



SPU Lenten Devotional 2019

Brought to you by SPU Campus Ministries

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Lent 2019 – An Invitation to Journey with Christ

What is Lent?

The season of Lent marks the period of 40 days leading up to the celebration of Easter. Starting with Ash Wednesday and culminating in Holy Week, Christians throughout history have utilized fasting, prayer, and other spiritual practices during Lent as a means of dying to self in order that we might rise with Christ. This intentional preparation for Easter is marked by postures such as humility, repentance, and self-examination.

Why Use this Devotional?

The Campus Ministries staff at Seattle Pacific University curated this devotional as a means of helping our community grow during the Lenten season. As we read scripture together throughout these 40 days, it is our deep prayer that our students, staff, and faculty might grow in their love of God and love of neighbor. It is one thing to observe a spiritual practice on your own, but quite another to journey *together* as we pursue Christ, allowing the reflections of our community to shape our engagement with scripture and pursuit of discipleship.

Practical Steps

Starting with Ash Wednesday (March 6, 2019), there is an assigned passage of scripture and a subsequent reflection written by a member of the Seattle Pacific community. You'll notice that there are no readings for Sundays, as Lenten fasting is set aside for these mini-celebrations of Christ's resurrection each week. We would urge you to make time each day to read both the text and the reflection, while also carving out space for your own prayer and reflection. No need for guilt or shame if you miss a reading; simply find the appropriate day and start again.

SPU Community, may we be met by the living God as we make our way to Easter morning. And in the company of one another, may we perceive the Spirit's movement, hear the calls of faith, and remain steadfast in accepting the loving guidance of God.

Image on front cover created by Courtney Rutzer (Class of 2018)

March 6, 2019 - Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Kelsey Rorem, Associate Director, Campus Ministries

Sleep and I used to be very good friends. Every night I would look forward to bedtime, blissfully resting for eight, nine, sometimes even ten hours before leisurely rising the following day. Though many struggle with insomnia or other ailments, for me sleep was a welcome companion, a place of respite.

Then, I became a mother.

As a new parent, I quickly realized there's nothing more jarring than being startled from a deep sleep by the cries of a newborn. Stumbling through our apartment I would struggle to find my bearings, upright but not yet lucid. Though I couldn't have strung together a coherent sentence, my son's distraught voice brought me out of sleep and into my present reality.

In many ways, Ash Wednesday is similarly jarring. The themes of our human mortality, the imagery of destruction, and the call to repentance are foreign to our daily conversations. "Blow the trumpet!" declares Joel—an attempt to startle us from our slumber. Far too often we sleepwalk our way through our days—going through the motions as we pursue love of God and neighbor.

And rather than continue in this sleepy stupor, Ash Wednesday rips off the covers, calling us to wake-up and contend with a life that is not all that God dreams for it to be. The good news? As we wake-up, we return to a God who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.

Family of God, the season of Lent is upon us. May we shake off the slumber of the day to day, and return to a pursuit of God and God's Kingdom that is vibrant, alive, and growing.

Blow the trumpet, Lord. Awaken us from our sleep that we might live for you. Amen.

March 7, 2019

Psalm 51:1-17

Joshua Tom, Assistant Professor of Sociology

Psalm 51 is attributed to David as his confession in the wake of a truly remarkable string of wrongdoing. It's worth a recap: David sends his army to wage war while he stays home; spies on Bathsheba while she's bathing; confirms she is the wife of Uriah, one of his soldiers; coerces her into a sexual relationship; gets her pregnant; attempts to manipulate Uriah into believing he's the father; and finally, ensures Uriah's death by ordering him to the front of a siege and telling his commanding officer to abandon him.

Against this backdrop, Psalm 51 is fronted by a puzzling confession to God: "*Against you, and you only, have I sinned*" (v4). Imagine the confused murmurs: "Did he just say he's sinned *only* against God? Really?" I want to suggest David's thinking is wrong, but also not entirely foreign to how we sometimes think of our sins.

Perhaps there are times where, having spiritualized our misdeeds into abstractions, we forget that they are concrete, and that we don't simply exist as atomized, individual relationships with the Divine. We surely sin against God, but more often than not those sins hurt others too. Despite our best intentions, it's possible to neglect the full scope of our sin.

David himself provides a correction to this mindset when he declares that forgiveness is granted for a purpose. "*Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you*" (v. 13). While it is good and right to be grateful for the restoration we receive, that is not its end. Throughout scripture, we're reminded that our salvation is not to our benefit alone, but for the continuing work of God in our world.

As we go through the Lenten season, let's not forget the ways we sin against our neighbors. Let's remember that Christian life is done in community, and resist the impulse to narrowly define it on individualist terms. And let us affirm that the grace of our merciful God is not just for ourselves but for the good of others as well.

March 8, 2019

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Maddy Fulcher, ASSP Vice President of Ministries; Theology Major, Class of 2019

I love this passage because it faithfully paints the wonderfully ridiculous reality that is attached to the meaning of being a Christ-follower. Some of the things Paul lists seem contradictory. But the fact of the matter is, to live with Christ inside us is to be a living, breathing, and walking contradiction in the first place. The whole story leading up to, and of the cross, is completely and utterly flabbergasting. God, who is the highest, and beyond any being's imagination- sent His son, Jesus to the Earth as a human. This was done so that Jesus could be our example of how to live a life of love for God and for others. But this was also done so that he, being perfect and without flaw or blemish could be treated and viewed by God as our sin. God allowed Jesus to be executed, in a most horrible way so that we could be atoned to God. This is the most contradictory event in all of history, and God made a way for us to have a part of it.

Because of this, what was once meaningless and broken can now be shifted into something that has hope and life. Paul says, "We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything."

This is what it means to live with Christ as his body. There is now eternal life beyond death, an unshakable joy, a hope, as we share in Christ's suffering, and therefore his resurrection. While on the cross, taking on the weight of our sin, Jesus broke the restraints of a finite and broken world and made a way for all of us to join in with him in the eternal glory that is to come. Our lives aren't promised to be ones of ease, but ones that are redeemed and made meaningful by a kind and merciful savior. This controversy and contradiction seem impossible to comprehend by our worldly understanding and reasoning. In fact, we look like outlandish spectacles to a world that looks on at the Church. But the only way to truly see and understand why Paul is urging the Corinthians (and us) to take advantage of this 'day of salvation,' is to refocus our gaze onto Jesus because it is only through him that it is all possible.

March 9, 2019

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Bryce Van Vleet, Group Core Team; Psychology Major, Class of 2019

Perhaps it is not difficult in our current context to imagine the wisdom of this passage going awry. You don't need to look too far to find abuses of all kinds, flourishing in American churches under the cover of secrecy and darkness. I also don't think this passage is calling us towards silence or secrecy in rallying against the injustices we notice around us.

On the contrary: Jesus' ministry is loud. He preaches to the masses, condemns the abuses of the religious leaders, is born under the roar of a heavenly choir, and dies under chants for his execution. His calling for quiet, therefore, should give us pause.

