

A dramatic sunset over a field. The sun is low on the horizon, partially obscured by clouds, creating a bright orange and yellow glow. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, some of which are illuminated from below by the sun. The foreground is a dark, textured field, possibly a field of grain or a similar crop, with some small structures or trees visible in the distance. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

# The Kingdom of God Is at Hand

2019 Lenten Devotions

**Lenten Devotional Booklet 2019**  
**Lewinsville Presbyterian Church**

Dear friends of Lewinsville,

In the gospel of Mark, the first words that Jesus speaks are, “The time is fulfilled, and *the kingdom of God is at hand*” (Mark 1:15). The PCUSA Book of Order teaches us that one of the primary purposes of the church is “the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.” We are called to be “kingdom people.”

The kingdoms of the world tend to promote greed, violence, fear, anxiety, and selfish control. The church offers an alternative to these. We are called to live different kinds of lives, to be “kingdom people” who live with compassion, justice, peace, and joy, as we interact with the challenges and problems that face us in our world.

Lent is a powerful time to reflect on what this looks like. What does it mean for LPC participants to embody the values of the kingdom of God at this time in history, in our community? What sorts of activities should we be up to, as citizens of the kingdom of God, in our wider neighborhood? During these turbulent and divided times in our society, we have an opportunity to reflect on how we, as a congregation, might promote social healing. At a time when many people are lonely and isolated, we offer small groups as a way for people to build meaningful relationships.

All of these, and many more, are ways that we demonstrate our hopeful conviction that *the kingdom of God is at hand*.

It is our joy to offer you this Lenten devotional booklet, organized around the theme of “The Kingdom of God is at Hand” and written by members of the Lewinsville congregation. We invite you to use these readings as part of your daily spiritual practice during Lent. Our prayer is that they may help you to reflect on the gracious kingdom of God and your part in that kingdom.

We offer our deep and profound thanks to all who have contributed their time, energy, and love to the production of this booklet – the writers, coordinators, and editors.

Lenten blessings to you,

Pastor Scott

## March 6 Ash Wednesday

### Jonah 3:1–4:11 (NRSV)

*The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.*



*When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.”*

*When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” And the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.*

*The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”*

*But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.” Then the LORD said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”* **Devotion**

Jesus proclaimed, “The kingdom of God has come near; repent!” (Mark 1:14-15)

Jesus linked the nearness of the Kingdom of God with the call to “repent,” a word that seems heavy with regret, remorse, and shame. It’s like a swamp, where your feet get stuck and you can’t move. So I was delighted to discover that the Greek word we translate as “repent” actually means “to *change*.” *Metanoia* – change your thinking, change your life! What’s more, the Hebrew word we translate as “repent” is *shuv* – turn around, change direction. Return to God with heart, mind, and soul. Of course, making a change in our lives is not easy. It requires endurance, awareness, study, and commitment. But it moves us forward on the path God shows to us. When we realize that we need to change, we will feel some regret – but regret is our launch pad. *Change* is our trajectory.

Reading the verses from the book of Jonah shows us how challenging it can be to change, and how tirelessly God calls us to transform our hearts. Jonah struggled on his own. We have the companionship of the faith community. Together, we learn from Jesus about the changes God desires for us – that we would live with greater mercy, justice, love, and joy. We learn from each other what we can do for the well-being of others and ourselves. Along the way, we feel our hearts being transformed. This is the journey of repentance – *metanoia* – *shuv*. Our feet may grow tired, but they won’t get stuck, and we are walking together with Christ.

### **Prayer**

*Gracious God, help me to be open to the changes you desire for my life. With the power of your love, keep transforming me for the sake of your Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

Stephany Crosby

### **Thursday, March 7**

#### **John 18.36 (NRSV)**

*Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”*

#### **Devotion**

Scripture tells us a great deal about the Kingdom of God. It is God’s unmerited gift of love, immensely valuable. It is to be hoped for in this world, and yet is something beyond the here and now, a kingdom John 18.36 calls “not from this world.” Above all, it is our desired destination.

We have been taught to work to bring the Kingdom into being. This belief has passed into the broader culture. John Kennedy’s stirring Inaugural Address ended with the words, “here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.” It is easy to fall into the trap of believing that God *needs* our help. That is profoundly wrong.

God *allows* us to work toward the kingdom so we can show our gratitude for God's infinite grace. God has no need of our talents and efforts. As Milton said, "His State is Kingly: thousands at his bidding speed and post o'er Land and Ocean without rest."

The risk in thinking God needs us is that it induces a false pride. *We* are doing this or that to help God. Aren't we special! Yet God's Son (who really was essential to the Kingdom) humbled himself, accepting a shameful and painful death. We too must cultivate humility. Someday we will be within God's kingdom, knowing Him as we are known. We will have no obligations, only joy as we rest for eternity in the arms of our loving parent. That is God's destiny for us.

### **Prayer**

*Lord, make us grateful that you allow us to work for your Kingdom. Grant us the humility to understand that our efforts are insignificant in the face of your greatness, yet you love us infinitely anyway. Above all, grant that we may someday be fully united with you, beyond all needs or obligations or pride, eternally safe in the arms of a loving parent. We ask this in the name of our guide on our journey, your Son our Savior, Jesus the Christ.*

Linton Brooks

### **Friday, March 8**

**Psalm 22** (Read all of it! Here are sample NRSV excerpts)

<sup>1</sup>*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

*Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?*

<sup>4</sup>*In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.*

<sup>6</sup>*But I am a worm, .... scorned by others....*

<sup>12</sup>*Many bulls encircle me, ...they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.*

<sup>14</sup>*I am poured out like water ....*

<sup>16</sup>*For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me.*

<sup>19</sup>*But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!*

<sup>27</sup>*All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; ...*

<sup>28</sup>*For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.*

<sup>30</sup>*Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.*

<sup>31</sup>*and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.*

### **Devotion**

Psalm 22 seems an unlikely commentary on the good news and present tense of Mark 1:15. Mark wrote within recent memory of God's incarnation in Jesus. For Mark the "Kingdom of God Is At Hand," *NOW!* Coming "immediately"! But Psalm 22 is noted for its dark opening, the perfect expression of human despair that Jesus uttered on the cross [Matt. 27:46, Mark 15:34]. This poignant psalm follows a popular pattern in Hebrew poetry of strong contrasts, here between despair and hope, abandonment and presence, anxiety and conviction. The psalmist cries desperation to God while talking confidence to himself. He cannot stick to images of horror, for the urgency of his plea for attention reveals his belief that God will respond favorably to him and

even to unborn people. I believe he knew that the Kingdom is at hand, but longed for Mark's sense of immediacy. God's Kingdom is a dilemma of tenses. It became manifest when Jesus walked on earth, but was there long before – at the Burning Bush, in the Temple with Isaiah, with the Israelites in wilderness and exile, with the poor and aliens who populate the salvation story. The psalmist had enough evidence and faith to pray, praise, and hope eloquently.

We may not have the psalmist's fluency, but we know that the Kingdom has come, is here, and is coming, because the Bible explains that through paradoxes and parables with blinding bursts of light. God has steady dominion for all generations. Human perception, though flawed, includes enough memories and visions of God's deeds and purposes to sustain individuals and faith communities, motivate works of love and justice, and chase away self-conceived demons. It's why we need an annual Lenten journey to convey more clearly how the cross can perfectly express human evil and divine love.

We do not know why Jesus recited Psalm 22:1 after a life of confident faith and eschatological hope. Perhaps he trusted that people would also recall vv. 30-31. Perhaps his totally human, totally divine nature required a human response to pain. Perhaps it's just a matter of tense. God may seem to forsake in the very present moment what God is saving in past and future. God's Kingdom includes everything in God's universe and time, "good" and "bad." One day, coming-but-not-yet, full clarity will arrive. Meanwhile, I rejoice that God accepts all of our honest cries.

### **Prayer**

*Dear Triune God of mysteries, surprises, and presence, thank you for the gift of scripture and church community, in which each Lenten season we grapple with the confusion of tenses in your eternal Good News. Thank you for accepting our gripes and fears, while helping us to envision the marvels of your forever presence and promises. Amen.*

Carroll Leslie Bastian

### **Saturday, March 9**

#### **Deuteronomy 7:17-26 (NRSV)**

*If you say to yourself, "These nations are more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them?" do not be afraid of them. Just remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the LORD your God brought you out. The LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. Moreover, the LORD your God will send the pestilence against them, until even the survivors and the fugitives are destroyed. Have no dread of them, for the LORD your God, who is present with you, is a great and awesome God. The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to make a quick end of them, otherwise the wild animals would become too numerous for you. But the LORD your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great panic, until they are destroyed. He will hand their kings over to you and you shall blot out their name from under heaven; no one will be able to stand against you, until you have destroyed them. The images of their gods you shall burn with fire. Do not covet the silver or the gold that is on them and take it*

*for yourself, because you could be ensnared by it; for it is abhorrent to the LORD your God. Do not bring an abhorrent thing into your house, or you will be set apart for destruction like it. You must utterly detest and abhor it, for it is set apart for destruction.*

### **Devotion**

The language used in this Deuteronomy passage is scary. Moses speaks these words to the Israelites after God delivers them out of Egypt and as they prepare to enter and take the land that God has promised them. The image of God “clearing away” entire nations and not stopping until “even the survivors and fugitives are destroyed” is worrisome, violent, and quite frankly, not the type of God in whose kingdom I’d like to live, even if I’m on the winning side.

