The background of the poster features three dark grey crosses of varying heights on a grassy hill. Behind the crosses is a large, stylized sunburst with rays emanating from a central point. The sky is filled with soft, purple and yellow clouds. The overall color palette is dominated by purples, yellows, and greys.

The Season of Lent

St. John's United Methodist Church

130 Tom Hall Street

Fort Mill, SC 29715

Praying.

Fasting.

Almsgiving.

*...to be Christ to all people by living out God's call
to love, serve, and transform the world.*

Ash Wednesday - February 18, 2026

Joel 2:12-13 NIV

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

These solemn words, often spoken on Ash Wednesday, mark the beginning of the Lenten journey toward Easter. The ashes are traced in the shape of a cross on our foreheads, reminding us of our own mortality.

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of a forty-day journey toward the cross and the empty tomb. Throughout scripture, ashes symbolize mortality and repentance. Ashes confront us with our mortality. They remind us that life is fragile, time is limited and we are deeply in need of God's grace.

“Even now”, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love...

Ash Wednesday is also about return! Throughout the prophet Joel, does not say, come back when you have fixed yourself. He says, “Return to me with all your heart.” The call is not merely outward ritual but inward transformation: **“rend your heart not your garment.”**

Therefore, Lent invites us to examine our hearts, confess our sins, put away distractions, and re-center our lives on Christ.

When David cried out in Psalm 51, “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” he modeled true repentance, not shame that drives us away from God, but surrender that draws us near.

As we wear these ashes on our foreheads, may it always be a symbol, even in repentance, that the cross is present. Even in confession, grace is near. Lent begins with humility and it moves us toward hope.

Prayer: Gracious and merciful God, as we begin this season of Lent, we confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed. We have wandered. We have neglected your presence. We have trusted in ourselves more than in You. Create in us clean hearts, O God. Renew a right spirit within us. As ashes mark our foreheads, mark our lives with humility, repentance and renewed devotion. Draw us closer to the cross of Christ and prepare our hearts for the joy of resurrection.

submitted by Pastor Karen Radcliffe

Thursday, February 19, 2026

The Heart of Lent

Lent is an invitation to return to what matters most. At its heart are three tenets: **prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.**

Prayer draws us closer to God. It can be as simple as five quiet minutes each morning, a short daily Scripture reading, or a whispered prayer throughout the day.

Fasting helps us refocus. When we give something up — a favorite food, social media, or even negative speech — we let that space remind us of our need for God.

Almsgiving turns our faith outward. Acts of generosity, service, and kindness shape our hearts to look more like Christ's.

Lent isn't about spiritual perfection. It's about making room — room for repentance, renewal, and deeper love — as we journey toward Easter.

Prayer:

Lord, guide us in prayer, discipline us in fasting, and grow generosity within us, that our hearts may be ready for Easter joy. Amen.

Friday, February 20, 2026

A Lenten Devotion: Hope While We Wait

Scripture:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,
“plans to give you hope and a future.” — Jeremiah 29:11

Jeremiah’s promise was spoken to people living in exile, not comfort. It reminds us that God’s plans are at work even when we feel far from where we want to be. Lent invites us to sit honestly in that space of waiting—trusting that God is present, even when the future feels unclear.

As we journey toward the cross, we learn that hope is not found in rushing ahead, but in returning our hearts to God. The same God who promises a future also walks with us through the wilderness.

Prayer:

God of hope,
Help us trust your plans
even when we do not yet see them.
Draw our hearts back to you this Lent,
and anchor us in the promise
of the future you are preparing. Amen.

Submitted by Beth Meador

Saturday, February 21, 2026

Lent: Becoming Instruments of Peace

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”
~Matthew 5:9

I recently heard the Prayer of St. Francis recited in a television series and it immediately reminded me of how often I fall short as a Christian. The director of the series was trying to bring a group of people of differing views and opinions together for a moment of personal reflection. The point was to set aside petty differences and focus on what was really important and in the TV show, they were at the bedside of a dying mother.

The Prayer of St. Francis doesn’t begin with what we want from God, but instead, what we are willing to become: “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.”

Lent invites us to surrender ourselves into God’s hands. It means letting go of our need to dominate, defend, or be right, and instead allowing God’s love to move through us. The prayer names the places where the world, and our hearts, are fractured: hatred, injury, despair, darkness. Lent dares us to look honestly at those places without turning away.

This prayer does not ask us to fix the world by our own strength. It asks us to show up faithfully, trusting that God can bring love out of hatred, pardon out of injury, and hope out of despair. So as we go through this season of Lent, may we have the courage to ask God to shape us into people through whom His peace can flow. Then ask God to show us where He is inviting us to be an instrument rather than the center and where He might be calling us to bring love, pardon, and hope this Lent.

Prayer: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Strip away what blocks your grace in me, so that my life may echo your mercy. Use even my weakness to reflect your peace. Amen.

submitted by R.W. Edmondson

Monday, February 23, 2026

Lenten Devotion: Returning to the Heart

Scripture: “Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” — Joel 2:12

Reflection

Lent is not about proving how strong or disciplined we are. It’s about honesty. God’s invitation is not to perfection, but to return—again and again—with our whole heart. We come as we are: distracted, tired, hopeful, resistant, faithful, unsure.

In this season, we slow down long enough to notice what pulls us away from God and from love of neighbor. We ask gentle but brave questions:

What am I clinging to that keeps me from freedom?

Where have I grown numb instead of compassionate?

What would it look like to trust God a little more here?

Repentance in Lent isn’t shame-driven. It’s love-driven. It’s the turning of the heart toward the One who already longs for us. God does not wait with crossed arms, but with open hands.

Prayer

God of mercy,

I return to you—not because I have it all together, but because I don’t.

Search my heart with gentleness.

Name in me what needs healing, and release what I no longer need to carry.

Teach me how to walk these days with humility, with courage, and with hope.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Amen.

submitted by Adriane Starnes

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

Courage to Step Forward

Joshua 1:7–9

Lent invites us into a quieter, more honest season—a time to notice the fears we carry and the places where the path ahead feels uncertain.

This is where we meet Joshua, standing on the edge of something new after Moses’ death, unsure of what comes next. Into that uncertainty, God speaks clearly: **“Be strong and courageous.”**

God does not call Joshua to courage because the road will be easy or because he feels ready. God calls him to courage because of one promise: “The Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Courage is not about confidence—it is about trusting God’s presence.

At Epiphany, Pastor Karen placed stars in our hands with a word for the year. My word was courage. Like the star that guided the magi, this word has become a reminder that God’s light shines most clearly when the way forward feels uncertain. As Lent unfolds, that star continues to guide me, calling me to take faithful steps even when I don’t have the whole map.

