Monday, Feb. 8  
Isaiah 58:1-12

The prophet is proclaiming to the people God’s call and intent regarding the practice of fasting. The prophet is calling out those who claim to practice righteousness but instead are pursuing their own interests. They claim to be humble but are actually serving their own purposes and oppressing their workers. This is not the kind of fast to which God calls us. For true fasting is not done for ourselves or even for God. Rather true fasting is done for the good of others. This is God’s promise to us—when we share our bread with the hungry, house the homeless and cover the naked, then our light will shine forth like the dawn. God is not bargaining with us to see if we will obey. Rather it is by repairing the breach that we see again that God is already satisfying all our needs.

O God, may we be lights shining in the darkness so that all creation may be healed. Amen.

Tuesday, Feb. 9  
Psalm 51:1-17

“Have mercy on me, O God...” The psalmist cries out to God in the midst of despair over his sin, despair for broken relationships, particularly feeling distanced from God. Yet we hear through the psalmist’s despair, a confident hope in a God who is merciful. Even though the sin is grave, God is one who can be trusted. God is one who can create clean hearts, restore us to joy and sustain in us a willing spirit. When God does this, we are free to teach others God’s ways, to declare God’s praise with opened lips. Through this proclamation, sinners are invited to return to God. Even in the midst of our greatest transgressions, God can be trusted to bring about a new and right spirit within each of us. A life that was once crushed can now rejoice. For our God is merciful and full of steadfast love for all creation.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, for through your steadfast love I find forgiveness and freedom. Amen.
Ash Wednesday, Feb. 10  
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

On this day of ashes, we are reminded that we are dust. In many communities we receive ashes in the form of a cross on our forehead while remembering our humanness and God’s claim on our lives and future. We then go out into the world with this symbol of our faith prominently marked on our foreheads, having just heard Jesus’ gospel words urging us to give alms, pray and fast in secret. Hmmm ... As we begin our Lenten journey our hearts are turned again to seek God’s mercy and justice in the world and in our lives. We venture on this journey not to receive the accolades of the world, but rather to embody more fully the righteousness that only God can give. So as we remember and claim our humanness, we again turn away from the praise that the world gives and instead cling to God’s promises for all creation.

We cling, gracious God, to your promises made manifest to us through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday, Feb. 11  

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit,” begins our gospel reading. Fresh from the Jordan River and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove, Jesus begins his public ministry and a new life born of his baptism. Immediately, this new life encounters some peril in the temptation to run away from the very Spirit which has called and sent Jesus into the world. But isn’t baptism a gift? Isn’t this supposed to be a life-giving, transforming, God-claiming experience? And yet, when the Spirit is active, the devil also takes special notice. So while we rejoice and pray for the Spirit’s activity in our lives, we know that sometimes it means we must be alert and prepared to go against the forces of evil. We pray for the Spirit’s protection and care as we encounter the perils of this world, yearning for God’s mercy and presence in all we do.

Holy Spirit, guide our days and stay close to us when temptations challenge our faithfulness. Amen.
Friday, Feb. 12

“If you are the Son of God ...” The tempter tries to thwart Jesus’ mission by calling into question his very identity. While Jesus remains clear in his mission and identity as the Son of God, how often does a voice of uncertainty threaten or inhibit our mission as children of God? How often do we forget our identity, drawn by the powers of this world which seek to give us false glory and power? How easy it is to seek the admiration and accolades of the kingdoms of this world while ignoring our core identity as a child of God, which was showered upon us in our baptism. How eagerly we look to the world to provide for our daily bread rather than trusting that our God will be faithful as God has promised to be. While the cares of this world can be overpowering, we can trust that God’s claim on us in baptism is sure and true, and because of that promise we can remain faithful.

_Holy God, you have claimed us as your own. May we rest secure in our identity as children of God. Amen._

Saturday, Feb. 13
“Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333

“A shelter in the time of storm.” How often have we yearned for a shelter in life’s storms? We yearn for shelter when the winds of shame are blowing with hurricane-like ferocity and we wonder if we’ll ever escape from such pain and humiliation; when an overabundance of responsibilities floods our everyday lives and we wonder how the water will ever recede; or when the snows of poverty and want seem like they will never melt and we cry out for food, shelter and clothing. Our African-American brothers and sisters sing with a tenacity that is born of a faith that knows Jesus will indeed provide shelter in the midst of life’s storms. In that confidence we can face any wind, flood or snowstorm that comes our way. Thanks be to God!

_We trust you, gracious God, to be our shelter in every storm. Amen._
Sunday, Feb. 14
“Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333

In verse two we sing about the divine Christ taking on human form. While there can be a sense of weakness in being human, Jesus shows that this weakness offers the opportunity to serve the neighbor. When we embrace our humanity, we know we are not better than other people. We know we are not without need. Jesus’ life shows us the way to lower ourselves and take the towel, girding ourselves so that our neighbor in need may have their feet washed in the name of Jesus. May we be bold enough in our weakness to follow Jesus’ lead in serving others, trusting that Jesus is present with us, empowering us to humbly serve our neighbor in need.

