when I was sinking down, O my soul! 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.” Others, even those closest to us, may not be able to “see” our deep grief, spiritual distress, or fear, but the great “I AM” knows both our hearts and our minds. As Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of the wizarding school Hogwarts—made famous in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series—notes, “Happiness can be found even in the darkest of times, if only one remembers to turn on the light.”

## Reflection Question

How might we serve to be the light that conquers the darkness of mental health disabilities for those around us?

## Prayer

Most Merciful God, help me to fan this little light of mine into a veritable conflagration, so that I may bring light to the distant corners where painful darkness resides. “Hide it under a bushel, NO!, I'm gonna let it shine.”

## Quote

““Happiness can be found even in the darkest of times, if only one remembers to turn on the light.” - Albus Dumbledore

*Song - What Wondrous Love  
Is This - Stacy Lantz*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER**



# FEBRUARY 26, 2024

## Scripture

**Revelation 21: 5-7** And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.”

## Devotion - Jessi Grieser

I am about the most type-A person one can possibly be—I have five year plans and ten year plans and weekly plans and daily to-do lists. I have budgets and calendars and digital assistants that warn me in fifteen minute intervals. And I get a lot done: I’ve more than once had someone ask “good God do you ever sleep?” and I laugh and say, “Yeah eight hours most nights!”

I do a lot. And I judge myself a lot by my doing. How much did I do yesterday? Was it enough? What about last month? What about last year?

The thing is, that’s not how God invites us to live. God invites us not to do, but to be. The very reality of the resurrection is a state of eternal being for humankind—a permanent switch from needing to do something and instead a state of eternal grace.

God simply is. And so we are invited to simply be also.

## Reflection Question

When was the last time you felt the joy of being? What does it take to get yourself back there? How can you get there more often?

## Prayer

Steadfast creator, Beginning and the End, thank you for sacrificing Your only Son so that we might experience the ability to be. Help us to reject the world’s demands of doing, and instead to celebrate your call of being as your children in your creation.

## Quote

“Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren’t always comfortable, but they’re never weakness.” - Brene Brown

*Song : Is He Worthy*  
*Andrew Peterson*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: AUTISM**

# FEBRUARY 27, 2024

## Scripture

**Philippians 2:8-11** And being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him more highly and gave him the name that is above every other name, so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

## Devotion - Sarah Altenburg

As someone with a diagnosed mental illness, I have a few things that I must be obedient to as I live my life. I must be obedient to taking my medication, being truthful with my therapist, keeping my psychiatrist appointments, and applying my coping skills when in a situation where that is necessary. I must be obedient to knowing that part of my identity is as a person with Bipolar 1 Disorder and I must hold myself accountable to care for myself in order to live life the way I'd like to live it.

I don't imagine I'll ever understand just what it took for Jesus to become obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross. But I can appreciate Jesus' obedience to his identity, not just as fully Divine but also as fully Human. And I often wonder, what if Jesus hadn't been obedient to his identity and didn't die on the cross all of those years ago.

We aren't always handed easy paths and decisions. I take comfort in knowing Jesus was not handed an easy path either. But Jesus journeyed the difficult path and ultimately took actions that were redeeming for the entire world. While I know I don't have the power to redeem the world, it gives me hope that Jesus' journey had similarities to the difficulties that I face on a daily basis. And it makes me truly believe that Jesus is in the darkness with me, because He's been three Himself.

## Reflection Question

What things in life do you have to be obedient to? What would happen if you lost that obedience? What does being obedient allow you to do?

## Prayer

Holy One, help me to remember that I am not alone and to be grateful for the people who hold me accountable. Help me to always remember just what Jesus did for me. Amen.

## Quote

"Just because you don't understand it doesn't mean it isn't so." - Lemony Snicket

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:  
CONDUCT DISORDER**

Song - Even Unto Death  
Audrey Assad

# FEBRUARY 28, 2024

## Scripture

**Luke 15: 21-24** So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe - the best one - and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

## Devotion - Sarah Altenburg

This parable is always a harsh reminder to me that Christ doesn't call us to hold grudges. I tend to be a person who will hold grudges or focus on negative feelings for far too long. But in this story, you have a father purely happy that his son had come back to him - which is not a narrative we often hear.

I find myself wondering what that father's forgiveness truly looked like? I imagine he had not forgotten the past. I find myself wondering how he put the anger and pain aside to welcome his son back - seemingly no questions asked or explanations needed. Was he protecting his own self while doing this?

I'd be lying if I said that mental illness has not gotten in the way of my friendships and relationships at times. I have surely said things in the heat of the moment that I didn't mean and that I wish I could take back. I think all of us can relate to that, mental illness aside.

To me, this parable is a story about grace, second chances, and God's redeeming mercy mending broken relationships. While every relationship is not safe to mend, it does remind me to let go of the grudges that are holding me back and keeping me from fully living into God's grace.

## Reflection Question

When is it not safe to welcome someone back into a relationship with you? Why is living into God's grace seemingly challenging and how do we overcome those obstacles?

## Prayer

God of Grace, help me to see the humanity in the people I am in relationship with. Help me to offer grace in appropriate and healthy ways. Help me to lift the grudges that are seemingly unnecessary. Amen.

## Quote

"Just because no one else can heal or do your inner work for you doesn't mean you can, should, or need to do it alone." - Lisa Olivera

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
**SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL**  
**HEALTH SERVICES ASSOCIATION**

*Song: Path of Sorrow*  
*All Sons and Daughters*

# FEBRUARY 29, 2024

## Scripture

**Galatians 6:14** May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

## Devotion - Julia McMorrough

Elizabeth Guffey, a disabled art historian, has written about the first time she encountered the blue wheelchair symbol, as a child in the 1970s. As she and her mother drove through the supermarket parking lot, they noticed that the lot was full, but the newly painted accessible spaces were 'conspicuously empty.' Later, she overheard her neighbor tell her mother that she used to be able to park in the spaces right in front of the store, but now "nobody can use them." Guffey wondered who 'nobody' was, before realizing that the special marking of the wheelchair symbol was welcoming her, including her, and promising something to her. That symbol was designed to identify barrier-free spaces and situations, to let those who need them know they are there. It also conveys to all of us - disabled or not - that our role as compassionate beings is to offer support to all who need it, to make room even when we feel we have none to spare, and to understand the necessity of interdependence within our lives.

A symbol has the capacity to distill great depth and meaning through a simplified form. Without speaking, it can reach us with its message, sometimes before we are able to understand it, like Guffey's childhood neighbor. When I see an empty accessible parking space, I'm grateful it will be there for someone who might need it. The space doesn't have to be in continuous use to be doing its job; but the symbol holds open the promise, so that when it is needed, it will be found. The cross speaks to us in similar ways - it welcomes us, includes us, it reminds us of Christ's sacrifice for our salvation. Even for those who may think it doesn't have anything to do with them, the cross is still there for them, holding open the promise of God's eternal grace.

## Reflection Question

What goes through your head when you see the cross? Has it meant different things to you at different times in your life?

## Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank you for the salvation you have promised us, and for waiting patiently for us, even when we turn away.

## Quote

"There is hope, even when your brain tells you there isn't." - John Green

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
**ADHD**

[Song - When I Survey](#)  
[Chelsea Moon and Uncle Daddy](#)

# MARCH 1, 2024

## Scripture

**John 15: 12-14** “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

## Devotion - Liza Altenburg

In the fast-paced rhythm of life, I find it to be a breath of fresh air to remember Jesus' words from John 15:12-14, where He talks about the essence of love—putting others before ourselves, the kind of love that doesn't hesitate to make sacrifices.

As a cemeterian, I spend my days working with grief in its many forms, and it has changed my perspective. Here, "get over it" isn't part of the vocabulary because our society widely understands and accepts grief. We understand that losing someone is a monumental, life-changing event. It's interesting, though, how society readily extends grace for the loss of life but often stumbles when it comes to other forms of suffering. Why is it that we can stand together in the face of death, acknowledging the depth of that loss, yet struggle to offer the same compassion for the different, yet equally challenging, battles people face daily?