This season invites us to practice that kind of courage—letting go, telling the truth, and trusting God one step at a time. May we move forward not without fear, but with trust, holding fast to the promise that God goes with us wherever we go.

Prayer: God of light and promise, give us courage this Lent—not because we are strong, but because you are with us. Guide our steps and lead us forward in trust. Amen.

submitted by Mallory Capps

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Lenten Devotion: “Bloom Where You Are Planted”

Scripture: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God; if anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.”
— 1 Peter 4:8–11 (NIV)

Reflection

Lent is a season of reflection, renewal, and redirection — a time when God calls us to pause and let His grace nurture our hearts. The phrase **“Bloom where you are planted”** reminds us that spiritual flourishing doesn’t depend on being in ideal conditions, but on being rooted in God’s love right where we are.

Peter’s message here is deeply practical. He doesn’t invite believers to wait for better circumstances, more recognition, or a more welcoming environment. Instead, he calls us to love deeply, serve faithfully, and speak graciously — to live fruitfully in the present soil God has placed us in.

Like a plant that draws nourishment from its roots, we are anchored in Christ, receiving strength to grow and bear fruit — even in seasons of difficulty or dryness. Lent reminds us that God can bring new life out of barren ground. The soil you stand in now — your family, workplace, church, or community — is the very place where God invites you to bloom.

Wednesday, February 25, 2026 (Continued....)

To “Bloom” During Lent Means:

- Love deeply.
- Let forgiveness, understanding, and compassion flow freely. Love is the water that keeps your roots nourished during Lent.
- Serve faithfully.
- Whether your gifts are visible or small, use them with joy. Service transforms ordinary soil into sacred ground.
- Speak with grace.
- Your words can refresh weary souls. Speak encouragement, truth, and hope.
- Depend on God’s strength.
- Flowers don’t strain to grow—they simply respond to the sun. Let your growth come through God’s sustaining grace, not striving alone.

Prayer

Loving God,
In this Lenten season, help me to bloom where You have planted me. Teach me to love deeply, serve humbly, and speak graciously. When the ground feels dry or hard, water my spirit with Your presence. May my life bring glory to You in every word and act of love. Amen.

Lenten Challenge

Identify one simple way you can share love or serve someone where you already are — at home, at work, in your community or here at St. John’s in an area that is new to you.

Now, it is your time for you to ‘bloom’.

submitted by Minda Siebert

Thursday, February 26, 2026

Lamentations 3:22–23 “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

We live in a loud world these days. As a parent, I often feel overwhelmed by anxiety and the quiet pressure to be perfect while holding down the fort for my family. And as if motherhood is not stretching enough on its own, the world around us, filled with social media, division, and constant comparison, only makes it harder to move through each day with peace. By the end of the day, I can feel how much that noise has crowded my heart.

I am guilty of listening to those loud voices. The whispers of perfectionism. The measuring of my worth by how much I can accomplish in a single day. Striving to do more and be more often leaves me depleted and distracted from what truly matters.

When my mind is overtaken by the heaviness of motherhood or the pressure to be society’s version of perfect, I begin to miss the small things God is inviting me to notice. The quiet morning light. The laughter of my child. The Legos crashing to the floor. The sacredness of ordinary routines. Even the sticky fingerprints, the overflowing laundry baskets, and the little frustrations that try to steal my peace lose their power when I remember that they do not define me in God’s eyes. They are small in light of His mercy.

That is why His new mercies matter so deeply. They are a fresh start every single day, a gracious gift that allows me to reset, refocus, and return to what truly matters. A reminder to put the phone down, look up, notice what is real, and smile at the gift God has placed right in front of me. As the younger generation might say, maybe it is time to “go touch some grass.”

Thursday, February 26, 2026 (Continued.....)

That is why I return to these words from Lamentations.

In the middle of sorrow and wreckage, we are reminded that God’s love does not cease. His mercy does not run dry. Every single morning, it begins again.

Those words feel like a deep breath. My son and I wrote them out on a piece of paper, drew a picture, and hung them on our refrigerator. Each morning, as we pass through the kitchen, they remind me that God’s mercy meets us before the noise of the day begins.

They call me back to the center of what life, motherhood, and family are really about. Not perfection. Not performance. But faithfulness. Faithfulness is trusting that God will steady my worries, soften my heart, and renew my strength each day. When I allow fear and anxiety to drown out His mercies, I miss the opportunity to place my faith back in His hands and receive the grace He is already offering. Sometimes I think God leaves us little sticky notes throughout the day, small and quiet moments of grace. But if we do not slow down and look around, we can easily miss them.

When I place my trust in Him, I am freed from the loud expectations of the world. I do not have to become the version of myself that culture demands. I only need to become the version God is shaping through His grace.

As I write this, I am days, maybe even hours, away from bringing another little life into our family. I know it will come with sleepless nights and moments where I feel stretched thin. But I trust that the same God who has carried me this far will meet me in that season too. His mercies will be new in the newborn days, just as they are now.

Thursday, February 26, 2026 (Continued.....)

Each morning, when I wake with my coffee and watch the sun rise, I am reminded that the day is new. His mercies are new. I can release yesterday's shortcomings and begin again. Not striving, but trusting. Not overwhelmed, but anchored in His faithfulness.

A Prayer

Gracious God,

In a world that feels loud and demanding, quiet our hearts. When we are overwhelmed by expectations and weighed down by comparison, remind us that Your steadfast love never ceases. Help us release yesterday's worries and receive the mercy You have prepared for us today.

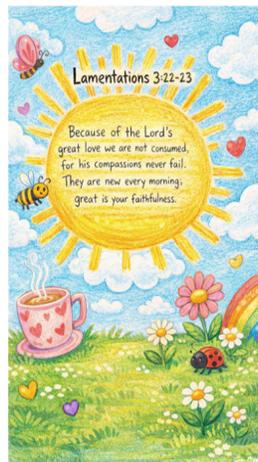
Teach us to notice the small gifts You place before us, the morning light, the laughter in our homes, the meals on our table, the ordinary moments that shape our lives. When fear and heaviness begin to rise, draw us back to the center of Your faithfulness. Steady our hearts. Renew our strength. Anchor us in Your grace.

As we walk through this next season, help us slow down, trust You more deeply, and rest in the promise that Your mercies are new every morning.

Great is Your faithfulness.