In our weakness, show us the strength and power to humbly serve. Amen.

Monday, Feb. 15
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

“Complications! Delays! Roadblocks! What is going on? God promised that God would make me the father of a great nation—but nothing’s happening. Did I misunderstand? Is my servant Eliezer supposed to become my heir? See, I moved my entire household hundreds of miles to this land that God showed me. That wasn’t so bad. I could handle that. But now that I’m here—an heir? That’s not altogether up to me. I’m not getting any younger. I could die tomorrow. Then what?”

We can imagine all of Abram’s anxious thoughts. Despite assurance from God not to be afraid, not to worry, Abram is the former and doing the latter. In spite of the separation of 4,000 years, we aren’t that far removed emotionally from Abram. Anxiety is always ready and willing to rule the roost, just like it was with our father in faith. Yet, in this lovely scene, God figuratively puts God’s arm around Abram’s shoulder and ushers him outside the security, but also the restricted view, of his tent. See all those stars in the sky. They aren’t going anywhere, and neither am I. And Abram trusted that what God promised, God would do. And God replied to Abram, “That’s what I’m talking about! Well done!”

Lord, be our vision. Help us to see beyond our own limited understanding and rely on your promises. Amen.
Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land

Tuesday, Feb. 16
Psalm 27

This psalm is an interesting mixture of supreme confidence tinged with moments of uncertainty and fear. Perhaps this is why it has connected so well over the ages with Scripture readers—because we see our lives mirrored in these verses. Verse 1 boldly proclaims that because of God we have nothing to fear. Verse 5 states that, when times of trouble come, God will be there for us. But soon after, anxiety creeps in, reflected in a string of pleading “do nots:” do not hide your face, turn me away, cast me off, forsake me, give me up. Things are so bad the psalmist even seems to question the permanence of parental love and protection, as if to say, “I can’t be sure of anything I have relied upon previously. You, God, are my only possible source of help or else I’m sunk.”

Of course, in truth, God is our first, last and best parent. The psalmist ultimately knows this, and in the final verse we are encouraged to take heart. Like Abram looking up at the night sky and renewing his trust in God’s promises, we are encouraged to be strong and wait, and maybe even adjust our vision to better see God present in our life and in our world.

Lord, be our vision. Help us to walk evermore confidently wearing the night goggles of faith. Amen.

Wednesday, Feb. 17
Philippians 3:17-4:1

With his exhortation to “stand firm,” the Apostle Paul acknowledges that the allure and distractions of this world are real and powerful. He goes so far as to equate those who are set on earthly things as “enemies” of what Jesus went to the cross for. Such a strong term should give us a jolt—which is likely what Paul intended. But how is it possible to be part of this world and not have our minds “set” on the things of daily life: food, shelter, pro sports, etc.?

Paul promotes himself as worthy of emulation in this regard, but he also suggests paying attention to others who live according to his example. Where are these “others?” I think of a faith community, where Christ’s rule is proclaimed and where once a week, or perhaps more often, we have a chance to pull out our original passports and remind ourselves, and each other, of our true destination and home—the Commonwealth of Heaven.

Lord, be our vision. Help us to see beyond the borders of the nation states of this world to where our most valid citizenship rightly belongs. Amen.
Thursday, Feb. 18  
The thought of Jerusalem and its stubborn history sends Jesus into something like a melancholic reverie. Rather than a beacon of light to the nations, this walled city, consumed by fear for its security, is its own worst enemy. Using a compelling image, Jesus contrasts a Jerusalem that has killed the ones who were sent to call it to account with the sheltering wings of a mother hen and the trusting chicks that know to seek protection there. A case could be made that this is one of the saddest passages in the Bible because it speaks to a peace and security that might have been, but does not yet exist. No wonder the last book of the Bible holds out the vision of a New Jerusalem where we will be truly God’s people at last.

*Loving God, you call us to shelter under your wings, but we resist. As the days and years pass, help us to rely less on the security we try to create, and more on the security you provide. Amen.*

Friday, Feb. 19  
Jesus is “on the road,” slowly making his way to Jerusalem, when he is warned by some Pharisees to make himself scarce because Herod wants him dead. It’s notable that this time it’s Herod Antipas, son of the infamous Herod the Great, who wants to kill Jesus. A family tradition, perhaps? It’s even more notable, however, that it is Pharisees who tip Jesus off. It is not clear whether they are warning Jesus out of a genuine concern for his welfare, or for reasons that are less transparent. Nevertheless, Jesus seems unconcerned. “Tell that fox from me,” he says, “that my work will be accomplished—my work of healing and my work of dying, which, by the way, will not be here but in Jerusalem.” These verses are for us one more reassuring message that God’s purposes will not be thwarted.