Beau Taplin captures this sentiment, criticizing the rush to push past our problems. Healing, he reminds us, isn't something to be expedited. Whether it takes years or even a lifetime, that's perfectly okay. This brings us back to the heart of Jesus' message: love one another as He has loved us. This isn't just about big gestures; it's about being there, truly there, for each other through all kinds of struggle—not just the kind that involves saying goodbye forever.

So, in the spirit of that love, let's challenge ourselves to broaden our understanding of grief and support. Just like we wouldn't dream of telling a bereaved spouse or child to “get over it”, let's work to eliminate it from our approach to all suffering, visible and invisible. It's about offering grace and space to heal, no matter what form the hurt takes. Your journey, your timeline.

## Reflection Question

Have you ever been told “get over it?” How did that make you feel? Have you ever said that to another person? How did that affect your relationship? How can we provide an environment where grief is more widely accepted?

## Prayer

God of comfort, help me to provide peaceful comfort to those who are grieving. Help me to allow others in when I am grieving. Amen.

## Quote

“I cannot stand the words ‘Get over it’. All of us are under such pressure to put our problems in the past tense. Slow down. Don’t allow others to hurry your healing. It is a process, one that may take years, occasionally, even a lifetime - and that’s OK.” - Beau Taplin

Song: How Deep the Father’s Love  
For Us - Anna Golden

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: MULTIPLIED BY ONE**





# MARCH 2, 2024

## Scripture

**Psalm 34:4-6** I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Look to him, and be radiant, so your faces shall never be ashamed. This poor soul cried and was heard by the Lord and was saved from every trouble.

## Devotion - Peggy Deames

When thinking about self care, I am reminded of Jesus' commandment to love our neighbors as ourself. Self care is not selfish, but in fact enables us to be all that we are created to be physically, mentally, and spiritually. All of us need to practice self care regularly and we need to encourage and assist our neighbors to do so as well.

As the quote of the day states: "self care is empowering". Let us remember that empowered people who care for their entire being are tuned into the power of the universe, the Holy Spirit and can move mountains of all types for the well being of everyone.

## Reflection Question

When have you felt empowered? What aided you to feel that way and how can you encourage your neighbor to be so empowered?

## Prayer

Holy Spirit, Embolden us to care for all of creation not the least of which is ourselves. May we be holy encouragers of our neighbors' well being. Thank you for your abiding presence. Amen.

## Quote

"Self-care is how you take your power back." - Lalah Delia

*Song - I Shall Not Want*

*Audrey Assad*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: BIPOLAR DISORDER**

# MARCH 3, 2024

## Scripture

**Isaiah 30:18** Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

## Devotion - Dani Johnson

Let's be honest. There are some days that we appreciate God's grace, or need God's grace more than others. When our lives are moving along as expected and without any problems, it is easy to become complacent about God's presence. We just keep humming along, still grateful, but maybe not as aware.

But there are days that don't hum along. In fact, there are days when we are stopped in our tracks. These are the days when we seek God so fervently that all we can do is cry out and hope that God understands our needs amidst the anguish and suffering.

When children get hurt, either physically, or emotionally, they turn to a loved one whom they trust. They seek comfort in the arms of the person who holds them tight and assures them that everything will be okay. We can do the same with God. We can count on God to hold us tight and to comfort us.

Suffering happens in this world and in our lives, but God will never leave us. There will be days when we need God's grace more than others, but God is always there for us to comfort us.

## Reflection Question

There is suffering all around us. How has God used you to be an instrument of God's grace and love for another person or situation?

## Prayer

Holy one, we are grateful for your presence during our good days and our bad days. Make your presence known to those who are suffering today and inspire us to be instruments of your grace for our brothers and sisters on earth. Amen

## Quote

“My dark days made me strong. Or maybe I already was strong, and they made me prove it.” - Emery Lord

*Song : Time - John Lucas*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: DEPRESSION**

# MARCH 4, 2024

## Scripture

**Psalm 139:13-14** For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

## Devotion - Joanna Whaley

There are times in our lives we look in the mirror and feel disappointed. For thirty-two years of my own life I avoided mirrors. I was assigned male at birth, and everytime I saw my own reflection I cringed at the way I was made. However, for years I preached "freedom in Christ" and "knowing who you are in Jesus", but did not know it for myself.

There are times in life that we have to confront the person staring back at us in the mirror, and get close to that person. If we put our face to the mirror and look for the imperfections like a painting on a wall, we will see the dust in the brush strokes. However, if we can zoom out and see the canvas from the perspective of the creator of the universe (which is a wide lens), we can find beauty in ourselves. By zooming out and knowing that we are part of a larger story of the cosmic Christ, we will see that we are part of a bigger and beautiful story.

Knowing our place in the universal story of God lets us see that we but dust, but part of a beautiful picture.

## Reflection Question

What part of yourself do you focus too closely on, and how can you see yourself in the greater story of freedom, and beauty in the creation of God?

## Prayer

God, creator of the universe, let us see ourselves in the painting of the cosmos and know that we were made perfectly for our place on your canvas. God let us see the wider picture and find our freedom in knowing we are part of something beautiful.

## Quote

"'Positive vibes only' isn't a thing. Humans have a wide range of emotions and that's OK." - Molly Bahr

*Song: Wonderfully Made*  
*Ellie Holcomb*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT**

# MARCH 5, 2024

## Scripture

**1 John 1:1-4** We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us - what we have seen and heard we also declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

## Devotion - Roger Harms

I work with a community youth group. Youth safety and confidentiality is a top priority. In the middle of that situation, I hear and see the struggles that some youth have with mental health, in some little ways and some bigger ways. How can youth deal with their own identity, and the challenges of their relationships at home, at school and other groups? But that is not unlike the challenges that people of many ages and situations face. What can I do?

Mary McLeod Bethune says to “Believe in yourself, learn, and never stop wanting to build a better world.” That is my challenge. I could go home and sit at my computer or my TV in peace and quiet. Or I could build a better world by encouraging and listening to what others are thinking and experiencing. It starts with me as the psalmist says crying to the Lord out of the depths of my life, and then seeing that the Lord is full of steadfast love. The Lord believes in me. I work to help others to see that they are special people (created by God).

Young people and older people, as the about 70 young people of the Brooklyn Youth Chorus sing, may feel broken on the ground, not strong enough to stand. That’s when friends are needed to find each other, to reach out a hand, and bring sun into their lives. And I would add, that God will find us, and bring us loving godly friends to reach out to us and bring us God’s forgiveness. People struggle with life. I struggle with life. I will do all I can to help others to be found and lifted up to live with God’s love.

## Reflection Question

How can I lift up others with God’s love?

## Prayer

Holy One, help me to love and support the people around me. Help me to create a world in which everyone is their best possible self. In your Holy Name, Amen.

## Quote

“You don’t have to be positive all the time. It’s perfectly okay to feel sad, angry, annoyed, frustrated, scared, and anxious. Having feelings doesn’t make you a negative person. It makes you human.” - Lori Deschene

Song: For Everyone Born  
Joanna Whaley

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: AUTISM ALLIANCE**



# MARCH 6, 2024

## Scripture

**Galatians 2:19b-20** I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

## Devotion - Helen Harms

Birds are special to me. If you look around our home, you will find ceramic figures of birds, pictures of birds, and one tea towel with, you guessed it, birds! Some of my interest in birds comes from my brother Richard, 15 years older than me. Some of the pictures of birds are ones that he painted. He would carefully research the subject of his paintings and then meticulously render them on canvas. Each year, he would enter a painting into the duck stamp competition in Minnesota. He never won but once he was asked to design the background of a natural history museum display of birds. When I was a teenager, Richard came “home” to live with us for a while. He had nowhere else to go when he was released from the mental health hospital. Two years earlier, Richard had unsuccessfully tried to take his own life. From what I know of his life, his depression began long before that attempt and went untreated for years. Richard always seemed to be a misfit, never quite living up to expectations, his own or others. Eventually Richard was able to move out of our home to a subsidized apartment, get a job, and live on his own.