Amen.

submitted by Taralynn McNitt DeTombeur



Friday, February 27, 2026

What the Lord Requires

Scripture: Micah 6:6–8 “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Devotion: When I read Micah's question, What does the Lord require of you? I feel frustration more than comfort. I see many people who claim faith but do not live it out in meaningful ways. In a world filled with injustice and oppression, performative belief can feel empty. Micah reminds us that God has never been impressed by appearances. God cares about how faith shows up in daily life.

The part of this verse that challenges me most is the call to walk humbly with God. Humility asks for a lowliness of heart, letting go of the need to be important, right, or acknowledged. As a teacher, I work hard and care deeply, and I feel discouraged when my efforts go unnoticed. I want to be seen. Yet humility reminds me that I am not alone in doing good work. Many teachers and staff serve faithfully every day, often without recognition, and their work matters just as much.

Walking humbly also means choosing compassion over ego, even with myself. When I make mistakes, I am learning to respond with grace instead of self-criticism. This Lent, Micah calls me to a quieter faith, one that serves without applause and trusts that God sees what others may not.

Prayer: God, during this season of Lent, teach me to walk humbly with you. Help me serve quietly, love deeply, and trust that you see my faithfulness. Amen.

submitted by Sarah Ochoa-Hughey

Saturday, February 28, 2026

In 1998 when I was in sixth grade, my family moved from my hometown of Erie, Pennsylvania to Salem Virginia. The move was hard especially for my middle school self who didn't want to be uprooted from where I grew up. A year later, I had friends and became an active member at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church. For Palm Sunday, several teens were asked to sing a verse of Psalm 22 in between the first and second reading. I was asked to solo verse three in front of the congregation. Below is the entire version of the Psalm that was sung.

Psalm 22: 8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24

Refrain: My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?

Verse 1: All who see me scoff at me; they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads; "He relied on the Lord, let him deliver him, let him rescue him, if he loves him."

Verse 2: Indeed many dogs surround me, a pack of evil doers closes in around me. They have pierced my hands and my feet; I can count all my bones.

Verse 3: They divided my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots. But you, O Lord, be not far from me. Oh my help, hasten to aid me.

Verse 4: I will proclaim your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise you; "You who fear the Lord, praise him; all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to him.

The first three verses have a very gloomy feel to them. There are times in our lives where things do not go our way and the cross is too heavy to bear. When we are at our weakest, we often feel lost and hopeless. However, if we turn to God and ask for help, he will lighten the load. The final verse shows that after we ask for help, we should express and share as much joy as possible. This Psalm truly shows the progression from Good Friday to Easter Sunday.

Heavenly Father,
Please be with me as I journey through life and this Lenten season. Please be there to listen when I ask for help, so that I can give the glory back to you. In your name we pray. Amen.

submitted by Ashley Helms

Monday, March 2, 2026

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." — Psalm 51:10 (NRSV)

Lent is a season of reflection. It is a time when we pause and honestly look at our hearts. Psalm 51 was written as a prayer of repentance — a cry out to God for forgiveness and renewal. David doesn't ask God to simply adjust his behavior. He asks for something deeper: a clean heart. During Lent, we are invited to do the same.

We live in a world full of distractions, noise, and pressure. It's easy for our hearts to become cluttered with worry, pride, jealousy, anger, or fear. Sometimes we don't even notice how far we've drifted from the peace God wants for us. Lent gently calls us back.

As Methodists, we believe in God's transforming grace — grace that doesn't just forgive us but continues to shape us into who God created us to be. When we pray, "Create in me a clean heart," we are trusting that God is not finished with us. We are trusting that God can renew, restore, and reshape us.

Lent is not about shame. It is about surrender. It is about making space for God to work within us. When we give something up, spend more time in prayer, or serve others more intentionally, we are opening the door for God to create something new in us. And the good news is this: God always answers a sincere prayer for a clean heart. As we journey toward the cross and look ahead to Easter morning, may we allow God to renew our spirits and prepare us for resurrection hope.

Prayer:

Gracious and loving God,
During this holy season of Lent, we come before You with humble hearts. Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us. Forgive us for the ways we have fallen short. Help us turn away from distractions and draw closer to You. Shape us by Your grace. Teach us to love more deeply, serve more faithfully, and trust You more fully. As we walk the road toward the cross, remind us that Your mercy is greater than our mistakes. Prepare our hearts for the joy of Easter morning. We surrender ourselves to You.

In the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen.

submitted by Abigail Edmondson

Tuesday, March 3, 2026

GIVING UP OR GIVING BACK?

“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” Hebrews 13:16.

What are you giving up for Lent? Chocolate, sweets, shopping? At the beginning of every Lenten season, we ask one another that question. Often we give up something that we consider a real sacrifice to commemorate Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness before He gave us the ultimate sacrifice. It is true that Lent is the time to reflect on that sacrifice and what it means in our lives.

But lately there seems to be more emphasis on a positive approach to Lent that involves a sacrifice of a different kind. The sacrifice of our time, our talents and our treasure in service to others. Isn’t that at the heart of Jesus’ life and ministry? Not what we can give up but what we can take on. Maybe in our search to be more Christlike that would be a more effective way to capture the spirit of Lent.

We are fortunate to be members of St. John’s. Our church provides many opportunities to make this kind of positive sacrifice as we serve one another, our community and our world.

This year let’s challenge one another to look for those opportunities.

What are you taking on for Lent?

submitted by Richard Stark

Wednesday, March 4, 2026

JESUS SPEAKS TO A MODERN WORLD

What makes a person successful? Is it intelligence, wealth, education, popularity or fame? The modern world suggests that all these factors play a part. Who do we lift up as role models in our society? Often politicians, sports figures and celebrities.

As we might expect, Jesus’ teachings have a different perspective entirely. Wealth, fame or celebrity are never mentioned. Instead, He offers as a guide to living a purposeful life the Beatitudes found in Mark 5:1-12.

In His Sermon on the Mount he singled out these groups:

“Blessed are the meek”

“Blessed are the merciful. . . and the pure in heart”

“Blessed are the peacemakers”

“Blessed are those who are persecuted. . .for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”

The recent appearance in our community of the Buddhist monks as they continued on their “March for Peace” was inspirational. They are living out the teachings of Jesus for all of us to witness.