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann assures us that these verses make us feel a “deep awkwardness,” so I’m not alone in my discomfort. If I’ve learned anything at all about how the Old Testament relates to our lives today, it’s that context is key. The land that the Israelites take is the obstacle that stands in *their* way to God’s kingdom. In their world, at that time, conquering by force was the way to get things done. Countless things could (and have) been said about the justification of violence as a means to arrive at God’s kingdom, but the important part here is that God has the *power* to bring them there. All they have to do is trust in that.

We each have obstacles that get in our way of living into the kingdom of God. For the Israelites, it was several nations, their peoples, and probably a wall that came tumbling down. For me, it is at times trying to keep control over my life, and at other times, doubt and fear when I lose that control. The wonderful thing is, the kingdom that lies on the other side of our obstacles is better and more wonderful than we can even imagine, and that thought is not scary at all.

### **Prayer**

*God, we have many obstacles that we let get in our way of living into your kingdom. Help us to turn these obstacles over to your power. We give thanks for your kingdom and that you have made a place for each of us in it. Amen.*

Elizabeth Steel

### **Monday, March 11**

#### **John 2:1-11 (NIV)**

*On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.” “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and*

*then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.” What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

### **Devotion**

This scripture, to me, is surprising. First, the dialogue reveals an unexpected dynamic in Mary’s relationship to Jesus. Second, at first blush, this “sign” appears to be more like a parlor trick than a serious miracle worthy of Jesus. However, this sign is meaningful and important. The Gospel author uses this first of seven “signs” to launch Jesus’ public ministry delivering the good news that the “Kingdom of God is at hand” – or in the words of the Lord’s Prayer, that God’s will is about to “be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”

Symbolism in this passage, which would have been apparent to early Christians, relates the wedding feast to the Kingdom of God. (cf Matt 22:2) Scholars have identified numerous symbols in this passage. Here are a few examples: A Jewish wedding feast, often a week-long celebration with good food and wine, represents the joy of the Kingdom of God. Wine was associated with the Kingdom of God (Isaiah 25:6). Wedding guests without wine represent people without the joyful experience of God’s Kingdom. Empty stone ceremonial jars represent people ignoring God, worshiping without passion, or just ignorant of God’s will. Servants are the Church. Water is the Word. The extraordinary volume (120 gallons) of wine produced by Jesus demonstrates the abundance of God’s love. Whatever the specific symbolism intended, or that we choose to read into the passage, this remarkable event demonstrated that God was present and acting through Jesus that day, and convinced Jesus’ new disciples to believe in Him.

### **Prayer**

*God, please help me to really believe that Your Kingdom is present here on earth, to understand the abundance of Your love, and to be passionate in showing Your Kingdom to all.*

Bill Cassels

### **Links to paintings of the wedding at Cana:**

By Veronese, 1563; <https://www.italian-renaissance-art.com/Marriage-at-Cana.html>

### **Tuesday, March 12**

#### **Psalm 25:4 (NRSV)**

*Make me to know your ways, O LORD;  
teach me your paths.*

### **Devotion**

In the prosperous West, many of us lead comfortable lives. We are children of abundance, with many freedoms. War does not touch our shores. And yet, even we lucky ones walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

God’s good green earth, our only home, suffers an increasing fever, as glaciers melt and oceans

rise, while a “sixth great extinction”<sup>1</sup> is underway, threatening even the pollinators on which many food crops depend. Warning signs are everywhere.

Meanwhile, public policy is often driven by those who love money more than truth, decency, or compassion, who would spit on the widow and the orphan, the sick and the prisoner, the naked and the hungry. By those whose hearts are untroubled by threatening the lives of our children and grandchildren for generations yet to come. By those who conjure alternative realities and bear false witness, who exploit and deepen divisions among us for private gain.

We are all at risk. Biologist E.O. Wilson says our “Stone Age emotions ... and godlike technology” make us “a danger to ourselves and to the rest of life.”<sup>2</sup>

But the kingdom of God is at hand. If it is darkest before the dawn, we cannot be without hope. Hope for turning from mere Mammon toward God. Hope for enlightenment and reconciliation. Hope for a green Renaissance where we can use our godlike technology to walk lightly on the earth, curing its fever. Hope for seeing the path of righteousness and having the courage to follow it.

### **Prayer**

*Dear God, touch our minds and hearts and souls, that we might love all of your creation as ourselves. Help us resist the nihilist and the deceiver, who do not delight in truth, but sow distraction and division and denial and doubt. Show us your path<sup>3</sup> and help us discern a way to faithfully follow it, persevering with willing hands and joyful hearts, no matter the magnitude of the tasks you set before us. Let us truly be instruments of your peace, toward all creatures great and small, and toward the good earth, on which we all depend. Amen.*

John Clewett

<sup>1</sup> <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/06/150623-sixth-extinction-kolbert-animals-conservation-science-world>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/18073401-the-social-conquest-of-earth>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.beholdtheearth.com>

### **Wednesday, March 13**

#### **John 2:23-3:15 (NRSV)**

*When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/06/150623-sixth-extinction-kolbert-animals-conservation-science-world>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/18073401-the-social-conquest-of-earth>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.beholdtheearth.com>

*he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone. Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*

### **Devotion**

Lent is often seen as a time a reflection and spiritual renewal; we are tasked with looking back and ruminating on our lives – within the church as well as outside of it – and exploring how we can renew our faith. In this passage Nicodemus is struggling with the idea of how one can be reborn; physically that is clearly not possible. Christ reminds him, and us, that physical rebirth is not the point, but rather one must seek out a renewal of the spirit, a spiritual renaissance of sorts. At the end of the passage we are given the key to that rebirth. "So must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." In order to truly be reborn and be part of the kingdom of God, we must "be born from above." We must be willing to accept Christ and make a fundamental internal change that is reflected by our external actions.

The Lenten season offers us the opportunity to pursue our own spiritual renewal through prayer, reflection, deeds – however you choose to seek out Christ in your life – and the story of Nicodemus reminds us that no matter what our past may be, we are part of the kingdom of God through our acceptance of Christ.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ej5-MpY8xw>

### **Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, during this Lenten season guide us as we seek to renew our faith and remind ourselves that the path to your kingdom lies through our acceptance of you into our lives. In your name we pray. Amen.*

LeeLee Hunter

**Thursday, March 14**

**John 3:16-21 (NRSV)**

*“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.*

*“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”*

**Devotion**

This scripture reminds us that Epiphany’s theme of the light of Christ shining through the darkness is not left behind as we enter the Lenten season. The first half of this passage is guided by verbs of God’s action and the people’s response: God loves and saves, sends and does not condemn, and the people believe, and not believing is outlined in negatives: if you believe you shall not perish and you shall not be condemned. Before you think to ask, does that mean non-belief leads to perishing and condemnation, the passage turns to light. The light comes into the world, and draws us out of our shadows. The dichotomies seem clearly drawn: we will not come into the light if we fear exposure; we will come into the light if we live by the truth of God. But the larger context matters: Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night and receives the words Jesus speaks of love and light. After Jesus dies, Nicodemus prepares his dead body for burial. The verb root is the same, Nicodemus first came by night, now he comes during daylight to prepare his body for burial. Nicodemus will come out of the light when it matters, after the love of God he received in the words of Jesus grow strong enough in his heart to bear fruit.

We too find Jesus in our darkness, and we are drawn to his words of light. If it is to save ourselves from a negative, those words of promise are there. If it is to witness the light and love we have received from Jesus, there is no time limit for when the Word can bear fruit in us. Madeline L’Engle’s poem *Epiphany* mirrors Jesus’ call to come into the light: “Unclench your fists. Hold out your hands. Take mine. Let us hold each other. Thus is his Glory Manifest.”

**Prayer**

*Dear Jesus, for all the paths we find out of the darkness, for all those who help us come into the light, for all the hands we hold on the journey, for all the patience of God as we find our way, we give thanks. Amen.*

Jen Dunfee

## **Friday, March 15**

### **Deuteronomy 10:12, 20 (NIV)**

*And now, O Israel, what does the Lord, your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? Fear the Lord your God and serve him.*

### **Devotion**

The Lord has called all believers to be "active priests" everywhere Jesus is allowed to rule. In a sermon, the Rev. Lee Laaveg reminds us that "serving others in love and offering the same grace and reconciliation God has given us a powerful way to live as 'kingdom people'." The early apostles appealed to the early church to be sure the Greek widows had enough food and a place to live.