Expectations played a big role in the life of my family. When I came home with a “C” on my report card, I was told I “could do better.” When I came home with a “B” on my report card, I was told I “could do better.” When I came home with an “A”, nothing was said. It seemed we could never quite measure up. Each of my 10 siblings as well as I learned how to deal with those failed expectations in our own way. I became an overachiever never sure that I have done my best. Years later, my heart still aches for Richard and what he must have felt. I wonder how he managed to deal with his own and my parents’ expectations. I find solace in knowing that Richard found acceptance and respect in later years outside the family from a family-owned business that respected and cared for him, and a pastor who “commissioned” a mural of the resurrected Jesus for the hallway of Richard’s church. It was those people who lived out the passage from Galatians—they were truly Christ to my brother.

## Reflection Question

How has your family influenced your attitudes about yourself and others?

## Prayer

Holy Spirit, help me to be Christ to those I encounter in my life. Help me to love myself as you love me. Give me a heart for the misfits in my life even when that misfit is me.



## Quote

“You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.” -  
Buddha

*Song: Christ For Everyone*  
*Essential Worship*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: ADJUSTMENT DISORDER**



# MARCH 7, 2024

## Scripture

**Ephesians 2:8-10** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.

## Devotion - Elizabeth Friedman

Back when I was in peak violin-playing form, I had a seven-minute warm-up that I would complete before I played anything. It didn't matter whether I was about to play something really complex or really simple; I always wanted to be playing my best, so I always ran a series of scales, arpeggios, double-stopped scales, and bow techniques that could get my fingers ready for absolutely anything.

And then, I moved from grad school in Houston to a squatters' settlement along the railroad tracks in San José, Costa Rica. I was living upstairs in a tin-roofed, cinderblock church. And whenever I would play for church services, I would always do my warm-up. Always.

Except for that one time when there wasn't time. I don't remember why - maybe the guitar player couldn't make it that day - but I was being asked to play and I hadn't had time to get ready. There wasn't time for my security blanket. And all I was being asked to do was play a hymn.

All I was being asked to do was to share my music.

No one was demanding that I be perfect. No one was critiquing the gift I was bringing. My playing was enough, because it was what I had to give.

I listened to myself, my nervous self, using all the practicing and experience I'd had over those many years of lessons and practicing to play music that would help people feel closer to God in that concrete building that shook when the trains went by. I realized that, despite the fact that I wasn't warmed up and my hands were a bit tight, all those years of practicing had, in fact, made me capable of playing quite beautifully even when I wasn't quite ready. I realized I had no business withholding that gift when it was something I could give.

I realized that perfection was never the point. I'd been taught it was, and that's what I believed. It's why I was never, ever satisfied with a performance I'd given, no matter how well it went, because there was always something that wasn't perfect.

But perfection was never the point.

Perfection isn't the point of our lives, either. We're called not to perfection, but to show up: Imperfectly but faithfully. We bring our best - not our ultimate best, but the best we can manage on that day.

We can't be perfect, but God calls us to show up anyway. Perfection was never the point.

We've been saved by God's grace through faith, and it's a gift. It's not something we can earn through our works. It's not something we can earn by being perfect. It's also not something we can lose by being imperfect. God's grace is free, and God works through our imperfect selves to bring good into the world.

### Reflection Question

What gifts and skills have you been given? Do you ever resist doing something you know you can do because you're worried it won't be perfect? How do you listen to what God is calling you to do and to be in this world and at this time?

### Prayer

God of grace, help me remember that I am not, in fact, you. Help me remember that I have been given gifts by you for the sake of the world, and that those gifts are meant to be shared with your world in love. Give me the courage to show up when I'm worried I may not do the thing quite as well as I'd like. Help me to give myself grace, remembering that you always do. Amen.

### Quote

"You are valuable just because you exist. Not because of what you do or what you have done, but simply because you are." - Max Lucado

*Song: The Promise*  
*Calvary Music*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: TOURETTE SYNDROME**

# MARCH 8, 2024

## Scripture

**Psalm 88: 9-13** Every day I call on you, O Lord; I spread out my hands to you. Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise up to praise you? Is your steadfast love declared in the grave or your faithfulness in Abaddon? Are your wonders known in the darkness or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness? But I, O Lord, cry out to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you.

## Devotion - Floyd Schoenhals

The poet who penned Psalm 88 cries out for help in relentless complaint against God. But there is no sign of help or assurance of deliverance on the way. And no one else seems to hear or care. She has no community or companions. The psalmist feels despair, fear, hopelessness, and abandonment, but she does not remain silent. The poet continues to cry out and pray every day. She is desperate in seeking answers to her many questions.

The psalmist is staring death in the face. Death is the ultimate limit we all experience but often defy or deny. None of us want to be forgotten. None of us want to be cut off from our loved ones. But we often have a false sense of security in thinking that our lives are not limited in any way.

What a bold faith the psalmist has! Even in the silence and the apparent absence of God, she continues to trust that God is present! She continues to cry out in faith and in hope!

## Reflection Question

Who are those among us who might feel the way the psalmist does? Do you ever feel that way?

## Prayer

Gracious God, hear the prayers of all who cry out to you. Attend to them with your mercy, grace, and love, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## Quote

“There is no standard normal. Normal is subjective. There are seven billion versions of normal on this planet.” - Matt Haig

*Song: Psalm 88 - NewCity Worship*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: DISSOCIATION  
AND DISSOCIATIVE DISORDERS**

# MARCH 9, 2024

## Scripture

**2 Corinthians 9:9-10** And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, "He scatters abroad; he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

## Devotion - Dani Johnson

You may have heard this one before: A man was stranded in a flooded river, but he was convinced that God would save him, so he wasn't afraid. Another man with a boat, a woman with a rope on shore and even a helicopter attempted to rescue the man. In all three interactions, the man said, "No. I don't need you. God will save me." The man ends up drowning in the flood, goes to heaven and asks God what happened. God says, "I sent you a man in a boat, a woman with a rope, and a helicopter. I did all I could do."

Indeed, God provides for all of us. God gives us each unique gifts to contribute beautiful and wonderful things to the world, but we are not intended to live in this world alone. God meant for us to live in community with all of creation and to rely on the gifts given to others as well. It is in the sharing and cooperative use of our gifts that we create a world that is not only pleasing to God, but to God's creation as well.

## Reflection Question

What is a gift that you have that you freely give? Is it difficult for you to ask others for the use of their own unique gifts? Why?

## Prayer

Holy One, thank you for the gifts that you have given us in abundance. Help us to notice and appreciate the gifts that you have given to others in our community. Give us the courage and creativity to share our gifts with each other in ways that would glorify you.

## Quote

"Women have to take the time to focus on our mental health - take time for self, for the spiritual, without feeling guilty or selfish. The world will see you the way you see you, and treat you the way you treat yourself." - Beyonce

*Song: Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*  
*(Psalm 139:14) - Tom Mottershead*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: ANOREXIA**

# MARCH 10, 2024

## Scripture

**John 1:24-28** Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, “Why, then, are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” John answered them, “I baptized with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal.” This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

## Devotion - Eunice Phillips

Baptism is not what is important in this reading. John does not answer the why, he simply says he used water. The Pharisees are asking the wrong question, for John goes on to say there is one coming after him that they do not know. We, too, often fall short of recognizing Him. Our song today helps define where we can find Him, and it is not only in the joy of our life, but amongst the clutter, pain, and hurt. John says, ‘He stands amongst us.’ Our song says, “He is ‘Here for You.’ ” When one can personalize and recognize His presence, one’s faith can lead them to personalize that line. Being able to do so calms one’s trauma, changes one’s brain chemistry and brings peace even in times of distress. As you sing along with our song for the day, try adding one more line or changing that last line to “He is here for ME.” What assurance that can bring!