“Blessed are the peacemakers”.

submitted by Nancy Stark

Thursday, March 5, 2026

Lenten Meditation

Joshua 1:9 — "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Have you ever felt like you are not experiencing God's presence at times? I think we all feel that way at some point in time. There are instances when I look around and ask "Where is God when something bad happens". Then when something wonderful happens, I forget to think about God at all and just accept that it happened. The final phrase from the scripture above states that "God is with us wherever we go." It reminds me that we should be open to the understanding that God is **ALWAYS PRESENT** in our lives. We need to accept that God is that soft voice in our head that tries to console us when the bad times occur as well as celebrate with us when there are good times. This only works if we are listening for God and not shutting him out. For me, this is not the easiest thing to do, so that is something I have to work on all the time.

Dear Lord, help me keep in mind and remember that you are always there and to listen to that soft voice in my head for all experiences, both good and bad.

Amen

submitted by Rick Diak

Friday, March 6, 2026

Most biblical scholars state Lent started in the 4th century AD. It is not mentioned in the Bible, but is known as the 40 days of preparation before Easter, a season Christians have used to fast, repent, or give up something to refocus their hearts on Jesus as Easter approaches.

Lent isn't about the practice itself of "giving up" something. It's about what it points us toward. I learned that lesson well last year. What if instead of choosing to give up, you are forced to give up something, to lose something, and have no control over the situation.

Last year at this time, Jim and I went through a horrible loss. A take away we couldn't fight. An imposed, indefinite "giving up of something" that we had no choice in. It changed what I had been, and who I was. We went through this together/separate, with friends and family/without them, screaming/silent. "Give it to God," "pray". I did. My problem is the taking it back. Always has been. I am a fixer, organizer, a leader at times, the energizer bunny - go fast go hard.

After many months, my feelings of thinking I could fix this changed. I knew only God could change this, and it would be His timing. So I changed my prayers, I quit taking it back, I worked on me instead of trying to knock down walls. I worked on my relationship with the Lord - just because you are a Christian you can't stop working on the relationship with Him.

It's been a year. We have had some answers to prayers. We continue to pray. I fight most days not to "pick back up the rocks and carry them" let God do that. Leave it with Him. Focus on Him. Trust Him.

Lord,
This Lent, these 40 days, every day, may we all know You will carry us, our problems, our rocks, if we will just lay them at your feet. Thank you for your mercy.

submitted by Joan Pate

Saturday, March 7, 2026

TASTE AND SEE THAT I AM GOOD.

The more intimately you experience Me, the more convinced you become of My goodness. I am the Living One who sees you and longs to participate in your life. I am training you to find Me in each moment and to be a channel of My loving Presence. Sometimes My blessings come to you in mysterious ways: through pain and trouble. At such times you can know My goodness only through your trust in Me. Understanding will fail you, but trust will keep you close to Me.

Thank Me for the gift of My Peace, a gift of such immense proportions that you cannot fathom its depth or breadth. When I appeared to My disciples after the resurrection, it was Peace that I communicated first of all. I knew this was their deepest need: to calm their fears and clear their minds. I also speak Peace to you, for I know your anxious thoughts. Listen to Me! Tune out other voices, so that you can hear Me more clearly. I designed you to dwell in Peace all day, every day. Draw near to Me, receive My Peace.



Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!

Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Psalm 34:8

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Colossians 3:15

For Reflection: John 20:19

From the devotional book titled “Jesus Calling” by Sarah Young.

Submitted by Jan Patterson

Monday, March 9, 2026

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” – Genesis 1:31

As I write this while currently in Grand Cayman, this verse feels less like ancient history and more like a living truth unfolding before my eyes. The quiet rhythm of the waves, the endless blue stretching beyond the horizon, and the soft white sand of Cemetery Beach all whisper the same message: very good. Creation still carries the fingerprints of its Creator.

I remember my friend Tom Vinson used to say you were never closer to God than in the Appalachian Mountains. I understood what he meant—the stillness, the height, the way the world seems to pause among the trees. But standing here in the Cayman Islands, watching sunlight dance across clear water, I can’t help but feel that nearness just as strongly, maybe even more. Not because one place is holier than another, but because God’s goodness fills all He has made. Genesis reminds me that beauty is not accidental. It is intentional, spoken into existence by a loving God who delights in His work—and in us. Wherever we stand, mountain peak or ocean shore, we are surrounded by reminders that His creation is still, wonderfully, very good.

submitted by Russ Williamson

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

“Here I Am, Send Me.” – Isaiah 6:8

In Isaiah 6:8, the Lord asks, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” Isaiah responds, “Here am I. Send me.” What makes this so powerful is that Isaiah had just expressed his own feelings of unworthiness. He was aware of his flaws and limitations, yet he chose obedience over insecurity.

Recently, I experienced this in my own life. I was presented with the opportunity to apply for a new position, but I hesitated. Self-doubt crept in. I questioned whether I was capable, whether I was ready, whether someone else might be better suited. But the thought kept returning: If not me, then who? So, despite my reluctance, I applied.

Since stepping into this new role, I have felt a deep sense of peace. There have been growing pains, learning curves, and moments where I still feel stretched. Yet through it all, I sense that the Lord led me here. The peace I feel confirms that obedience often comes before confidence.

How many times do our insecurities prevent us from taking that next step for the Lord? We wait until we feel fully prepared, fully confident, fully qualified. But God is not looking for perfection—He is looking for willingness.

Today, I encourage you: don’t let insecurity silence your calling. When the Lord prompts your heart, step forward in faith. Say with confidence and surrender,

“Here I am, Lord. Use me.”

submitted by Elisabeth Williamson

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

This year in 6th grade, school has been a little harder. In elementary school, we barely had any homework. Now, more is expected of you. Projects are due faster, tests are given after only having learned the material for a short time. We have more class periods to change between, and the teachers are stricter on grades.

In elementary school, I got straight As and it was easy. In fact, my brother got mad at me a little because I bragged about my good grades. But now, it’s been hard adjusting to the new environment of middle school. I thought it would be easy because my mom is a teacher and I already knew the lay of the land.

Early this school year, I was working on a project in science class. I hadn’t paid attention in class as much as I needed to and it turned out that I missed something VERY important in the instructions...the part of the project that gave me the most points. When I found out that I got a D on the project, I was really discouraged. I was mad at myself. I felt hopeless and frustrated. I may have screamed into a pillow.

But, my mother talked with me. We made a plan. I found a way to get my grade back up to an A. As Ms. Mallory asked me to write a devotional, I found this a little bit hard and looked for a scripture to base it off of. I found Deuteronomy 31: 6 and thought it was a good message:

”Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

When you feel discouraged and lonely, when you’ve messed up in a big way or a little way, you can know that God is on your side. He is there with you. I’m thankful for that and I hope that you remember that you are never alone. God is always there with you, no matter what.

submitted by William Isenhour

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Ephesians 4:31-32 & Matthew 6:14-15:

How does one forgive? How does one give their bitterness away?