We spend so much time concerning ourselves with what others think of us. We worry what others gossip behind our backs. We begin to believe the lies – I'm not good enough, not pretty enough, not selfless enough. And it's not our fault. The world is chock full of moths and vermin, mean Instagram comments, and divisive holiday dinners. What would happen if we began to let go of the world's power over us, if we forged our identities in the quiet, absorbing presence of the Holy one?

When we take time to quiet ourselves, we give God space to move in. We give God permission to bless our offerings, converse with us in prayer, fill our hunger up with the presence of holy manna.

Where is your treasure? How loud are the screams of self-doubt and questions of worthiness? Are you brokenhearted, like me, over the lies you've internalized and been taught to believe? Take time today to carve out a place of quiet, free of expectation and intention, free of the earthly vermin. The Easter story is a good one; It's okay if you don't believe it yet, but this world does not own you.

March 11, 2019

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Paul Yost, Associate Professor of Industrial-Organizational Psychology; Director of Applied Learning and Development

During graduate school, I lived in Maryland just outside of Washington, DC. The beltway, as we called it, was and still is filled with people rushing to get into or out of the city. People don't work during the week to enjoy their weekends; they recover during the weekends to survive the coming workweek. Going to work in the morning on the Metro was a microcosm of the east coast pace: park your car, run—don't-walk—down the escalator, dart through the turnstile but do it quickly so the people behind you don't trample you, at the train pause for people to rush off, wait for it...rush in so the people behind you don't trample you, fight for a place to stand, fight to get off at your station, rush off to work. Repeat 8 hours later.

One Sunday during this time, my pastor preached on tithing. But he didn't start with money. The question was, "What blessing do we struggle to give back to God?" He suggested that in DC it was often not money but our time: What would it look like to be a cheerful giver of 10 percent of our time? Ugh... tithing time meant I had to trust the creator of the universe to handle all of the people in my life I was disappointing and all of the things I wasn't getting done. How crazy is that? And I struggle today. Spending more time in one-on-one conversations, hanging out with my son, morning coffee and a good devotional book? Giving God those first-fruits? That sounds exciting and scary. As you think about the Lenten season, what are the scary and exciting first-fruits that God is inviting you to give?

March 12, 2019

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

May Tag Yang, Interim Department Administrator and Program Coordinator,
University Ministries

On most days, do you believe you are under the shelter, protection and care of the Most High (verse 1)? Even as I type this particular question, I am acutely aware of my lack of praxis in this notion, “trust in God” (verse 2).

At my core, I like to think that I am someone rooted in Christ though my flesh and the push and pull of everyday life vie for my attention and therefore my sense of rootedness—in God's shelter—is quickly muddled. Yet, I think the invitation in this Psalm is clear—to live *in* God's shelter and to abide *in* the shadow of the Almighty regardless of my track record. In other words, we are invited to live *in* the shelter and shadow of the Creator. Thus, to live and embody this is to make God our refuge and dwelling place (verse 9).

How then will you make God your dwelling place today? Where in your life can you live *in* the Creator's shelter? As you seek to live *in* these truths, I pray you experience God's deep abiding love this Lenten season.

March 13, 2019

Romans 10:8b-13

Jessica Fossum, Sharpen Ministry Coordinator; Applied Mathematics and Psychology Majors, Class of 2019

This is the simple Gospel. Good news seems to be an understatement for what Paul is talking about here in this letter to the Romans. This is what our faith is all about, that “if you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). How awesome is that? The next verse sticks with the theme of both our hearts and our mouths. It is so easy to just say something and not really believe it, but Paul challenges us here to do both. Our hearts are where our lives are changed, and we get to share the redeeming work God is doing in our lives as our testimony of faith.

While the message of this passage is simple, the implications are lifechanging. My encouragement for you is to sit down with a good friend and open your Bibles to this passage and talk about it together. Explore what Romans 10:11 could mean and see if your Bibles translate it differently. Find hope in Romans 10:13. I pray the familiar message of Christ’s resurrection would become even more meaningful this season as we prepare our whole selves for Easter.

March 14, 2019

Luke 4:1-3

Bryce Van Vleet, Group Core Staff; Psychology Major, Class of 2019

What strikes me about this passage is not just that Jesus is human – someone who gets hungry, who is tempted, who deals with human issues and conditions – but that the temptation the devil uses is a human one as well. It's a temptation we wrestle with watching drama and inequality play out across the newspapers and our personal lives. It's a reduction of the complex – what a person needs to thrive – to a binary option of starvation or satiation.

When we are weak, for instance, in our hunger, it's easy to succumb to simple characterizations of complex problems. This thing is good, this thing is bad. This is the right way of living; this is the wrong way. In verse 4, Jesus picks an option that is outside the binary presented to him. Jesus, who lived his life as an intersectional being, the first (and last) of its kind – fully human, fully God – calls his followers into an understanding of problems that is outside of binary thought, into solutions that are intersectional and complex in nature.

When the world, full of little and big devils, convinces you to pick a side, to view things from an “if-then” perspective, be like Jesus and point toward a third. When the Spirit leads you into wildernesses outside of your everyday experience, question the narratives fed to you about that space. It's here, in the unfamiliar, that the devil chooses to tempt Jesus, and that the evil chooses to tempt us into believing things must either be one way or another. The God embodied in Jesus, the God with you in the Spirit, the God above you, is not a God of binary; It's a God who lives one in three.

March 15, 2019

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Vanessa Coker, MDiv Student, Class of 2019

The words of Psalm 118 are both celebratory and anticipatory, full of what *has* happened and what *will* happen, what *has* been established and what has yet to be fully realized. In this space there can be great expectation, deep gratitude, and peace. There can also be doubt, suspicion, and confusion. I am most interested in what shape our worship takes in these places in between. What if we come to find that our highest hopes and expectations go unmet? Many times, throughout my life, I have found myself in that place of unfulfilled expectation, wondering, “Is this it?” If I’m honest, in that moment, I am not proclaiming God’s faithful, enduring love. I do not feel like celebrating or even calling out to God. I do not feel blessed. What has come to pass is not what I had hoped for.

And yet, there is a deeper reality under every unmet expectation and under every disappointment. There is the reality of a God who surpasses expectations, who transcends the edges of our limited imaginations. This is the God the Psalmist praises. A God who takes all of the unfulfilled hopes and desires and refashions them into something more expansive, more faithful, and more loving. Our lives, in all their excitement and anticipation, as well as their let-downs and sadness are lives that can honestly stand before a God who is big enough to hold it all and loving enough to transform it all. God takes them all, peels back the layers, and reveals something that reaches beyond what we could dream up for ourselves. Surely this is what Jesus has done with the people’s rejoicing and cries of “Hosanna!” along the road into Jerusalem. What might our worship look like in the places of waiting and unmet expectation?

March 16, 2019

Hebrews 10:4-10

Christy Barnes, Endorsement Coordinator, School of Education

“We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”-Hebrews 10:10

Growing up, I heard this verse all the time. Full disclosure: I owned a neon-green t-shirt from church camp with this verse emblazoned across the back.