Volunteerism is one thing we can do to strengthen the local church. There are many ways we can serve besides being a missionary or a minister. We can pray, sing, usher, and teach. As an expression of thanks, we can donate time, money, and expertise to help struggling churches and Christian businesses. Volunteerism extends to city streets, classrooms, churches, and mission fields. There are many opportunities here at Lewinsville, such as teaching, helping with the Bloodmobile, making coffee, offering hospitality, being Sunday morning greeters, preparing communion, driving LRR and Chesterbrook residents to services and other activities, sending boxes to service personnel and college students, going down to Miriam's Kitchen, donating clothing and blankets to the needy, and working on the Summer/Winter mission projects. These are just a few of the ways we can serve.

In addition to helping others, volunteering is beneficial to us as we discover and develop our spiritual gifts, experience joy, strive to be more like Jesus, and work to increase our faith. Serving is good for your soul. It can ease stress and is the best distraction from our own problems.

### **Prayer**

*Dear Lord, I pray for your continued guidance so that I may serve you and others with compassion and love. Amen.*

Donna Knoerr

## **Saturday, March 16**

### **Deuteronomy 11:18-28 (NRSV)**

*You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that your days and the*

*days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.*

*If you will diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving the LORD your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and mightier than yourselves. Every place on which you set foot shall be yours; your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the Western Sea. No one will be able to stand against you; the LORD your God will put the fear and dread of you on all the land on which you set foot, as he promised you.*

*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn from the way that I am commanding you today, to follow other gods that you have not known.*

### **Devotion**

The writer of Deuteronomy has received a commandment from God and his task is to share this commandment. It's a simple commandment, only three words: *Love The Lord*. Simple to say, but maybe not so simple to do.

Moses, as the writer of Deuteronomy, doesn't want us to miss the importance of these words. He tells us that these three words are a mandate for us, so all-encompassing that they become our life: *Write these words on your hand so you see them every day. Write these words on your forehead so all you are with see these words. Make sure your kids know these words. Tell your wife, tell your mother-in-law, tell your dog. Put these words on a T-shirt you wear to the gym. Write them over your door so you see them every time you go in and out of your house.*

Have you ever met someone who is a one-trick-pony, who is so focused on one thing that he can only talk about that one thing? What we are talking about here is different – it is someone who loves the Lord so much that it becomes a natural part of his or her life. It's not something that one puts on a big sign and carries around. It's not something one writes on 3x5 note cards and hands out. Rather, it is something that one lives out. We rethink everything because we love the Lord. In a way, Moses suggests we become a walking billboard for loving the Lord...but without the actual billboard. Then, Moses tells us, our lives will be good. Our lives will be complete because we are loving the Lord and walking with the Lord.

### **Prayer**

*Let me learn to pause from the grasp of this busy life, if only for this day.  
In pausing, let me find peace, and let me enter into a quiet world if only for this day.  
And in peace and in this quiet world, let me be free of the burdens that must return.  
So that I may learn to love you. Amen.*

Rick Neldon

## Monday, March 18

### John 4:35 (NIV)

*Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.*

### Psalm 121:7-8

*The LORD will keep you from all harm—  
he will watch over your life;  
the LORD will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore.*

### Devotion

The theme of this year's Lenten booklet is "The Kingdom of God is at hand." What does this mean: is it here or just around the corner? "*Is at hand*" or some variation on "*is near*" are common translations. This suggests to me that it is in the future. But, *The Message Bible* and the J.B. Phillips versions translate it in the present tense; it "*has arrived*" and "*is here*."

In John 4:35, Jesus says "Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." Jesus is telling the disciples that the time has arrived to take action. Others may have sown the field, but it's our responsibility to harvest it. The time to act is now.

How do we take action? The church is Christ in the world, but we are just humans. How can we be like Christ? That seems a pretty tall order. How are we to address the challenges of the world today? Psalm 121:7-8 tells us that "The Lord will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore." Where do we get the strength and courage, the knowledge and wisdom to fulfill Christ's mission? By relying on God and using the law as our guide.

### Prayer

*We understand that you have called us to be your light in the world. It almost seems too much to expect of us. Give us the courage and understanding to be able to go beyond ourselves and to act justly, to love kindness and walk humbly with you. Amen.*

Mark Jacobs

## Tuesday, March 19

### Psalm 146 (NRSV)

*Praise the LORD!  
Praise the LORD, O my soul!  
I will praise the LORD as long as I live;  
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.*

*Do not put your trust in princes,  
in mortals, in whom there is no help.  
When their breath departs, they return to the earth;  
on that very day their plans perish.*

*Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD their God,  
who made heaven and earth,  
the sea, and all that is in them;  
who keeps faith forever;  
who executes justice for the oppressed;  
who gives food to the hungry.*

*The LORD sets the prisoners free;  
the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.  
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;  
the LORD loves the righteous.  
The LORD watches over the strangers;  
he upholds the orphan and the widow,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

*The LORD will reign forever,  
your God, O Zion, for all generations.  
Praise the LORD!*

### **Devotion**

When I hear daily news of the turbulence and terrors around the globe, my heart races. It's hard to sleep well when worried about the welfare of families separated by immigration policy, drug dependency, and war. I turn to Scripture for reassurance that God's Kingdom is real and is at hand.

In Psalm 146, I find hope in the Creator God. Hope stems from faith, and God keeps faith forever. Hope grows in knowing that there will be justice. The hungry will be fed, the ill will be healed, and the ones who suffer will be protected. In *Psalms for All Seasons: A Complete Psalter for Worship*, we read that this Psalm "is noteworthy for giving particular attention to God's love for the lowly: prisoners, strangers, orphans, and widows."

The Psalmist warns us not to trust in other people, who ultimately can't deliver us and who live only for a season. I take this to heart. I'm here for a season, so I will pray for peace, act as God's hands and feet on earth, and trust God for salvation in every sense. I'll praise my Maker while I've breath – as Isaac Watts wrote in his hymn of the same title, based on Psalm 146.

For a fresh take on Watt's words and those of the Psalmist, listen to Kurtis Parks' arrangement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYveKxrGWcw>

## **Prayer**

*Divine and Powerful God, grant us wisdom to act and faith to believe that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Help us to praise you in word, in deed, and with song every day we live and breathe upon your earth. Amen.*

Libby McConnell

## **Wednesday, March 20**

### **Psalm 5 (NRSV)**

*Give ear to my words, O LORD;  
give heed to my sighing.*

*Listen to the sound of my cry,  
my King and my God,  
for to you I pray.*

*O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;  
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.*

*For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;  
evil will not sojourn with you.*

*The boastful will not stand before your eyes;  
you hate all evildoers.*

*You destroy those who speak lies;  
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.*

*But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,  
will enter your house,*

*I will bow down toward your holy temple  
in awe of you.*

*Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness  
because of my enemies;  
make your way straight before me.*

*For there is no truth in their mouths;  
their hearts are destruction;*

*their throats are open graves;  
they flatter with their tongues.*

*Make them bear their guilt, O God;  
let them fall by their own counsels;  
because of their many transgressions cast them out,  
for they have rebelled against you.*

*But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;  
let them ever sing for joy.*

*Spread your protection over them,*

*so that those who love your name may exult in you.  
For you bless the righteous, O LORD;  
you cover them with favor as with a shield.*

### **Devotion**

We live in partisan political times. We are bombarded with news about political leaders who lie and only act in their own best interest. We see images of vulnerable families being torn apart, the negative effects of climate change, and military conflicts around the world. These images cause people to feel anxious, depressed, and powerless to make things better. During Lent, we ask ourselves: How should we respond as members of God's Kingdom?

Psalm 5 reassuringly reminds us that God has been here before. This turmoil is nothing new. God recognizes evil and lying and sin in this world. Judgment is left in God's hands. We are not called to fix everything. If we humbly bow down and pray, then God will lead us in paths of righteousness and make our way straight. I believe God opens doors of opportunity for each of us to help make the world a better place. This passage suggests that our eyes will be more open to opportunities, and we will be better prepared to serve, after prayerful consideration and openness to God's will.

God's path may be unfamiliar and scary. We may be called to do random acts of kindness to help strangers. We may have an opportunity to quietly and respectfully listen to someone we disagree with and to respond in a loving way that leads to friendship. We may be called to volunteer or donate money to further good causes. We may need to be more positive, kind, and supportive to our own friends and family. But one thing we know for sure – God has been here before and we will get through this together.

### **Prayer**

*Dear God, please help me to humbly pray and to listen for your answers with an open heart.*

Patrice Comey

### **Thursday, March 21**

#### **Psalm 65: 5-13 (NRSV)**

*By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,  
O God of our salvation;  
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth  
and of the farthest seas.  
By your strength you established the mountains;  
you are girded with might.  
You silence the roaring of the seas,  
the roaring of their waves,  
the tumult of the peoples.  
Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;  
you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.*

*You visit the earth and water it,  
you greatly enrich it;  
the river of God is full of water;  
you provide the people with grain,  
for so you have prepared it.  
You water its furrows abundantly,  
settling its ridges,  
softening it with showers,  
and blessing its growth.  
You crown the year with your bounty;  
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.  
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,  
the hills gird themselves with joy,  
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,  
the valleys deck themselves with grain,  
they shout and sing together for joy.*

### **Devotion**

David's psalm, brimming with lavish nature imagery of the greatness of God and the richness of God's creation, is joyously uplifting. It extols a God of awesome deeds and mighty power, who actively participates in caring for what God has created.