The Bible says if you cannot forgive others, the Lord will not forgive your transgressions.

So easy to say and hard in practice. Or is it?

In the Bible it's said: forgiveness should be endless, or forgive seven times seventy...

Are you smarter than God? Are you better than God? Do you out think God?

We often speak of the man on the cross forgiven by Jesus. (I love that story) but what happened to the other man on the cross? Didn't Jesus die on the cross to forgive all our sins?

Forgiveness is like water for the soul... forgive everyday with 8 full glasses! I guess someone heard the parable... and just applied it differently.

I forgive all the people who have transgressed against me, I will not hold my bitterness. I give all my hatred and wanting to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Lord I know you have, yet I still need to say it out loud ... please forgive me.

submitted by Jim Wolfe

Friday, March 13, 2026

1 Peter 1:13

"Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

A long time ago I worked for a very liturgical church. Lent had many rules we had to follow. During the 40 days of Lent, we could have no flowers in the sanctuary. Also, during Lent the choir sang no songs that contained the word "Alleluia" as it was forbidden. We even took the children around the church just before Lent and buried the "Alleluias" in a safe place to be found on Easter. Usually, we placed the word "Alleluia" under the Altar which was a good hiding place.

Lent is a solemn time in which we remember the days Jesus spent fasting in the desert and being tempted by Satan. We remember his death on a cross and look forward to his resurrection at Easter. Many people used to give up a special food during this time to remind them of the fasting that Jesus did. The fast did not mean that you avoided all food, rather you could have only one meal a day after 3 PM. But those rules gradually were lifted and new ways to celebrate Lent emerged. Now the emphasis has been to take on something new such as reading the Bible each day, praying or reflection.

I admit I have never fasted except for perhaps a day. But I do try to do a new devotion and more Bible reading. It is a good thing I believe to remember the bad times or the down times in our lives. And it is good to give thanks to God and to our Christian friends for helping us through those times.

submitted by Elaine Cryderman

Saturday, March 14, 2026

Held in Love During the Hardest Seasons

Scripture:

Psalm 46:1

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

Hebrews 10:24–25

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together... but encouraging one another.”

Lent is often described as a wilderness season — forty days of reflection, repentance, and preparation. Yet for some of us, the wilderness is not symbolic. It is very real. It is the diagnosis, the loss, the uncertainty, the waiting, the prayers whispered through tears.

And still, even here, we are blessed.

In times of a hard challenge, God’s love does not weaken. It grows more visible. His love shows up in the friend who texts at just the right moment. In the church member who drops off a meal. In the worship song that steadies a trembling heart. In a sermon that brings you to tears. In the quiet reassurance that you are not walking this road alone. A supportive church is not just a place, it is the body of Christ alive and active. It is hands and feet. It is prayer spoken over you when you have no words left. During Lent, we remember that Jesus Himself walked the hardest road, carrying the cross surrounded by both suffering and love. Simon helped carry His burden. The women stood nearby. Even in His suffering, community mattered.

Saturday, March 14, 2026 (Continued.....)

Perhaps this season has revealed something precious to you: that God’s powerful love often arrives through people. Through family who sit with you in silence. Through friends who remind you of hope when yours feels thin. Through a church that refuses to let you disappear into isolation.

Challenge has a way of clarifying blessings. We begin to see that what sustains us is not our own strength, but God’s.

This Lent, instead of only asking, “What must I give up?” Perhaps we also ask, “Where have I seen God’s love holding me together?”

Give thanks for the church that surrounds you.

Give thanks for the family that steadies you.

Give thanks for friends who show up again and again.

Give thanks for a Savior whose love is stronger than any trial.

submitted by Bri Natoli

Monday, March 16, 2025

Psalm 51:10 - "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

As a preschool teacher, I clean up messes all day — paint on tables, glue on fingers, toys scattered everywhere. As a mom of two, the cleaning continues at home. But the hardest messes aren't the visible ones. They're the impatient words when I'm tired. The sharp tone after a long day. The sigh when someone calls "Mom?" one more time.

Little eyes are always watching — in my classroom and in my kitchen. They see how I handle frustration and whether I apologize when I get it wrong. And during Lent, this prayer feels especially honest:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God."

Not help me fix it.
Not help me try harder.
Create.

Just like my preschoolers can't fully clean up their own spills, I can't scrub my own heart spotless. I need God to do what only God can do.

"And renew a right spirit within me."

Not a perfect spirit — just a right one. A spirit quick to turn back to grace. A spirit willing to say, "I'm sorry," and "Let's try again."

Before the next lesson and the next load of laundry, this is my prayer:

God, clean what I cannot clean.
Renew what feels tired.
Create in me a clean heart — so the little hearts watching me learn what grace looks like.

Amen.

submitted by Janelle McBride

Tuesday, March 17, 2026

Joel 2:12–13 (NIV)

"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love..."

With our everyday busy lives, Lent invites us to slow down and look inward—to return to God with honesty, humility, and openness. It's not about doing more for God, but about making space for Him to shape our hearts. In this season, God doesn't ask us to put on a performance or show our devotion outwardly. Instead, He invites us to let Him into the deeper places—the worries we carry, the habits we cling to, the hopes we hesitate to name.

This is a season of returning. Lent isn't about perfection, but direction.

What is something you can add to your day to draw closer to God? It could be saying a short prayer, giving grace to some in a strained relationship, or noticing a place in your life where you feel distant from him. It might be starting your day with a moment of silence, pausing to pray during stressful moments, or doing a simple act of kindness for someone.

Prayer

Lord, You are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. Help me return to You with my whole heart. Reveal the places in me that need Your healing and renewal. Meet me in my ordinary moments, and draw me closer to Your presence. Walk with me through this season of Lent, and shape my heart to look more like Yours.

Amen.

submitted by Kristi Vandergriff

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

As the seasons change, I'm always reminded that God designed life to move in rhythms. Nothing can stay the same forever, yet seasons of change are often uncomfortable. We cling to familiar routines and relationships. We prefer certainty and want to know what tomorrow will look like. But seasons are not accidents and God is not surprised by the season each of us are in.

Whether you are grieving what has ended, waiting in uncertainty, or stepping into something new, He is present in all of it. He is in the space between prayer and answer, loss and restoration, and closed doors waiting for the next to open.

The uncertainty of change stretches us because we cannot see what God sees. We look for clarity, timelines and guarantees. Proverbs 3:5 reminds us, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." To lean into this trust is to place our full weight on Him - our fears, our questions, our unknowns and our doubts.