## Reflection Question

Think about a time or times, when you have been able to say with all confidence, “He is here for Me.” What thoughts, emotions, etc. led you to recognize His presence; how do you react to that same experience today? How open have you been to share that experience with others who struggle to recognize His presence? Today, amongst the clutter of your day, look for His presence in your life.

## Prayer

My Father (Mother) in Heaven, I know you are here for me every day, day after day. To each new day you bring anew gifts of grace, comfort, forgiveness, protection, peace, and amazing love. Yet knowing all that, I still find myself needing to hear you remind me that “I am here for you.” Oh, Father (Mother), open my mind, my eyes, all my senses, to see your presence in my day. Open my mouth to share those reminders with those around me. May your presence intensify my joy, uphold me in my sorrows, and bring healing to my heart moving me one step closer to you in a faith that stretches through my days to an eternity of peace. AMEN

## Quote

“We are not our trauma. We are not our brain chemistry. That’s part of who we are, but we’re so much more than that.” - Sam J. Miller

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
**ALZHEIMER ASSOCIATION**

*Song: I Am Here For You*  
*Stuart Townend*



# MARCH 11, 2024

## Scripture

**Isaiah 48:17-19** Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord your God, who teaches you how to succeed, who leads you in the way you should go. O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your prosperity would have been like a river and your success like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been like the sand and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed before me.

## Devotion - Sarah Altenburg

Today's quote really resonates with me. For a long time, I didn't give my mental health the value and importance it deserved. My relationships suffered, my career suffered, and my faith suffered. I truly believe that in today's scripture reading from Isaiah, part of "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you how to succeed" also can pertain to mental health.

We have been given commandments, but rarely do we turn those commandments inward. However, I challenge you today to look at the ten commandments and not only look at how they benefit society around you but how they make you a better, whole, and stable person. God has given us the tools to be steady in our relationship with the Divine and with one another.

It can be challenging to prioritize our own mental health. It can make someone feel selfish because the focus is not being placed elsewhere. However, I have found when I prioritize my mental health, I am a much better asset to the people and places around me. I pray you're able to recognize just how much value you are worth and recognize that you deserve to focus on you sometimes. The way life happens around you depends on it.

## Reflection Question

What would it look like if you prioritized your mental health? What is holding you back from prioritizing mental health?

## Prayer

Holy One, help us to remember that we are only good for others when we are good to ourselves. Be with us as we look inward and deliberate the best way to focus on ourselves while still being compassionate and caring to those around us. Amen.

## Quote

"Your mental health is everything - prioritize it. Make the time like your life depends on it, because it does." - Mel Robbins

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
**BULIMIA**

*Song: Isaiah 48 (Peace)*

*Project of Love*

# MARCH 12, 2024

## Scripture

**Romans 5:18-21** Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. But law came in, so that the trespass might increase, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so grace might also reign through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Devotion - Sarah Mayer-Flatt

When I was working at a camp as a Chaplain for a summer, I oversaw a staff who came from a variety of beliefs and faith journeys. Some were active in church, though not all of them Lutheran, and some were only beginning to wrestle with words like "faith," "belief" and even "God." At some point during staff training, one of these counselors came up to me in tears, because they were afraid that they wouldn't be able to have conversations about faith and God with their campers, being relatively new to the ideas and words themselves.

In that moment, I handed the counselor a kleenex and said: "Here's all you need to remember: Grace, grace, grace, and Jesus loves you." Throughout the summer, I found myself repeating those words often. It worked for that demographic, but was probably, at best, an example of "Cheap" grace -- relying on God to keep loving us without our having to do any of the "work."

"Costly" grace makes us as Lutherans get a little jumpy. Because we believe our righteousness in Christ, and not our public works will save us. Beloved, we are called by God to do "the work," and Lent is the most dedicated time in the church to explore what it is we are to do. Costly grace might best be understood in the words of one of my colleagues:

God loves you just as you are, but God loves you too much to let you stay as you are.

God loves you so that you can have the courage to do the right thing, and not the easy thing. God loves you so that you can have the strength to do anti-racism, anti-ableism, or mental health work by listening to voices that are different from those you hear in your own circle. God will never rescind our righteousness, while also delighting when we repent and turn closer to God.

## Reflection Question

What is the "right" vs. "easy" thing you are struggling with right now?

## Prayer

God of Grace, thank you for claiming us as your own, adopting us into your family and giving us righteousness we could never earn. Help us to remember you will always love us, but call us to do "the hard work" of loving our neighbor, and caring for your world, as well. Amen.

## Quote

“If we start being honest about our pain, our anger, and our shortcomings instead of pretending they don’t exist, then maybe we’ll leave the world a better place than we found it.” - Russell Wilson

Song: Only Grace

The Many

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER**



# MARCH 13, 2024

## Scripture

**John 1:16-18** From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's great, who has made him known.

## Devotion - Steve Piche

As the passion approaches, let us remember the power our faith gives us. Our faith rewards our dreams, patronizes our passions, and strengthens our love for one another.

Believe in our Lords mercy for our flaws and turn to Him in all times of need. Leave your mark in the world through your actions, your love, and your compassion for others.

Your faith will ease the tensions of the world around you.

## Reflection Question

What actions have you done this week to better the world? What actions can you do in the weeks to come to bring more love and compassion to the world?

## Prayer

Holy One, help us to be extensions of Your love to the world around us. Guide us to be compelled to compassion and kindness. Amen.

## Quote

"Mental health problems don't define who you are. They are something you experience. You walk in the rain and you feel the rain, but you are not the rain." - Matt Haig

Song: Lay It All Down (At the Feet of Jesus) - United Pursuit

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER**

# MARCH 14, 2024

## Scripture

**Isaiah 54:10** For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

## Devotion - Valerie Brader

The Old Testament contains a lot of stories in which peace doesn't seem to figure prominently. So what does Isaiah mean here where he relays a promise that the covenant of peace shall not be removed? A covenant is actually an agreement, so God needs our participation to fulfill that covenant. But here, God promises that even when we don't keep our part, he will continue to extend the offer to work with us, because he both loves us and has compassion for us.

## Reflection Question

This Lent, how can I take God up on his offer of a covenant of peace?

## Prayer

Dear God, who loves us and has compassion for us and who always wants us to accept your gifts of peace, guide us to the pathways of peace. Thank you for having patience with us when we turn away from those gifts, and for always offering a renewed and refreshed life in you. Amen

## Quote

“Being able to be your true self is one of the strongest components of good mental health.” - Dr. Lauren Fogel Mersy

*Song: Tremble - I AM THEY*

**[LEARN MORE ABOUT: HOPE FOR SCHIZOPHRENIA](#)**

# MARCH 15, 2024

## Scripture

**Matthew 17:19-20** Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

## Devotion - Mary Lewison

How can I increase my faith in God? It's a question without an answer because the question is fundamentally flawed. It focuses me on myself - "How can I...?" Having more faith is not an exercise in acquisition. It is the subtraction of self-reliance. The disciples ask "Why could not we cast it (a demon) out?" The short answer is, "Because you can't." We don't have any special powers when we walk in God's Light. We become conduits for the Power of God's Love - a greater Power than we can imagine. The disciples were trying too hard to cast the demon out themselves. Ego is a barrier to channeling God's Love. We need to strive for God-reliance. It's a big pill to swallow - especially in a culture where "God helps those who help themselves" is frequently espoused. This "aphorism" is NOT in the Bible. God helps those who surrender - give up, if you will - and turn to the Lord. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Matthew 28:3 The smallest of children must rely on adults for everything - food, shelter, clothing, Band-Aids on their boo boos.