I have to confess that holiness can feel like a bit of a loaded concept for me...and not just because it led to some questionable fashion decisions. The church I was raised in liked talking about holiness, but most of the time, our definition of holiness boiled down to a list of rules. When we said we believed God could make us holy, for the most part, we meant that we believed God could keep us morally pure.

This approach to holiness holds an obvious appeal. Through this lens, holiness can be fully comprehended, and thus controlled. A holiness like that makes us feel safe...and who doesn't like feeling safe?

The spirit of Christ can't be measured, judged, or corralled for our own uses, and yet we are always so tempted to do just that, whether through the animal sacrifice of the past or the carefully written rules and manuals of our churches today. As Christians, we are called to surrender our own desires, and I believe this includes our desire to quantify, define, and fully comprehend what holiness looks like. When we surrender that desire, we free ourselves of the value judgements we so often use within church settings to evaluate, control, and condemn each other.

In this new freedom, we can offer ourselves more fully to God. We can say, with Christ, “Here I am, I have come to do your will,” and trust that God's grace will guide us beyond our fear of the unknown and into a new, deeper experience of God.

March 18, 2019

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Teylar Greer, Executive Assistant, Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Staff Council President

Scripture is the story of our promise-keeping God. It is the story of the people of God and what they do while they wait for the fulfillment of God's promises. This, too, is our story. What do we do while we wait?

After Abram carries out God's instructions to prepare a covenant ceremony, Abram has to drive away circling birds of prey looking to make a meal out of his preparations while he waits for God to show up. I imagine Abram putting the finishing touches on the alignment of the animal pieces, wiping the back of his hand on his forehead as he crouches on the hot ground, taking a deep breath as he prepares for God to come. He's hot and tired, and has done what God has asked of him, so now he can sit back, rest, and wait. As he waits though, he notices that scavengers have noticed him, and that they are beginning to circle above, coming closer and closer. He is determined to keep things ready for when God comes, so he jumps up, scans the desert brush and breaks off a stick, wielding it against the birds of prey.

Abram waits actively because he trusts God will show up.

We, too, can trust God's word to us – even in the waiting. There are moments when we, too, must be ready to drive away that which tries to sabotage our preparation, our hope, our sacrifice. Regardless of how long the wait, we know God will come.

During this season of Lent, as we wait individually and collectively for our promise-keeping God, as we reflect on our need for Jesus our Redeemer and Reconciler, as we seek to receive and respond to the revelation of the Holy Spirit, are we ready to wait like Abram?

March 19, 2019

Psalm 27

Caenisha Warren, Coordinator for Events and Student Ministries, John Perkins Center

This Psalm begins with encouragement on who God is and ends with the same remembrance through an expectant hope in God's wait. However, in between there is a whole lot of life - praise, struggle and lament. And that life being lived in the in-between is one that is real and in need of this expectant hope that David speaks of.

The words in verse 9 say "You have been my help; Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation." This is a plea but also a comforting assurance of a God who is "with". When there are tests, trials, and troubles, and those against me rising within the midst, even so, in those spaces and in those places, there is God. This is the belief that, like David, carries me into the waiting.

As a sharing example, the next verse stings of familiarity given parts of my own story (perhaps not a seemingly normative example for some), "When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the Lord will take care of me." As someone with one parent who is an addict and the other emotionally estranged, this recites a truth that demonstrates part of the grace and blessing about who I am today and for how my story of becoming was formed through a God who made a way. But even in the broader context when community may be distant, whether parents, family, friends, there is still a God who is "with".

This is one practice of being community that we can learn from God; how to be "with", even in the waiting.

March 20, 2019

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Joselyn Molina, Urban Involvement Coordinator; Chemistry and Political Science Majors, Class of 2019

Oh what a blessing it is to be a friend of someone who serves as a great and wonderful example of a life of love, humility, and strength. As I reflect on this passage, I think back on the gift of Jesus' life to us – not only did he live a good life of love and mercy, but he invites, not forces or guilts us, to live just as he did. We are welcome to live like God. By our own will, we are free to love like the love that was given to us, and that is liberating in how God cares for us.

It is through being firm and living beside God that we can live by his example. Through this, we are able to manage life in the face of evil and those who hold evil thoughts. We are called to live in the light of what Jesus has done to and for us. For we are people of heaven, and we are able to live by how heaven does. We live on Earth, surrounded by the fellow creations of God, to live in a reflection of Jesus by living in love. This is the beauty of Jesus' life to us.

This passage brings me to understand the foundation of my role in another person's life – I am here to love and to serve. I am here to wash my friend's feet, because I long for them and love them much like how Jesus loved those around him. I strive to continue living in this way and follow Jesus' steps in all I do.

March 21, 2019

Luke 13:31-35

Nate Wieland, MDiv Student, Class of 2022

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

This Lukan passage is all about desire. The Greek word *thelo* occurs three times throughout the pericope. First when Herod *wants* to kill Jesus, secondly when Jesus *wanted* to gather Jerusalem together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and finally when Jerusalem did not *want* to be gathered. In this we see the conflicting desires of the Divine and human will that constitute the brokenness of our world today. The Divine enters into the human situation and desires to gather us into one people, but in response to this Divine initiative we tend to resist, often with violence against the very God we claim to worship. What does this mean as we enter into this season of Lent? Lent is a time of preparation, of tending and pruning our spiritual lives with the fulfillment of our discipline in sight; Easter. Our houses are left to us, and we find ourselves downtrodden as we wait for the time when we can say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" The time for celebration and rejoicing is on the horizon, but we aren't there yet. We must fast before we can feast. We must be readied to join in the resurrection of the Christ. How does this passage guide us into that readiness?

We learn from Jesus' emotional lament, the strength of God's desire to gather God's people up into one body. We learn also the strength of God's sorrow over the human desire to resist this gathering; manifested in hierarchies that subordinate some to the benefit of others, doling out lethal violence to those who embody God's desire for reconciliation. Given this revelation of God's desire, we must examine our own desires. Where in our lives are we resisting the gathering of all people together under God's wings? Who are we pushing out, whether actively or by our silence? Are we ready to be gathered together, or will we find that togetherness with God exceeds what we thought we desired?

March 22, 2019

Isaiah 7:10-14

Rebekah Johansen, Administrative Assistant, Finance and Business Affairs

In these verses God is telling Ahaz to ask the Lord for a sign. But how does Ahaz respond? By saying that he won't test the Almighty. The thing was, God was asking Ahaz to do that very thing and even without Ahaz asking, God still chose to give him a sign.

Is there an area of your life in which God is calling you to seek wisdom from the Holy Spirit before anyone else? Maybe in your search for a spouse, a job, in trying for a family, or applying to grad school. Maybe you're in the midst of one of those things, but you aren't sure what steps God wants you to take next. Imagine with me what could happen if you were to ask God to reveal these areas to you.