Waiting doesn't mean God is absent, and delay doesn't mean denial. Throughout Scripture, God worked Powerfully in the waiting and the waiting was not wasted. Sometimes uncertainty is where God is teaching us patience, forcing us to surrender and strengthening our trust.

When everything feels unclear, this remains true: God is faithful.
God is present. God is working.

submitted by Paige Harroff

Thursday, March 19, 2026

As someone who has not always partaken in the season of Lent, I am always in awe of the intentionality that comes with this time of year. I have witnessed many friends and family members give up worldly vices, make time for prayer, and commit acts of service with intent and purpose of strengthening their relationship with God. As my middle schoolers may describe it “for forty days, we’re locked in, for real for real”.

This season reminds me that it’s not just a time of “giving up” but “giving out”. A prime example of this in the scriptures is when the Apostle Paul chose to reject financial compensation from the Corinthian Church as he recognized his work was for God and to reach others, hence my “giving out” reference. In the scriptures, Paul says:

1 Corinthians 9:22d “I act weak to the weak, so I can recruit the weak. I have become all things to all people, so I could save some by all possible means.” **9:23** “All the things I do are for the sake of the gospel, so I can be a partner with it.”

The scriptures continue in which Paul highlights the importance of discipline and intentionality:

1 Corinthians 9:24: “Don’t you know that all the runners in the stadium run, but only one gets the prize? So run to win.” **9:25** : “Everyone who competes practices self-discipline in everything. The runners do this to get a crown of leaves that shrivel up and die, but we do it to receive a crown that never dies.” **9:26** “So now this is how I run—not without a clear goal in sight. I fight like a boxer in the ring, not like someone who is shadowboxing. **9:27** “Rather, I’m landing punches on my own body and subduing it like a slave. I do this to be sure that I myself won’t be disqualified after preaching to others.”

Thursday, March 19, 2026 (Continued.....)

These scriptures are a reminder to be intentional in our goals and actions during this season. Paul simultaneously not only gives up his financial rights but does so as a means of giving out to others and to glorify God. As we move into this time of Lent, I am hopeful that in our service and sacrifice, we stay intentional in our purpose and use this time to forge a stronger relationship with God and do all things in His name.

Prayer

“Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunity to serve in your name. As we begin this glorious time of lent, we ask that you help us stay focused and steadfast in our purposeful actions of service and sacrifice. May all we do be to the glory of your name.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen”.

submitted by Josh Honea

Friday, March 20, 2026

In a chapter captioned “True Fasting,” comes this promise from God:

“Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and He will say: Here am I.” Isaiah 58:9a

In the preceding verses, God has criticized those who complain that their fasting has not earned them God’s good grace. Yes, they fast, but do as they please, exploiting their workers and quarreling among themselves – not what God is calling for.

God is instead asking that we “loose the chains of injustice, ...set the oppressed free, ...share your food with the hungry, ...provide the poor wanderer with shelter,... and clothe the naked.” (Isaiah 58:6,7) When we honor God by honoring God’s children, God has promised to be present in our lives, through our own sorrow and struggles.

In Jesus’ parable contrasting the Pharisee and the tax collector, we are reminded that when the Pharisee boasts that he “fasts twice a week, and gives a tenth of all I get,” (Luke 18:12) the boasting is its own reward, but doesn’t draw him (or us) nearer to God.

This Lenten season is an opportunity to strengthen our connection with God through humble fasting, through quiet or anonymous acts of service, and through daily conversation with God as we reflect on scripture and pray.

Loving God, please search our hearts as we long to grow closer to you and strive to do what you have asked of us. We ask this in the name of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

submitted by Barbara Gaither

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Psalm 51 :10-12

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Psalm 51 is David’s prayer of repentance after one of the darkest seasons of his life. Instead of hiding from God, David runs to Him. These verses show us what true repentance looks like—not just sorrow for sin, but a deep longing for inner transformation.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God”

David doesn’t ask for a patched-up heart. He asks for a new one. The word create is the same word used in Genesis when God created the heavens and the earth. Only God can create something clean out of something broken.

Sometimes we try to fix ourselves—manage behavior, adjust habits, cover guilt. But God desires to do a deeper work. He doesn’t just modify; He renews. When we come honestly before Him, He begins the work of cleansing from the inside out.

When we screw up! God forgives. He not only forgives—He strengthens and steadies us up again.

When we fall, the enemy whispers, “Stay away.” But God invites us to come near. His mercy makes restoration possible.

Salvation is not meant to be endured; it is meant to be enjoyed. The joy of knowing we are forgiven, loved, and held by God is a strength to our souls.

submitted by Shawne Heeren

Monday, March 23, 2026

I enjoy reading history, especially church related history that includes how worship evolved over time, changes to liturgy and how everyday life was affected, even today.

Before clocks, townspeople in Europe who lived near a monastery or convent learned time based on the 7 hour schedule of chants by the monks or nuns. These began early morning and carried throughout the day and early evening, with Vespers (Ad Vesperas) around 5:45PM. Originally, the chant about 2:45PM was known as None (Ad Nonum). None also corresponded to the time that a break was taken for a midday meal. Legend says that the Abbot of one monastery grew too hungry that late in the afternoon and moved the None chant to midday which, for us, led to the midday term Noon.

In the case of Lent, there is the connection to scripture based on Jesus's time in the wilderness after his baptism by John. As the story is presented in Matthew, immediately following his baptism, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the Judean wilderness for 40 days of fasting and prayer. During this time, he was tempted by the devil, faced extreme physical weakness, and lived among wild animals while being ministered to by angels. This period served as preparation for his public ministry. Forty (40) is also the number of years the Israelites wandered in the desert.

Monday, March 23, 2026 (Continued.....)

In the 1400s when the plague was decimating Europe, the early Catholic church of Venice required ships and visitors to remain isolated for 40 days before entering the city. In addition, those who had contracted the plague or "Black Death", were determined to be free of the disease and allowed back in public if they survived the 40 day isolation. The Italian term used was "quaranta giorni", which translated is "forty days" and the root of the word "quarantine".

During this Lenten period I invite you to rid yourself of that which "plagues" you by spending time in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. And like Jesus, know that you are not alone, but in the presence of that which sustains you.

Selah,
Les Spencer

submitted by Les Spencer

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

Hebrews 10:24-25 — “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...” (ESV)

As we move deeper into Lent, let’s take an honest look at our faith. There aren’t tidy answers to these questions, but I would like us to consider a few during the Lenten season.

What are we doing about what we say we believe?

Are we in worship? When we are present, are we engaged in singing, praying, and listening? Or do we occupy a seat?