David recognizes that God reveals something of God's self through nature. He understands that to know and love God, one must maintain a connection and live in harmony with all of God's creation. He portrays God as a Master Gardener, facilitating abundant life for all. God ensures that all parts of nature live in balance with each other so that each can receive what it needs to thrive. All of nature responds to God's careful tending with joy and singing.

What would David write today? In modern times, we humans have taken far more than our fair share of God's bounty, to the detriment of other parts of God's cherished creation. Our greed and thoughtlessness have diminished our connection with God and produced serious challenges for present and future generations. Nature is more likely to cry out in anguish than sing for joy. How do we as "kingdom people" respond to nature's cry? God cares deeply for all of creation and so must we, for we have been made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We recognize God's call in Genesis 2:15 to "till and keep" the earth, to work in partnership with him as stewards of the earth. LPC is answering this call by being an Earth Care Congregation. We praise and thank God for creation as we strive to understand our place in God's plan and work faithfully to restore and care for God's earth.

### **Prayer:**

*Dear God, we marvel at your glorious creation. We thank you for providing what we need to sustain us, and for making the earth beautiful. Forgive us when we live in ways that damage your creation. Grant us vision and strength to act as responsible stewards of your earth. May we move in partnership with you toward a day when all of nature is restored, shouting and singing for joy. Amen.*

Susan Bartram

**Friday, March 22**

**Psalm 148 (RSV)**

*Praise the LORD!*

*Praise the LORD from the heavens,  
praise him in the heights!*

*Praise him, all his angels,  
praise him, all his host!*

*Praise him, sun and moon,  
praise him, all you shining stars!  
Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!*

*Let them praise the name of the LORD!  
For he commanded and they were created.  
And he established them for ever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds which cannot be passed.*

*Praise the LORD from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,  
fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!*

*Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!  
Beasts and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!*

*Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!  
Young men and maidens together,  
old men and children!*

*Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.  
He has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his saints,  
for the people of Israel who are near to him.  
Praise the LORD!*

**Devotion**

Now the psalmist in 148 (RSV) really lets it fly. Everybody and everything explodes with praise. This is PRAISE w/ the volume up as high as it will go and with absolutely everybody – “Kings, princes, young men and maidens, old men and children” – the heavenly hosts, “angels” –

the elements, “fire and hail, snow and vapor, mountains, beasts, cattle, and flying birds, and dragons and deeps,” and, I assume, ticks and rattlesnakes. This choir has no auditions. The poet, here in what’s called a “Hallelujah Psalm,” has assembled quite a chorus (but don’t seat me next to the scorpions).

Now I love to sing. The Lewinsville choir will soon let soar the chorus from Handel’s Messiah. The church should rock. People should leave with hearts, and perhaps even feet, skipping. And so with heart full to brimming, I had intended to concentrate my short piece on the environment, to air we can’t breathe, species dying, God’s glory shrouded by the mess we can make of all that the chorus praises. Hard to sing praises with a face mask.

No: given what can go on in families, communities, nations, the pain we feel and can transmit, can the paean of praise cover sorrow, can the transcendent above the dome (wherever that is) hear lament?

Yes. I’ll never stop singing. I love it. But I need the guy on the mule headed to the cross. The guy who’ll share a drink with me when I hurt, a guy who listens, forgives, fills with grace, dusts me off then commissions me saying, “Get back on the field.” The guy who says, “Just look where I’m headed. Do your part.”

### **Prayer**

*Lord fill my heart with joy and my lips with praise, for awesome is your creation. Walk with us as we try to be present for others, lift us up when we stumble, re-inspire and strengthen us to inspire and strengthen those in your creation who are lonely, hurt, hungry, and without hope. We ask this in Christ’s name. Amen.*

Jack Calhoun

### **Saturday, March 23**

#### **Psalm 143 (NIV)**

*Lord, hear my prayer,  
listen to my cry for mercy;  
in your faithfulness and righteousness  
come to my relief.  
Do not bring your servant into judgment,  
for no one living is righteous before you.  
The enemy pursues me,  
he crushes me to the ground;  
he makes me dwell in the darkness  
like those long dead.  
So my spirit grows faint within me;  
my heart within me is dismayed.  
I remember the days of long ago;  
I meditate on all your works  
and consider what your hands have done.*

*I spread out my hands to you;  
I thirst for you like a parched land.*

*Answer me quickly, Lord;  
my spirit fails.  
Do not hide your face from me  
or I will be like those who go down to the pit.  
Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love,  
for I have put my trust in you.  
Show me the way I should go,  
for to you I entrust my life.  
Rescue me from my enemies, Lord,  
for I hide myself in you.  
Teach me to do your will,  
for you are my God;  
may your good Spirit  
lead me on level ground.  
For your name's sake, Lord, preserve my life;  
in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.  
In your unfailing love, silence my enemies;  
destroy all my foes,  
for I am your servant.*

### **Devotion**

“Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.” It is so difficult in our everyday lives to slow down enough to “entrust my life” in God. It often feels like there is too much work to do, too many activities to attend, too much news to keep up with ...the list goes on and on. But when you stop and think about it, how much easier is it to face life when you know and believe that God is there with you?

“Rescue me from my enemies, Lord, for I hide myself in you....may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.” Reading these words reminds me that I can take on anything because he is by my side. And when the stress around you gets to be too much, taking that deep breath and realizing that you can do it, you can remain grounded among all the chaos, because you have a refuge in God, is truly comforting.

It's also a reminder that it's not all about me. That if I can find comfort in knowing I'm not alone, it's incumbent upon me to share that comfort with others. I once read that to be a good friend, you just need to show up. I hope in this season of Lent, I can do more of that moving forward.

### **Prayer**

*Dear Lord, thank you for showing us the way, for leading us onto level ground, and for saving us, each and every day. Through your grace, we learn how to care for others and through your love, we continue to face the chaotic challenges of our time. In your name we pray, Amen.*

Deirdre Ramsey

**Monday, March 25**

**John 7:14-18 (NRSV)**

*About the middle of the festival (of Booths) Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. The Jews were astonished at it, saying, “How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught? Then Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. **Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.** Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him.”*

**Devotion**

In John 7, Jesus is in Jerusalem teaching in the Temple. The crowd expresses opposing opinions about Jesus. Some feel Jesus is deceiving them and suggest he is demon possessed. Others, astonished at his teachings, ponder whether Jesus might be God’s Messiah (7:31). Jesus responds by declaring that clarity comes to those who do God’s will (v. 17).

For me, the Kingdom of God and doing God’s will are complementary concepts. Kingdom people seek to do God’s will. These concepts are beautifully summarized for me on a gift stole I received from the Immanuel congregation. On it are embroidered the words, “**Embodying God’s Love.**” The words “God’s Love” remind me that I must center my life in God’s love and in the loving Lordship of Jesus Christ. In addition, these words remind me that love is not a power of my own making, but is a gracious gift from God. I must abide in Christ to receive the power of love and use it well.



The word “embodying” should remind us all that as citizens of God’s kingdom we are called in Christ’s name to incarnate God’s love in the world. The ultimate establishment of God’s kingdom does not depend on us (thank God!) but God’s love graciously invites us to assist in building this kingdom through embodying love in our daily living. To faithfully live out Christ’s teachings on God’s will I need the Church who nurtures me on how to share God’s love through worship, teaching, fellowship, and mission.

**Prayer**

*God of love, your kingdom is at hand when we center our lives in your love. Help us do your will by embodying your love to others so that others may know the blessings and joys of your kingdom. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Daniel Thomas

**Tuesday, March 26**

**Romans 4:13–25 (NRSV)**

*For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.*

*For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”)—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.*

**Devotion**

I don’t interpret “the law” in this passage to mean the laws of the government or even the laws of God. I see instead the laws we create for ourselves through forming groups and divisions. In these verses, I read a condemnation of the distorted kingdoms we construct. While we may do tremendous good through these groups, none of them are the true kingdom of God. God’s kingdom transcends the “laws” that establish political parties, friend groups, or even religious institutions.

In high school, I was a member of the National English Honor Society. We promoted literacy throughout the community, all while taking pictures and displaying our NEHS pins. It felt good to be doing good. This status was a badge I wore proudly. More than that, though, it felt good to be part of something exclusive and prestigious.

I do consider myself to be a kingdom person, but I refuse to wear that name like a badge of honor on my chest. As kingdom people, we are not members of an elite group. We are not called to bring others into our kingdom. Rather, I believe everyone is a member of the kingdom of God. When this passage urges us to depend on faith rather than the law, we are not being asked to flaunt our faith like a shiny pin. We are instead being asked to have faith in the broad reach of God’s kingdom, being kind to all its people regardless of the laws dividing us.