Take a deep breath and ask for a sign. God gave one to Ahaz, so why wouldn't our Almighty grant the same to you? The truth is, that the Everlasting will. God just needs you to listen, and when you do, you give God the space to do incredible work in your life. Does someone who is almighty need this? No. (Just look at Ahaz) But, if you let go of resistance, the answer will be so much sweeter.

Breathe. Listen. Receive. God will take care of the rest.

March 23, 2019

Psalm 45

Tracy Norlen, Director of Public Information, University Communications

Psalm 45 is a royal “wedding song to the tune of ‘Lilies,’” and reading through it certainly gives the reader a feeling they are witnessing the beginning of a most extraordinary ceremony. The bridegroom and bride are described in extravagant terms and surrounded by the finest materials.

“You are the most excellent of men and your lips are anointed with grace” is one description of the groom. “All glorious is the princess in her chamber, and her gown is interwoven with gold” is the description of the bride and her dress. They enter the king’s palace with “joy and gladness.”

As I think about the grand entrance of this royal couple, I can’t help but think of Jesus’ final return. I know we don’t know when that day will be, but what will it be like? The day of Jesus’ first return — an empty tomb and surprise appearances before Mary, Martha, and the bewildered apostles — was not extravagant and only witnessed by a handful of people. It certainly changed the lives of all those who worshiped and believed in Jesus, but most people in Jerusalem were unaware. The second time Jesus comes, like a royal bridegroom coming for the royal bride in the most extravagant setting imaginable, is something everyone on Earth will witness. Maybe we will be singing the hymn “What If It Were Today?”

“Jesus is coming to earth again, what if it were today?
Coming in power and love to reign, what if it were today?
Coming to claim his chosen Bride, all the redeemed and purified,
over this whole Earth scattered wide.
What if it were today?”

(Hymn: “What If It Were Today? Words and music. Leila N. Morris 1912)

March 25, 2019

Isaiah 55:1-9

Paul Kim, Coordinator of Global Engagement and Small Groups, John Perkins Center

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways” (v. 8). These words are often used as a salve for our feelings of uncertainty but hardly address the source of that uncertainty. These words, used in this way, lack a certain power to move us towards trust in God. They placate more than they enliven our faith.

However, taken with the preceding verses, we might better understand these words to emphasize and move us to faith in the *certainty* of God’s provisions *in spite* of our lack of understanding. By establishing an everlasting covenant with the people, like the one established with David, God signals the certainty of the promise to the people. God invites the people to eat, drink, listen, and therefore live and identify as the people of God.

In fact, so powerful is God’s desire to give life that even the “wicked” and the “unrighteous” are invited to return to God (v. 7). We might expect this invitation for the faithful, but the unfaithful too? Therein lies the power and promise of God’s thoughts and ways – God’s thoughts and ways are not like ours. These words move us beyond our understanding towards God’s understanding and work to reconcile all people to God. The invitation is for all to incline themselves towards God and to find life.

In the season of Lent, this passage may be an invitation to you to return to God whether you consider yourself one of the faithful, the unfaithful, or perhaps one of no faith. What promise for life do you find in this passage? Seek and call upon God, for God is near.

March 26, 2019

Psalm 63:1-8

Alyssa Broberg, Latreia Coordinator; Ecology Major, Class of 2019

Growing up in upstate New York, I know what it feels like to have an endless winter. When the snow starts in October and can still stick around into April, it seems as winter will never end. This year in Seattle, we kept checking the weather and grew weary as snow interrupted our daily routines. During the winter season, I yearn for sunlight and warmer weather. The shorter days filled with clouds and rain leave me feeling weak and tired. While it feels as if the seasons will not change, I am reminded of the hope of spring sunshine and new life returning soon.

This seasonal desire for lighter days is similar to our call and desire for Christ. We long for Christ as we yearn for water after a run or sunlight in the winter months. The goodness that God provides cannot be described as anything other than life changing and rejuvenating just as spring after winter brings new life.

As the promise of spring gives us renewed hope, the Holy Spirit gives us the endurance to face life's struggles and setbacks. The power of God's love is what can lead us through the darkness found in life's struggles and refresh our spirit.

The cold winter is behind us (hopefully). As the plants begin to spring up again look for God's sustaining power at work in your own life.

March 27, 2019

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Priscilla Ozodo, Minister of Worship, Campus Ministries

The apostle Paul in this letter to the Corinthians draws parallels between the Christian experience and the Israelites journey out of Egypt into the land that God promised them.

The Israelites experienced God's presence as a cloud in the wilderness, they were fed with "spiritual food" provided by God and were "baptized into Moses" by the waters of the red sea. Similarly, Christians experience the presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit, are baptized by water into the family of Jesus the Messiah and are fed regularly by the "spiritual food" of the Eucharist. But in somewhat of a sudden turn, Paul reminds these Christians that none of these spiritual experiences guarantee God's pleasure, or a place in the promised land. Paul warns Christians not to follow the example of the Israelites presuming that their spiritual encounters are an excuse to live however they choose.

At this point, it is easy to get discouraged. If the children of Israel, who experienced God's tangible miracles, could not get into the promised land then our journey could seem very bleak. In response to a similar concern, Jesus said to his disciples: "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible." While Paul challenges Christians to live with moral integrity, he reminds us that our faithfulness to God is not dependent upon our own strength or spiritual encounter. He makes it clear that God is cheering us on, making sure that we do not fall; in fact, God provides a way out for every temptation that we encounter.

So even when it seems really hard to live according to our Christian calling, remember that you can depend on our faithful God who does not test you beyond your ability and will always provide a way. On those days when you feel alone, remember that God is always there with you in your hardest moment of testing, holding the door of escape wide open. You are never alone in the fire, God is Faithful!

March 28, 2019

Luke 13:1-9

Jessie Todd, Student Ministry Coordinator; Psychology Major, Class of 2019

There is a solemn tone to this passage, it takes place just after horrific tragedy. It's my understanding that because tragedy struck these individuals, the people thought it was due to divine punishment for their sin. Jesus says it was not due to this, and responds with an urgent call to repentance for all. Jesus implies that the time for judgment has not yet come, but is coming, and there is a need for repentance from all people. The desperation in this cry strikes me. I believe God's call for all to repent reflects God's desire and longing to be with all of humanity.

I am reminded and encouraged by the sweetness of repentance itself. The image of Jesus as a gardener tending to the tree to call it to repentance is so beautiful. Jesus tends to our hearts like a good gardener, loosening us and giving good fertilization for our souls so that we may be inclined, as the tree is to bear fruit, to repent. Jesus is tending to us out of mercy and love, and calls us to respond.

The idea of repentance bearing fruit is also so beautiful, because the tree is called back to flourishing. Repentance is a renewal of the heart and mind, and a return to relationship with a loving God. The tree does not stand condemned in repentance, but instead is brought back to life in abundance with a good gardener.

This passage is both encouraging and striking to me. I'm reminded of the urgency of the Gospel in a world that desperately needs God's love and relationship. I'm also reminded of the tenderness of God caring for our hearts and beckoning us back into relationship and flourishing.