Our culture trains us to consume. Church isn’t a product. It’s a body. The question isn’t what are we getting out of the service, but whether we’re building anything up. Maybe we’re there on Sunday to strengthen our own faith. Or maybe we’re there to strengthen someone else’s. Either way, let’s be about the Father’s business.

If we move just one step closer to the path of the apostles these 40 days by being active, sacrificial, and invested in one another, what would 2026 look like for St. John’s?

How can we commit to serving our church, strengthening its people, and loving the community where God has planted us?

submitted by Justin Isenhour

Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Returning to the Quiet Place

Scripture: “Be still, and know that I am God.” — Psalm 46:10

Lent invites us into a quieter season—a time to slow our pace, soften our hearts, and listen more closely for God’s voice. In a world that prizes productivity and noise, stillness can feel uncomfortable. Yet again and again, Scripture reminds us that God often speaks most clearly when we pause.

Jesus Himself withdrew to lonely places to pray. He stepped away from crowds, expectations, and urgency to be with the Father. During Lent, we are invited to follow His example—not by doing more, but by creating space. Space to notice where we have grown weary. Space to confess what we carry. Space to remember that God’s love does not depend on our busyness or perfection.

As we journey through these forty days, may we resist the urge to rush ahead to Easter morning. Instead, let us linger in the wilderness, trusting that God meets us there. In stillness, we are reminded that we are not alone—and that even in quiet, God is at work.

Prayer:

Gracious God,
In this Lenten season, help us to slow down and listen.
Quiet the noise within us that keeps us from hearing Your voice.
Meet us in our waiting, our wondering, and our wandering.
Renew our spirits and draw us closer to You,
so that we may walk faithfully toward the cross
and joyfully toward the resurrection. Amen.

submitted by Lisa Henley

Thursday, March 26, 2026

Check Engine Light

On my way to work recently, my check engine light came on. Our cars are so smart, and communicate with us when they need attention. We take our car to our mechanic, who can read the codes and know exactly what to do to fix it. Problem solved.

I wish sometimes we as humans had check engine lights. Something that could tell the world "Hey, I am not going to tell you, but; I need love and attention". Even stopping to see if our own check engine light is on can be difficult to do sometimes. We can get focused on the world and the chaos in our lives and we don't notice that our, or someone we are interacting with, has a light that has come on to warn us to stop and care for ourselves. Thank Goodness we have the ultimate mechanic in God. He knows us, and knows our needs. He knows when the light is going to come on and we need service.

This Lenten season, what are you doing in your daily life to help you recognize the need for self-care in ourselves and others? What have you done to help yourself become more focused on your relationship with God, so you can feel his love and guidance through those "Check Engine Light" times? Turn your anxiety or internal "alerts" into prayer and letting God's peace be the "mechanic" that restores you.

Philippians 4:6-7 NLT

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

submitted by Jemma Hardinger

Friday, March 27, 2026

Ephesians 4:29

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

Christians should avoid corrupt, harmful or useless talk and instead speak words that build others up, encourage and bring grace, meeting the specific needs of the listener, making speech an act of ministry rather than destruction.

submitted by Melissa Morse

Saturday, March 28, 2026

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart...” - Joel 2:12

There is something tender about the word return. It assumes relationship and belonging. It assumes that even if we've wandered, we still have a place to come back to.

Lent begins not with condemnation, but with invitation.

In these forty days, we are not trying to impress God or prove our devotion. We are responding to grace that has already been extended to us. God's grace goes before us, long before we think to seek Him. Our desire to draw closer during Lent is itself evidence that God is already at work in us.

When Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days, He did not go to show off spiritual strength. He went in obedience and trust. He was hungry. He was tempted. He was vulnerable. The wilderness stripped away comfort and distraction. And in that quiet, difficult space, He chose repeatedly to trust the Father.

Lent offers us our own kind of wilderness.

For some, it's giving something up like chocolate, social media, unnecessary spending. For others, it may be adding something meaningful like daily prayer, Scripture reading, an act of service. But the point isn't the discipline itself. The point is what the discipline reveals.

When we remove something, we rely on, we often discover how quickly we reach for substitutes—control, busyness, approval, comfort. Beneath those habits is a deeper hunger. And that hunger is for God.

The prophet Joel says, “Rend your hearts and not your garments.” In biblical times, tearing one's garments was an outward sign of grief. Joel reminds us that God is after something deeper than appearances. God desires honest hearts.

Saturday, March 28, 2026 (Continued.....)

Lent asks gentle but important questions:
Where have I grown distracted?
Where have I become complacent?
Where is God inviting me to soften?

John Wesley spoke of holiness as love perfected, love of God and love of neighbor filling the heart. That kind of love doesn't grow accidentally. It grows when we allow the Holy Spirit to shape us, sometimes through discomfort, sometimes through conviction, always through grace.

Many of us would prefer to skip ahead to Easter morning. We want the celebration, the lilies, the Easter dinner. But the Christian story does not bypass the cross. It moves through it. And in our own lives, resurrection often comes on the other side of surrender.

Perhaps this Lent your wilderness is not something you chose. It may be illness, uncertainty, strained relationships, or quiet grief. If so, you are not walking alone. Christ has gone ahead of you into every barren place. He knows what it is to hunger, to ache, to wait. He remains faithful.

The promise of Lent is not that we will emerge perfect. The promise is that God meets us in the journey. When we return, even imperfectly, we are met with mercy, not rejection.

In these forty days, let us slow down. Let us pray honestly. Let us examine our hearts without fear. When we stumble, let us remember that God's grace is larger than our weakness.

May this season draw us gently back to the heart of God. May we arrive at Easter not just having observed Lent but having been quietly transformed.

submitted by Robyn Grant

Monday, March 30, 2026

“Grace for the Weary”

Scripture: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” — 2 Corinthians 12:9

Lent is a season that invites us to slow down and reflect. It draws our attention to what’s happening beneath the surface—our struggles, our worries, our impatience, and even the quiet doubts we don’t always speak out loud.

Many of us spend our days trying to hold everything together. We work hard, take care of others, manage responsibilities, and try to do what is right. We want to be dependable. We want to be strong. We want to be enough.

But sometimes we reach a point where we feel worn down. We may find ourselves thinking, I should be doing better, or Why do I feel so overwhelmed? Or maybe we whisper to God, I’m trying... but I’m tired.

Lent reminds us that we are not alone in that feeling.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul pleads with God to take away something painful in his life. Instead of removing it, God responds with a powerful truth:

“My grace is sufficient for you.” God does not say, “Try harder.” He says, “My grace will carry you.”