**Prayer**

*Dear God, help us to overcome the laws that divide us and to have faith in the expanse of your loving kingdom.*

Abby Comey

**Wednesday, March 27**

**Romans 5:1-5 (NRSV)**

*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

**Devotion**

I am hopeful that today I will stay focused and accomplish something. I am hopeful that the dinner I put on the table this evening will be well received. I am hopeful that my community will do an ever-better job of educating our children to respect each other and be good stewards of the bounty they receive (and good problem solvers of the problems that we leave to them). I hope to face the end of life bravely and find reunion with my loved ones who have gone on before me. I hope that my faith in love will be redeemed.

On what do I base my hope? I would like to say that the basis of my hope is the sure knowledge that God loves me and my community and that I/we have some notion of what God would have me/us do to live Godly lives. But that knowledge and that hope sag when I look within me and around me. I see the forces of evil gathering strength.

I find Paul's guidance in the fifth chapter of Romans to be helpful. God has done his part, and now it is time for me to do my part. Through His grace, He has given us undeserved hope. We can take that to the bank. We can boast about it. Find happiness in it. Because that grace is the power of God's love, we have strength to bear up under suffering. God's grace, God's love, sets the conditions for us to hope, to suffer, to endure, to build character, to find further hope, and to do His work in our lives and in our world.

**Prayer**

*Lord, infuse my life and my relationship with Your hope. Give me real options to engage suffering for your sake, to build my endurance and character, and to find sustaining hope in Your love and Your message. Get me out of my too comfortable box. Amen.*

David Jessee

**Thursday, March 28**

**John 8: 31-32 (ESV)**

*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

**Psalm 27: The LORD Is My Light and My Salvation (NIV)**

*The Lord is my light and my salvation- whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life- of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident. One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord.*

*Hear my voice when I call, Lord; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior. Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me. Teach me your way, Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations. I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.*

**Devotion**

Whom shall I NOT fear? I fear the liars, women haters, race baiters, war mongers, false idolaters, destroyers of God's creation. Where is "the Kingdom of God" when strong forces seek to chain up our freedoms, oppress the poor, sick, and vulnerable, mock and hurt the different among us? It is challenging to "be strong and take heart" when there is daily fear. Cleo Wade writes:

I get up  
(I don't always want to)  
I'm tired  
I am run down  
My thoughts run me down  
The news runs me down  
My country runs me down  
Our history runs me down  
But  
Something pulls me from ... my sheets

Puts me in the shower  
Dresses me and says

Show up...

Because

To not show up

To stay silent

To do nothing

Is to tell the world that I think it is fine the way it is

And I do not think the world is fine the way it is.

To reduce anxiety, I show up to “sing and make music to the Lord.” The act of communally raising voices invites love in, helping me recommit to the hard work of striving for fairness and justice. Music is where I see the Lord at work in His earthly Kingdom, and that harmonic beauty bolsters my small attempts to overturn the sins of the world. Revelations via Handel affirms: “The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah!”

### **Prayer**

*Help us, oh Lord, to find our way to honor and preserve Your Kingdom as it is on earth. Guide us on the path to salvation through the works of love and inspiration that Jesus showed us when he walked among us. Keep us from exhaustion and despondency. Remind us, oh Lord, that when we despair of the anger and division, injustice and hatred all around us, that You have given us a charge to live by: to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with You. Show us patience and determination, in the face of those who seek to destroy Your creation, and guide us as we seek to save the earth and all who live or will live in this place. Help us to speak truth to power in all things, without fear, for as Jesus said, the truth shall indeed set us free. And in that freedom, we will become one with You in Your Kingdom, both on earth and in heaven. Amen.*

Cindy Speas

### **Friday, March 29**

#### **Psalm 148 (NRSV)**

*Praise the Lord!*

*Praise the Lord from the heavens;*

*praise him in the heights!*

*Praise him, all his angels;*

*praise him, all his host!*

*Praise him, sun and moon;*

*praise him, all you shining stars!*

*Praise him, you highest heavens,*

*and you waters above the heavens!*

*Let them praise the name of the Lord,*

*for he commanded and they were created.*

*He established them forever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.*

*Praise the Lord from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,  
fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!*

*Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!  
Wild animals and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!*

*Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!  
Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!*

*Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.  
He has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his faithful,  
for the people of Israel who are close to him.  
Praise the Lord!*

### **Devotion**

All creation praise the Lord!

This ancient hymn called upon all creation to praise the Lord, including animals, plants, sun, moon and stars, people young and old. Then, as now, people asked for God's wisdom during troubled times, and were constantly reminded of his presence in their daily lives. Today, Pastor Scott's weekly sermons help us to address our anxieties: our world with its violence, drugs, poverty, loneliness, and disasters.

In praising God, we also remember that God is ready to listen to our concerns and cares. In praising God together as members of one congregation, whether in word or song, we add to our personal spiritual uplifting. A verse of a favorite hymn springs to mind:

*Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;  
To His feet thy tribute bring:  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
Who like thee His praise should sing?  
Praise Him! Praise Him!*

Bless the LORD, O my soul; and forget none of His benefits. "Because Thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips will praise Thee." "I will give thanks to Thee, O LORD my God, with all my heart, and will glorify Thy name forever."

## **Prayer**

*We thank you, God, for our Church family and for what we mean to one another. We are grateful for the bonds of loyalty and affection which sustain us. We praise and thank you for your loving grace we receive every day of our lives. May we continue to rejoice in singing your praises. Amen.*

Verna Chenault

## **Monday, April 1**

### **John 6:1-15 (NRSV) Feeding the Five Thousand**

*After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."*

*When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*

## **Devotion**

### **Crumbs**

When he was old, he still had some crumbs  
of the leftover bread from the Bread of Heaven.  
Given at that long-ago picnic.  
He shared them, himself a grandfather now,  
one tiny crumb at a time.  
Everyone tried to smell the precious crumb.  
He would smile, eyes crinkling,  
and place the tiny bit in a shaking outstretched palm.  
He looked at you  
Right in the eyes  
and his story was always that he

just happened to be there, just a boy.  
And he gives thanks for each of us around the table  
Somehow knowing exactly what to say.  
It fills us up, full, to the top, each week  
And there is laughter  
And forgiveness  
Maybe tears too,  
And it all rises up in the air to God.  
Even if the crumb sometimes is little more than dust,  
Somehow they last Sabbath after Sabbath.  
So powerful you could almost smell it.

### **Prayer**

*Dear Gracious God,  
Each time we take the bread and drink from the cup  
Let us be full of thanksgiving  
Rich in living water and the bread of heaven.  
The miracle of feeding the thousands was more than human sharing  
It was heavenly transformation  
Though we were unaware,  
Though we were barely awake,  
And just thought it was bread and fish.  
Thank you God for all the miracles that we are unaware of,  
That we will yet be surprised by. Amen.*

Rachel Russell

### **Tuesday, April 2**

#### **Psalm 25:1-5 (NRSV)**

*Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.*

#### **Devotion**

These days, as chairman of Lewinsville's Trail Blazer Capital Campaign, I find that I am reading everything, even scripture, through the lens of that daunting challenge. So, when I'm told the church should be "an exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the World," my immediate reaction is, "Can we use the capital campaign to turn that exhibition up to 'high'?"

If only it were that simple.

Pulling out a checkbook to make a gift, even a sacrificial gift, is not all that is expected of us during Lent, or indeed, the rest of the year. If we anticipate that we may someday receive a "great reward in Heaven," we must commit – or renew our commitment – to following the example of Jesus Christ every day of the week, every month, every year. That means Christians

on Lewinsville Hill must do more than pledge to “do our best” to meet our current financial goal to redesign and repurpose Heritage Hall; it also means asking God to walk with us toward that goal. Surely, that request is the easiest.

If our goal is to satisfy earthly ambitions, we will fail. If God walks with us, as he will if we only ask, the physical manifestation of our faith will appear as a transformed educational building. New missions and new ministries will emerge for us to embrace. And on that day when the new building is dedicated, the “kingdom people” of Lewinsville will “rejoice and be glad.”

### **Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, please walk with us down a path that leads to the edge of tomorrow. We acknowledge that a glimpse of our future is impossible to grant. Therefore, we will continue to prepare for the new missions and ministries you have planned for us. We move forward in faith, reach outward in service, and pray upward in gratitude. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.*

Roland McElroy

### **Wednesday, April 3**

#### **Romans 8:5b (NIV Study Bible)**

*"...but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."*

### **Devotion**

#### **God's Kingdom is near**

To a gate one day on my walk I came,  
from behind of which I heard my name  
compelling me through the gate to go.

And I heard music, so clear but low.  
And a voice was breathing onto me  
to always follow that melody.