March 29, 2019

Hebrews 10:19-25

Deb Nondorf, Minister of Discipleship, Campus Ministries

There was a season in our family's life when we were literally held up and held together by our church community. I truly do not know how we would have made it through those turbulent waters without these people coming alongside us. I am humbled and grateful that these people chose to surround us with love, and abundantly serve us.

This text, among other things, is a clear indication that the Christian life is meant to be lived in community, and not on our own. It speaks of the necessity for Christian fellowship and our need to remain together and be mindful of each other. This is so we can encourage one another toward living a life full of love and good deeds. A life that is active, not passive. One where we hold each other accountable, where we can be real about our struggles, and where we can serve one another with compassion and humility.

Have you experienced this kind of Christian community? What did you notice about how the community loved and served one another? Is there a way to show your gratitude for the love and care you received? Can you express this gratitude in a creative way?

March 30, 2019

Isaiah 58:1-12

Jacky Nakamura, ASSP Communications Manager; Sociology & Communication Majors, Class of 2019

The Scripture reads, “They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them...yet...you do as you please and exploit all your workers.” The past few years have seen a rise of hot topics (justice, equity, reconciliation, etc.) and in that I recognize varying views across the spectrum—from more liberal to more conservative theology. In the midst of these stances, there is one view of justice that I find peculiarly challenging, and perhaps “lukewarm.” Presumably “neutral,” some regard justice as relevant but supplementary to the Christian faith. But I ask, how can we as Christians, claim that we are eager to get invested in the work of justice and to be committed to righteous acts while choosing to remain a bystander in moments that require action? When we ask God what we can do to help, do we say yes even when the answer is unexpected/undesired?

I believe in grace and wisdom in discernment, but I also believe in accountability and faith in action. Isaiah 58:1-12 is a powerful reminder that we cannot use the excuse of, “But God didn’t answer.” Perhaps God did answer, but we chose complacency, named it as “not knowing”—simply because it was the easier choice.

April 1, 2019

Joshua 5:9-12

Deb Nondorf, Minister of Discipleship, Campus Ministries

In this text we see the Israelites, the generation of wanderers, celebrating the Passover and eating food produced in the land. The next day the manna stopped, they had arrived in the place to which God led them. Oh, and one other thing: their disgrace had been rolled away. For us to live the abundant lives God intends, we must first shed those things that bind us. Disgrace is rolled away, and we live abundantly. We have been delivered from our place of bondage. God has fulfilled God's promise.

What are the things in your life that bind you, that keep you from a full and abundant life? To what place, and for what purpose is God calling you?

Reflect on your journey. How has God provided for your daily needs? Where is your place of promise? What things do you need to shed so that you are ready to receive?

After a time of silence, give thanks to God. Create an image that represents God's provision in your life.

April 2, 2019

Psalm 32

Tia Hyodo, Resident Hall Ministry Coordinator; Human Development and Family Studies Major, Class of 2019

For me, Lent is a time of waiting in preparation to begin celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. Psalm 32 reminds me of what this kind of waiting in preparation often looks like. It is not just waiting while our bones and lives waste away. That kind of waiting is too easy.

The other day I was watching a tv show, Parks and Recreation, where one of the main characters was told to sit back and take it easy due to external forces that created a time of waiting. Her response was, “No, we’re going to lean forward and take it hard.” In this Lenten space, acknowledging our sins *and* the forgiveness that has come with them is nowhere near sitting back and taking it easy.

Psalm 32:10 says, “...steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.” I believe that one of the most necessary and difficult parts of acknowledging our sins and the love of God is simply trusting it. Deeply and sincerely trusting God to mold each of us during this season of Lent invites the Spirit to pour out God’s steadfast love in every part of our life. In waiting, listening, and preparing, our version of “leaning forward and taking it hard” can simply be trusting what we have already known as God’s promises fulfilled through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit being present with us in response to that.

In this season, may we find peace and rejoice in those moments.

April 3, 2019

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Carla Orlando, Vocational Discernment Counselor, Center for Career and Calling

Today, I hear an empowering message to the people of Corinth, a message of freedom, courage, and love.

WE are those people, the people of Jesus, who follow him to the cross and beyond. We are his friends who are called to stay awake to the suffering of our friend and, during Lent, to stay present to those suffering in Gods world, to those in need of reconciliation, to look, listen and respond.

As before, we are asked to stay in relationship with God today, to be Gods partners, together. We are called to be Gods people of mercy, hope, grace and joy. To be in relationship with Christ and with one another. We are called to be God's reconcilers, not asking, "What can I do for God, today?" but, "What is God wanting to do through me, today?"

Today, how will I be a reconciler?

"Christ has no body on earth now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on the world; yours are the feet with which he walks to do good; yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world."

- Theresa of Avila

April 4, 2019

Luke 15:1-3

Abbie Wright, Head Volleyball Coach, SPU Athletics

These verses precede three parables in Luke 15, and are the only words recorded in the chapter in which Jesus is not directly talking to the crowds (i.e. religious leaders, general public, and more specifically, tax collectors of the time) around him. Verses 1-3 show the discontent the Pharisees had with Jesus for the fact that he associated with those they felt didn't adhere to the law. Their main complaint, Jesus' willingness to 'welcome' and share a meal with 'sinners', reveals the unconditional and unfathomable love that God extends to humans. The Lord's first desire is transform people's hearts and embrace individuals for who they are, despite the baggage, shortcomings and unpredictable responses humans might have to the grace extended.

It is even more ironic then that after the Pharisees criticize Jesus' inclusive behavior, He goes on to share three parables that have to do specifically with individuals discovering something that is lost: a shepherd finding his sheep, a woman finding her coin, and a man reuniting with his son. The sheep, coin, and son were the very symbols of why religious leaders were angry. The same way these three were returned to their rightful protector, so Jesus sought and desired to redeem and restore the marginalized, the sinful, and the outsider.

It is encouraging to know that Jesus meets humans today with the same mission – to extend grace and get to the root issues of one's heart rather than one's appearance. What is so transformative in Jesus' association with 'sinners' both then and now, however, is that His inclusivity first accepts people for where they are, but is not content with them staying there. The love of Jesus inspires change. His grace is not cheap, but it is always available. When one authentically accepts it, a heart shift and transformed life is always the direct result.

April 5, 2019

Philippians 2:5-11

Kelsey Rorem, Associate Director, Campus Ministries

I grew up with competition all around me. Whether it was one on one basketball with my brother in our driveway, Sunday night card games at my youth pastor's house, or my four-year career as a varsity cross-country runner, competition shaped much of my formative years.

A cardinal component of competition involves strategy; looking for any opportunity to capitalize on an advantage, whether through your own skill or your competitor's blunder. And while there's nothing inherently wrong from my perspective with a little healthy competition, I wonder if a winner takes all mentality comes at odds with the example of Jesus.

