

# psalms for lent



Reflections to  
help you spend  
time each day  
with God.

Written by Lutherans in Missouri and Kansas with different experiences, perspectives, and talents, just like you. By sharing these reflections, we invite you - and each other- to read how God works in our respective lives and to help you see God more clearly active in your own life, too.

## *a daily reflection*

Plan a time each day that works for you. It might be when you wake up or go to bed, before a meal, waiting in the car for kids, or with a loved one. If it helps, set an alarm or reminder. If you miss a few days, restart with today's reflection--mark what you missed if you decide to go back later. We encourage you to read the whole psalm listed at the top of each page to hear the context of God's Word, but it's not a requirement. Finish with the prayer.

Read this online, download a PDF, or sign up for daily text reminders at [bit.ly/cssdevo](https://bit.ly/cssdevo).



## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5 - Psalm 1

Point a phone camera at this code to open a website with the full Psalm.



**“They are like trees planted  
by streams of water.” v. 3a**

The book of Psalms is the first hymnal of God’s people, filled with songs of celebration and songs of pain and grief. Some are communal, while others are personal. Some are songs of confident faith, while others are filled with questions for God and honest doubt. And the collection starts with Psalm 1.

I envision the composer crafting this hymn to do what Moses urged the community to do in Deuteronomy 6: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.” So sing, says the psalmist, sing of God and God’s way of life.

Psalm 1 begins with a picture of *all* God’s people. Some are happy and blessed, whose lives are fruitful and righteous, firmly rooted in and nourished by God. Others are labeled wicked, scoffers, and sinners, whose lives are dry, dusty, and fruitless.

The big word here is righteousness: right relationships with God, one another, and all creation. For the psalmist, it means to live in accord with the Torah, and be guided by the stories of God’s promises to Abraham and Sarah, the stories of Joseph and his brothers, the stories of Moses, Pharaoh, and the Exodus.

The way of the wicked is the way of Pharaoh, the way of broken and twisted relationships. But the way of the Lord is the way of right relationships, the way of life and blessing.

These are difficult days, with divisions and the destruction of relationships happening daily, streaming out of Washington DC. Fear abounds – fear of immigrants, fear of the poor, fear of minorities, fear of The Other. But the songs of God’s people are stronger than fear, nourishing us with blessing, hope, and life.

1. Where do you hear the songs of scarcity, fear, and death that lure you from God?
2. What are the songs of blessing, hope, and life that sing God’s love to your heart?

**In times of fear, bless us with faith. In times of doubt, embrace us with hope. In times of pain, fill us with peace. Amen.**

*Peter Rehwaldt, Trinity Lutheran, Lawrence, KS*

## THURSDAY, MARCH 6 - Psalm 4



**“When you are disturbed, do not sin;  
ponder it on your beds and be silent.” v. 4**

In Psalm 4 King David, the leader of Israel, is considering the behavior of those around him who are “seeking after lies and dishonoring him.” He sings his contemplation aloud, confidently affirming his trust in divine protection and faithfulness in the face of turmoil.

It feels like King David is reassuring himself as he speaks to God. At the same time, his prayer encourages us to ponder what is disturbing or angering us. Sounds like some good advice. We don’t want our anger to get the best of us. Instead, we are invited to recognize our distress and avoid doing something hurtful; to go to our beds, think about it, and be quiet.

God will come to us in the quiet and give us the clarity we need to respond with grace and to take loving action in any situation we encounter. “Let me take some time to think about it,” is a proper response. Disengaging in a heated moment can help us avoid sin.

Many people are disturbed, angry, and anxious right now. In the midst of that, God will give direction as we seek to live in lifegiving ways, all while we resist the falsehoods, misinformation, and slanderous behavior that demeans and criminalizes people we are called to love or denigrates the good works we graciously offer as we care for our neighbors.

1. What disturbs or angers you right now?
2. How do you deal with your anger so that you can avoid sin?

**Holy and Wise one, teach me to recognize my distress  
and to respond in ways that help me avoid sin.  
In the quiet, Lord, I trust that I will hear what you say to me.  
Help me to know the rest and comfort of your faithfulness  
always and especially when I am disturbed. AMEN.**

*Sue Tarkka, Overland Park Lutheran, Overland Park, KS*

## FRIDAY, MARCH 7 - Psalm 8



**“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what are humans that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?” vss. 3-4**

I’ve always been a bit of a stargazer, looking for familiar constellations and planets or waking in the wee hours of the morning to catch a meteor shower. I’ve spent much of my life in big cities with so much light pollution, I really had no idea just how much more you can see when you find an area with little to no manmade light. Last year on a trip to Australia, my friend and I sought out a low light area, and, for the first time in my life, I could see the Milky Way spread across the sky above me; more stars and planets than I could hope to count.

Like the Psalmist, I marveled at the vastness of the universe and my tiny role within it. Beneath the grandeur of God’s creation, I pondered the significance of humanity and was truly humbled realizing that the Creator of such magnificence is also deeply mindful of we mere mortals below.

In our daily lives, it can be easy to feel small and insignificant, especially amidst the busyness and challenges we face. Yet, this psalm reassures us that God’s care for us is intentional and intimate. Despite the immensity of the cosmos, God’s love and attention are directed towards each of us and God is actively working in our lives, guiding us and sustaining us, much like God sustains the stars and the moon.

1. How often do you take the time to reflect on the beauty of God’s creation and your place within it?
2. In what ways have you felt God’s presence and care in your life recently?
3. How can you become more mindful of God’s ongoing work in your daily routine?

**Gracious Creator, we stand in awe of your magnificent works. Help us to recognize your presence and care in our lives, even when we feel small and insignificant. During this Lenten season, draw us closer to you, and open our hearts to see your handiwork around us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

*Elizabeth Carr, St. John’s Lutheran Parish, Lancaster & Bendena, KS*

## SATURDAY, MARCH 8 - Psalm 16



**“You make known to me the path of life...” v. 11**

When I was a little girl, my Grandpa showed me how to read a map. North was at the top. Some of the lines were big roads, some smaller, and some were railroads. Lakes were blue. Airports were marked with an airplane. The index could help me find even the smallest town - down to G and over to 13 - and there it was!

Then came Mapquest! I could tell Mapquest where I was starting and where I was going -- hit “PRINT” - and out would come pages of directions! Some trips would be many pages of directions -- and woe to the navigator who got the pages mixed up!

And now we have GPS navigation. Siri now guides me turn by turn, traffic light by traffic light, intersection by intersection. Sometimes Siri even knows when a road has construction. “You have reached your destination!” Siri proclaims.

As great as technology is at guiding me to my next destination - the path for my LIFE is often far less clear. Should I apply for that job or enroll in school? Should I move -- or should I stay?

At a time when I was really searching for God’s path for my life, a friend taught me a way to pray for clarity. It was called a breath prayer -- a mantra to be prayed again and again. Following the process, I was led to pray, “Show me your way, oh God.” I prayed it multiple times each day -- hundreds of times. I would find myself praying it even when I had not consciously remembered to pray.

Eventually God made known to me the path of life -- the path for my life. The puzzle pieces came together. As I continued to pray about it, I got confirmation after confirmation that this was God’s path of life -- for me.

1. In what way are you seeking God’s path for you?
2. What ‘breath prayer’ could open you to hear God’s directions?

**Show me your way, O Lord. Amen.**

*Joan Swander, St Mark’s Lutheran, Emporia KS*

## SUNDAY, MARCH 9 - Psalm 17



“Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry;  
give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit.” v. 1

I admire the boldness of the psalm writer. There are so many times my thoughts closely match theirs. My thoughts go something like this: *“God, I really wish other people knew better. Could you please just make all the people working ~~against me~~ against you be put to shame, and get what they deserve? You know I haven’t done anything truly bad, and I am a good person. Could you please just do something about those people already? It’s getting a bit much putting up with them. Oh, and I love you, God of Justice. Amen.”*

I don’t actually say that to God. I also don’t act on it (because, you know, I *am* a good person). I *know* it’s the wrong attitude. But sometimes it is just how I feel. And that’s clearly how the writer of this psalm feels--frustrated, disappointed, angry, and desperate.

When I was a kid, it really freaked me out when I heard in church that God knows what’s on our hearts and minds. If God could do that, God would know what a rotten apple I really was.

Over the years, I’ve learned I’m not the only one who has these feelings. The psalm writer names out loud what all of us think at some point. Yes, it is self-righteous, but at least it is honest. God already knows what we’re thinking, so we might as well get it all out in the open.

Besides, God seems to like honest hearts, even the self-righteous ones. I imagine it’s easier for God to work with us when we’re honest about our feelings than when we hide them. God can calm my (rational and irrational) fears, turn my frustration into action, transform my anger into constructive energy, and give me hope that good will come (whatever form that takes). We can’t control our initial feelings, but with God’s help, we can control our subsequent words and actions.

I’m learning to trust that God knowing my heart and mind is not a bad thing -- it makes it easier for me to trust that when God promises to love me and work with me that God knows what God is getting into.

1. Can you be honest with God about your most self-righteous feelings?
2. When have you been ashamed of your thoughts, but by the grace of God managed to speak or act better?

**Dear Lord, you know I’m not perfect. When I get on my high horse, help me safely get back out of that saddle. Amen.**

*Mike Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO*

## MONDAY, MARCH 10 - Psalm 18



“The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,  
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,  
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.  
I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,  
so I shall be saved from my enemies.” v. 2-3

Do you have enemies?

I am not sure I have enemies, but I do have individuals who have been hateful and unkind to me. Their words and behavior have wounded my heart. In my youth, I would cry or, in retaliation, try to wound them with hurtful intentions. Then I realized that doing that only caused me more pain. So, in my old years, I have learned to let it go and not hold on to my pain.

I like this Psalm because it is one that David wrote when he was delivered from his enemies, acknowledging that God was his strength, rock, fortress, and deliverer. God was his shield, salvation and stronghold. We too have a God who loves us beyond all measure and enables us to let go of those things and people that cause us pain!

1. How have you responded to hateful words or actions in your life?
2. Have you been able to let go of the pain and move forward?

**Gracious God, let us always remember that you are with us in our pain, and you seek to offer us comfort and mercy. Amen.**

*Cynthia Schnaath, St. James, Kansas City, MO*

"There's something about it that makes sense, Lent. You give something up, and everything's more joyful."