*Lord, we are on the road also. Help us to remain confident that your loving purpose for us and for all humankind will remain unto eternity. Amen.*
Saturday, Feb. 20
“Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333

“A weary land.” The African-American slaves certainly knew what a weary land their situation was. They also knew, though, that in the midst of their bondage, Jesus was still their rock, their only real recourse. To my mind, the refrain recalls the Israelites in their wilderness journey. Some felt that God, through Moses, had led them out of Egypt, only to die of thirst in the desert. All seemed lost, but then Moses struck a rock with his staff and reviving water flowed forth.

If we think of our world and its myriad troubles, it can seem like a weary land, and in many respects it is. Refugees are perpetually seeking shelter from warfare and despotism, while our earth itself shows signs of drooping under the effects of over-development and high carbon emissions. Our human community agonizes and at times despairs over these ills. In our Christian community, especially in Lent, we know that our journey in this weary land leads ultimately to the cross, where blood flows from Jesus’ body for us. We have recourse. We are revived to live as God’s people.

Gracious God, in the shifting sand and sometimes bleak landscape of this life, help us to stand evermore firmly on the solid rock of your son, Jesus. Amen.

Sunday, Feb. 21
“Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333

The verses of this spiritual testify to Jesus’ actions—restoring Lazarus to life; washing the feet of his disciples; and unlocking the chains of death and hell. Many other deeds could have been recited, of course, but these, perhaps, spoke most meaningfully to plantation slaves whose hope for a better life existed mainly in the afterlife. Jesus stands up to the powers of sin and the devil. He breaks the shackles of death. He turns the conventional understanding of greatness upside down. To serve, not to be served, is the better path. And when they and we come to die, whether later or sooner, Jesus will be there to welcome us all into a new, and anything but weary, land.

Dear Lord, in this season of Lent, and indeed throughout the year, give us the strength and courage to follow more faithfully Jesus’ example of servanthood for the sake of the world. Amen.
Monday, Feb. 22
Isaiah 55:1-9

This passage from Isaiah is almost counterintuitive, especially when read during the season of Lent. “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” What is God doing here? What about self-denial and giving to the poor? Is God really freely giving to God’s people? Yes. The prophet is reminding us that all we need comes from God. Yet, as the prophet clearly points out, we so often spend our energy on things that do not sustain life. We are called to keep in check what we actually need to live on day-by-day and only use our share. If we look at our lives in terms of what we need and through that which truly satisfies, then we are freed to live for each other. We are broken from the chains that bind and weigh us down—freed to be part of people of every nation, calling all peoples together.

Lord, you provide us with so much in this life. Free us from what holds us back. Free us from the possessions that weigh us down and from that which does not satisfy. Let us live in you as you live in us so that we may glorify your name wherever we go. Amen.

Tuesday, Feb. 23
Psalm 63:1-8

Have you ever been unable to praise God? Have there been periods of your life where love for God seems distant and far away, like a fading memory? Perhaps you have dealt with depression and wondered where God really was. From time to time the psalmist’s words capture this feeling so well: “My soul thirsts for you … as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” The psalmist has been there. Yet, like a light in the distance, the psalmist also sees hope, and this hope draws ever closer and overwhelms the psalmist to the point of praise. Joy seems to overwhelm the psalmist when he feels the need for God’s presence so greatly and deeply. In the depths of thirst and longing the psalmist is able to find solace in knowing God is present.

Lord, you know our deepest yearning; you know when we thirst. Come to our aid, be present in our need. Then use us to be your presence for others who are longing and hoping and craving your love. Provide your people with joyful lips and meditative hearts. Amen.
Wednesday, Feb. 24
1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Upon first reading, I find this passage to be rather scary. Honestly, it is not in the top 10 of my go-to bible passages. Why would it be? I do not want to hear that if I do something that doesn’t please God, then God will strike me down. In a single day, 23,000 fell. I know that I am not perfect; I know that false idols come my way; I know that I can complain from time to time about what I don’t have, knowing full well that God has provided what I truly need. As I read I am feeling condemned and trapped. I was baptized, ate the spiritual food, drank the spiritual drink and then I too, like the Israelites, thought I was standing, but soon found myself falling. But then verse 13 comes along with its good news that God will provide a way out. It is my understanding that this comes through Christ, who came to die for our sins and who conquered death by rising from the grave. It is only through this resurrection promise that I am able to cling to this life, even when I fall short of what God asks of me.

God, continue to provide for us the way out. When we fall short of loving and serving our neighbors, remind us of your promise that frees us from our bondage. Again and again we seek your forgiveness, only to find that it has been there all along. Thank you, God. Thank you for loving us and keeping us. Amen.

Thursday, Feb. 25

Whose sin is greater? Yours or theirs? Ever played that comparison game? Our current culture puts a great deal of emphasis on competition. Competition in sports, in the arts, in work, in politics, almost everywhere. So it seems natural for us to draw comparisons in sin as well. Even Jesus seems to note this in this reading, when some are claiming to be less sinful than others. But Jesus seems to cut them off, and won’t allow us to go there, either. No one’s sin is greater than another’s. Everyone falls short of what God asks of us. This is why we confess. This is why we are called to daily repentance and to rely on God’s forgiving grace.