It is often our own suffering that leads us to God-reliance - That moment when we realize we can't fix ourselves or our situation, and we give up. And when we become God-reliant, we enter the Kingdom of Heaven. It's not something that happens at the end of life. It's where we dwell now when we walk with God. We are in the world but not of the world. It still hurts when we stub our toes, but we will see God's Power in action everywhere in this often gloomy world - both through us and around us. And like the effect of a butterfly's flutter, Goodness and Mercy will spread to the ends of the earth.

## Reflection Question

What am I still trying to fix or change by myself? Am I self-directed or God-directed?

## Prayer

Lord, My ways are not always Your Ways. Even my best efforts and intentions must align with Your Will to bear Fruit. Please help me to wait upon You in every situation, knowing that You will Show me Your Way if I keep my heart and mind on You. Then Your Love and Salvation will flow through me into this world.

## Quote

“Sometimes the people around you won’t understand your journey. They don’t need to, it’s not for them.” - Joubert Botha

Song: Praise You In This Storm  
Casting Crowns

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION**  
**ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA**

Faith



# MARCH 16, 2024

## Scripture

**Psalm 22:1-5** My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night but find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

## Devotion - Sarah Altenburg

Has anyone else ever laid in bed at night with thoughts racing through their mind? Perhaps they are thoughts of everything that you need to do as soon as you wake up tomorrow. Perhaps they are thoughts of every single thing that you could have done better that day. Perhaps a big argument is playing itself over in your head. Perhaps you are analyzing your responses and actions from the day, wondering if you did the right thing.

I have found myself crying out in prayer at times like these. Typically, if my brain is racing at night, it is because my brain is leaning towards mania. I have cried out, "God, why me? Why are you doing this to me?" I admit, I have often felt no answer in the moment. Because sometimes the answer is just not being alone in these spiraling thoughts. Perhaps the answer in that moment is a constant to talk to.

Though I'd love an immediately calm, we don't always get the answers from God that we are seeking. But we do get answers. In the snuggles of our pets, in the words of our loved ones, and in the knowledge that we are not alone - even if we feel completely isolated. We might just have to be more open towards the answer God is trying to provide.

## Reflection Question

When have you felt prayers unanswered? Looking back, are you able to see where God was present in those situations even if you were wanting a different answer?

## Prayer

Holy One, I ask for grace when I am not open to hearing the answers you are providing. Thank you for showing up in every way that You do. Help me to show up for others in similar ways. Amen.

## Quote

"The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen." - Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:  
THE JED FOUNDATION**

*Song: Forsaken  
The Many*

# MARCH 17, 2024

## Scripture

**Romans 8:9-11** But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, then the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

## Devotion - Julia McMorrough

The family I grew up in was unusual in many very obvious ways. There were six of us kids. My sisters are Asian, one brother is brown, and I am the only one who was not adopted. My sister Cindy was severely physically and mentally disabled. She had cerebral palsy, brain damage, and was deaf. Her body, her flesh, were clearly different, she could not care for herself in any way; her physical self left no doubt as to her needs and her disability. Her presence was central to the family. Most of Cindy's days were spent in the middle of the family room, in a special bed, watching tv. The family room was where the action was, so Cindy was rarely alone. The television was always on, and activity was always around her. Though we all helped, for all 33 years of Cindy's life, my mother was primarily the one who fed her three meals a day, bathed her, changed her, put her to bed, and woke her up; much like caring for a large baby. Though Cindy was slight of build, it took considerable strength to lift and carry her.

My mom was also a pediatrician and professor of medicine (during the weekdays, Cindy had a babysitter). She was so active and busy that it was never obvious to any of us kids that she suffered throughout her life from often debilitating depression. She was what would now be described as 'high functioning.' And she was, but the facts of her mental health struggles were not shared, and only became known to me toward the end of her life. It has been exactly one year since she died, and in that time, I have come to learn so much more. I have read letters she wrote at different stages of her life, mostly to her siblings and parents. Ever organized, my mother kept actual carbon copies of much of her correspondence, which we found after she'd gone. The letters are well-written, sometimes funny, often very candid, and utterly heart-breaking in the ways she was able to articulate the depth of her illness, and the frustration and shame she clearly felt. She was not writing the letters to gain understanding or even sympathy, but almost as a confession of her 'sinful' mental illness.

Unfortunately, this shame was prevalent in my upbringing, where being stoic and repressing strong emotions was considered to be good behavior. The version of my mother that comes through her letters is not the one I knew, but I wish I had. When acknowledging her depression, she seemed funnier, less guarded, and more real; she came truly alive when 'confessing' her weakness, her struggle, and her humanity. We all knew Cindy was disabled, because her body told us so, but I now know that my mom, Grace, by feeling so ashamed that she hid her true spirit, suffered more than she needed to. She was a "good" Christian; a medical missionary whose father was a pastor. So I know she believed that Christ was within her, but I wish that she had been able to give herself the grace she never felt worthy of.

## Reflection Question

What are ways we can show grace to others, even when their struggles are not obvious to us?

## Prayer

Dear Lord,

When we feel our most helpless, lift us up by the power of your Spirit, allow us to trust others to help us, and let your grace shine upon us in our darkest moments. Amen.

## Quote

“There is hope, even when your brain tells you there isn’t.” - John Green

*Song: Yet Not I But Christ In Me*  
*CityAlight*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID**



# MARCH 18, 2024

## Scripture

**John 20:16-18** Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Robbouni!" which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, "Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and she told them that he had said these things to her.

## Devotion - Kim Bailey

I've read these bible verses many times and it always leads me to think. It also leaves me wanting more to the story. I wonder what will happen next. It seems so unfinished. I have so many questions. Why does Mary Magdalene linger at the tomb? Why don't the disciples stay with her or at least one of them stay with her for protection. (In John 20: 3-4 there are several disciples that accompany her, but leave before her.) Why does Jesus say don't touch me? Is Jesus like a ghost and Mary's arms will go through him? Why did Jesus say don't hold on to me? Maybe he did not want to be earthly bound?

Why does Jesus say go tell my brothers? Why didn't He use the term disciples like he used before He died? Did Mary wonder if she was losing her mind and going crazy? What does it mean when Jesus tells Mary I haven't ascended to my Father and your Father? Did Mary think Jesus meant her biological father? And when Mary went to the disciples did they think she was crazy? Did they believe her the first time she told them she saw Jesus?

So many questions. But at least we know Mary was a believer of Jesus and His resurrection. She was the first to hear and see the good news and tell others of the good news.

Mary doesn't hesitate to tell others, she just does goes off and tells the disciples of Jesus rising from the dead after three days. I can understand why Jesus tells Mary not hold on to Him. She is probably shocked to see Him and may have Him in a tight hold. Which would happen if you saw a friend of yours who died recently and was walking around. Jesus had stuff to do. He had to go see His and our Father. We don't know what that is, but we can rest assured if Jesus was going to see God, it must be important. What is amazing is Jesus says His Father and our Father, His God and our God. Here we are elevated to the status of being related to Jesus through having the same Father. That's quite an honor and what revelation to Mary knowing Jesus and her and us have the same Father.

So Mary goes away and tells the brothers what she saw and heard. I wonder if the disciples believed her right away or questioned her thoroughly like my brothers would have done? Are you sure in your grieving state you did not imagine it? "Are you going crazy," my brothers would have asked. But hopefully Mary did not have to listen to all those questions and accusations from the disciples. Hopefully the disciples just listened to Mary and put that all together with what Jesus taught them. Then they could all come together and start passing out the good news to others.

That's what we should also do. Tell others of the good news and the coming again of Christ. We should not be concerned with who we tell, just proclaim it to people in our path. God will open their hearts to hear what we say. It does not matter if you think they may not understand or are too stressed to hear. God will take care of that. We just need to spread the joy of Jesus. Everyone needs to hear the joy and love of Jesus.