-Elaine Stritch



## TUESDAY, MARCH 11 - Psalm 19



**“Let the words of my mouth  
and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to you, O Lord,  
my rock and my redeemer.” v. 14**

When I first started my ministry as an ordained pastor, Bishop Charlie Maahs, who ordained me, used these words from the psalm before he preached. I appreciated the words and use them each Sunday as I start my sermon.

But I have changed it just a bit. “Let the words of my lips and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and redeemer.” For some reason “lips” sound more personal than “mouth” and I use “our hearts” because I want the hearts of all who hear my words have their hearts in the listening.

For me, these later years of my ministry have become more personal and I want the entire worshipping community engaged in the message. I pray for all those who preach God’s word and hear God’s word preached that they may be lifted up in their faith lives.

1. Have you heard a sermon lately that really moved you?  
Why did it move you?
2. Did you tell the preacher and /or ask questions?

**God, we give you thanks for faithful preachers, be they bishops, parish pastors, deacons, teacher or lay leaders, who have inspired us to understand your word in a way that stirs our hearts. Amen.**

*Cynthia Schnaath, St. James, Kansas City, MO*



“There’s something about it that makes sense, Lent. You give something up, and everything’s more joyful.”

-Elaine Stritch



## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12 - Psalm 22



**“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” v. 1a**

Matthew tells us that these words from Psalm 22 were Jesus’ last words from the cross, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

According to Matthew, Jesus very last words were a prayer... a question... a lament. In his last human moment, Jesus felt abandoned by God.

The Gospel writers make it clear that Jesus was fully human. Jesus enjoyed eating and drinking wine with his friends. Jesus wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. Jesus felt hunger and thirst. He was tempted in the wilderness. Jesus experienced the betrayal of his closest friends and disciples. And just before he died, he felt abandoned by God.

As the TV ad says, “Jesus gets us.” Jesus gets us because he has experienced the things we experience - up to and including feeling abandoned by God. If Jesus can cry out his feeling of abandonment from the cross, is there anything we cannot take to God?

1. What is your “why?” question for God?
2. Who needs to hear “Jesus gets you.”?

**Lord God, give me grace to hear the deep cries of your people and let them know they are not alone. Amen.**

*Joan Swander, St Mark’s Lutheran, Emporia, KS*



“While we are trying to make sense of things, may we learn to make peace with things.”  
— Morgan Harper Nichols

## THURSDAY, MARCH 13 - Psalm 23



### “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” v. 1

Both the psalm and Jesus refer to the Lord as a shepherd, and us as sheep. Jesus said of us, “My own know me,, they listen to my voice.” Interesting – we don’t have to know ourselves well – we don’t have to analyze, understand and be entirely content with ourselves – but we are asked to know the shepherd well. If our focus is on the message (*the Bible*) rather than the mirror, we will be more secure and at peace. What happens when you stop trying to satisfy yourself, to please yourself, and instead try to satisfy and know God? You’ll be more satisfied with yourself.

One reason both the Psalmist and Jesus use the image of shepherd and sheep is that sheep have a remarkable ability to know their shepherd. They may be dumb in other ways, but they know who to trust. There is a wonderful story from Palestine after World War I. During the war, the Turks controlled what is today Israel. For security purposes, the Turks gathered all the sheep of the land into a few huge herds (these were no longer flocks – they were herds). After the war, the British victors wanted to give the sheep back to their owners, but they faced a problem. How do you divide thousands of sheep among hundreds of shepherds? The British told the shepherds, “Tell us how many sheep you owned and we will round up the same number for you.” “Oh, no,” said the shepherds, “We want the same sheep we had before the war. They’re part of our family.” How could they do that? “Watch,” said the shepherds. The shepherds walked among the thousands of sheep, calling for their own. The sheep recognized their shepherd’s voice and ran to them. Know your shepherd, and from that, you will know yourself.

“I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there will be one shepherd, one flock.” Jesus is the Good Shepherd for he brings us together in one fold. He said, “When I am lifted up on the cross, I will draw all people to me.” Christ may love us as individuals, but his goal is to make us a community serving each other. There is no such thing as an individual Christian. Faith is personal, never private.

Accepting community is not popular today. People want to be uninvolved, keep their distance, having only cyber friendships and defriending people if they offend them. The fastest growing religious segment of the US population are the “nones” – people who believe in God but don’t associate with any religious body. I know a lady who bought a private communion kit; she watches a worship show on TV and communes herself when the people on TV commune. How tragic! We are meant for community. Isolated faith is no more likely to burn bright than a single charcoal has of burning separate from the bed of coals. The plural of sheep is ... sheep! It’s how we’re made.

1. To what flock do you belong?
2. How do you listen to Jesus’ voice?

**Lord, give us community, that we might be calm as sheep beside still waters. Amen.**

*Paul Hegele, Martin Luther Lutheran, Lees Summit, MO*

## FRIDAY, MARCH 14 - Psalm 24



**“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.” v. 1a**

A hazy mist followed my friends and I into the vast forest of Redwoods at John Muir National Monument. A hush fell over each of us as we breathed deeply and looked upwards. Sunlight broke through in patches across the canopy of leaves. A chorus of animals made their presence known. And a flowing stream pulsed through the forest floor keeping us company.

Silence and awe descended upon us. One of my friends turned to me, “Isn’t it great to feel so small.” I nodded. I felt it too. There as we looked up at the majestic Redwoods, we were surrounded by history, life, and years of growth. The trees stood long before we entered the world and would outlive each of us. I didn’t have many words, but each step and breath contained a prayer. I could feel God’s presence in creation. God made the trees, water, and egret that stood on lookout in search for food. God made me, too.

And God made you. Each of us — beautiful creations.

It’s hard to remember our own worth sometimes, let alone the goodness of others and this creation. With the 24 hours news cycle of violence, sickness, and political divisions, it’s no wonder we need to remember the holiness of creation, ourselves, and the God who is in all things.

This season meets us in this turmoil, in our doubts and wonderings, and in the desire to know God more deeply. Lent also reminds us that we are good. We are God’s beautiful creations - created in love to care and protect the world God made.

1. Where have you felt “small” in God’s creation? Reflect on a time where you were in awe of God’s creation.
2. Take a few minutes and look outside your home. Make a list of the beauty you see (fresh snow, children going to school, sky and clouds, the delivery driver, neighbors greeting one another, etc.).

**God of all, you are in all things. You are the creator of all.  
Help us to see ourselves as your beautiful creations  
and to go into your world declaring the goodness  
of the people and places we encounter. Amen.**

*Kimberly Knowle-Zeller, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Cole Camp, MO*

## SATURDAY, MARCH 15 - Psalm 25



**“Make me to know your ways, O Lord;  
teach me your paths.” v. 4**

In college, I worked at the Philmont Scout Ranch, a backpacking camp in New Mexico. I'd equip crews, accompany them the first few days of their hike, and then head back to basecamp after sending them on their way.

On one occasion, the shortest trail back to basecamp took a wide multi-mile circle around the terrain. Looking at the map, I saw that I was less than a mile from my destination, and all I had to do was follow a creek. Smarter than the trail-builders, I confidently set off through the woods.

It didn't go well. Dense vegetation left scrapes all over my arms and legs. A swarm of biting insects happily feasted on me. Mud caked my boots from crossing the muddy creek countless times to avoid cliffs. A branch knocked the camera off my belt, making me backtrack to find it. I considered turning back several times, but I kept thinking it wasn't that far. My destination *had* to be just around the next bend. Unfortunately, I had not yet heard the wisdom of gerontologist Aubrey de Grey: “Don't cling to a mistake just because you spent a lot of time making it.” It took me miserable hours to traverse that less-than-a-mile, when the longer path would have taken just under an hour. I learned my lesson: follow the path.

When we are young and foolish (but also old and foolish), we think we know better than everyone else. The Bible is full of people who thought they knew better than the people around them, their elders, and even God. It didn't go well for them either. Like me, they got scraped, chewed up, dirty, set back by loss, and despairing.

God knows a thing or two, and so do those who have gone before us. We like to think we know better, but sometimes it's better to just go with the tried and true path, no matter how boring and roundabout it appears. I still foolishly try to go my own way on occasion, but I'm learning that the well-worn path of the faithful before me is a whole lot more enjoyable and efficient. And I'm a lot quicker to admit when I'm on the wrong path.

1. Why do you sometimes resist going the way someone else tells you?
2. What mistake do you *continue* to make, just because you've already spent a lot of time making it?

**O Lord, lead me down your path. When I stray, give me the humility to stop and go back, that I might get where you're leading me quicker and less painfully. Amen.**

*Mike Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO*

## SUNDAY, MARCH 16 - Psalm 27



**“The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?” v. 1a**

Psalm 27 opens with a bold assertion, with no ifs, ands, or buts: “The Lord is my light and my salvation.” These words can fall freely from my lips, filled with both joy and certainty. The psalmist immediately asks a probing follow-up: “Whom shall I fear?” The psalmist knows that often we say, “Yes, I believe, but . . .” Then the psalmist doubles down, repeating the assertion and the challenge: “The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

I once was cornered into team-preaching by an eight-year-old named Erica. The text was from Isaiah 35, about the fears of God’s people, and God making streams in the desert. As we prepared to preach, we started by naming the fears. “What are second graders afraid of?” I asked her. Grinning, she said, “Speaking in front of a crowd of grownups.” Then she talked about herself, her friends, and the things they worried about: the first day of school, moving somewhere where you didn’t know anybody, and coming home to an empty house. “What about parents?” I asked her. “They worry about their kids, especially if we’re late coming home or crossing a busy street, as well as about their jobs, and about divorce.” “And people who are older still?” I asked. “They worry about their kids and grandkids, and they worry about getting sick, or their friends getting sick.”

Then we pivoted. “What would it look like,” I asked her, “for God to be with fearful second graders?” She talked about making new friends, visiting the doctor ourselves or visiting with those who are sick, and all kinds of other things. Pretty soon, our picture of grace was just as full as the picture of fear. She summed it all up by saying “We are the ones God uses to bring peace to people who are scared.” And that became the sermon; I prompted, and *she* preached.

Near the end of the psalm, our prayer shifts: “Teach me your way, O Lord.” I give thanks for eight-year-old teachers like Erica.