God, daily we fall short of loving and serving you and our neighbor. Today we once again ask for your forgiveness. Guide us in your ways. Teach us to judge less and love more. Amen.
Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land

Friday, Feb. 26

Who are you in Luke’s telling of the fig tree parable? Are you the landowner, or the gardener? Perhaps you are the tree or even the manure. The landowner has all but given up on his investment, but the gardener has hope. The horticulturalist sees potential in the fruitless tree through the careful tilling and the rich, fertilizing manure. Where in your life do you see something as being lifeless? Is there someone or something that you have all but given up on? Perhaps it needs another look. God may be calling you to be the carefully tending gardener or even the stimulating manure itself.

*God, grant us wisdom to know what is needed from us. Guide us with hope as we look to our neighbors. Plant in us the seed of helpfulness as we live each day in your creation. Amen.*

Saturday, Feb. 27
“Jesus Is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333

How do you define a weary land? What troubles are around you? We can find ourselves dwelling on these things and feeling no escape. At such times all we can see is defeat and hopelessness. Then it is a gift for us that others who have been in this situation before retell their story through songs passed along to the next generations of Christians. This African-American spiritual begins with the strong reminder that Jesus is our rock. There is hope for us. No matter the circumstance, we can find and hold fast to our rock, our savior. The refrains repeat the confident message, driving further the truth that no matter the storm, no matter the darkness, no matter what is weighing us down, we have hope set in Jesus Christ our savior.

*Lord, we need you, we cling to you. At times we are tired, we are worn out, not sure where to turn or what to do. It is in these moments that we need you, we need to be reminded that you are there. We may forget, but with you as our anchor, we have hope. Amen.*
Sunday, Feb. 28
“Jesus Is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333

Yesterday we saw the hope that the refrain of this hymn drives home—almost a mantra that one can sing to oneself when feeling weary. When we look to the verses we find examples of Jesus’ great work: raising Lazarus from the dead, becoming a servant to his followers by washing their feet, overcoming death and rising from hell. The verses wrap up the saving power of Jesus’ ministry on earth in three short statements—all framed by the truth of Jesus as a rock. Through any weakness we have a God who stands strong with us, who is willing to go to the depths of hell to save us even when we are weak and weary.

God, you are our ever present help in trouble. Because of your saving powers we are able to stand strong when faced with too much. When life is overwhelming, remind us of your love. Remind us how you raised Lazarus, how you conquered death for us. Be ever present in our weary land. Amen.

Monday, Feb. 29
Joshua 5:9-12

“Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” The Israelites had left Egypt a long time ago. A new generation has grown up knowing only wandering. In the last few days they have crossed over the Jordan into a new land. After arriving at Gilgal all males are circumcised. The Israelites celebrate Passover in this new place and the very next day they are no longer homeless. God’s people are ready for a new start in the land promised to them.

Has your life always been stable, filled with the familiar and the comfortable? Or have you lived in exile? Have you ever crossed a border and faced danger? In 2015, The United Nations High Commissioner reported almost 60 million refugees worldwide. Can you imagine leaving all your possessions behind and wandering? How long would you be homeless? What would it be like not to know if you would ever find a new land, a new home?

God of new beginnings, thank you for all you provide, all you have rolled away, for leading us to a life without disgrace. Help us to care for our land and all it produces. Amen.
Tuesday, March 1
Psalm 32

In times of distress we can lose our way. How do we find the right path again? Who will guide us? How will we resolve our problems? Whether we need a place to hide, or are looking for deliverance, this psalm suggests that there is a way to evade those mighty waters and find a path to comfort. We don’t have to feel uncertain and alone. Selah

Suffering silently is one choice but it is not what God wants us to do. God asks us to share our troubles and reveal our transgressions. Can we open our hearts and trust that God will listen and forgive us? Selah

God will stand by us, advise and teach us. God promises to be with us. Selah

Is there something you have been waiting or wanting to talk to God about? Do you seek forgiveness? Let God know you are ready to try something new.

God of forgiveness, help us let go of our mulish ways and attend to your teachings. Open our hearts and our minds. Share your wise counsel. Show us the joy that comes from trusting you. Amen.

Wednesday, March 2
2 Corinthians 5:16-21

“God has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” How are we to succeed and be good ambassadors? We know that humans are not all knowing and all seeing. Each of us filters the world through our senses and experience. How shall we be agents to reconcile the world?

As I read this passage my thoughts turned to current events. We live in uncertain times with the specter of terrorism and other horrors. Must we always be fearful and untrusting? I wish for leaders who take reconciliation seriously, who leave aside combative arguments and disturbing visions, and who will work for a world where shalom (peace) prevails. Can we find a way to live that helps us foster understanding towards people we don’t like or agree with? I think often of the words we say in church when baptizing or welcoming new members or when blessing special groups: “I will with God’s help.”