### Reflection Question

In verse 17 why does Jesus call the disciples his brothers instead of His disciples? What does this mean to us as we are also His brothers and sisters?

### Prayer

Here we are Lord, the day you made lies open before us. Let us pray with one heart and mind and rejoice in the gift of Jesus Christ. So that the light of Jesus will set our hearts on fire and proclaim the good news always. Amen

### Quote

“No one would ever say that someone with a broken arm or a broken leg is less than a whole person, but people say that or imply that all the time about people with mental illness.” - Elyn R Saks

*Song: In The Garden*  
*Josh Garrels*

**[LEARN MORE ABOUT: CDC MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES](#)**

# MARCH 19, 2024

## Scripture

**Psalm 62:1-2** For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken.

## Devotion - Heather Oberlin

Life seems to be getting noisier, doesn't it? Today, as I drove a coworker home, we didn't talk a lot, and my radio was off. It was a peaceful, companionable silence. During the trip, I reflected on the realization that I could not remember the last time I was surrounded by silence. If you're like me, there's a lot of noise in your life...the television, people, social media, games, radios. Even when I'm in silence, my brain is often distracted by my never-ending list of things to do, personal and professional goals, and what I want to make for dinner.

The Psalmist says that their soul waits in silence for God alone. This isn't just sitting around, mentally writing their shopping list. The sense here is that the writer is expectantly waiting for God to speak, to lead, to show up. It's like getting up before dawn, eagerly watching for the sunrise. You know it's coming, so you're watching for it.

As people of faith, we trust and believe that God is present in and through everything. We don't have to wait for God to show up because God is already here. However, when the noise of this world distracts us, we often miss the ways that God speaks to us because we're busy trying to listen to everything else.

## Reflection Question

What noise can I let go of so that I can wait expectantly to hear God speak?

## Prayer

God of the silence, focus my heart and my attention on you. Protect me from anything that would distract me from your ways.

## Quote

"Things not to say to someone with mental illness: Ignore it. Forget about it. Fight it. You are better than this. You are over thinking." - Nitya Prakash

*Song: My Soul Finds Rest*  
*(Psalm 62) - Sandra McCracken*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: PARANOIA**

# MARCH 20, 2024

## Scripture

**1 John 4:7-8** Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

## Devotion - Annette Kramer

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It used to be thought of as a war time issue for veterans. These days it seems we are all suffering from it.

Over the generations, people who suffered from mental problems had to keep it a secret. If you broke your leg, you got treatment but if your mind was broke, you had to hide it. Then along came COVID, a shared trauma. We need to break down the wall of silence around mental health issues. We need to talk about what causes them. Talking about it helps to ease the suffering. Trauma comes with visible wounds and invisible wounds. Both need attention. If we considered mental health issues as a normal part of life, and had affordable treatment, could we stop tragic events like:

School Shootings?

Suicides?

Accidents?

Bullying?

Why is it considered shameful to have mental health issues? Why do we hide it? What does this have to do with love? Jesus said to love one another like he loves us. Jesus showed compassion for everyone. He never left anyone suffering. Caring for one another is loving one another.

## Reflection Question

What would the world look like if we normalized mental health disorders? What would it look like if “love one another” also included “love yourself as I have loved you?”

## Prayer

Dearest Abba, You are the source of all that is good. Teach us to recognize when someone needs to talk. Give us the patience and courage to listen, the wisdom and compassion to understand. In Jesus' holy and loving name. Amen.

## Quote

“We envisage a society in which mental health problems are an acceptable and in some ways valued part of human experience.” - Slade, Oades, and Jarden

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
**THE HEADSTRONG PROJECT**

Song: Belovedness  
Sarah Kroger



# MARCH 21, 2024

## Scripture

**Philippians 3:7-11** Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

## Devotion - Kathryn Haueisen

What would our world be like if we reversed “Seeing is believing” to “Believing is seeing?” If we believed people who struggle with addiction or mental challenges, would we have the vision to more clearly see and embrace their suffering? If we did, perhaps we would devote more resources toward research and adequate care for people dealing with these. That would be a good start in making the love of Christ tangible to them. We too often blame victims of addiction and mental health disorders for their suffering rather than believing them and walking with them as they seek hope and help. People don’t choose with largely invisible challenges don’t choose to suffer any more than people chose to be lame, blind, or deaf. We easily show compassion to the physically challenged; but often neglect to do so for those whose afflictions are largely hidden from view.

## Reflection Question

How can our faith communities best make the love of Christ visible to people with addictions and mental health challenges?

## Prayer

Lord of all creation,

You create us in your own image.

Help us see your reflection in those around us,

Especially when the reflection is blurred by disabilities.

Grant us vision to see the value and beauty of all your creation.

Forgive when we let fears and suspicions of those who are differently abled

Keep us from offering your compassion and love to others.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

## Quote

“Not surprisingly, there has been a mismatch between the enormous impact of mental illness and addiction on the public’s health and our society’s limited commitment to addressing these problems.” - John Campo

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:  
POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION**

**Song: Be Thou My Vision (Lord  
You Are) - Shane and Shane**

# MARCH 22, 2024

## Scripture

**John 20:24-25** But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

## Devotion - Sue Sprowls

Poor Thomas! So often he gets a bad rap for his very human desire to see the Lord’s wounds firsthand. Like Thomas, many of us have been taught that, “seeing is believing.” But is it really? As little as 8% of an iceberg may be visible above the surface of the ocean. Consider all we’re missing when we marvel at their majestic forms! Likewise, what we experience of other people is often but a sliver of the whole.

My mother, a psychologist, taught me early on not to assume anything about people based upon our limited experience of them. “Not all disabilities are visible to the eye,” she’d say. Over time I’ve come to understand the Dr. Mom’s wisdom more fully. Just as there are scars I hide, I’ve come to assume that everyone I meet may be dealing with hidden – or invisible – scars as well. As a result, I try to lead with understanding rather than judgment.

## Reflection Question

If you bear hidden or invisible scars, are there people with whom you feel safe sharing them? What makes it possible – or difficult – to do so?

## Prayer

Healer of our every ill, help us to make your Church a safe space in which we may be vulnerable to one another, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

## Quote

“We all add to the stigma surrounding mental illness. I am not trying to call anyone out or make anyone feel bad, but in our own way, we all contribute to the stigma. It could be the way we think about other people with mental illness, or even the way we talk to ourselves about our own struggles.” - Kati Morton

*Song: Wood and Nails*

*The Porters Gate*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: PSYCHOSIS**

# MARCH 23, 2024

## Scripture

**Galatians 3:27-29** As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

## Devotion - Sunny Roller

At a summer retreat high in the Colorado Rocky Mountains, a lovely polio survivor named Karen told us about an interaction she and her husband had experienced on a trip to Naples, Italy. They had found a monastery that had, over the years, necessarily evolved into a public restaurant. After wandering in, they found a table, sat down, and ordered their lunch. As they were waiting, a young priest asked if he might join them. They agreed and the three engaged in warm lunchtime chatter for quite a while. Upon leaving, Karen and her husband rose and walked away toward the door of the restaurant. It suddenly became obvious to the friendly priest that Karen dragged a heavy brace on her leg and walked with a limp. Stunned with compassion he lovingly called out across the room to them both "Mia spina dulce!" in Italian. Translated, he was saying "my sweet thorn!" They looked back, smiled, and never forgot what he had said with such affectionate sensitivity.

Her story was a commentary about the grace it takes to live well with the thorn of a physical weakness or disability. It's ultimately about changing one's perspective with God's help, from denial to acceptance; negative to positive; from bitter to sweet.