1. What fears haunt your life?
2. Who has God used to calm your fears?

**For your light in our lives, I give thanks, because you cast  
out the fears that thrive in the darkness. Amen.**

*Peter Rehwaldt, Trinity Lutheran, Lawrence, KS*

## MONDAY, MARCH 17 - Psalm 30



**“Weeping may linger for the night,  
but joy comes with the morning.” v.5**

What is it about nighttime that opens all the doors to the fears, sorrows and questions that we’ve kept neatly closed away during the day? After a long day of work, we finally get to fall into bed and relax... only to find that relaxation drowned out by the noise of anxious thoughts.

While there are many remedies to this -- a calming cup of tea, peaceful music, a faithful animal companion -- this verse reminds me that sometimes, you just gotta cry it out. Tears are literally, biologically, designed to help us feel better when life is too much. Crying releases a flood of “feel-good” chemicals and allows pent-up stress and emotions to flow freely.

Crying can also be a form of prayer. In Romans, Paul writes, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words.”

So when you feel overwhelmed, whether it’s at night or in a difficult situation, let your tears be a prayer to the God who promises to always be with us, hear us, and carry us through til the morning dawns.

1. What thoughts tend to keep you up at night?  
What tools do you use to help release your worries and find peace?
2. Can you think of a time that you felt held -- literally or spiritually -- during a crisis? What helped you know that you were not alone?

**God, when it’s all too much, you hold me as I cry and listen  
to the prayer of my tears. Be with me now and always. Amen.**

*Alison Kern, Hosanna Lutheran Church, Liberty, MO*

## TUESDAY, MARCH 18 - Psalm 31



**“Be strong and take heart,  
all you who hope in the Lord.” v. 24**

Is it only me, or does it seem like hope is in short supply these days? Our world is a mess, global conflicts rage unabated, and the plight of the poor and vulnerable among us appears to be getting worse, not better. The enormity of it all is taking its toll. I am tired. I am weary. How can anyone heed the psalmist’s counsel to, “Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord?” (Psalm 31:24).

It all depends on how one defines hope. If I equate hope with “pie-in-the-sky pipe dreams” or unrealistic optimism, my situation is hopeless. Except, hope is different from optimism.

In his essay, “An Orientation of the Heart,” written three years before the “Velvet Revolution” toppled Czechoslovakia’s dictatorship, Vaclav Havel suggests that optimism is the belief that things are going to turn out as you would like, as opposed to hope, which “springs from certainty.” Hope is an orientation of the heart that “begins and ends in what stirs our hearts, where we place our trust, and how we conduct our lives.”

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are a people of hope. Just as God has been present in our past, God *IS* present now. God *IS* present amid the uncertainty, change, and chaos of life -- guiding, leading, and inviting us to participate in what God is up to in the world.

This is the promise of the cross. When death-dealing powers of the world gain the upper hand, when all hope seems lost, when grief, anxiety, and fear stop us in our tracks and make us want to lose hope, the cross proclaims loud and clear that God *IS* working in and through all of it . . . redeeming, renewing, and reconciling all things to God. And this is what gives me hope!

1. Where do you turn for hope when so much of what is happening in our world seems beyond your control?
2. How does Scripture inform your understanding of God’s abiding presence in your life?

**God with us, in you we experience abundant life. When life seems out of control and fear begins to take hold, help me to trust that you are with me, working in and through all of it. Amen.**

*Jon Brudvig, Salem Lutheran, Lenexa, KS*

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18 - Psalm 33



**“The eyes of YHWH look on those  
who stand in reverence,  
on those who hope in God’s unfailing love.” v. 18 (IB)**

As we journey through the season of Lent, a time of reflection and renewal, Psalm 33 serves as a reminder of God’s steadfast presence and love. This psalm speaks to the assurance that God watches over those who stand in reverence, finding hope in God’s unfailing love. In the context of Lent, a period of self-examination and drawing closer to God, this message offers profound encouragement.

In our everyday lives, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed by the challenges and uncertainties we face. Whether it’s the demands of work, family, or personal struggles, we often search for stability and reassurance. Psalm 33 reminds us that true security is found in God’s unfailing love, a love that remains constant regardless of our circumstances. God’s eyes are upon us, offering guidance, protection, and care.

Consider your own life: where do you place your hope? Is it in your own abilities, material possessions, or perhaps the approval of others? Lent invites us to redirect our focus and place hope in God’s steadfast love. This hope transforms our perspective, allowing us to see beyond the temporary trials and trust in God’s ongoing work in our lives.

As God actively watches over us, we are invited to participate in God’s unfolding story. This involvement requires us to acknowledge our dependence on God, trusting that God knows our needs and holds our future. Embracing God’s love leads us to respond in gratitude and faith, influencing how we live and interact with those around us.

1. How does recognizing God’s unfailing love influence your understanding of the challenges you face?
2. In what ways can you practice placing your hope more fully in God during this Lenten season?
3. How can you show God’s love to others in your daily interactions?

**Gracious God, thank you for your unwavering love and watchful care. As we journey through this season, help us place our hope in you alone. Open our hearts to trust your guidance and reflect your love in our daily lives. May your presence bring peace to our hearts and lead us closer to you. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.**

*Elizabeth Carr, St. John’s Lutheran Parish, Lancaster & Bendena, KS*



## THURSDAY, MARCH 19 - Psalm 34



**“Taste and see that the Lord is good.” v. 8**

I really enjoy the parade of fresh fruits and vegetables during the growing season. Asparagus and strawberries; sweet corn and ripe tomatoes; green beans and raspberries. And my favorite: the truck from Georgia or Colorado bringing fresh peaches.

When I get them home, I put out old towels and gently lay the peaches out to finish ripening. Soon they soften, and the kitchen fills with their fragrance. The taste of those peaches is SO GOOD! I try to freeze some for the rest of the year. Thank you, Lord!

In our family, we try to celebrate birthdays with the honoree’s favorite food. My dad always wanted German Chocolate Cake and my mom wanted Lemon Meringue Pie. I can count on my niece to ask for Mashed Potatoes. Thank you, Lord, for tasty foods and people I love.

A note in my Lutheran Study Bible says that this verse may have been a reference to a sacrificial meal celebrated as part of the ritual of thanksgiving. Our own holiday traditions often include a feast. We have turkey, stuffing, and pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving; egg casserole and sweet rolls for Easter brunch. It is hard for me to imagine the Fourth of July without potato salad and watermelon. Thank you, Lord, for all our blessings; for Jesus who is victorious over death and the grave; for our freedom to worship and praise you.

These foods we enjoy can serve as a reminder to give thanks to the One who provided them. We give thanks not only for the food, but for the people who grew and prepared it, and for those with whom we gather to eat it.

1. What tastes remind you that ‘the Lord is good’?
2. Are there foods that remind you of certain people?

**Good and gracious God, we give you thanks for the tasty foods that remind us of your goodness and mercy. Amen**

*Joan Swander, St Mark’s Lutheran, Emporia, KS*

## FRIDAY, MARCH 21 - Psalm 37



**“Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;  
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,  
over those who carry out evil devices.” v. 7**

“Fret” is a funny word, and one that we don’t use much anymore. To me, it tends to conjure up the sound of a 1950s movie star saying something like, “Don’t fret, darling.” But this Psalmist emphatically reminds us not to fret, especially over the actions of others.

At the risk of sounding trite, I went to the dictionary to learn more about fretting. As it turns out, “fret” comes from an Old English word that means “to devour.” So it is literally the act of something eating away at you. Synonyms include “corrode,” “rub” and “chafe.” Very unpleasant sensations!

In short, fretting destroys us from the inside, like rust or decay. We can be so consumed with worry and angst about what “they” (the wicked, our enemies, those who seem to have everything while we have little) are doing that it eats up our peace and leaves us hollow.

By contrast, the Psalmist says, “Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.” If fretting is anxious, frenetic chewing, stillness is where we can release our negative energy and restore our soul. Prayer, meditation, or even simply sitting outdoors and observing your surroundings can all be channels to the peace that comes from stillness.

So don’t fret, darlings. The peace of God is waiting for you in the quiet places.

1. When was the last time you felt fretful about something?  
What impact did that have on your mental, emotional,  
and spiritual well-being?
2. Where do you find peace in stillness?  
What is difficult about being still?

**God of peace, help me to combat my gnawing anxieties  
with the fruits of stillness. When I feel fretful,  
fill me with your nourishing strength. Amen.**

*Alison Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO*

## SATURDAY, MARCH 22 - Psalm 40



**“I waited patiently for the lord;  
who inclined to me and heard my cry.” v. 1**

U2’s “40” is a powerful fusion of a psalm of thanksgiving a psalm of lament. Created in the last hour of their “War” album recording sessions, this raw but gentle track became a staple of their live performances. Its simple instrumentation and heartfelt vocals resonate deeply with audiences, to this day.

I didn’t know all that when I was in high school, blasting the “War” album in The Skunk (the black and white Chevy ‘61 Apache pick-up truck I drove). My dad had installed a cassette player and speakers for me, which made up for the lack of a heater, A/C or speedometer.

I was into churchy stuff. I ruled at Bible trivia. I listened to Christian rock. I even wrote and presented “God Gave Rock n’ Roll to You” (a survey of contemporary Christian rock) for the Lutheran Church Women’s group. I prayed. I “rededicated my life to Christ” at Christian rock concerts. My main diversion from Christian rock was U2.

U2’s “40,” because of its source material, of course, was in tune with the Christian music I enjoyed. But in sharp contrast with that same Christian music, “40” had something I needed to hear, something just as biblical and faithful: lament. *“How long to sing this song? How long? How long?”*

The lack of certainty in that refrain was a relief. Christian rock was full of certainty. I heard artists I liked singing judgmental, dismissive, even smug lyrics about anyone who doubted, was “insincere” in faith, or who lacked the zeal of a martyr. Eventually, I couldn’t reconcile that music with following Jesus, so I quit listening.

“40” was a balm for my soul. I wonder now if, in part, U2’s success has been in their ability to humbly offer words of faith and their willingness to offer their fans accompaniment in the uncertainties of this world. I wonder, too, if the same is true of the Psalmists.