In Philippians 2 we are invited to emulate the humility of our Savior. Though the word made flesh was fully God just as he was fully human, he "did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage" (NIV). And instead of strategizing a victory over creation due to his unmatched strength and power, Jesus set it all aside in order that his obedience might yield our salvation.

Today we are nearing the end of Lent. In these final two weeks, I wonder how God might be inviting each of us into a renewed sense of humility, service, and love as a way to follow Christ's example. Where are we being called to set aside competition, striving, and bitterness for a way that is more gracious, open, and kind?

Family of God, as we seek to live as Jesus lived, may our hearts be better prepared to glorify the servant king on Easter morning.

April 6, 2019

Luke 9:28-36, 37-43a

Mykylie Zelaya, Campus Ministries Graduate Assistant; MDiv Student, Class of 2021

One of my favorite ways to engage with scripture is through Lectio Divina. I enjoy Lectio Divina because it is a chance to breathe, listen, and reflect. When I read scripture, I try to stay aware of words or phrases that stand out to me and meditate on them when they do. When I read this passage of scripture, I am continually struck by the words from the NRSV that say, "...but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him." It is also sometimes worded, "...but when they were fully awake..." When they were *fully* awake. I have a hard time feeling fully awake even on my best days when I have managed to get a full night of sleep. However, if Peter, James, and John had not stayed awake with Jesus, they probably would not have witnessed this incredibly significant moment.

I wonder what it means for us to stay fully awake with Christ. I wonder what it might look like for us to take seriously the importance of rest, both physically and spiritually, so that when we are awake, we can be fully present.

The next portion of scripture (37-43a) might also have something to speak into our lives with regards to being fully awake or fully present. Jesus sounds frustrated with the disciples after he is told that they could not successfully heal the boy with the demon. Could it be that Jesus is tired or growing weary of being the only one who takes his alertness or "awakeness" seriously?

In this Lenten season, what are ways that you can practice rest for your spirit so that you can be fully awake in your faith and avoid missing the work that God might be doing in you and in the world?

April 8, 2019

Isaiah 43:16-21

Priscilla Ozodo, Minister of Worship, Campus Ministries

As a child, I was taught to look back often and learn from the mistakes of the past in order to be successful in the present and future. God also reminded the Israelite nation to remember all the great things God had done for them in the past. They were instructed to mark festivals to help them remember the miraculous acts that God had performed in their history and to pass these stories to their children (Deuteronomy 4:9). It is therefore puzzling that in this Isaiah passage, Israel is being instructed to “Forget about what’s happened; don’t keep going over old history”

I don’t believe this is a contradiction. Like the Israelites, I believe that this passage calls us, in this Lenten season, to live in complete awareness of what God is doing in the present while trusting God to do new and amazing things in the future. It is important to note that our trust for the future is buried in the knowledge that the God “who opened a way through the waters, making a dry path through the sea” (verse 16) is the same God who “will make a pathway through the wilderness [And] create rivers in the dry wasteland” (verse 19).

It is easy to celebrate what God did in the Bible while forgetting that GOD IS STILL AT WORK TODAY and is seeking to show God’s delivering power to this generation. Jesus himself said that those who believe in him will do even greater miracles than he did (John 14:12).

So in this Lenten season, don’t focus only on the past; let us not drive forward with our eyes glued to the rearview mirror. Look around, look forward, because our GOD IS ABOUT TO DO SOMETHING NEW! It’s time to live in excitement and expectation!

April 9, 2019

Psalm 126

Caroline Beresford-Wood, Group Coordinator & Theology Major; Class of 2019

Living as a human being means we are in danger of pain. We can experience stresses, grief, heartache, frustration, and so much more at the hands of others, of the world, or even ourselves. Heartbreak is not an uncommon occurrence in life. We all carry wounds and hold the capacity to wound one another.

“The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.”

Our heartbreaks, and how we heal from them, are probably some of the most formative parts of our lives. I believe God meets us in these heartbreaks. I find the grace of God most present in our ability to grow better— more loving, more kind, more caring, more brave— from our wounds instead of growing bitter. What a miracle it is that we can come out on the other side without callused souls.

“May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.”

I pray that our wounds stretch us to love more passionately and more widely. I pray that we let God work in us so that, if our hearts must be broken wide open, they will heal wide open, too. I pray that God meets us as we go out, weeping as we sow the seeds. I pray that we feel God holding us there. And, when it's time, I pray that we get to be the ones who love bigger than we ever thought we could, that we grow kinder than we ever thought we would, that we will reap these seeds with shouts of joy.

April 10, 2019

Philippians 3:4b-14

Chuck Strawn, Dean of Community Life, Office of Student Life

In the passage for today, Paul does a pretty good job checking his privilege.

Hebrew of Hebrews, Roman citizen, male and educated, articulate and given leadership- Paul lets us know that it would be a mistake to get into a credentials measuring contest with him

“My resume? Flawless. My wardrobe? Clean. My bonafides? Bonafide. I’m as good as it gets... the Influencer’s influencer. If anyone deserves to be blessed and highly favored by God, it’s me.”

And yet... Paul discounts all of this. It’s worth nothing. In his mind... it’s rubbish. (In fact, the Greek word he uses that’s translated as “rubbish” is one that probably wouldn’t be at place in polite circles- check it for yourself). Not only does it not matter to him, but he even says that he’d cast it all away if it was keeping him from a deeper relationship with God. He’d denie and defer and decline all of these things if they were stumbling blocks in building God’s kingdom.

So, he presses on- not to earn God’s love, but because he’s already received it. He seeks more, because he finally understands what’s worth having. And what’s worth sharing.

And that’s where we find him encouraging us and challenging us to join him in seeking and sharing God’s love. Using the opportunities and privileges that he’s been given for the sake of the community and the kingdom.

Which leaves me with questions to think about this Lenten season:

- How do my privileges and opportunities limit my ability to remember God’s love?
- What would be hard for me to step away from or sacrifice to be faithful?
- What would living like I believed God loved me, in spite of my brokenness, look like?
- What ways can God use my privilege to build others up and join in the work of the kingdom?

April 11, 2019

John 12:1-8

Kate Dieda, Sharpen Core Team; English Major, Class of 2019

In this passage, we get to observe a beautiful gathering of Jesus and his friends. Jesus is the guest of honor, and his community gathers around to celebrate him, shortly before he is betrayed and crucified. He is in the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, who have already been established as some of his closest friends, with his disciples.

I love Mary's deep humility in this moment. She sits at the feet of her dear friend and honors him by anointing his feet with expensive ointment. Washing the feet was a servant's job—she is in no way obligated to do this for Jesus. The perfume she uses is said to be very costly, yet without regarding the expense, Mary sits and worships Jesus through her service. She wipes the oil away with her own hair, which is remarkable considering her societal context; Jewish women rarely ever unbound their hair in front of others. In this act, she humbles herself to the Lord, and offers all she has to serve him.

In sharp contrast to this unconditionally loving act, Judas Iscariot chimes in, concerned about the lost profit of the expensive perfume. These two figures, the humble woman and the self-serving man, both look as though they are serving others, but Judas's intent is to take the profit for himself.