Paradoxically, it is only when we fully embrace our thorns, our physical imperfections, that we can ever hope to become as physically stunning and vibrant as the rose inside of us is meant to be. We must acknowledge that the thorn and the rose exist as one, side by side, together. At first, a rose is only a budding green stem that sprouted dark jagged thorns. But as it grows and matures beyond its thorns, it blossoms into the most adored sweet-smelling bloom on the planet—the ancient symbol of love and beauty, a sign of compassion at funerals and the symbol of religious exemplars including the Virgin Mary. The thorns still exist, but they diminish, receding from view. They don't matter as much as they did at first. Once the rose is blooming robustly, bursting in brilliant color, few people even care to notice the thorns. Moving our focus from thorn to rose, bitter to sweet, is a choice we can make. People do it all the time. As Karen smiled back at the young Italian priest, it was clear that her thorn of obvious physical disability had somehow been transformed into a spiritual reflection, a sweet story. It had also become an important message about personal transcendence that she could enthusiastically share with our empathetic group of listeners.

## Reflection Question

During our lives, we all experience the thorns of physical illness, weakness, imperfection, even disability. Before He rose again, Christ wore a crown of thorns. How might the message of Easter inform our own thoughts and psychological perspective as we face the distress and hurt of a physical health crisis? How do we move from bitter to sweet? Life is a series of crucifixions and resurrections.

## Prayer

Dear Father, Thank you for all parts of my life—the thorns as well as the roses. Fill me with grace to remember and embrace the Easter story of hope and miraculous transformation in my everyday life. God is good and his mercy endures forever.

## Quote

“When mental health is ultimately recognized as essential to physical health, not an extraneous element of it, then we will have access to true, complete, modern medicine.” - John Campo

Song: All Belong Here  
The Many

## LEARN MORE ABOUT: HEADSPACE



# MARCH 24, 2024

## Scripture

**Psalm 28:7-8** The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. The Lord is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed.

## Devotion - Jessi Grieser

“Strength” is one of those things we don’t question very often as being a virtue. Think of any superhero—one of the first thing a writer gives them is often some sort of superhuman strength. When we talk about positive attributes of people, we often similarly talk about strength: a given person has “resolve” or “fortitude” or they can “tough it out” in the face of a difficult problem. Being categorized as “weak” is the playground taunt of generations and even slips its way into slang like “that’s weak” meaning something is generally not good.

And if you don’t have strength? Well you’re supposed to somehow develop it. We talk about building “willpower,” or “strengthening” our resolve. Being good, successful, wanted people, the common culture tells us, is about being strong. Being weak is to be a bad person.

But what if we aren’t? What if we experience physical disability, or mental disability, temporary or permanent, acute or chronic? Are we less? Are we bad?

God’s word invites us into a different space. A space where strength is not the internal attribute that makes us “good,” but rather comes from an external source where we are invited to rest. In God’s world, God is the source of strength for all, and we don’t have to worry about our—or anyone else’s—weakness.

## Reflection Question

What ways do I consider myself weak? When do I pridefully consider myself stronger? In what way this lent can I journey resting in God’s strength, instead of insisting on having my own?

## Prayer

Lord, thank you for being our refuge. Help us recognize our shared humanity in our shared weaknesses as your children, and to rely on you as our strength and salvation.

## Quote

“Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of, but stigma and bias shame us all.” - Bill Clinton

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
**TALKING THERAPY AND COUNSELING**

*Song: You Say*  
*Lauren Daigle*

# MARCH 25, 2024

## Scripture

**Matthew 26:26-29** While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

## Devotion - Helen Harms

"As I write, California is experiencing an atmospheric river, a deluge of rain, turning gentle streams into raging torrents, washing away everything in its path. I am reminded of my own experience with "raging torrents". During my adult lifetime, I have sought professional help for depression twice. Each time I was dealing with a raging torrent of grief, sweeping me away down an uncontrollable river of sorrow and despair. I grasped at the lifelines offered to me by mental health care professionals much as one would grasp at a branch or the hand of a rescuer. It was hard to admit at first that I needed help until the grief was so unbearable, I could no longer function. People like me who need help often hesitate to get it because there is so much stigma and negative attitude toward mental illness. It is hard to share that we need help or have sought help even when we know the benefits of reaching out. For some of us the illness is temporary. For some of us, the illness is chronic with a daily persistence needing to be managed with lifestyle and perhaps medication. For some of us it comes as periodic "atmospheric rivers" around for a season and then receding. We check the "weather" anticipating that some day we will again be thrown into the "raging torrent".

In the music for today, O Come to the Altar, the musician asks, "have you come to the end of yourself?" Then gives the invitation "come to the altar". An image comes to mind. Take eat, this is Christ body. A hand reaches out much like the hand of the rescuer and places bread in my hand-the bread of life. Again, hands extend, holding a cup, take drink, this is the blood of Christ shed for you. Hands reaching out like the hands of a rescuer. At the altar, the raging torrent is transformed into the healing river of life. The beauty? You can come to the altar again and again and again.

## Reflection Question

How can your story help to end the stigma and negativity surrounding mental illness?

## Prayer

Lord, thank you for being our refuge. Help us recognize our shared humanity in our shared weaknesses as your children, and to rely on you as our strength and salvation.

## Quote

“Stigma and self-stigma are some of the most significant barriers surrounding mental health. Pervasive stigma is defined as a negative attitude towards a condition or person which leads to negative action or discrimination.” - Haugen, McCrillis, Smid, and Nijdam

Song: O Come to the Altar  
Elevation Worship

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
**WELLBEING**





# MARCH 26, 2024

## Scripture

**Matthew 26:20-25** When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve disciples, and while they were eating he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?” He answered, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.” Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He replied, “You have said so.”

## Devotion - Sarah Altenburg

Have you ever been betrayed? Perhaps it was by someone “outing” you as an identity you weren’t quite ready to claim publicly. Perhaps it was by a friend who did something you would knowingly be upset about. Perhaps it was by a partner who gaslit and manipulated you. Regardless of how that betrayal happened, what did you feel when you were betrayed?

I have dealt with some amount of betrayal in my life - I think everyone has. And I have found talk therapy to be an excellent place to hammer out just what I am upset about, what holds truth, and where to go as I journey onward.

My wife and I tell everyone, “Everybody should be in therapy.” But I truly believe it. Talk therapy is a way to really delve into things that seem inappropriate to focus on and delve into in other settings. If you are currently feeling betrayal and it is affecting your well-being, let me be the first one to suggest talking about it with a professional who can help you move onward while still respecting the betrayal that happened.

## Reflection Question

Have you ever considered talk therapy? What has held you back in the past? How do you think it could be helpful moving into the future?

## Prayer

Healing One, help us to open up and be vulnerable in situations that will help us move forward with grace and love towards those around us. Remind us that it is courageous to seek help. Amen.

## Quote

“It takes ten times as long to put yourself back together as it does to fall apart.” - Suzanne Collins

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:  
SUPPORTING OTHERS**

*Song: Be Kind To Yourself*  
*Andrew Peterson*

# MARCH 27, 2024

## Scripture

**Matthew 26:47-50** While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

## Devotion - Sarah Altenburg

It is easy for me to say that I could never be like Judas. I could never betray a person that I loved so dearly. I could never betray Jesus. But it is far more difficult than that. And in reality, all of us have been Judas in the betrayal story - and all of us have been Jesus in the betrayal story.

I find myself wondering what glances Judas and Jesus gave each other during and after that kiss. I want to know what Judas was feeling. What was going on in his life that led him to this very moment? I want to know what Jesus was feeling. He knew he was going to be betrayed and by whom, but how did it feel? I want to know the little details that we don't hear in this story.

What I do know, is this. This story reminds me that it does not take a cruel and harsh action to betray someone. It reminds me that even my loving actions can be a betrayal to someone.

At the end of each day, I look in the mirror. I ask myself if I am pleased with the person I was that day. I'm sad to admit that some days, I am not. However by taking control of mental health and always seeking wellness, I hope to have many more pleased days as I continue into the future.