1. Were you into “churchy” stuff in high school?
2. Is there “un-churchy” stuff that helps you now in your faith?

**For God’s sake, incline your ear and hear my cry  
and I will sing a new song. Amen.**

*Daryn Holdsworth, Pathways Hospice, Chesterfield, MO*

## SUNDAY, MARCH 23 - Psalm 42



**“As the deer pants for water,  
so my soul pants for you.” v. 1**

I love how God shows up in the routine of everyday life. Like the night I prepared to close my front door at the end of another long day. Only this time something caught my eye. There, directly in front of me stood two silhouetted figures at the tree line highlighted by the majestic orange-lavender-pink sky. Trying not to spook the deer, I remained perfectly still and watched as the pair finished their evening meal. The unexpected encounter, one of those moments in life that takes your breath away, reminded me just how often I fail to experience God’s soothing and healing presence in my life.

“How often,” I asked myself, “have I overlooked God’s abiding presence in my life because I have been too busy, too tired, or too caught up with the mundane tasks of everyday life to take a break from the never-ending routine of my to-do lists? Or, worse yet, that I close the doors to the world around me; thereby short-circuiting the opportunity to renew my weary soul that thirsts for a divine connection as the deer pants for water.

Closing doors -- living and working within the confines of the comfortable, the familiar, and the routine -- is a choice many of us make without a second thought. However, in doing so, we sadly obstruct the view from our front porches, the gateways to our communities, and the portals from which we engage the world around us.

The view of the two deer silhouetted against the backdrop of an amazing sunset served as a timely reminder for me to celebrate God’s presence in the beauty that I often take for granted. “God writes the Gospel, not in the Bible alone,” noted Martin Luther, “but also on trees, and in the flowers and clouds and stars.”

1. How do you experience God in the beauty of God’s creation?
2. What spiritual practices might help you deepen your awareness of God’s presence in your life?

**God of all creation, help me to see and experience your presence in surprising and unexpected ways. Amen.**

*Jon Brudvig, Salem Lutheran, Lenexa, KS*

## MONDAY, MARCH 24 - Psalm 46



**“There is a river whose streams make glad  
the city of God... Be still, and know that I am God...  
The Lord of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our refuge.” vss. 4, 10-11**

Psalm 46 was Luther’s favorite psalm and the inspiration for his hymn “A Mighty Fortress.” As a youth, Luther was filled with anxiety and depression. He became a monk hoping the monastery would be a refuge for his soul. But monastic life offered little peace. His vigils, studies and prayer could not quell an inner turmoil. Legend says an ink stain on the Wartburg castle wall where he hid early in the Reformation was from Luther hurling an ink jar at the devil. Finally, his scripture study convinced him that God was more interested in joy than judgement. After that, he believed vs. 11: “The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” Then, when depression hit or enemies attacked, Luther would say to friends, “*Come, let us sing the 46th Psalm and let them do their worst.*”

Psalm 46 is also my favorite psalm. Because the psalms were originally lyrics for music sung in ancient Hebrew worship, the churches I served usually sing psalms rather than responsively repeat the words alone. When we could not find a good psalmody, my music director and I composed psalms. My favorite is based on Psalm 46. It begins with the image of verse 4, “*A river makes glad the city of God; its streams water and wash.*”

The river the psalm refers to is real but hidden. It allowed Jerusalem to be the refuge the psalm promised. In the year 701 BC, when the Assyrians besieged Jerusalem, the Hebrew king Hezekiah needed a water supply for his beleaguered people. His solution was to dig a tunnel to an underground stream. Its presence in ancient times reassured besieged Israelites that God would always give them water. It allowed Jerusalem to be a safe refuge.

The end of the psalm says, “*Be still, and know that I am God.*” That is more than a call for personal quiet time in the morning. These words are a command from God to the enemy to disappear. These are the words Jesus said to the storm on the Sea of Galilee: “*Peace! Be still!*” And the waves stopped. Jesus becomes our refuge.

When storms come, think of God’s water of life deep beneath you and say with Luther, “*Come, let us sing the 46th Psalm and let them do their worst.*”

1. What is your refuge and strength when life besieges you?
2. How can you be the quiet water of life for someone besieged by problems or dying of spiritual thirst?

**O Lord, water and wash me in your refreshing stream of love.  
Be my refuge that never runs dry. Amen.**

*Paul Hegele, Martin Luther Lutheran, Lees Summit, MO*

## TUESDAY, MARCH 25 - Psalm 51



**“Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.” v. 10**

Every fall, as the leaves fall from the trees in our backyard, I put them into a compost pile. They slowly break down all winter, until by spring we have a nice batch of compost to use to nourish and renew our gardens.

For me, the season of Lent is all about renewal, and perhaps no psalm speaks more about renewal than this one. “Let me hear joy and gladness...” and “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain me with your bountiful spirit.”

These days, it is easy to feel overwhelmed. Inside the church, in addition to all the ordinary things going on, there are midweek Lenten services, and all the services of Holy Week to get ready for. Outside the church . . . let’s just agree that it’s an understatement to say the news feels overwhelming.

So this prayer for renewal is not just nice but necessary.

Hymns are a source of renewal for me, and during Lent I make them part of my seasonal prayer life. This year, I am dwelling in six hymns by my friend Mary Louise (“Mel”) Bringle:

*As the Winter Days Grow Longer (All Creation Sings 924)*

*When Memory Fades (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 792)*

*In a Far-Off Place, Jesus Comes (All Creation Sings 908)*

*Cast Out, O Christ (All Creation Sings 1016)*

*Kneeling in the Dust to Form Us (All Creation Sings 1099)*

*Light Dawns on a Weary World (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 726)*

“Renew a right spirit within me” -- That’s what Mel’s hymns do. Through them, God slowly breaks down the distractions in my life and nourishes and renews my spirit by reminding me of God’s presence, promise, and power.

When I preach, I am to be a Good News Bringer. But before I step up to read the gospel, the gathering hymn echoes in my ears and the hymn of the day is in my head waiting to conclude my sermon. These authors and composers are my partners, renewing my spirit even as I seek to renew the spirits of the assembly that has gathered.

1. In your deepest night, how does Jesus come to you?
2. How does having your spirit renewed reshape your ministry and life?

**O God, may your light dawn, your love grow,  
and your hope bloom in our weary world. Amen.**

*Peter Rehwaldt, Trinity Lutheran, Lawrence, KS*

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26 - Psalm 55



**“Cast your cares upon the Lord,  
and God will sustain you.” v. 22**

I just finished a reading a novel with a storyline that revolves around a young couple from very different backgrounds. She grew up in a wealthy family in the city and he grew up on a peach farm in Georgia. The mother of the bride can hardly imagine that her daughter is marrying into this backwoods family and the mother of the groom feels the weight of expectations she can never meet.

As the story unfolds, the wealthy mother discovers that her “loving and devoted” husband has been having an affair with his secretary AND embezzling funds from his clients. He is hauled off in handcuffs and her life falls apart overnight.

The only two people who reach out to her with compassion and concern are her attorney (out of obligation) and her son-in-law’s backwoods mother. All her stylish “friends” wanted nothing to do with her once her wealth was gone. She asks her new friend what she should do, and her friend asks, “Have you prayed?”

This had never crossed the woman’s mind, but there are hints that she timidly starts reaching out to the true source of comfort and care. She soon finds herself a part of this extended family in Georgia -- and her life is better than it ever was before.

How often is there someone in our circle of neighbors, co-workers, and friends who need a nudge to “cast their cares upon the Lord” and be assured that “he will sustain you?” Perhaps we need to be reminded, too.

1. Is there someone you know who needs an invitation to “cast your cares upon the Lord”?
2. How has the Lord sustained you in the past?

**I cast my cares upon you, O Lord,  
trusting in your promise to sustain me. Amen.**

*Joan Swander, St Mark's Lutheran, Emporia, KS*

## THURSDAY, MARCH 27 - Psalm 62



**“For God alone my soul waits in silence,  
for my hope is from God.” v. 5**

I don't know a lot of people who enjoy waiting, especially at the DMV. I chuckle every time I think of the scene in the animated movie “Zootopia” where all the DMV workers are sloths. I recognize it's an unfair depiction, and that our waiting has nothing to do with them. In fact, *they* have to be patient with all of *us*, who each come in at one time or another one document short of what we need to renew our license, all because we didn't understand or pay close enough attention to the renewal instructions.

So when the psalm writer says, “my soul waits in silence, from God comes my salvation,” I don't feel excitement or hope. I feel frustration. I might wait in silence at the DMV, but my mind is screaming “Why is this taking so long?!?” And when it's God saving me from whatever crisis I'm in at any moment, I'm even less patient and internally silent.

We get frustrated when we feel like nothing is happening. Whether we're waiting on DMV workers or on God, things ARE happening -- we just don't see it. God is no sloth either. And sometimes God is the one patiently waiting on us because we don't understand what's going on or we haven't been paying close enough attention.

Some things just take time. Especially big things. Being granted the privilege and freedom to drive myself wherever I want is worth the occasional wait. Being given blessings by God and freedom to live and love and enjoy life is also worth waiting for on occasion.

Maybe if I'd look up from my phone in the DMV for more than a few seconds at a time, I'd see that things are happening. And if I looked up from all the busy things I make myself busy with in my life, I'd see that God is patiently working, too.

Sometimes we just need to trust the process, and trust the processor. So... for God alone (as well as the DMV workers), my soul still waits in silence.

1. What makes it so hard for you to wait?
2. What are you waiting for?
3. Does the way that you wait impact your attitude about the waiting?

**Dear Lord! I'm tired of waiting! Nonetheless, help me trust that you are doing something. Thank you for the life and redemption you promise to give me, and for being patient with me, too. Amen.**

*Mike Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO*



## FRIDAY, MARCH 28 - Psalm 63



**“O God, you are my God, I seek you,  
My soul thirsts for you;  
My flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and wear land where there  
is no water.” v. 1**

Psalm 63 is said to be written when David was pursued by King Saul in the wilderness of Judah. David was no angel. He stole a man’s wife, killed that man, and then failed in his self-awareness about that serious lapse in judgement. He was a sinner, like all of us. Nevertheless, God loved David, and David loved God.