Jesus, however, instantly quiets the self-serving betrayer: "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me." Mary honors Jesus while he is with them, because he will not always be. And her precious gift of this perfume to the living Jesus will resonate into her visiting Jesus's tomb (where, as we know, there will be no body for her to anoint).

We have the benefit of knowing the full story. Jesus lives his human life and meets us in our everyday ways of being; he is crucified and assumes our struggle even to death; and three days later, he is resurrected, saving and restoring hope for humanity.

In this time of Lent, we honor Jesus's life in light of the upcoming Crucifixion and Resurrection. As we reflect on this gift of our new reality, how can we not humble ourselves, following Mary's beautiful example in this season of Lent? In what ways can we, like Mary, humbly serve Jesus with all we have in this season of waiting and reflection?

April 12, 2019

Hebrews 2:1-9

Michelle McFarland, Director of Executive Operations and Executive Assistant to the Provost

On this very day, 17 years ago, I gave birth to my son, Emmett. He came into this world and was received, with long-awaited anticipation, into the loving arms of his parents, who had been told during the pregnancy that it was possible he would have some birth defects. And yet, he came out perfect (at least in his mom's eyes). I stayed up all night long looking at my son and praising God for his wonderful life, be it with birth defects or without.

I cannot help but think that God does the same with us. He sees our imperfections and yet rejoices in bringing us into arms that long to hold us close. God chose Jesus to walk in the shoes of humans on this earth, so I take comfort in knowing that the Lord of the Universe understands our hurts, our pains, our joys, and our sorrows.

Hebrews 2 quotes from Psalm 8, perhaps one of my favorite passages in telling us how big God is, and that we, though very small, are of significance to God: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them?"

As we walk through this season of Lent, let us take comfort in knowing that the majestic God who created the earth, and hung the moon and the stars in their place, sees us, knows us, and loves us; through thick and thin, highs and lows, joys and sorrows. God has been there...and knows.

April 13, 2019

Psalm 31:9-16

Kelsey Rorem, Associate Director, Campus Ministries

Throughout my journey of faith, the psalms have become one of my favorite places in scripture. In these pieces of poetry and song we are invited into every facet of the human experience—the highest highs and the lowest lows. Through the inclusion of such raw and vulnerable honesty in the canon of scripture, I believe God blesses and inhabits the scope of emotion that accompanies each of us. We see great celebrations of life and faith— “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever” (Psalm 118), or “Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth” (Psalm 100). But we also encounter places like Psalm 31—a declaration of great sorrow, pain, and loneliness. What a gift that the Bible includes both ends of the spectrum!

Psalm 31:9-16 gives us permission to be present with our experiences without the pressure to buck up amid places of deep sorrow or confusion. As I read these words, I am immediately transported to painful seasons in my life. Those spaces where I struggled to pray or even believe that God was present to my current reality. And you know what? Sometimes the most faithful thing we can do is to cry out in lament, holding our pain before God, knowing that some situations lack easy answers or ways forward.

Friends, we are on the brink of Holy Week. And as I think about Jesus, I can imagine him similarly finding comfort in these words in his final days. During this last week of Lent, I pray that the words of Psalm 31 are an invitation to us. An invitation to be present to our own pain, as well as the pain of Jesus.

*“Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress;
my eyes grow weak with sorrow,
my soul and body with grief.” (Psalm 31:9)*

April 14, 2019 - Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Stephanie Lindblom, Special Education Major, Class of 2019

As I read this passage, I was struck by the picture that it paints of Christ's walk to the cross. These verses describe His relentless obedience to the Father's will amidst harsh mistreatment, alienation, and accusations. That willing obedience is so powerful. Christ is confident of the Lord's nearness to Him which gives Him the strength to confront the challenges placed before Him.

A friend recently shared with me the idea of every morning waking up and asking the Lord, "what are we doing today?" I was challenged by the word "we," and it got me thinking about how I view my day, my week, and really, my future. When my alarm goes off in the morning, am I so quick to launch into my to-do list and everything that I have scheduled for the day that I forget to invite Jesus along for the ride? Or am I stopping, taking time to pause and open myself up to the Father's leading?

I've found it super intimidating asking that simple question because what if He brings something my way that I'm not a fan of! Nevertheless, we are called to be imitators of Jesus and walk in obedience. It brings me comfort to read phrases like "Because the Sovereign Lord helps me" (vs. 7), "He who vindicates me is near" (vs. 8), and "It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me" (vs. 9) because it means that I don't have to enter each day alone, but I have a Sovereign God walking alongside me!

As we approach Easter, a celebration of Jesus' sacrificial love and the ultimate example of obedience, my prayer echoes that of verse 4: *Lord, waken my ear to listen to your leading.*

April 15, 2019

Psalm 36:5-11

Mykylie Zelaya, Campus Ministries Graduate Assistant; MDiv Student, Class of 2021

Sometimes it can be difficult to remember that the Lord sustains us. It can be particularly difficult in hard or spiritually dry times. It does not always feel like God is present with us and unfortunately, faith is not always lived out on the mountaintops.

The first time I hit a truly life-changing low point in my faith, I was incredibly concerned with somehow trying to hide my emotions and struggles from God. I didn't want God to see me at my lowest. And although I knew somewhere deep down that it wasn't true, I felt as though I needed to be a certain way before I interacted with God in any intentional way. A dear professor reminded me in that season that God can handle whatever I am feeling. With that shift in perspective, I was able to give the hurt and heartbreak I was feeling to God and begin to heal.

Psalm 36:5-11 reminds us that God cares deeply about us and all that God has created. God's love can reach us and meet us no matter where we are, and we can "take refuge in the shadow of God's wings" (V. 7). God can reach us on the mountaintops and in the depths. God sustains people and animals. God gives us what we need and meets us where we are. This is worth rejoicing over!

In this Lenten season, I encourage you to be brave enough to give God all of yourself, whether that is joy, gratitude, or praise; depression, anger, or fear. Because God's love reaches everyone and everything regardless of where we are. God, and God's love, is big enough to handle all of us, in every season, including this one.

April 16, 2019

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Erin Rooney, Undergraduate Certification Advisor, School of Education

Sometimes Scripture comes at us like a puzzle that doesn't have all the pieces; it's composed of sentences we read again and again, eyes straining to glean some sort of wisdom. I realized this process was limiting – I was trying to add structure to something that maybe never needed it.

It's normative in the culture and society of Western Christianity to seek to bring structure and greater meaning as we journey through our faith. Not to mention, most of us want to find the pathways in life that bring us the most success, be it financially, vocationally, or relationally. We want to be wise, but perhaps more importantly, we want others to see that we are wise. In this great pursuit, however, we contribute to existing standards that put humanity on a pedestal, a kind that not everyone can reach. If one's body or mind doesn't function quite the same as the "norms," if they are "too young" or "too old," if their job, Instagram, or skin color doesn't take on the look of the privileged, then they are dehumanized. It may happen overtly, through segregation and inaccessible spaces, or it may be unconsciously numbing, like micro-aggressions, the dismissing of their ideas, or not inviting them to the table because they are "just a little off."