God of loving kindness, help us be patient and find joy in the work of reconciliation. We struggle to live beyond our limitations in your new creation and to embody love. Help us know which actions and thoughts separate us from you. Help us become right with you. Amen.
Thursday, March 3
Luke 15:1-3

“So he told them this parable ...” When you attend your next corporate event, church potluck or family holiday celebration, will you be excited? Will you look forward to talking to everyone? Or will you grumble a little (or a lot) about spending time with people you don’t really care for? Will you avoid the people who make you uncomfortable? Will you only talk to the people who are like you, who think as you think and do as you do?

Imagine hearing about a man whose stories and teachings were so compelling that people from all walks of life traveled to be with him. This man’s message was about the kingdom of God. He didn’t care if you had leprosy, were sick, blind, rich or poor. Heck, he even talked to women, and he had the power to heal. His magnetic, healing presence was real and powerful. Just like God.

Welcoming God, help me to see that the people I think are sinners are just like me. Help me to lessen all that separates us. Help me practice hospitality and acceptance. Amen.

Friday, March 4
Luke 15:11b-32

This story has been playing out for thousands of years: two sons (or two daughters), two points of view, two different paths through life. What does it take to go beyond jealousy and resentment? Are we able to celebrate when our families have the chance to be whole again? Why is it so hard to be compassionate?

The younger son does not know the satisfaction of hard work. His understanding of living the dream is narrow. His “dissolute living” has resulted in many mornings after. He has little else. The dutiful elder son has worked and learned alongside his father. He will inherit the wealth of the family: jewelry, fine robes, animals and land. Still, sadly, the elder is not whole. He is resentful and angry. “All these years ... I have never ... you have never ... who has devoured ...” He has neither asked his father for, nor been given the means to party with his buddies. The elder son is stuck. He can’t see past his anger. He feels wronged, life is unfair.

Generous God, love us when we are dissolute and angry. Help us see beyond the superficial. Teach us to be compassionate, share what is ours and celebrate when we can begin again. Amen.
Saturday, March 5
“Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333

The lyrics “not a mumbling word he said” have appeared in many gospel songs from the 19th and 20th centuries. It shows up in lyrics from songs sung along the northern coast of England and in African-American spirituals. It is a memorable phrase. It is hard to contemplate anyone going through the trials Jesus experienced without comment, without complaint. In this hymn’s first verse we also learn that Jesus went to his friend’s grave and restored him to life.

As you journey through Lent, are there times when you feel as though you are living in a weary land? Do you have a rock of strength and support in your life? Will you be restored? Can you live without complaint, without mumbling? Do you look to Jesus when you are weary and need “a shelter in the time of storm?”

Jesus, is it true? Not a mumbling word? Help us to know through your life and ministry what is important. Help us as we live in times of weariness and storm to support and strengthen those who need kindness and care. Amen.

Sunday, March 6
“Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333

Let’s think about feet. Did the disciples wear Doc Martens, Air Jordans or Vans? Did they benefit from gel insoles or a stiff shank? How did they cut their toenails? Not too many podiatrists in Jerusalem! Let’s also think about transportation. How did Jesus and the disciples get from Galilee to Jerusalem? There were no planes, trains or automobiles—no megabuses either.

Disciples walked. They probably had a pair of sandals. Their feet were dry, dusty, mud-caked. At the end of the day it would have felt good to soak your feet as you washed the miles and the grime away. Twenty-four dirty, stinky feet would have meant several trips to the well, several buckets of water. What an odd scene it must have been. This great man—whose stories, miracles, compassion, life of prayer and teaching had transformed you, led you to leave your life to follow him—was now clad in a towel, down on the floor washing 24 feet.

Thank you, Jesus, for this amazing, blessed memory of the time you washed my feet, showing me how much you love me. You are my rock in a weary land, you are my shelter in the time of storm. Amen.
Monday, March 7  
Isaiah 43:13-20

“I am about to do a new thing,” says the Lord. Does this statement bring comfort or anxiety? It depends on how you view change, and what this statement means for us. When the Lord states a new thing is about to happen, be ready and hang on because it probably won’t be a subtle change or go unnoticed. Because God knows our needs before we even ask, these new things can happen suddenly or unexpectedly.

I remember seeing a poster while in college in which an ostrich was depicted with its head stuck in the sand. The poster asked, “Is this how you face your future?” Sometimes we might feel like putting our heads in the sand and denying that a “new thing” is about to happen. However, we are invited not to fear these changes, but rather to declare God’s praises because God has redeemed us and called us to be God’s own children!

Almighty God, provide us the courage and strength to endure the changes that occur in our daily life. Amen.

Tuesday, March 8  
Psalm 126

Eleven years ago my Dad died of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. It was just one year after my wife’s Mom and Dad had died, so our grief seemed unbearable. During these 11 years, God has given us two sons and a daughter whose middle names were chosen to honor their grandparents. Over the years, tears of sorrow have been turned into shouts of joy!

Psalm 126 talks about how our Lord restores fortune. Where there were once tears and weeping, expressions have now been turned into shouts of joy! As we move through the Lenten season, we witness much sorrow and grief around us in our personal lives, community, nation and world. The death and destruction we witness may feel so unbearable that they bring a river of tears that seems endless. Because our hope and faith is in our Savior Jesus Christ, who through death brings new life, we can say in confidence that our tears of sorrow will be turned into shouts of great joy!