David was a man after God’s own heart. He made God central to his existence and longed for God’s presence, especially when he was pursued by Saul. We might imagine David on the run in the mountains, hiding, exhausted, in need of a drink of water, and ready to collapse in exhaustion, knowing his thirst would not be satisfied. And then he began professing his love and praising God. His predicament gives us a picture of what a deep sense of longing looks and feels like. He knew he needed God.

God loves us as much as he loved David. The issue isn’t God, it’s us. It’s always us. We don’t always recognize our sin or our need of God. The key thing is to come to terms with who we are, knowing that God loves us still, and then to trust in that love.

1. How would describe a moment when you longed for God’s presence in your life?
2. How do you profess your love of God?

**Oh God, you are my God, I pray that I will always seek you,  
and trust that you will make your presence known to me.  
Don’t let me forget my need of you; remind me if necessary.  
Let me sing songs of praise to you and you alone,  
all the days of my life. AMEN.**

*Sue Tarkka, Overland Park Lutheran, Overland Park, KS*

## SATURDAY, MARCH 29 - Psalm 68



**“Summon your might, O God; show your strength,  
O God, as you have done for us before.” v. 28**

When asked to describe God, many of us think of Jesus. We think of love, mercy, gentleness, and grace. We might even conjure up that painting that hangs in many churches and homes of Jesus with the red sash and long, flowing hair, looking down at the a little lamb held gently in his arms.

And that is why it’s so jarring (and troubling!) when we read scripture like this, in which God is portrayed as a warrior: “As wax melts before the fire, the wicked perish before God... When God marched through the wilderness, the earth quaked... The kings of the armies, they flee, they flee!... The Lord will shatter the heads of God’s enemies.” Yikes!

The psalm writer refers to God’s people as a flock, but the shepherd here looks different than we’re used to imagining. As I recall what a shepherd actually did, I realize they probably weren’t scrawny or soft. Shepherds had to be tough enough to traverse and live in rough terrain, strong enough to carry and wrangle sheep, and fierce enough to fend off and kill predators. A shepherd might be gentle, but *had* to be tough. Mighty King David the warrior, who wrote many of the psalms, began as a shepherd.

I have watched my large muscular cousin with tattooed arms and calloused hands cradling and cooing over a baby with gentleness and love. He knows how to shower his beloved child with love and grace, but I pity any fool caught threatening that child. Strength and deep, grace-filled love can coexist in the same person and in the same God.

I’m still not comfortable with a picture of God shattering skulls, but it’s good for me to remember that God is not only soft eyes and tender hands. God might be slow to anger and abounding in love, but God can and will do whatever is needed to protect the vulnerable.

Some day I’d love to see a remix of that painting of the Good Shepherd with a buff and tough Jesus holding a tiny lamb.

1. How do you react when you read about God being aggressive?
2. Who do you know that’s tough on the outside, but a big softy inside?

**Almighty God, the thought of your strength is daunting,  
and sometimes scary. Thank you for being a big softy on the  
inside and using your almighty power for the good of all. Amen.**

*Mike Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO*

## SUNDAY, MARCH 30 - Psalm 71



**“O God, from my youth you have taught me,  
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.  
So even to old age and gray hairs, O God,  
do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might  
to all the generations to come.” vss. 17-18**

Church is one of the few intergenerational communal spaces that remain in our increasingly segmented and isolated world. Kids are grouped by age in school, adults gather with others in similar stages of life, and even our online communities tend to be people that are just like us. But church is for everyone, from “youth... to old age and gray hairs,” as the Psalmist says!

Faith communities offer gifts like:

- Support for those in need, both within and outside of the community.
- A chance to learn from those who have the wisdom of experience (or the school of hard knocks!)
- Delight in the joyful noise of babies, children and teens.
- Opportunities to share our own gifts in new ways.

If you find yourself longing for connection, look for ways you can serve in your congregation. You might just find that your gifts -- whether they are crayon drawings on the back of a bulletin or beautiful quilts for people in crisis -- are exactly what your community needs!

1. Who is someone from your congregation that is in a different age or stage of life from you, but who inspires or encourages you?
2. What unique gifts do children, young adults, middle-aged people, and older adults bring to your church community?  
How can you celebrate and encourage people of all ages?

**God of our beginnings and endings, thank you for the  
tapestry of people who make up our congregation.  
Bless each one, from the littlest to the eldest,  
and help us see the value in all of them. Amen.**

*Alison Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO*

## MONDAY, MARCH 31 - Psalm 73



**“When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was stupid and ignorant; I was like a brute beast toward you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me with honor.” vss. 21-24**

If you’ve ever shared feelings of frustration and anger with another human, at least one of those people had a big, dumb helpful heart and they started offering advice and trying to fix things for you. But all you wanted was for them to listen to you and say, “Jeez, that must be really upsetting.” I confess that I’ve been the big, dumb unhelpful heart myself more than a few times, and it only leaves people more frustrated and angry.

Nine times out of ten, we don’t need a fixer. Whether it is justified or not, we just need someone to acknowledge that our pain and frustration is real. We need to lament, so that we can move out of the reactionary part of our brain and into the rational part.

When the disciples undoubtedly stubbed a toe on the road to Jerusalem, I doubt Jesus said, “Get over it. That’s nothing compared to the pain I’m going to feel.” Instead, I imagine him saying, “Ooh, that must hurt,” as he puts an arm around his friend and helps them walk it off.

More often than not, I think of God as being more of a fixer, someone to go to when I need a solution to a problem -- either in the form of a good miracle, a revelation, or a smiting. And so, I appreciate that the psalm writer whines and complains to God. They remind me that God is more than a big, dumb, helpful heart. God isn’t just a fixer. God is a lament-listener. Along with problems that need fixing, I can come to God with the feelings I just need to be speak out loud, even when they are petty.

Whatever pains you have, especially the ones that can’t be fixed with a simple commandment or two, trust that God cares to listen. God invites lament. God is there to talk it out and walk it off with you. Before you know it, you might just start feeling like a human again.

1. Why do we feel ashamed to tell God what we’re feeling sometimes?
2. How does God show love to you when you tell God of your pain?

**O Lord, sometimes I just hurt, and I don’t need you to fix things. But I do need you to let me know I’m not alone. Thank you for listening and caring in those times. Amen.**

*Mike Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO*

## TUESDAY, APRIL 1 - Psalm 84



**“Happy are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.” v. 5**

My robotic vacuum has programmed the map of my house into its memory, so that no matter where I set it down, it finds its way home to the charging station. My heart is like that vacuum cleaner. No matter where I may be -- cities or rural spaces, this continent or another -- I find myself wandering into God’s dwelling places without really thinking about it, drawn there by some ethereal memory. Every time, they bless me.

I remember sneaking into an old Baptist church when I was eight, wandering around and then standing there transfixed by the creaking silence, staring at the baptistry high in the east wall -- alone, and yet not alone -- feeling myself embraced by the palpable presence of God -- awash in serenity.

On a cold misty day in Scotland, I found myself following a cobblestone street and walking into the ruins of an ancient church, its moss-covered walls rising into a roofless expanse of sky. Birds flew from nests tucked into crevices so that movement and birdsong engulfed the space. Worship was in session! My soul exploded upward and outward and I laughed out loud. “O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.”

Pilgrimages... following the path of the heart and stumbling into the courts of the Lord.

Even in the valley of complaint, the psalmist says, springs will well up before us and we will move from strength to strength for the God of gods will be with us in Zion -- the place, like an umbilical cord, through which God’s life pours forth with nourishment for body and soul. When we are running low on faith, hope, joy, passion, or anything else, we can simply go “home” and get recharged. The way, Jesus once said, is known -- it has been programmed into us.

1. When or where have you suddenly stumbled into Zion?
2. What in your life or spirit needs recharging?

**God who nourishes, draw us closer to you in these Lenten days of pilgrimage and startle us with fresh wellsprings of grace.  
In your name, amen!**

*Alix D. Pridgen, Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, Prairie Village, KS*

## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2 - Psalm 86



**“Teach me your way, O Lord,  
that I may walk in your truth;  
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.” v. 11**

A few years ago, I found myself juggling the demands of family, work, church, and seminary. While each aspect of my life was important, I felt constantly torn, unable to give my full attention to any one area. This left me feeling exhausted and spiritually depleted. My family felt neglected, I showed up to work but was too tired to do my best, I didn't have enough time to devote to my congregation, and I was falling short in my studies. During this difficult time I was just going through the motions and I realized that my heart was divided, distracted by competing priorities. I was missing out on the deeper connection with God that I yearned for.

In our daily lives, it's easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of responsibilities and forget our primary focus—our relationship with God. David's plea for an undivided heart is our reminder to seek God's guidance and to trust in God's ways, even amidst life's busyness. We are called to prioritize our faith, allowing it to shape our decisions and actions and draw closer to God, as we seek to align our hearts with God's will and experience the true joy of an undivided heart.

1. What are some areas in your life where you feel your heart is divided or distracted from focusing on God?
2. How might your daily routine change if you committed to seeking God's guidance and truth wholeheartedly?
3. In what ways can you intentionally create space for a deeper relationship with God during this Lenten season?

**Gracious God, you know the distractions and struggles that vie for our attention. Teach us your ways and guide us to walk in your truth. We ask for an undivided heart that is fully devoted to you, especially during this Lenten season. Help us to prioritize our relationship with you above all else and grant us the peace that comes from trusting in your steadfast love. Amen.**

*Elizabeth Carr, St. John's Lutheran Parish, Lancaster & Bendena, KS*

## THURSDAY, APRIL 3 - Psalm 91



**“When they call to me, I will answer them;  
I will be with them in trouble,  
I will rescue them and honor them.” v. 15**

You could read Psalm 91 as if you are speaking with a friend who is going on a dangerous journey; maybe starting back to school, or starting a new job, or even beginning treatment for a serious disease. You have an opportunity to share how God has been your refuge and protector on your own journey of faith.

When I was at the seminary, Christ Seminary-Seminex, we had two children and very little money. We could not see past graduation. Would there be a call from a congregation to be a pastor? Would our money hold out? We were impatient with God, waiting and wondering where God was, and why this process of clarifying our future was taking so long. We were turning our backs on God; not trusting God to care for us. Our sin turns us in on ourselves so that we are unable to trust God’s Promise and see God working.

God is our refuge and faithful Promiser. I found a manufacturing job. I taught in a Lutheran school. I did have an interview in a congregation, and I did receive a call to serve as their pastor.