It said: "When you have a choice to make  
be careful, child, which way to take.  
On crossing roads be fully alert

from which direction this sound is heard.  
So strong was my conviction thus –  
the Spirit of God tries leading us

toward one main goal: to help and fulfill  
what Jesus came for – God's Holy Will.

## **Prayer**

*Lord please help us – especially on the crossroads – always to ponder Your will and reach the decision You want us to make.*

Brigitte Rais

## **Thursday, April 4**

### **Romans 8:12-27 (NRSV)**

*So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*

*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

### **Devotion**

At some point in my teen years I was exposed to German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Finally – a person of fairly recent vintage who truly seemed to personify what Christ was all about. A brilliant theologian, he reflected the two personal characteristics I have always sought for myself – courage of conviction and peace of mind. During the 1930s, Bonhoeffer was conflicted by his personal desire to experience spirituality around the world and the need to do something about the devastating subservience of the Christian church in Germany to Hitler. For the most part, he remained in Germany, spoke out against the Nazi regime and organized the Confessing Church, comprised of those few pastors who had not succumbed to the requirements of the Reich Church. In short order, Bonhoeffer was earmarked by the Gestapo.

Despite opportunities to escape, Bonhoeffer continued his resistance activities and was ultimately imprisoned at Tegel prison camp. He was implicated not only in resistance activities

prior to his imprisonment, but the July 1944 Generals Day plot to assassinate Hitler as well. In April 1945, days before the end of the war in Europe, after holding an Easter service in which he focused on Isaiah, (“With his wounds we are healed”), he was taken to Flossburg, stripped naked, and hung, along with the remaining conspirators.

Like Christ, Bonhoeffer had some sense of what was coming. And like Christ he had the opportunity to deny what was to be his destiny. Despite the horrors of the known final outcome, he was able to attain peace of mind, believing his ultimate destiny lay with the risen Christ.

In August 1944, in one of his last letters from prison, with some recognition of what lie ahead, he wrote Eberhard Bethge, “not only action but suffering is a way to freedom. In suffering the deliverance consists in our being allowed to put the matter out of our hands into God’s hands.”

### **Prayer**

*Lord may you grant us wisdom to recognize your will, the courage to do your will, and the peace which comes with doing such.*

Bruce DeAtley

### **Friday, April 5**

#### **Psalm 130 (NSRV) A Song of Ascents**

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.*

*Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications!*

*If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?*

*But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.*

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;  
my soul waits for the Lord*

*more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.*

*O Israel, hope in the Lord!*

*For with the Lord there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.*

*It is he who will redeem Israel  
from all its iniquities.*

#### **Romans 8:35-39 (NRSV)**

*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

### **Devotion**

In 1738, John Wesley – an Anglican cleric and one of the founders of Methodism – was depressed and discouraged. He had recently returned from a missionary trip to America that had not gone well, and during which he had fallen in love with a woman who married another, partly because he hesitated to tell her his feelings. He was uncertain of his faith and unsure about his future. Then one May afternoon, he was deeply moved by hearing the choir of St. Paul’s sing Psalm 130 (you can hear a sung version here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yETRxtYIL-E>). That evening, he very reluctantly attended a lecture on Martin Luther’s Preface to Romans. As Wesley later wrote, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ.” John Wesley marked that as his real conversion, the moment the kingdom of God became a reality for him.

Both the Psalm passage and Romans 8, two passages that called so profoundly to Wesley, speak to despair and hardship. Both these passages respect the truth that faith does not protect us from hardship, persecution, peril. But the gift of faith is knowing that when we cry “out of the depths” nothing – nothing – can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus that is indeed the kingdom of God.

### **Prayer**

*God, we wait for you. Many wait for you. Help us to find you even when we are in the depths, and help us lead others to see their place in the kingdom of God.*

Rob Hunter

### **Saturday, April 6**

#### **Psalm 143 (NRS) The Kingdom of God is at Hand**

*Here my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness. Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you. For the enemy has pursued me, crushing my life to the ground, making me sit in darkness like those long dead. Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled. I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands. I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me, or I shall be like those that go down to the Pit. Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Save me, O Lord, from my enemies; I have fled to you for refuge. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path. For your name’s sake, O Lord, preserve my life. In your righteousness bring me out of trouble. In your steadfast love cut off my enemies, and destroy all my adversaries, for I am your servant.*

## **Devotion**

Since moving from Vienna to Charlottesville and New Haven last summer, I've been visiting many churches (Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Episcopal) in both towns, for Sunday morning worship. I've experienced some surprises in church liturgy and culture, including praise bands, standing for Confession, different versions of the Lord's Prayer, hymns routinely sung in French, German, Arabic, and Latin, and written music that's projected on the wall behind the pulpit.

Despite church closures and declining attendance in both New Haven and Charlottesville, I've witnessed many positive trends during my church visits. Interfaith activities are strong and getting stronger; Yale Divinity School and Music School students routinely intern at many New Haven churches, offering great talent and mentoring services to youth and young adults; church affiliated Day Schools are alive and well; one church offers free outdoor meals to homeless men and women every Sunday, no matter the weather. A church in Charlottesville has a large house devoted solely to youth and young adults, and everywhere I go, hymns are sung with grace and enthusiasm! Last, but not least, all the churches I've visited are friendly and inviting, particularly to people of color, immigrants, people with differing sexual orientations, and folks with no Christian background at all.

In Psalm 143, the writer talks about being a servant to God. In the churches I've been visiting, I've seen many active congregations filled with people who are providing service to others, and by extension, to God. In many ways, providing meals to homeless people on the New Haven Green; offering a safe place for young people to talk about tough issues in Charlottesville; or simply offering a friendly place for worship to people from all backgrounds, means that the Kingdom of God is with us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Prayer**

*Lord, grant us your peace and know that as the Psalmist writes in verse eight above, we always try to put our trust in you. By doing so, we know that we will come to experience your Kingdom here on earth. Amen.*

Tom Mellor

## **Monday, April 8**

### **John 9:1-17 (NRSV)**

*As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."*

## **Devotion**

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness..." "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry." These and other bold statements by Jesus are manifestations of the big one, the statement that really seals the deal for us: "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand."

Wow! These words demand action and accountability. No more dithering. But wait. Just hold your darn horses there, buster. What's the rush? I, for one, don't move that fast anymore and have tried all my life never to make rash decisions. I'll do it when I'm good and ready!

What seems clear to me – as it was to the Jews, Gentiles, Greeks, Samaritans and other assorted folk in Jesus' day – is that we have a choice to make. Either accept Jesus Christ as our personal lord and savior or put it off until we're more “in the mood.” It's pretty easy to give lip service to the former. A number of us do it all the time. We go to church regularly, put money in the plate, read the scriptures, at least on Sunday. Through long experience we've learned certain skills: the language of Christianity and many of its rote answers. And yet somehow it's not enough. Are we frauds? John Wesley would have called us “heathens!” Such a response is dictated by fear of the unknown and a gnawing doubt of our ability to truly measure up to what Christ asks of us.

On the other hand, taking that leap of faith and diving in with Jesus holding us by the hand – and we holding onto Him for dear life – can and will, I believe, yield unparalleled spiritual riches and joy in our lives. I am reminded of a treasured hymn we all sang as children, “Jesus loves me, this I know.” Can we honestly believe He loves us less as adults? By no means! Thanks be to God.

### **Prayer**

*Gentle, loving Father, restore in us that childlike faith we knew as children. And let it blossom in us as we seek to serve you and your kingdom on earth. Amen.*

Jim Scopelitis

### **Tuesday, April 9**

#### **Romans 10:8-10 (NRSV)**

*“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.”*

#### **Devotion**

In today's scripture, Paul paraphrases a quote from Moses' farewell to the Israelites found in Deuteronomy 30:14, wherein Moses reminded them that God's word (or perhaps God's kingdom on earth) was very near to them in their mouths and hearts. Paul asserts that this phrase is applicable to Jesus. Paul declares that believing in our hearts and stating with our voices that Jesus is the Son of God, who was raised from the dead, is our salvation. We must not only to be receptive but also be proactive in transmitting the news to others for by doing so we are like Christ proclaiming that the Kingdom of God has come near, or is at hand.

While Jesus was alive, the Kingdom of God was indeed at hand, through his human presence. He had commanded his disciples to love God with all their being and to love their neighbors as themselves. He taught them to pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” After he ascended to heaven, his followers then (and in 2019) are to carry on his

message. Through Christ-like behavior, they (and we) were (are) to perpetuate that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Through our acts of love and kindness, such as listening to a child read her poems, working in a food pantry, driving a handicapped person to a medical appointment, or being a Sunday School teacher for eight rowdy kindergarten boys, we can show by words and actions that the Kingdom of God is at hand. As Christians, until Jesus comes again, and come again he will, we are to be the doers and teachers of his message. In the words of President John F. Kennedy, “Here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.”