## Reflection Question

What do you find yourself asking about this story? When have you been like Judas? Have you ever betrayed someone with a loving action?

## Prayer

Redeeming God, help me to see my humanity as a gift and to constantly work towards being a person that I can be proud of every single night when I look in the mirror. Amen.

## Quote

We need never be hopeless, because we can never be irreparably broken.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**  
**NATURE AND**  
**MENTAL HEALTH**

*Song: Were You There*  
*The Vigil Project*

# MARCH 28, 2024

## Scripture

**John 13:12-17** After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined again, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

## Devotion - Heather Oberlin

I absolutely love how Jesus uses an argument at the Last Supper as a teachable moment here. The Gospel of Luke tells us that there was an argument among the disciples about “which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest (Luke 22:24).” Jesus doesn’t yell, “Have you heard ANYTHING I’ve said these last three years??” Instead, he takes a basin and a towel, and without a word, begins to wash their feet. Here he is...the Son of Man who was just welcomed into Jerusalem with shouts of “Hosanna!,” performing an act of humble service and hospitality.

We are all called, and we are all part of the body of Christ. That calling isn’t something we use to leverage power over others. Imagine if the pastor decided making coffee was beneath him, or that she was too important and educated to plunge a plugged toilet. This holy call we were blessed with challenges us to serve the world with humbleness and gratitude.

## Reflection Question

Are there ways I resist serving because I don’t want to “get my hands dirty”?

## Prayer

Lord, help me to follow your example in serving others with humility and grace. Thank you for calling me to use my gifts in the world.

## Quote

“I am not afraid of storms for I am learning how to sail my ship.” - Alcott

*Song: The Basin and the  
Towel - Michael Card*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:  
FOOD AND MENTAL HEALTH**

# MARCH 29, 2024

## Scripture

**Matthew 26:38-41** Then he said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want but what you want. Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

## Devotion - Sarah Altenburg

Today’s song really resonates with me. I discovered it during Lent of 2020 when we had just gone virtual. I like this song because it is a song of confession and turns the Bible verse around from Jesus asking for our forgiveness, to us taking accountability and asking for forgiveness. “We don’t know how to pray here, stay here, all we hope is You’re here...” In this song, we own the humanity of the human race and acknowledge what we have done, rather than denying it.

Accountability can be a tricky thing when it comes to the mental health community. How do you hold yourself accountable while also allowing yourself grace? When do you blame the disorder? What human consequences must you suffer because of it, regardless of accountability? Mental disabilities ravage marriages, families, and friendships. Mine has obliterated a few. But staying accountable helps me to know that I’m constantly striving to be the best human I can be. And sometimes that just has to be enough. My message to you today is simple: stay accountable and offer yourself grace as you deal with things that you are often ashamed of.

## Reflection Question

As you listen to today’s song, what emotions are evoked in you? When do you struggle with accountability? What in your faith might help you stay more accountable?

## Prayer

Redeeming Christ, thank you for your sacrifice that saves me each and every day. Help me to be accountable to those around me and to show love to myself, even when I feel I don’t deserve it. Amen.

## Quote

“Mental pain is less dramatic than physical pain, but it is more common and also more hard to bear. The frequent attempt to conceal mental pain increases the burden: It is easier to say ‘My tooth is aching’ than to say ‘My heart is broken.’” - C.S. Lewis

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:  
SCHIZOPHRENIA**

*Song: Forgive Us - The Many*

# MARCH 30, 2024

## Scripture

**John 18:38-40** Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man but Barabbas!"

## Devotion - Kathy Schell

In the gospel of John, Pilate asks Jesus "what is truth?" This was a political question at the trial of Jesus, and it is often a political question in our day as well. We witness political factions shouting at one another, each claiming to know the facts. But in our political climate, facts cannot be agreed upon, much less truth.

If you are reading this devotion on Holy Saturday, March 30th this year, you know that it is a quiet day in the Church between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The mood is somber as some churches hold prayer vigils, remembering the grief of Jesus' followers as he lay in a borrowed tomb. However, in the 21st century we know how the story turns out.

Our quotation for today says that there is always hope, even when our brains say no, there is none. Hope is essential to life, as necessary as food and water and the air that we breathe. On the darkest days, such as Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and even the political time in which we live, there is still hope. And this hope doesn't emanate from us, but from our living Lord.

## Reflection Question

What gives you hope on this day?

## Prayer

Living and loving God, help us to trust that you are with us always. Remind us that you have acted in history and are still at work in our day. Even in days of despair, renew our hope as you live among us. Amen.

## Quote

There is hope, even when your brain tells you there isn't. - John Green

*Song: Buried in the Grave*  
*All Sons and Daughters*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER**

# MARCH 31, 2024

## Scripture

**John 20:11-18** But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, and she saw two angels white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know here they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father, But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and she told them that he had said these things to her.

## Devotion - Pastor Krister Ulmanis

In our Gospel reading it was early morning and Easter had come. But in many ways it was still Good Friday for Mary. There she was, weeping and looking into the tomb. And what did she see? Nothing! The tomb was empty.

But it IS Easter and Mary didn't need to weep. She would be the first to see the promise of the resurrection fulfilled. In this event she should rejoice and be glad Her joy becomes our joy because Jesus resurrection is the ultimate sign that absolute love - which is God's love - can never loose. There is no power on earth, or anywhere else, that can overcome it.

The sad reality for so many people are that they live in the Good Friday world They are those who are hurting and in pain - physically, emotionally and/or spiritually. The reality is that we don't have to live in a Good Friday world. It is easy to say for us, but for those caught in mental health crisis that may be a different story.

For anyone who has ever struggled in life, the experience of the Mary at the tomb is the hope we look for in our lives. Her experience is the assurance that Easter is the victory over all the things that drags us down. The very things that imprison us.

Easter is the opposite to all that darkness in our lives. As we look to the resurrection of Jesus Christ we see hope. The empty tomb shouts louder than words that God's promises are to be taken seriously.

Come and see. Come and rejoice. The tomb IS empty. The forces of evil could not win the battle. God did! Easter is the battle of God's love. A love that conquers everything. Even the darkest moments in our lives. Even the grave itself.

And the beauty of the love of God is that it is there for all of us. Through the unconditional grace we received through the Water and Word in our Baptism we are the recipients of this love. So we can shout our alleluia's as we witness the empty tomb.

The centre of our story this day is an empty tomb. There should not be an empty tomb, but there is. Jesus is not there. His resurrection is a revelation of God's plan for the world. An affirmation that who Jesus is and what he taught is true. An affirmation that who Jesus is and what he taught is a sign of God's new creation coming to birth.

In the jumble of stories about that first Easter morning, we see women and men expecting death and meeting new life. They came to see the body but found an empty tomb. Their reaction was predictable. They were shocked, scared and awed. But more than that, the experience ultimately changed them forever.

Like the first Easter people, we need occasionally to be reminded that the tomb is empty and we are to look for Jesus among the living, not the dead. We can't cling to the Good Friday's of our world. The Good News, the Gospel message, of the empty tomb is that there is an end for all of us from living in the Good Friday world.

The Angels asked Mary why she was weeping. But she didn't have to because the Resurrected Jesus was right there with her. We have turned this experience of hope and joy from the angel of the Lord into our Easter acclamation - Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

### Reflection Question

Where and how do you see and experience the resurrected Jesus Christ in your life?

### Prayer

Help me to understand that as we should our Easter acclamation - Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! there are people around us for whom the world is still a dark place as a result of their mental health challenges. Help me help find a way to help them see the Easter hope in life. Amen.

### Quote

"It's possible to live well, feel well, and also find happiness with bipolar disorder or any other mental illness you're struggling with." - Demi Lovato

*Song: Reckless Love*

*Cory Asbury*

**LEARN MORE ABOUT: ELCA STATEMENT ON MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS**





# Happy Easter

FROM THE STAFF OF TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