I know that things do not always work out this way for people. Sometimes life is a dangerous journey. Loved ones die; jobs are lost; children get sick, and money can be scarce. The future may look bleak. But God’s Promise in Christ is to be there for us and with us. God’s last word is Promised to us by God: “I will deliver, I will protect, I will answer, I will be with you, I will rescue you, I will show you my salvation.”

1. In what ways has God been there for you in times of trouble?
2. Which verse or verses of Psalm 91 speaks to your soul?
3. What do you need to hear in times when you may feel so alone and impatient with God?

**O Lord, in the midst of our fears and distrust, you are our hope, our Promise. Draw us close to you and be our deliverer, our rescuer, our help in times of trouble. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

*Tom Schoenherr, Good Shepherd Lutheran, Manchester, MO*

## FRIDAY, APRIL 4 - Psalm 94



**“When I thought, ‘My foot is slipping,’  
your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up.” v. 18**

Close calls -- we’ve all had them. A split-second swerve to avoid a car accident. Grabbing the back of a toddler’s shirt to keep them from running into danger. A fall on the ice that bruised our rear end and our ego, but nothing worse.

While I do believe that God cares for our physical safety and can miraculously intervene at times in these circumstances, I think it’s much more common for God to put people in our path when our spiritual “feet” are slipping.

Take my spouse, for example. He has this really irritating way of calling me out when my words get too sharp or I start to slide down the slippery slope of dehumanizing those I disagree with. I don’t appreciate it in the moment, but usually, once I’ve cooled off, I’m glad for his guardrails.

Or those times in a group of friends where the conversation turns from gentle teasing to just plain meanness toward one individual, and someone has the courage to say, “Hey, that’s enough. So...how ‘bout those Chiefs?”

Let’s be honest: our feet will always and forever be slipping. We are human, and our collective moral ground is shaky at best. But God gives us a community to help us find our footing on a better path, narrow though it may be. Be open to experiencing God’s steadfast love in the form of gentle correction -- and look for opportunities to speak the truth in love to your friends and family when they begin to slip.

1. Who in your life acts as a guardrail when you struggle to live out your calling as a follower of Jesus?
2. How do you respond when someone corrects you? How does their tone or approach impact your ability to hear their feedback?

**Lord, open my ears and my heart to correction when my feet begin to slip. Place people in my path to help me stay true to the values you’ve given me, and help me to be a kind guardian for others. Amen.**

*Alison Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO*



## SATURDAY, APRIL 5 - Psalm 95



**“O come, let us sing, with hearts full of grace,  
To the Rock of our refuge, our sacred place.” v. 1**

In the depths of the earth and the heights of the skies,  
His majesty echoes, our praises arise.  
With joy let us enter, with voices we raise,  
In the presence of God, let our hearts sing His praise.  
For He is our Maker, and we are His own,  
The sheep of His pasture, in His love we are known.  
In creation we glimpse the Creator’s embrace,  
The mountains, the rivers, all speak of His grace.  
Yet in this season, we pause and reflect,  
On the paths that we wander, on the ways we neglect.  
O Lord, soften hearts that have drifted away,  
Help us to listen, to hear what You say.  
In the wilderness, trials may come and may go,  
But Your voice is the beacon, the light that we know.  
Today, if we hear, let us not turn aside,  
For the promise of rest in Your presence does abide.  
Let us kneel in humility, surrender our pride,  
Finding peace in Your arms, where our souls can abide.

1. Where do you catch glimpses of God’s grace?
2. Which paths have you gone down in your life that led you farther away from God. Which paths have brought you closer?
3. What fears are you holding onto right now that you might be able to release in the safety of God’s embrace?

**O Lord, whenever I wander, help me hear your voice.  
Relax my grip, slow my steps, and lift up my eyes,  
that I might find joy and peace in your embrace.  
Amen.**

*Edd Wunderlich, Gloria Dei Lutheran, Kansas City, MO*

## SUNDAY, APRIL 6 - Psalm 100



**“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands!  
Serve the Lord with gladness!” vss. 1-2**

There is some debate about the origin of the word “worship.” Most scholars say it is from the Old English “*weorth*” (worthy) and “*scipe*” (shape), meaning an action of praise and learning shaped to be worthy of God. I also like the notion that worship means “worth ship” -- that we are sending to God the praise and love that God deserves.

But what does God deserve? And how can we “make a joyful noise to the Lord” in a way that most honors God? Many congregations have a paid song leader on a microphone whose singing drowns out the whispered words from people in pews. Does that best honor God? And what happens when the sanctuary screen goes blank during recital of the Nicene Creed? Do people go quiet forgetting the words? Are worshippers merely a quiet audience?

One quality of good worship is the energy and joy of the worshippers. We can “make a joyful noise to the Lord” only with enthusiasm. “Enthusiasm” literally means God (*theos*) in you (*en*). We are possessed by God’s spirit. I don’t think the Lord judges our singing for perfect pitch. God’s goal is gusto. We cannot honor Easter’s victory or Christ’s Calvary passion without passion.

Many years ago, I tried to enliven worship by creating Theme Services. Prayers, sermon stories, and music, came from other lands or cultures. Church members liked it so much they took up extra offerings to bring in guest musicians. For the Scottish music worship, we would invite 6-8 members of the city’s Scottish Society to wear kilts, parade tartan banners, and play bagpipes as they circled the nave. The Sunday before Cinco de Mayo, May 5, was for Hispanic music on trumpets, guitars and drums. At the Irish music worship the Sunday nearest to St. Patrick’s Day, several girls from a dance class danced Irish gigs in the chancel as part of the offering. The African worship brought back some of the African refugees the church had sponsored years earlier; they sang, played drums, and after worship sold handmade artwork. The first Sunday of Advent was for Klezmer music, that Yiddish culture of Eastern European Jews where clarinets wail plaintive music begging Messiah to come.

A few worshippers had wide-eyed wonder at some Theme Services. American Blues and jazz, and Americana music were safe. But was Reggae music from Bob Marley’s Jamaica Lutheran enough? And writing lyrics praising God to tunes from Brazil’s Samba and Bossa Nova culture stretched some people’s horizons, sometimes uncomfortably.

One thing was certain -- people left those Theme Services with huge smiles. They had lived Psalm 100. “Make a joyful noise to the Lord!... Serve the Lord with gladness.”

1. What church music makes your heart sing? Do you think God smiles at this?

**Lord, as you open our minds to learn new wonders, open our hearts and voices to enter your courts with joyful praise. Amen.**

*Paul Hegele, Martin Luther Lutheran, Lees Summit, MO*

## MONDAY, APRIL 7 - Psalm 103



**“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me,  
bless God’s holy name... who redeems your life from  
the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy...  
The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger  
and abounding in steadfast love.” vss. 1, 4, 8**

How easy it is to take God for granted, to forget to praise God and to rely on our own ideas and remedies, to depend on our own strength to lead us through challenges and troubles. The psalmist may have been delivered from a long-lasting illness or a stressful situation. The psalmist needs to talk to herself/himself to praise God and bless God for the healing that the psalmist has experienced.

I know that after having a few days of bone-aching sickness, or the debilitating cough from a cold, or after the isolation and mask-wearing that COVID dictated to us, I still, after I feel better, need to hear these words, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God’s holy name.” God has not given up on us.

Four times in Psalm 103 the psalmist reminds herself/himself of the “steadfast love” of God. That word, “steadfast,” is not used often in regular conversation, but it speaks to the long-lasting, deeply committed love of God for you and me.

We can easily take God’s care for granted, and we do that regularly. We turn away from God to follow our own path, to do things our way, to distrust God’s mercy and love for us. We could certainly expect God’s anger and wrath to come down on us for our unfaith.

But instead, God surprises us and we receive the Promise of God’s steadfast and abiding love in Jesus Christ. The psalmist says that God’s steadfast love is everlasting. Even though we have neglected to praise and bless God, God blesses us with the Promise that through faith in Christ we are righteous and God is delighted with us.

Now we cannot help but bless the Lord who forgives us, heals us, redeems us, and crowns us with God’s steadfast and everlasting love. God blesses us with life and hope all our days.

1. Think about times when you needed to be reminded to thank, bless, and praise God.
2. What does it mean to you to “bless the Lord”?
3. In what experiences has God’s steadfast love surprised you?

**O God of steadfast love, you are the Blessing One who forgives and heals us. Work in us through your Spirit that we bless and praise you at all times, and that we are empowered to be a blessing to all other people. Amen.**

*Tom Schoenherr, Good Shepherd Lutheran, Manchester, MO*

## TUESDAY, APRIL 8 - Psalm 104



**“O Lord, how manifold are your works!  
In wisdom you have made them all,  
the earth is full of your creatures.” v. 24**

The psalmist sings praise to the Lord God who has created and set the boundaries for all things. From the winds that blow across the fields to the waters that fall from the heavens and those that well up from within the earth, all the elements work together within God’s plan. Even fire and flame are ministers in service to the Lord who sustains all life. The Lord provides food and drink and places of habitation for every species on the earth and in the sea -- each according to its needs. This web of life is dazzling... stunning in its beauty and complexity.

The Lord breathes life into us -- and into the prairie chickens, white tailed deer, wild turkey, chipmunks, lizards and into the big bluestem, turkeyfoot, switch grass, the milo and turkey red wheat, the cotton wood tree and the post oak, the dragonfly and grasshopper and every living thing that makes up woodland and prairie. When God withdraws the breath of life, it all dies. But then the Lord renews creation, calling forth life again. Death is a part of the cycle of life, but it is never the end.

Therefore, “I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.”

1. Where have you seen renewal on the earth or in your own life?
2. How many insects or birds or other creatures can you name and give thanks for?
3. Do you find comfort in knowing that you are just one small part of God’s creation? Why or why not?

**O God, I marvel at the dazzling diversity of life all around me and I thank you for supplying my needs: water to drink, food to eat, the earth beneath my feet, and for each breath I take. May I bear witness to your goodness for as long as I live. Amen.**

*Alix D. Pridgen, Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, Prairie Village, KS*

## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9 - Psalm 105



**“The Lord is mindful of the Covenant forever...  
for a thousand generations.” v. 8**

I served a congregation that celebrated their 125th Anniversary during my ministry. They kept their confirmation class pictures in the library just outside the sanctuary. When family came home to visit or for the funeral of a life-long member of the congregation, those pictures were a magnet for younger generations. “Look - there is Uncle Earl and Grandpa!” “Look at Mom’s hair! What was she thinking?” “Is this Grandma’s mother?”