### **Prayer**

*Our Father, help our deeds and our utterances to be more like Christ's and that thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.*

Paul Phillips

### **Wednesday, April 10**

#### **John 10:1-18 (NRSV)**

*“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.*

*So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly...”*

### **Devotion**

I admit, I’m not of fan of gatekeepers. The checkpoint where fans get scanned before entering a baseball game; parking lot attendants; security and customs agents at the airport. With each gatekeeper, you have to show proof that you qualify to enter past them. Most, however, are pleasant, with the exception of airport gatekeepers. You know...the way they look at you! Yet, these guards and security staff serve a legitimate purpose. They help to maintain order and only allow qualified individuals through their gates.

In this passage of John, Jesus is a gatekeeper of greater significance. Unlike gaining access to a parking lot, or an airport, he is the passage point to an abundant life. Count me in! But what verifications do I need?

To explain, Jesus describes himself as a shepherd of his people. We need no special documents or tickets. He calls us by name and even ventures beyond to gather others outside who do not belong to his fold. Our only “proof of entry” is to respond to his voice. We can hear his voice through the Word of God, written in the Bible and spoken in sermons. Some of us may even hear him speak directly to us.

But there’s a catch. What exactly is this abundant life? It is not the path to care-free living with material prosperity, and little responsibility. Rather, it is to live like Christ – to show compassion and seek justice in today’s world. And in doing so, our lives will be abundant!

### **Prayer**

*Dear Lord, we yearn to live life abundantly. Keep us attuned to your voice each day so we may be your servants and thus experience this fullness of life. Amen.*

Jack Hess

## **Thursday, April 11**

### **Jeremiah 26:1-16 (NRSV)**

*Early in the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came from the LORD: “This is what the LORD says: Stand in the courtyard of the LORD’s house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from their evil ways. Then I will relent and not inflict on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done. Say to them, ‘This is what the LORD says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city a curse among all the nations of the earth.’”*

*The priests, the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speak these words in the house of the LORD. But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, “You must die! Why do you prophesy in the LORD’s name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?” And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.*

*When the officials of Judah heard about these things, they went up from the royal palace to the house of the LORD and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD’s house. Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, “This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You have heard it with your own ears!”*

*Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: “The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has*

*pronounced against you. As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing.”*

*Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, “This man should not be sentenced to death! He has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God.”*

### **Devotion**

I wonder if in the time of the prophets the average citizen had a clue that some among them had the word of God on their lips. In today’s reading from Jeremiah, you quickly get the sense that not everyone was on board that this man was indeed sharing the words of God. In fact, when he finishes his call to the people of Judah, they say “You must die!”

Now as it turns out, Jeremiah is fortunate that when brought before the officials and the elders and he explains again what he has been charged to do, everyone says “this man should not be sentenced to death! He has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God.”

It could be that life was simpler in the Old Testament days. They were fortunate to have prophets walking among them. Not that they all knew it, but they were there. I believe it is more difficult for us to discern the word of God and to respond to where we see or feel that the kingdom of God is at hand.

The New Testament tells us that Jesus says the kingdom of God *is* at hand. The charge in our reflections for this Lenten season was to seek and speak to where we see evidence of this kingdom of God. My observation is that it is all around us; through the Lewinsville community we are better able to help people as a loving, Christian community, than by ourselves. We individually need to strive to reflect God’s love in our lives, but with a community of faith we can take hope in the work that we do collectively, and the impact can be tenfold.

### **Prayer**

*God, give me strength to reflect your love in my life and to participate in the life of my church to multiply your love in our community, and our world. Amen.*

Bob Clark

### **Friday, April 12**

#### **Jeremiah 29: 1; 4-14 (NRSV)**

*These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon... It said: Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they*

*may bear sons and daughters; multiply there and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord.*

*For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart. I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

### **Devotion**

I have always thought the message delivered in this text was remarkable. The exile the people to whom Jeremiah's letter was addressed was surely a bitter experience, and the last thing they would have wanted to hear was that their stay in Babylon was unlikely to be short-lived. They would have wanted with all their hearts to believe they would soon be returning to their homeland. But Jeremiah's message was that it would be foolish for them to think in those terms, even if there were "prophets" among them who claimed otherwise. As things turned out he was right about that, and the advice he gave his intended audience has long been recognized as a model for people of faith in dealing with situations in which they find themselves inhabiting an environment that is not under their control. Throughout the time they would be spending in that strange place, he said, they should never lose sight of the God they worshipped or forsake His ways; but at the same time they should not allow their faith to turn them into antagonists of the native population and its ways, either. Not unless it was absolutely necessary, at least. They should settle in, he said, making the best of that situation, doing everything they could to seek the welfare of the place where God had chosen to put them.

Few of us have ever experienced exile in anything like the sense Jeremiah had in mind, nor are we likely to do so. But in the times in which we are now living it is not at all uncommon for people to find themselves being transported to places they find strange. Or even to experience an alien environment without ever moving physically. So the message of this text has in principle much wider applicability than might initially appear to be the case.

### **Prayer**

*Lord, we give thanks for the prophets you have given us in the past (and continue to give us today) as well as the wisdom you have communicated to us through them. Help us to heed that counsel and do what is acceptable in your sight. These things we pray in the name of your Son.*

Bruce Douglass

**Saturday, April 13**

**Romans 11:32 (NRSV)**

*For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.*

**Devotion**

Save for the closing doxology, this verse ends what is commonly called the Apostle Paul's "election discourse," which runs from Romans chapters 9 through 11. The meaning of this verse has challenged exegetes down through the ages; it is tough to hear that God imprisons us all in disobedience.

Paul's election discourse has served as one of the principal – if not *the* principal – passages in the Bible that grounds the Christian Church's doctrine of predestination. This doctrine holds that God has determined beforehand who is destined for eternal life. Some in the church believe that God's predestination occurred at the beginning of time, and some – like Augustine and John Calvin – hold that predestination works in two directions: God predetermined those who will live in eternal life *and* those in eternal damnation. These interpretations of the election discourse and related scripture have had profound effects on Christian church life; some salutary, some worrisome, and some downright pernicious. As history shows, many Christians believed and practiced the idea that God's predestination was the ultimate us v. them declaration.

Yet, there are others who hold that Romans 11:32 is one of the most hopeful verses in all of scripture. They point to the little word "all" at the end of the verse, and thus read the doctrine of election as affirming the possibility of universal salvation. This claim is buttressed by the idea that Christ's life, death, and resurrection have universal meaning: "Go," Christ commands in his final words on earth, "and make disciples of *all* nations [.]"

So one way to think about the doctrines of predestination, or election, or the possibility of universal salvation, is to lump them all together into a doctrine of humility and obedience. God's ways are inscrutable, a mystery, hidden, but yet known in and through Jesus Christ. Through Christ's humility and his obedience to God, we are now freed to turn our disobedience into obedience to God, our pride to humility, our "us v. them" into just "all of us."

**Prayer**

*Almighty God, we thank you for this day. Grant us, we pray, the wisdom to know the strength of humility, the courage of servitude, the freedom of obedience. Amen.*

David Morrison

## Monday, April 15 Holy Week

### Philippians 3:12-14 (NRSV)

*Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*

### Devotion

What can be learned from theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer about how to re-orient our lives to follow Christ? Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran minister, imprisoned during World War II for his participation in the resistance movement in opposition to Hitler. Bonhoeffer believed that being a disciple of Christ meant doing his Christian duty to resist against a criminal state. During his two years in prison Bonhoeffer continually asked, “What is Christianity...for us today?” It seems we are asking the same question today as we are confronted by polarizing political positions, war-torn countries, environmental crises, bigger and bigger gaps between the “haves and the have-nots,” increased diagnoses of depression and anxiety, and pervasive loneliness.

Bonhoeffer believed that daily prayer and meditation was essential to the Christian life, and that through prayer we can experience a sense of empathy and solidarity with our neighbors and members of our community. He warned that passive prayer, asking God to act on our behalf, ignores that fact that God works through us in the world. He believed that through prayer we could receive the motivating force that would lead us to act.

At this time of Lent, especially today at the beginning of Holy Week, we are called to “press on toward the goal” of knowing Christ, and to listen to the voice of God as we pray. What are we being called to do? Paul assures us in this passage that we must “press on” as we seek to know God’s purpose for us.

For a discussion of Philippians 3:12-14: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x\\_C33ZhELz4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_C33ZhELz4)

### Prayer

*Dear God, As always be patient with me as I press on toward the goal of knowing Christ. Like Bonhoeffer I will meet you in prayer, seeking to hear your will, your calling for me. What is my purpose? What lessons does Christ have for me during Holy Week? I pray that I will be open to receive them. Amen.*

Carol Kaffenberger

**Tuesday, April 16**

**Psalm 25:6-7 (TLB)**

*“Overlook my youthful sins, O lord! Look at me instead through eyes of mercy and forgiveness, through eyes of everlasting love and kindness.”*

**Devotion**

What does it mean to be “kingdom people” in 2019 in Virginia...in the United States of America...and in the world? How should we live our lives? How should we interact with one another? For clear guidance on answers to these questions, it might be a good idea for us to use WWJD [What Would Jesus Do] as our compass. A great starting point is this simple wisdom from Jesus, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” [Matthew 7:12] That’s a game changer! And that will turn things upside down in the ways we treat one another, in the ways we communicate with one another, and in the ways we see one another. With love. With kindness. With acceptance. With compassion.