Lord of everlasting life, provide us hope and strength during our time of sorrow and grief until the day comes when we can shout for great joy! Amen.


**Wednesday, March 9**  
**Philippians 3:4b-14**

Paul states that he forgets what lies behind in his past and strains forward to what lies ahead in the future. He provides examples of his former life of strict adherence to Jewish law and customs. He does not deny those matters that have defined who he is, but rather lays them aside as something he does not boast about. In Christ, Paul has come to see that righteousness, even when blameless, comes not through achievements of the law, but rather through the gift of faith in Christ.

As hard as we may try, like Paul, to forget what “lies behind us and strain forward to what lies ahead” we often feel like prisoners still chained to our past. Whether it is our efforts to maintain a healthy family relationship, good work ethics or avoid destructive behaviors, these efforts all seem to fall short of other people’s expectations and even our own. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, we are forgiven and unchained from our past to live a new life from this day forward.

*Lord of mercy, forgive us our past transgressions and fill us with your love and compassion so that we might share this joy with others. Amen.*

**Thursday, March 10**  
**John 12:1-8**

Often times when we hear messages of “good will” we realize they are from individuals whose motives are self-serving and deceitful. We identify these actions as having “hidden agendas,” as coming from”wolves in sheep’s clothing.”

In today’s reading, Jesus defends Mary’s act of kindness and love but then calls into question Judas’ deceit and self-serving motivations. As we read the passage, a little self-reflection will reveal to us that some of the same sinfulness that corrupts Judas is with us every day. To be sure we are capable of doing acts of kindness; however, our intentions may reveal that the “truth is still not in us” and in the end our good actions are compromised. That’s when the Holy Spirit drives us to the cross, where the ultimate act of love and kindness is revealed through Christ’s death and resurrection.

*God of mercy, you have the power to forgive and with that power we ask for forgiveness of all our sins through your son Jesus Christ. Amen.*
**Friday, March 11**

**John 12:1-8**

When Mary anoints Jesus, we see an intimate act of love and kindness. The description of Mary taking the costly perfume, wiping Jesus’ feet with her hair, and filling the house with her fragrant offering vividly wants to fill our senses, too. The action taken by Mary becomes a prophetic moment in the story because of its pointing ahead to the death of Jesus on Good Friday.

The love Mary shows in wiping Jesus’ feet with her hair reminds me of a program called Locks of Love. Through this program, individuals can donate their hair to children who endure a medical hair loss. This act of kindness and compassion by donors to physically share a part of themselves with children in recovery is an extension of Christ’s love towards others. Their act of kindness can be a prophetic moment that transforms another person’s life.

*Compassionate and loving God, use us as tools for your love that we may let others know about your mercy and goodness through your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 12**

**“Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333**

As I have been writing this devotion, there have been news reports about bombings, mass shootings, beheadings and war. The prevailing news stories are all associated with terror, fear and death. We want to ask, “Where are you, O Lord in this weary land?” How many times have we asked this question?

When we don’t know what to say, or don’t seem to have the appropriate words, sometimes a hymn can best express our hope and faith. Where are you, O Lord, in this weary land? The answer lies over yonder; it comes not in a savior for whom we must search and find, but rather in a savior who comes to us, holding the keys of victory in his hand!

*Almighty God, we live every day in a weary land that is in need of your love and peace. Instill in us hope and faith every day of our life. Amen.*
Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land

Sunday, March 13
“Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333

On Nov. 28, 1905, 29 ships were either damaged or sunk in a storm on Lake Superior. As a result, Split Rock lighthouse was built north of Two Harbors, Minn. This lighthouse became a life-saving structure on a rocky cliff, 130 feet above the violent and tumultuous waters of the North Shore of Lake Superior.

During the storms in our own life, we find ourselves in desperate need of guidance, navigation and direction. Jesus our rock rescues us from the destruction of death and shines a light from the cross that leads us to his home in heaven.

Christ our rock and salvation, guide us through this weary land and provide shelter for us during the storms we face in life. Amen.

Monday, March 14
Isaiah 50:4-9a

“I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near,” the speaker in Isaiah declares confidently. During this week we mark Jesus’ earthly ministry as it draws near its end. Soon he will be riding a donkey triumphantly into Jerusalem—on the way to his crucifixion. This is the climax of all the teaching he has done for the past three years. He’s healed the sick, recruited a successful ministry team, preached compelling sermons and now he’s riding a donkey towards his death. This reading from Isaiah fits well with our understanding of the Messiah. The speaker is confident. He’s aware of all the shame and violence and ridicule heading his way, just as Jesus was fully aware as he headed through the gates of Jerusalem on that donkey. He knew what was coming. But like the speaker in Isaiah, Jesus knew his value came from God—not from the naysayers who surrounded him. This week, let us remember that because God has accepted and vindicated us, shame has no hold on us.