The Lutheran Study Bible tells us that Psalm 105 is “a historical psalm and hymn of praise that tells the story of God rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt as the history of God keeping promises.” Stories of God’s faithfulness have been passed from generation to generation.

We have different challenges and opportunities to share the stories of God’s faithfulness than our ancestors did. There is a lot of “noise” in our lives that seems much more urgent and engaging. Sabbath rest seems a quaint concept from the past. But there are opportunities as well. I can carry on a “faith conversation” with a friend half way around the world in real time -- something my Grandmother could not have imagined. Resources to study the Bible are only a click away.

1. Who are some of the people who passed the faith to you?
2. How did they share it?

**Dear Lord, help me to remember that YOU are mindful  
of your Covenant FOREVER. Amen.**

*Joan Swander, St Mark's Lutheran, Emporia, KS*

"There are three elements that are  
almost always part of Lent:  
prayer, giving something up,  
and giving something back."  
— Elizabeth Hyndman



## THURSDAY, APRIL 10 - Psalm 107



**“Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story,  
those redeemed from the land of the foe,  
those gathered from the lands east and west...” v. 2-3**

The best way to work through the traumas of life is to tell your story. Grief, anger, fear, depression are all eased by sharing them. The old adage is true -- a log is heavy for one person to carry, but if you have one end and a friend has the other, the weight is halved.

I served a large church once whose first African-American member was the new music director we hired. Many people were angered that we addressed the city's racism by hiring Fred, a gifted black man, as a leader. We were poking their prejudice. As he quietly told his childhood stories of enduring discrimination, people softened.

With Fred on board, I once asked people to select their ten favorite hymns. It was an ecclesiastical ballot -- list your favorite 10 hymns on a blank paper on Sunday, then the next week select the ten best from the 70-80 nominated. After 5 weeks of winnowing down the list we had a consensus. I was amazed that 6 of the 10 favorite were by Africans (*We Are Marching in the Light of God*), or about slavery (*Amazing Grace*), or were about the Civil War (*Battle Hymn of the Republic*), or were by African-Americans (*Precious Lord, Take My Hand*), or were spirituals (*When the Saints Go Marching In* and *Were You There*). We were singing our love of racial harmony without knowing it.

What was equally amazing is that all of those composers wrote their hymns to deal with trauma in their lives. John Newton, a former slave-ship captain, wrote *Amazing Grace* to work through his guilt. South African Methodist Zulus sang and marched to *We Are Marching in the Light Of God* to combat apartheid. Thomas Dorsey, a share-cropper from Georgia, “combined the good news of the gospel with the bad news of the blues” in composing *Precious Lord*.

Troubled composers were uplifted and we are enlightened by stories told through music.

1. What are your favorite hymns? Why?
2. What are your traumas that you would like to tell others?

**Lord, God, we have lived long enough in the land of the foe. Keep us safe that we may tell your loving story of redemption. Amen.**

*Paul Hegele, Martin Luther Lutheran, Lees Summit, MO*

## FRIDAY, APRIL 11 - Psalm 118



### “God’s steadfast love endures forever.” v. 1b

I don’t remember a lot of the Hebrew words I learned in seminary, but I do remember the Hebrew word for God’s steadfast love. It is *hesed*. *Hesed* implies mercy, kindness, loyalty, and unbreakable love that God shows toward God’s people. This steadfast love is closely associated with enduring faithfulness, completely undeserved kindness, and generosity. It is grace -- unimaginable grace.

God’s love for us is unimaginable. For me, it must be like my grandmother’s love. As a child, I felt so loved by her. She always made me feel adored, loved, and special. As I’ve gotten older, I understand that for her, all of her grandchildren were special to her. We probably all thought we were her favorite. With a gentle touch, she would brush my long hair out of my face and tuck it behind my ear. She said, “I want to see your face. You are so beautiful.”

We spent long weekends with Grandma and Grandpa surrounded by a house full of cousins, aunts, and uncles. It was boisterous, loud, competitive, filling, and a wonderful memory. Not that there weren’t family squabbles and misunderstandings, but Grandma’s love for us filled the whole house.

Grandma Shirley died over 20 years ago, but the memory of her love remains a touchstone for me today. This is what I imagine God’s steadfast love for us is like. It fills every day. This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Because God so loved the world, God gave his only son so that we might have abundant life! May God’s steadfast love, mercy, kindness, loyalty, and unbreakable love accompany you today.

1. Whose unfaltering and unconditional love is an example to you of what God’s steadfast love might be like?
2. How will you share kindness, mercy, and generosity in the day ahead?

**Dear Jesus, thank you for living God’s grace in the world with your mercy, kindness, loyalty, and unbreakable love. Help me to live and love like you. Amen.**

*Jennifer Thomas, Mission Funding and Development,  
Office of the Presiding Bishop, ELCA.*

## SATURDAY, APRIL 12 - Psalm 119



**“Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path.” v. 105**

When I was in high school, I was fortunate to have a friend, Kristy, in the United Methodist Church youth group. Their youth director would take them to Christian concerts including Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith. I was able to go to a few of these concerts and even to an event in Willmar, MN called Sonshine Fest. Verse 105 from Psalm 119 is an earworm. I can't read the words without the gospel song being invoked:

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet  
and a light unto my path.*

*When I feel afraid,  
think I've lost my way,  
still you're there right beside me,  
and nothing will I fear  
as long as you are near.  
Please be near me to the end.*

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet  
and a light unto my path.*

*Verse text by Michael W. Smith © 1984 Meadongreen Music + Bug and Bear Music.*

God's word as a light to illumine our feet and our path is a powerful image. As Christians, walking in God's ways and following Jesus is our journey and our lifestyle.

These days, that is helpful to remember, because we see people who claim to be Christian living in ways that do not look like they are following God's word, but it is not ours to judge. Our work is to follow in God's path for us as God's word illumines our paths. And because God is near, we have nothing to fear.

1. What Bible verses light your path?
2. What current valleys are you walking through?

**Dear Jesus, thank you for being God's living Word in our lives, illuminating our feet, our steps and our path. Show us the way to walk and talk. Shine, Jesus, shine. Amen.**

*Jennifer Thomas, Mission Funding and Development,  
Office of the Presiding Bishop, ELCA.*



## PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 13 - Psalm 121



**“The Lord will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and for evermore.” v. 8**

This verse has always been a comfort to me throughout confirmation, college, seminary, our wedding, and especially now more than ever as parents whose children are at college. They no longer live with us, but they have bedrooms, belongings, and pets at our home. Some call this an empty nest, but the reality is that it’s an open door. Not only is our home’s door open for our kids to come and go. Our door is open for us to come and go too.

After raising kids for 22 years, we have no lessons, practices, games or recitals to attend. No one needs rides or help with homework. It’s also a time that our parents are aging and facing health issues, so we’ll come and go to see them more often as well. These are the seasons of life.

There is joy and sorrow. But there is also the reality that God is present. God never sleeps nor slumbers. God watches over us as we come and go. God was there at our birth, in our middle ages, and will be there in the future, no matter what comes. God blesses our lives.

1. What open doors do you have?
2. Who does God bless in your life?

**Dear Jesus,  
Thank you for dying on a hill that we might live.  
Thank you for sending your Spirit to lead us out  
and bring us back in. We worship and adore you. Amen.**

*Jennifer Thomas, Mission Funding and Development,  
Office of the Presiding Bishop, ELCA.*



“Patience is the companion of wisdom.”  
-St. Augustine

## MONDAY, APRIL 14 - Psalm 126



**“Those who sow with tears  
will reap with songs of joy.” v. 5**

I have a few photos from my first five years of life, but my favorite is of four-year-old me. I’m in footy pajamas, standing in my parents’ bathroom, in front of the full-length mirror. My dad’s music stand is set up with a sheet of music, and I’m pretending to conduct an orchestra. My mom used to tell me that I loved doing this. In the photo, I’ve turned toward the camera, beaming a joyful smile.

In Psalm 126, the writer describes their memory of the joyful return home of the Israelites from exile in Babylon. Every step they took brought them closer to the land God had provided, a land that represented everything to them. Despite the hardships of exile, their return filled them with overwhelming joy. Whether facing struggles or anticipating future ones, the psalmist remembers God’s faithfulness. Remembering the faithfulness of God in the past is a vital faith practice in the present.

This remembering is not just for the community, but is a practice for individuals, too. My own experience of “exile” began when a caregiver betrayed my childhood trust. I lived with Complex-PTSD due to that year of abuse. For decades I have pursued healing, through therapy, medication, meditation and my faith.

Several months ago, I experienced a breakthrough. Over several weeks, I felt a profound shift in my mental health, a homecoming in my heart, mind and body. Six-year-old me came home from exile. When I realized this healing had occurred, I felt “like those who dream” and my mouth “was filled with laughter”, my fortunes restored.

1. What life events have caused you to “rejoice”?
2. Were any of these preceded by something like “exile”?

**For God’s sake, return me safely from exile  
and I will rejoice in you. Amen.**

*Daryn Holdsworth, Pathways Hospice, Chesterfield, MO*

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*If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health,  
reach out for help immediately by calling the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.  
You can call, text, or chat online for 24/7 confidential support.*

## TUESDAY, APRIL 15 - Psalm 133



**“Behold, how good and pleasant it is  
when brothers live in unity!” v. 1**

Is your identity based upon the groups to which you belong?

Perhaps it is your religion, politics, race, sex, or sports team. What makes you unique and different from others?

For twenty years I served a church in Toledo. While Toledo is in Ohio, it is only 50 miles from the University of Michigan stadium in Ann Arbor. My members were split with engrained, nearly lethal loyalties to either UM or Ohio State. On the last Sunday of November, after The OSU-UM game, while other preachers dwelled on Thanksgiving, I always had to preach on peace, forgiveness, reconciliation.