“Overlook my youthful sins, O lord! Look at me instead through eyes of mercy and forgiveness, through eyes of everlasting love and kindness.” We have opportunities, probably daily, to live different lives and “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” When we do, we show God we are serious and really want to change our lives and the way we interact with others. Maybe, hopefully to mend the divisions – political, racial, etc. – and the many flavors of inequities. But one thing we know for sure...God is kind, patient, and merciful, and He has not given up on us! Every day, every single day God blesses us with His grace. So let’s not give up on ourselves!

**Prayer**

*Heavenly Father we pray for strength and the will to “Do to others as you would have them do to you” so that we can end the divisions and inequities that plague and prevent us from treating one another with love, kindness, acceptance, and compassion. Open our minds and our hearts to listen to, to understand, and to accept different perspectives so that we can come together as a community and as a nation. All of which we ask in the name of the Great Friend and Master of all. Amen.*

Grant Mann

**Wednesday, April 17**

**Jeremiah 17:5-10 (The New Oxford Annotated Bible)**

*Thus says the LORD:*

*“Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, whose heart turns away from the LORD.*

*He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.*

*“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit,”*

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?*

*“I the LORD search the mind and try the heart, to give to man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.”*

### **John 12:35–36**

*Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of the light.”*

### **Devotion**

As Easter draws ever closer and we continue to reflect upon following in the footsteps of Jesus, we endeavor to be “kingdom people” reflecting “kingdom values” in our daily lives and in all that we say and do. As the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah viewed it, the contrast was stark - we should lead lives to do good and exhibit faithfulness to earn our reward, and we should reject evil and disobedience or, failing that, we will be punished. Jeremiah illustrates this choice by saying, “[c]ursed is the man who trusts in man and draws strength from mere flesh, and whose heart turns away from the Lord.” Such a person is likened to a “bush in the wastelands” inhabiting “parched places.” Conversely, the person who “trusts in the Lord” is likened to a “tree planted by the water.” The watered tree does not become “anxious” during a drought and continues to bear fruit. Like the Godly person, our life of kingdom values must be like a watered tree that bears fruit in all that we say and do. We must trust in the Lord, for only God can understand us and will judge us according to the fruit we yield.

The Apostle John writes that as Jesus’ crucifixion neared, he spoke of light and darkness. In chapter 12, Jesus describes the one “who walks in the dark” as “not know[ing] where he goes.” Kingdom people, on the other hand, “believe in the light” so that they “may become children of light”. As believers in Christ Jesus, kingdom people believe also in the Heavenly Father who sent his son as a light unto the world so that we would not live in darkness but have eternal life. As believers, we also can exemplify the light of kingdom values through our interactions with colleagues, friends, neighbors, and strangers and in all situations, so that we can bear good fruit.

### **Prayer**

*Our Heavenly Father, thank you for the promise of continued growth and confidence as we follow in your footsteps. Help us to turn away from worldly things and perform deeds deserving of your light. Help us to carry the light throughout the World.*

Sallie and Al Robinson

## Thursday, April 18 Maundy Thursday

### Psalm 147:12-20 (NRSV)

*Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!*

*Praise your God, O Zion!*

*For he strengthens the bars of your gates;*

*he blesses your children within you.*

*He grants peace within your borders;*

*he fills you with the finest of wheat.*

*He sends out his command to the earth;*

*his word runs swiftly.*

*He gives snow like wool;*

*he scatters frost like ashes.*

*He hurls down hail like crumbs—*

*who can stand before his cold?*

*He sends out his word, and melts them;*

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

*He declares his word to Jacob,*

*his statutes and ordinances to Israel.*

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

*they do not know his ordinances.*

*Praise the Lord!*



### Devotion

Most Americans are uncomfortable with the idea of a monarchy and do not know what it means to have a king. Our best ideas of kingship come from history, and these historical figures often create a stark image of a person who takes advantage of his position to the detriment of everyone else. In the Middle Ages an *ideal* king would emulate Christ and, at a very basic level, would have a contractual relationship with his subjects. In return for the loyalty and service of his subjects, the king was to provide care and protection. History shows that earthly kings failed in these two regards. Countless rulers sought to obtain power and wealth for their own benefit rather than serve and protect their dependents through varied abuses and exploitations.

It is because of these past abuses and exploitations that we are wary in applying the moniker of “king” to Jesus and/or God. But we are fortunate in our Heavenly King who is nothing like the earthly kings of history. Our King who “sends out his command to the earth...gives snow like wool...scatters frost like ashes [and]... hurls down hail like crumbs...” protects and provides for his people whom he will not forsake. On Maundy Thursday, we remember the act of our king who humbled himself to wash his disciples’ feet, going beyond the contractual relationships of earthly kings. Maundy Thursday is also a step towards our king’s sacrifice on the cross to save his people from the power of sin and death.

### Prayer

*Sovereign king,*

*How glorious to be your subject for now and always. Earthly powers are nothing to your divine majesty. We can do nothing but praise you! Renew in our hearts our loyalty to you as well as our*

*commitment to be subjects in your heavenly kingdom. Praise to the true King who conquered evil and saved us!*

Meggie Lineberger

### **Friday, April 19 Good Friday**

#### **Psalm 130 (NRSV)**

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.*

*Lord, hear my voice!*

*Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications!*

*If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,*

*Lord, who could stand?*

*But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.*

*I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;*

*my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.*

*O Israel, hope in the LORD!*

*For with the LORD there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.*

*It is he who will redeem Israel  
from all its iniquities.*



#### **John 13:36-38 (NRSV)**

*Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward.” Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.”*

#### **Devotion**

Psalm 130 suggests a believer, a person of faith in God, but mired in fear of the dangers around him (or her). He prays to an Old Testament God who protects the people of Israel, but can violently strike down iniquitous enemies. He knows that he has sinned, but hopes God will have mercy. His posture is that of a supplicant without certainty, basing his hopes on history. God protects his people.

John 13 paints a different picture of Peter's action in the lead up to Good Friday. He is a good man and has been with Jesus for years. I have always loved Peter. I picture him as a burly, blustery man who is completely captivated by Jesus and feels he would "take a sword" for him. He wants to follow and protect Jesus. But the bluster is gone after Jesus tells Peter he cannot go with him and even asserts Peter will deny him. Think how that must have felt. We might wonder if Peter even heard the rest of Jesus's reply – "...but you will follow afterward." Yet that is the most hopeful and loving promise for every follower of Jesus. Following Jesus is not easy and we are not perfect. But unlike the supplicant of the Psalm, we have confidence in Jesus' word to a follower who fails.

LPC is full of Peters. It has been blessed with long-time followers of Jesus, good people who have been faithful, but know they will sometimes slip. Jesus understands that a slip does not define a person. Rather, it is the whole direction of our lives. We are ashamed at our failures, but we come back and follow Jesus with the assurance that, like his promise to Peter, in the end we will be with him.

### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, let me be more like Peter. Let me acknowledge my failures, but give me the courage to move past my shame. Let me continue to follow you no matter how difficult. I believe you want me to live my whole life as you have shown us – with goodness and love and care for others.*

Mike McKeown



**Saturday, April 20**

**Romans 8:1-11 (NIV)**

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

*Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.*

*You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead*

*is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.*

### **Devotion**

The Law was powerless to make us righteous. In other words, there was no way that the law was going to erase all of our misdeeds (sins of commission) and our other failures (sins of omission). The Law could tell us how to live righteously, but it could not transform us into people who live righteous lives.

Sin is a barrier that separates people from God (Isaiah 59:2). Isaiah, a prophet and a holy man of God, said “all our righteous deeds - are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Everyone sins; really, everyone (Romans 3:23). With human nature as “it is” (i.e., weak to many different types of temptations) and sin as “it is” (i.e., alluring, cunning, deceitful and hungry), humans had no way to “escape the gravity” of sin – that is, until God took action.

Jesus announced that “The Kingdom of God has come near!” Indeed, it had come near. Jesus is the gateway to the Kingdom of God (John 10:7). God did an incredible thing through Jesus! Through Jesus death, God satisfied the righteous requirement of the law.

The Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the dead can live in us, too. If we live according to the Spirit, then we have been set free from the law of sin and death. That is not to say that you will never ever sin again or that your body will not die a physical death, but your heart will be set on what the Spirit desires and you will live a life of faith, guided by the Spirit.

### **Prayer**

*Father God, give me the courage to trust you more. I've trusted you before, but I know that sometimes I just want to grab the “steering wheel” and turn this puppy in a different direction. Help me to set aside my own desires that take me further from you. Amen.*

This music video talks about “letting go” and asking God’s Spirit to lead: ["Jesus, Take the Wheel"](#)

Rob Ransom

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