Jesus, in the midst of change, heartache and embarrassment, continue to remind us of your eternal love and acceptance. Amen.
Tuesday, March 15
Psalm 31:9-16

Grief brings with him a heavy blanket and drapes it around my shoulders. The thickness of the blanket blocks out the light and I cannot see around me. The voices speaking to me are muddled. They try to touch me. They try to reassure me that all is well. But I can’t make out their faces or the words they speak. Grief deadens my ears and I’m alone. My friends—I think those are my friends—stop trying. “It’s too hard,” they say to each other. “She’s not getting it. She doesn’t want our help. She looks terrible!” I pull the corners of the blanket closer, tucking them in under my legs. Then the edge of the blanket lifts a little. A tiny bit of light shines in.

“Oh! God! You are my God!” I recognize the face peering in.

*Jesus, continue to pursue us in our doubt and depression. Come find us and hold us close.*
*Amen.*

Wednesday, March 16
Philippians 2:5-11

“Adopt the same attitude that was in Christ Jesus,” Paul instructs in his letter to the church in Philippi. So what about this attitude that Jesus possessed? He had every right to think of himself as something special. He was after all in the same form as God. Yet, now in human form, Jesus humbled himself. Instead of a domineering king, Jesus became a servant, a slave even, property of the people around him. Gods aren’t supposed to be slaves! When we make someone our property, we take away all of their power. But in the case of Jesus, his power was in fact because of his humility and his giving of himself even to the point of death. From the power in this gift of his life, his name has become the name that has the power to unite all people. As followers of this humble King, may we too be compelled to unite together and serve one another in his name.

*Jesus, we confess that we often fight instead of unite in your name. Bring us closer to each other and teach us your unity.*
*Amen.*
Jesus sat at the table in that guest room with his ministry team. The team members sat close together and waited for their leader to bless the meal. Jesus began, “I have been looking forward to this Passover meal with you all.” They had been through a lot together over the past three years, and he knew this would be the last chance he had to eat dinner together with his friends. Jesus wanted to mark this moment, so he raised a loaf of bread and gave thanks. He broke it, realizing that this group would never be as cohesive as it was at this time. He gave a piece of bread to each of his friends, saying, “Do this again, and remember me.” He didn’t want them to forget their time together. He poured the dessert wine, telling them that this was a promise between them. “We are forever bonded now, in this new covenant.” May we too be united in remembrance of this Jesus through the common cup and loaf of bread we share.

Jesus, as we remember your table and the new covenant you established, continue to bring us together through this meal. Amen.

As the disciples ate the bread and drank the wine Jesus had just blessed, they began to chat about recent events in their ministry together. They were a little confused as to why Jesus was acting like he was going to leave them forever. Then Jesus interrupted them and said, “The one who betrays me is with me, at this table with us, in fact.” The disciples looked around at each other in shock. “Well, are you planning on betraying him?”

“No! I’m not going to do that! Would you?”

“We all have pledged our loyalty to you, Jesus; why would you accuse us of this?”

Very little has changed in the 2,000 years since this table conversation first played out. Having become human, Jesus knew the human condition quite well. We aren’t known for our faithfulness, especially in times of trial. As we prepare for Palm Sunday, may we become mindful of the ways we often pledge faithfulness but don’t actually deliver on the promise.

Jesus, we confess that we often have good intentions on which we don’t deliver. Teach us to be faithful to you as you have been faithful to us. Amen.
Saturday, March 19

“Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333

This African-American spiritual arose out of a long and painful history. Slaves would sing spirituals as they worked in the fields, but only if their masters would allow it. Bought and sold as property, slaves would sing these spirituals as a message of hope in the painful wilderness of their experience. As you sing this refrain, “Jesus is a rock in a weary land, a shelter in the time of storm,” reflect on the experience of the slaves in our country. When all else was lost—somehow they would still sing songs of praise to their savior. They knew that God had not forgotten them and that Jesus is the ultimate liberator. Jesus experienced the pain and humiliation that was so familiar in their own experience, and was now accompanying them on their journey.

*Jesus, we are in awe that you, as the Son of God, are the liberator of the least of us. Empower us all to seek your justice and liberation for all people. Amen.*

Sunday, March 20

“Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333

In the Old Testament writings, the phrase “weary land” often refers to a desert area void of water. This hymn draws on the words of Isaiah 32:1-2, which reads, “See, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice. Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, like streams of water in a dry place, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.” Jesus is this kind of king. He satisfies our most desperate thirst and protects us from the hottest sun. When we sing “Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land,” we remember that he knows our plight and has responded to us in our need. We are not alone and exposed in the wilderness. We have his presence with us always.

*Jesus, we thank you that you sustain and protect us. We thank you for being with us through our wildest deserts and deepest pains. Teach us to be your presence to each other and remind us that you hold us close. Amen.*
Monday, March 21

Isaiah 42:1-9

At the beginning of Holy Week we have a text that points to the fulfillment of God’s promises for us in Christ. Jesus is God’s chosen servant and he will ultimately rule over a kingdom where love and justice prevail. The wrongs will be righted, and we will live in true peace. In verses 6 and 8 God uses the title “I am the Lord,” which he used with Moses in Exodus, and was fulfilled by Christ. God tells Jesus that he (Christ) is the (new) covenant—a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon. This Holy Week we see the fulfillment of these prophecies in Christ as he is crucified, dead and buried, descended to hell and rises again!