Where does our wisdom need to be shamed? Where do the foolish need to be given the mic to share their story? Consider this: are we willing to follow the wisdom of God into the unexpected places, through the unexpected people? Will we hear the experiences of God from those we have deemed the weak, the foolish, and the lowly, even if it means laying down the human standards that we use to project to others that we are somehow the best?

April 17, 2019

John 13:21-32

Ashley Kortman, Event Coordinator, Conference Services

When reading John 13:21-32, I could not help but question the reasoning behind Jesus' actions. Why did Jesus feel compelled to tell Judas that he was going to betray Jesus? When we watch movies or read books, we are not interrupted in the middle of the story with a scene where the protagonist confronts the antagonist and admits that they know exactly what they are going to do. Instead they just let it play out. So why do we see it here?

The truth is Jesus' response was out of obedience. When confronting Judas, Jesus released Judas to go out and commit the betrayal. Not because Jesus was tolerable of this sin, but because this was what God was using to get Jesus to the cross. Jesus needed Judas to betray Jesus in order to fulfill the calling to the cross. Jesus simply ushered Judas to go, to betray, as an act of obedience to God. Judas was not obeying God, but Jesus knew that God would use Judas' sin to lead Jesus to the cross- the ultimate act that will erase our sin and bridge the gap between us and God.

During this season of Lent, I pray that we can all remember that without Jesus' obedience the cross would not have been fulfilled. Today may you reflect on your obedience during this time and remember that God is proud of the commitment you have made. If you are struggling, keep going. If you are doing alright, encourage those around you. But overall, let us be thankful for the vital obedience that Jesus committed to for us.

April 18, 2019

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14

Tabitha Villaneuva, Latreia Core Team; Apparel Design and Fashion
Merchandising Majors, Class of 2020

When I think of the covenant God made with the house of Israel after leading them out of Egypt, I see how it points us forward to the new covenant we have now. Before they needed a sacrificial lamb to set them apart as God's chosen people and make them right with God. It was to the point where they needed to strike lamb blood across their door frame to avoid death. It was temporary, imperfect, and now obsolete because the new covenant was put into place by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now we are set apart by the sacrificial lamb, Jesus. This is amazing grace. That God worked throughout generations in messy, reluctant people, so that we may have the confidence to boldly approach God. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Jeremiah 31:34).

The bitterness and solemnity of the last meal together in Egypt was a remembrance of the bitter time spent in slavery and the haste of preparing for what God held next for them. As Matthew Henry reflected, "Christ will be sweet to us if sin be bitter." So today let's embrace how sweet it is to trust in Jesus and be expectant of how our deliverer is preparing us for future glories.

April 19, 2019 - Good Friday

Psalm 22

Nate Hoover, School of Theology Office Manager and SoulCare Assistant Director

Five days before Christmas 2017, our 18-month-old son Emerson died unexpectedly. He was perfectly healthy, and there is no known cause of death. I can accept that this loss and grief is part of my story, but I'm still having trouble accepting that my son is gone. "Why, God?" has been my consistent and consistently unanswered question. I can imagine the grief of Mary, the mother of Jesus, watching her son die on a cross. "Why, God?" Jesus had given hope and healing to so many—why was God allowing him to die at the hands of the Roman and Jewish authorities? Soon after Jesus was born, King Herod had all young children around Bethlehem killed, but Jesus and his parents escaped to safety in Egypt (Matthew 2:16–18). How many bereaved parents cried out, "Why, God?" And now, thirty years later, Mary witnessed the fulfillment of Herod's intent: her innocent son killed by authorities. How many parents today cry out, "Why, God?" when their children die because of sickness, malnourishment, violence, or accident?

It is easy for us, who have the Gospels, to understand Good Friday through the lens of Easter. We have Easter hope and know that the resurrection of Jesus is proof of God's victory over death. This is at the core of the Christian faith. On that first "Good" Friday, however, there was no hope of Jesus's resurrection. His death was not considered redemptive. His death was the end of hope in the Kingdom of God he had proclaimed. God had not protected him or saved him. The authorities had won. Death, as always, had the final say.

God could have redeemed humanity from sin and death with a thought. But God chose solidarity with humans through death. "I will not share you with death, so I will share death with you." Jesus did not pretend to die—he really died. The redemption of resurrection comes through a real death. The joy of resurrection comes through the pain and grief of death. The writer of Ecclesiastes says that "the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning" (7:4). This does not mean we should take a morbid view of existence. Rather, it is to recognize that God does not deliver us *away from* death but delivers us *through* death. Easter is not a celebration of joy without grief, but joy through grief. Read Psalm 22 again and consider how the writer suffers before being able to rejoice in deliverance.

I might never have my Good Friday "Why, God?" answered, and the joy of Easter still seems a long way off. But *through* Good Friday comes Easter; *through* grief comes joy; *through* death comes resurrection. I encourage you to meditate on these things. And amidst the joy of Easter Sunday, please remember those in your community who grieve, for whom rejoicing in resurrection may not be easy after experiencing the death of a loved one. God bless you and keep you.

April 20, 2019 - Holy Saturday

1 Peter 4:1-8

Jenisa Barr, Program Coordinator, Art Department



“A Rock in the Flood”
(Graphite and watercolor on mulberry paper)

April 21, 2019 - Easter Sunday

John 20:1-18

Lisa Ishihara, University Chaplain, University Ministries

What?!? Jesus is gone?!? That can't be?!? Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and couldn't believe what she saw. The disciples found the cloth and linens, but Jesus was nowhere to be found. Sometimes it seems easier to look back and say, "Didn't they get it?" But then I pause and realize, I think that there are times that I don't get it either or I forget that Jesus really did rise on the third day, conquered death and invites us into this resurrection life.

My life is so full at times and I get caught up in my own plans. Sometimes I don't realize that I'm trying to accomplish them in my own strength. In a way a part of me is probably doing it apart from the life-giving, resurrection power that God wants to freely give me... maybe this is on accident, maybe unconsciously, maybe on purpose at times.

At other times, life feels really hard, uncomfortable, unknown and uncertain. Maybe you can relate, or maybe there is another season you are going through, maybe a time of trial, doubt, grief, mourning or maybe celebration, joy, flourishing and thriving.

Wherever you are at today, God sees you. God is with you in your suffering, just as Jesus suffered on the cross. God is with you in your grieving, mourning and loss, just as the Father watched His son die. God is with you in joy and new life, just as Jesus resurrected and conquered death, inviting us into this life with God. There is hope! It is this deep love of God that enfolds us. You are worth this sacrificial love. You are valuable and invited daily into this resurrection-empowered life.

May your faith increase, may you be reminded you are not alone, and may you be encouraged today that "Christ is Risen!" "Truly, He is Risen!" "Peace be with you!" Amen.