This is the heart of Lent. It is not about proving ourselves to God or striving for perfection. Lent is about surrender—recognizing that we cannot do life on our own and that we desperately need Jesus.

Sometimes we think of Lent as giving something up—certain foods, distractions, habits. Those things can be meaningful. But what if God is asking us to give up something deeper?

Monday, March 30, 2026 (Continued.....)

What if He is asking us to release the pressure to be perfect, the fear of failing, the need to control everything, or the constant voice of self-criticism?

Jesus did not go to the cross so we could live under guilt and exhaustion. He went to the cross to bring freedom, forgiveness, and peace.

Lent reminds us that Christ willingly carried the weight we could not carry. He walked to the cross knowing we would still struggle, still fall short, and still need His mercy.

So this season, let Lent be a time of returning—not to shame, but to grace. Not to striving, but to surrender. Not to fear, but to faith.

Because when we feel weak, God is still strong. And His grace will always be enough.

Prayer

Lord, during this season of Lent, help me surrender what I’m carrying. Remind me that Your grace is sufficient and Your strength is made perfect in my weakness. Draw me close to You and give me peace.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

submitted by Mandy Shamblin

Tuesday, March 31, 2026

It's Okay to Drop Stuff

Hebrews 12:1-2

In Epistle to the Hebrews it says to “lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely... and run with perseverance... looking to Jesus.”

Okay but honestly? Life already feels heavy.

Homework. Tests. Trying not to embarrass yourself. Group chats blowing up. Seeing everyone else look like they have it together. It's a lot.

And this verse says to drop the “weight.” Not just sin — but weight. Stuff that drags you down. That could be bad choices, yeah. But it could also be things like caring way too much what people think. Comparing yourself nonstop. Pretending you're fine when you're not.

Lent is kind of like a 40-day pause where you get to ask:
Why am I carrying this?

Maybe giving something up isn't just about candy or soda. Maybe it's taking a break from scrolling. Or not talking bad about yourself all the time. Or actually praying when you're stressed instead of just spiraling.

The verse says to look to Jesus. Not to the popular kid. Not to your GPA. Not to your follower count. Just Jesus.

You don't have to run the race perfectly. You just have to keep going. And you don't have to carry everything.

Prayer:

Jesus, help me let go of what's weighing me down. Help me focus on you instead of everything else. And give me strength to keep going, even when it feels like a lot. Amen.

submitted by Bryce Robertson

Wednesday, April 1, 2026

“The Lord Will Fight for You” Exodus 14:14

In the Book of Exodus we hear these words spoken to a frightened people standing at the edge of the Red Sea:

“The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

As a preschool teacher, I spend much of my day helping little ones solve problems. Tying shoes. Settling disagreements over blocks. Wiping tears. Encouraging them to use their words. Their struggles are big to them — even if they look small to the world.

As a mom of a teenager, the problems are different — but they are no less real. Now the tears are quieter. The pressures are heavier. The things I cannot fix feel greater. I cannot tie this stage up neatly with a bow.

And if I'm honest, I often want to fight every battle for them. But Lent reminds me that I am not the Savior. God is.

When the Israelites stood trapped between the sea and the army behind them, they panicked. Of course they did. But Moses told them to be still. Not because the situation wasn't serious — but because God was already at work. Being still does not mean doing nothing. It means trusting that God is doing something.

In this Lenten season, I am reminded to loosen my grip. To pray instead of panic. To trust instead of control. To remember that the same God who parted the sea fights for my children — and for me. I do not have to win every battle. I do not have to carry every fear. The Lord will fight for us. And sometimes the most faithful thing we can do is be still.

Prayer:

Faithful God, when I want to fix and control, teach me to trust. Fight the battles I cannot see. Guard my children. Guard my heart. And help me rest in the truth that you are already at work. Amen.

submitted by Suzanne Fisher

Thursday, April 2, 2026

Psalms 51:10 “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

Lent is a season of prayer and return. Not just a turn away from sin but turning back to God. Psalm 51 is the cry of someone who sees their own brokenness and wants to bring it to God. It is not polished but simply real.

We want the grace that God gives us exactly where we are at that moment. We don't clean ourselves up instead we come as we are and we trust that God is the one who will create clean hearts.

Lent reminds us that God who formed the world and created light out of darkness can reform our hearts.

Lent is not about punishment but more about renewal. As we move towards the cross, we remember that God does not turn away from our brokenness. He meets us there with mercy and love. The ashes of Lent are not the end of the story. They help prepare the soil for resurrection.

Merciful God,
You see us as we are and love us completely. Create in us clean hearts and renew right spirits within us. Where we are broken, bring us healing. If we are lost, bring us home. Shape us during this Lenten season into people who will reflect Your grace.

Amen.

submitted by Carrie Crocker

Friday, April 3, 2026

“Yet Even Now”

Joel 2:12-13

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,
“return to me with all your heart...
rend your hearts and not your garments.
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and merciful...”

Lent invites us to slow down and take an honest look at our hearts. Through the prophet in the Book of Joel, God says something full of hope: “Yet even now.”

Even now — in our distraction, our pride, our weariness — we are invited to return.

“Rend your hearts and not your garments” means God desires something deeper than outward signs. Lent isn't about appearances or spiritual performance. It's about allowing God to gently open what has grown hard inside us — fear, resentment, self-reliance, or anything that keeps us distant from Him.

And the One who calls us back is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Lent is not about shame. It is about return.

Prayer:

Gracious God, even now, draw us back to you. Soften our hearts, deepen our trust, and lead us into your steadfast love. Amen.

submitted by Katherine Burns

Saturday, April 4, 2026

The LORD's Prayer is beautiful, comforting, universal and a direct message from Our LORD. The LORD's Prayer is perfect. But sometimes, to make sure I am concentrating on all the words and meaning, I like to pray a different version.

Matthew 6:9-13 (NRSV)

"Pray then this way
Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come
Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one."

And other languages offer this prayer in another way:

The New Zealand Prayer Book:

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-Bearer, Life-giver.

Source of all that is and that shall be.

Father and Mother of all,

Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your commonwealth of peace and freedom

sustain our hope and come on earth.

With bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and for ever.

Amen

Thoughts and Prayers Collection

Human feelings are frail

The ways of the world are rugged.

Happiness is like a butterfly.

The more you chase it, the more it will elude you.

But if you turn your attention to other things,

It will come and sit softly on your shoulder.

submitted by Lizann Rex



*...to be Christ to all people by living out God's call
to love, serve, and transform the world.*