*Lord, we pray that by your Spirit, we might worship you as the great “I am,” and see your Son as the fulfillment of all your promises for us. Amen.*

Tuesday, March 22

Psalm 70

As a musician, I love that at the literal center of the Bible is a hymnal—the Psalms. Obviously there is a wide range of real emotion throughout the Psalms, and this is a prayer for deliverance. We know that Jesus had the Psalms on his lips and in his heart even at his last breath, and one must wonder if this psalm went through his mind on that first Holy Week. The Gospels paint the picture of those who were seeking Jesus’ destruction, and Jesus asked God for deliverance, saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

Like yesterday’s passage, we see an image of God’s greatness: “May those who love your salvation say evermore, ‘God is great!’” Even as this world has so much darkness in it—mass shootings, terrorism, natural disasters—as believers, we can take joy that God will ultimately deliver us.

*Gracious God, by your Spirit help me to love your salvation and rejoice in your deliverance. Amen.*
Wednesday, March 23

Hebrews 12:1-3

For church people, Holy Week can often feel like a race. With the extra services to prepare for, it is easy to get lost in the shuffle and not see the forest for the trees. We can easily go through the motions and forget the founder and perfecter of our faith. In context, this passage comes after the famous “hall of faith” in Chapter 11, and it serves as great encouragement to us to continue living a life a faith, even when times get tough. The imagery of running a race definitely means it will not be easy, but it will be worth it. When and if you feel weary this week, “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”

Lord, thank you that life is not a pointless race. Help me focus on you this week. Amen.

Maundy Thursday, March 24

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

On Maundy Thursday we hear and see Jesus’ “new commandment” to love one another just has he has loved us. Of course the command to love one another was not new, but what made this new was the sacrificial love that Christ modeled by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this story we see that sacrificial love personified as Christ washes the feet of his disciples, a responsibility normally given to servants. It is, in action, the grand reversal of the gospel! Just as physical things often serve as greater symbolism, washing feet symbolizes the spiritual cleansing we all need and that only Christ can give.

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of your Son and his life of sacrificial love. Grant us faith in you, that we may be washed white as snow. In Christ’s name, Amen.
Good Friday, March 25
John 18:1-19:42

This Holy Week began with Isaiah 42, where we read a prophecy that would ultimately be fulfilled in Christ, and today we experience that fulfillment. Tonight we will gather in darkened churches, tell/hear/experience the story, and stare at the cross. We will see that the cross is the fulfillment of everything the Bible teaches! We look at the cross and at the one we pierced—just as the hymn, “Ah, Holy Jesus” says, “I crucified thee!” Somehow our culture wants us to believe that we are basically good people, but why hasn’t that thinking disappeared with all of the wars and brokenness that we constantly bring to the world? On Maundy Thursday we saw Christ symbolically cleansing his disciples, and on Good Friday we see him pierced to actually cleanse us. Hell is what we deserve, and hell is what Christ took. Thanks be to God!

Lord, thank you for the gift of being made clean. Forgive me when I fail you, and help me to enter into your story again, that I can rejoice that death is not the end. In Christ’s name, Amen.

Holy Saturday, March 26
“Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land,” ELW 333

This African-American spiritual tells the story well and powerfully. The refrain seems to be a variation of the spiritual “My God is a Rock.” The stanzas in “Jesus is a Rock” are different from “My God is a Rock,” focusing on the work of Christ. In verse 1 Christ raises Lazarus from the dead. Verse 2 is the Maundy Thursday story of washing the disciples feet. The third verse tells the Easter story of Christ’s victory over death. African-American spirituals were grounded in a spirit of hope—a spirit of moving from oppression to freedom. I pray that we each might experience that same spirit as we hear and enter the story once again.

Dear God, help us embrace your salvation and experience the true freedom that only you can provide. Amen.
Easter Sunday, March 27
“Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands,” ELW 370

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! This wonderful Easter hymn by Martin Luther celebrates the resurrection with “loud songs of hallelujah!” Luther based this hymn (both text and tune) on the German hymn “Christ is Arisen” (ELW 372), which itself was based on “Christians, to the Paschal Victim” (ELW 371). While Luther wrote seven stanzas—we have five here—the message is indeed preserved! On the cross Christ bound himself to sin and death, and in his resurrection broke those chains. The “theological center” comes in the central verse (3) with Christ’s death and sacrifice for us. Luther said, “The devil, the originator of sorrowful anxieties and restless troubles, flees before the sound of music almost as much as before the Word of God.” Let us sing with joy! Hallelujah!

Lord, we give you thanks that we can sing with confidence, “Hallelujah, Christ is Risen!” We praise you that through your dying and rising again we too can have life. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

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