Psalm 133 rhapsodies on the joy of “brothers” dwelling in unity. This is 1 of 15 “Psalms of Ascent” sung by worshippers as they climbed Mt. Zion to the Jerusalem Temple. Written after David and Solomon, the psalm tries to bring harmony to an Israel that already had or would soon split in a civil war. It praises Mt. Hermon, the mountain upon which the northern kingdom of Israel would center its worship following that split. But it also praises Mt. Zion, the site of Jerusalem’s temple and center for worship of the southern kingdom of Judea. It is a subtle cry for Israelite unity.

It is easy to find fault with others. Those quick to find fault are slow to enjoy unity. What creates disunity (and even hatred) today can be healed with patience, forgiveness and understanding. Our nation’s enemies 80 years ago -- Japan, Germany and Italy -- live in happy harmony with us today. And who remembers that the State of Ohio and the Michigan Territory actually fought a war in 1835-36 over which would claim Toledo. After only a few shots were fired, the U.S. Congress gave Toledo to Ohio and granted the Upper Peninsula to Michigan in consolation. (It is still debated who got the better deal.)

What makes us unique and different is less important than the unity that binds us together and makes each one special. “Unique” and “unity” come from the same Latin word *unus*, meaning “one”. We can be special and still be close. I see my chief identity as 1) Child of God; 2) Christian; 3) Brother to all other of God’s creation; 4) American. My loyalty to OSU comes slightly farther down the list. Who knows, perhaps our unity as Americans will make this April 15, Tax Day, more palatable.

1. How would you rank your identities?
2. How patient are you with those having different identities and loyalties?

**Lord God, Parent of us all, forgive our sibling rivalries. Amen.**

*Paul Hegele, Martin Luther Lutheran, Lees Summit, MO*

## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16 - Psalm 139



**“I praise you,  
for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.” v. 14**

This verse is a beacon of hope, especially during times of self-doubt and insecurity. We all have moments when we question our worthiness or compare ourselves to others. This is something I have struggled with throughout my life, but most especially when I began to feel the call to leadership in the church. I didn't think I could do what God was calling me to do and wondered if I was truly meant for this path.

But in a moment of meditation, I was reminded of Psalm 139:14. I realized that God has crafted me with care and purpose. My skills and strengths, even my weaknesses, are known to God, and can be used for God's purposes. This realization brought a deep sense of peace and renewed confidence.

As we journey through Lent, we are called to reflect on our relationship with God and ourselves. It's easy to become overwhelmed by our doubts and shortcomings, but God invites us to see ourselves through God's eyes -- as part of God's marvelous creation. God's love and craftsmanship shine through each of us, despite our flaws and fears. Let this knowledge anchor you as you navigate life's uncertainties.

1. When have you felt self-doubt or insecurity? How did it affect your relationship with God?
2. How can remembering that you are fearfully and wonderfully made change your perspective on these challenges?
3. What practical steps can you take to embrace your unique gifts and see yourself as God sees you?

**Gracious God, thank you for making us fearfully and wonderfully. When we doubt our worth, remind us of your endless love and perfect design. Help us see ourselves as you see us and guide us to use our unique gifts in your service. Amen.**

*Elizabeth Carr, St. John's Lutheran Parish, Lancaster & Bendena, KS*

## MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 17 - Psalm 145



**“The Lord is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” v. 8**

Today is Maundy Thursday, a day when we are given a “new commandment: love one another.” The commandment is really not so new. The Psalmist reminds us that the very heart of God is goodness and mercy. Our God is full of grace. Our God abounds in steadfast love. The people of God have always been called to love God and love one another because we have been called to live as God’s hands and feet in the world.

Would that our world acted more in the character of God. Yet, we are often quick to anger. We are often willing to accept grace, but unwilling to give it. We believe, as the Cobra Kai leaders chant, mercy is for the weak.

Grace, mercy, and love are acts that take extreme strength. They take a willingness to listen and share.

Perhaps that is why our God is so strong. Our God listens to our prayers, our cries of anguish, our laughter and joy, our need, our want, our self-adulation, and our praise and worship. Our God listens, and brings the salvation we need even if it is not the salvation we desire.

And so we learn to love, as God has loved us -- steadfast, with grace and mercy. We learn to listen and react, not with quick anger, but with measured assurance of the truth in love. In this way, our command becomes new: love one another.

1. When was a time that you reacted in anger without truly listening to someone else? How did that interaction affect you?
2. How do you practice listening in love and speaking truth to power to protect the last and the least among us?

**Gracious and merciful God: teach us the power of steadfast love.  
Strengthen us in that love that we may bear your grace and mercy  
to a world in need. Amen.**

*Jill V. Seagle, St. Thomas / Holy Spirit Lutheran, Sunset Hills, MO*

## GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 18 - Psalm 146



**“Do not put your trust in princes,  
in mortals, in whom there is no help.” v. 3**

It was a Good Friday Tenebrae service at my home church. Our choir director’s voice was echoing in the historic sanctuary: “It is finished.” I can place myself in my childhood at that moment, moved and sad and angry that we did this thing, this crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus, whom I was taught was my friend; Jesus, whom I was taught loved me; Jesus, whom I was taught was without sin: we killed him.

In my childhood mind it made no sense. Why would we kill our friend? Why would we kill the one who loved us so? Why would we kill someone who was to be our model for life?

As a pastor I could spout any version of atonement theory you would like to hear. But to be honest, I don’t want to lean into dogma and doctrine today. Instead, I remind you of what I remind myself all the time: Jesus was executed as a political prisoner for treason against the empire of Rome. Why? Because “we have no king but Caesar,” a sentiment that still rings true today. Our trust is too often given to powerful humans, relying on mortals to save us. We killed Jesus because it is in our nature to place our hope in tangible, quick fixes instead of in abiding relationship with the divine.

So, today I look to the cross and remember the one in whom I place my trust: the Lord who reigns forever. Today I weep for the world that continues to put trust in mortals for a quick gain. Today I watch over the one who has always watched over me and know that the resurrection dawn is coming to shatter the reign of the proud.

1. Where have you seen people placing their trust in human leaders and not in God?
2. How does your faith life shift the way in which you view the powers of this world?

**Help me keep watch, O God, over the one whom we crucified,  
trusting in your promise of resurrection dawn. Amen.**

*Jill V. Seagle, St. Thomas / Holy Spirit Lutheran, Sunset Hills, MO*

## HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 19 - Psalm 147



**“The Lord heals the broken hearted  
and binds up their wounds.” v. 3**

Most likely if you travel out into your community today there will be Easter egg hunts being held. There will be laughter and joy and chocolate and small toys. There will be springtime decorations in all of their pastel glory. The crocuses, daffodils, and other flowers of spring may even be popping through the ground (or already shedding their petals). Such experiences of joy and laughter should bring a sense of healing. Yet, in so many ways they feel empty to me.

In my heart, Holy Saturday is always the most difficult day of Holy Week. Today is a day in limbo: not quite resurrection dawn; but past the cruel death on a cross. Today is the day after the funeral. It is the day when other people move on with their lives while we are still mourning and questioning. Today is the day we wonder how we sing songs of praise when the tomb is still sealed and we are trapped in fear.

I have walked with many people in their grief and trauma. I know how difficult it is to see the world in celebration while they are in the midst of tears. Too many people give platitudes, “They are with Jesus now;” “Everything happens for a reason;” “God needed another angel.” What we need to do is sit with those who grieve, who fear tomorrow without their loved one. We need to let them know it’s OK to not be OK.

We know the promise of tomorrow; that promise is sure and true. But today, this Holy Saturday is important too. Today we are allowed to process the cruelty of death. Today we are allowed to be broken-hearted and wounded. Today we validate grief and trauma. Today we are allowed to show our brokenness and our wounds. Today we are allowed to be human. Because tomorrow is coming, and God will indeed lift us up with Christ, healing our broken hearts and binding up our wounds.

1. How do you process grief and trauma when the world seems to be moving on without you?
2. What words can you share with people who are grieving that are not just simple platitudes?

**Help me to be human in my brokenness, O God,  
that I may allow myself a time to mourn. Amen.**

*Jill V. Seagle, St. Thomas / Holy Spirit Lutheran, Sunset Hills, MO*

## EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 20 - Psalm 150



**“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.” v. 6**

We put away our “Alleluia’s” on Transfiguration Sunday, and today they all come out again, so what better psalm could there be than this one, for wrapping up these Lenten devotions?

Alleluia! It’s Hebrew for “Praise the Lord!” and the psalmist just can’t let that word go in this psalm that concludes Israel’s hymn book. Alleluia! It opens and closes this psalm like bookends, but there’s a lot more Alleluia-ing in between.

Where should that Alleluia be sung?

“*Allelu* in the sanctuary on earth! *Allelu* in the heavens above!”

Why should that Alleluia burst forth?

“*Allelu* for God’s mighty deeds! *Allelu* for God’s surpassing greatness!”

How should that Alleluia ring out?

“*Allelu* with the trumpets! *Allelu* with lutes and harps!

*Allelu* with tambourine and dance! *Allelu* with strings and pipes!

*Allelu* with cymbals, *Allelu* with the loudest cymbals!”

Who should raise those Alleluias?

“Let everything that has breath *Alleluia!*”

When I was two, my Grandma Rehwaldt was the organist at our church, and I was sitting with her as she practiced at home for Easter. She saw me watching, and pointed to a word that appeared repeatedly on the page. “*This* word -- ‘Alleluia!’ -- is *your* part to sing. The congregation and the choir will sing all these other words, but when we get to *here...* you sing *your* word.” I’ve been singing my word ever since.

Alleluia is everyone’s word. “Jesus Christ is risen today,” sing the folks who can read; “Alleluia!” sing the youngest children who can’t read; “Alleluia,” sing the elders whose eyes have dimmed, and even the folks who can’t read music. Alleluia is the song of the birds, cattle, and all creation. Let *everything* that has breath Alleluia!

On this Easter day, Alleluias ring in every corner of the world. Alleluias ring for all that God has done. Alleluias ring out with organs and praise bands, with quiet flutes and noisy trumpets and trombones, with whistles and drums and cowbells. And we can’t have just one cowbell -- we need more cowbell! It’s Easter!!!

1. Who taught you to bang your Alleluia cowbell?
2. For what do you raise your Alleluia today?

**For breaking the power of death, Alleluia! For blessing the world with life, Alleluia! For your promise of peace, Alleluia! Amen.**

*Peter Rehwaldt, Trinity Lutheran, Lawrence KS*