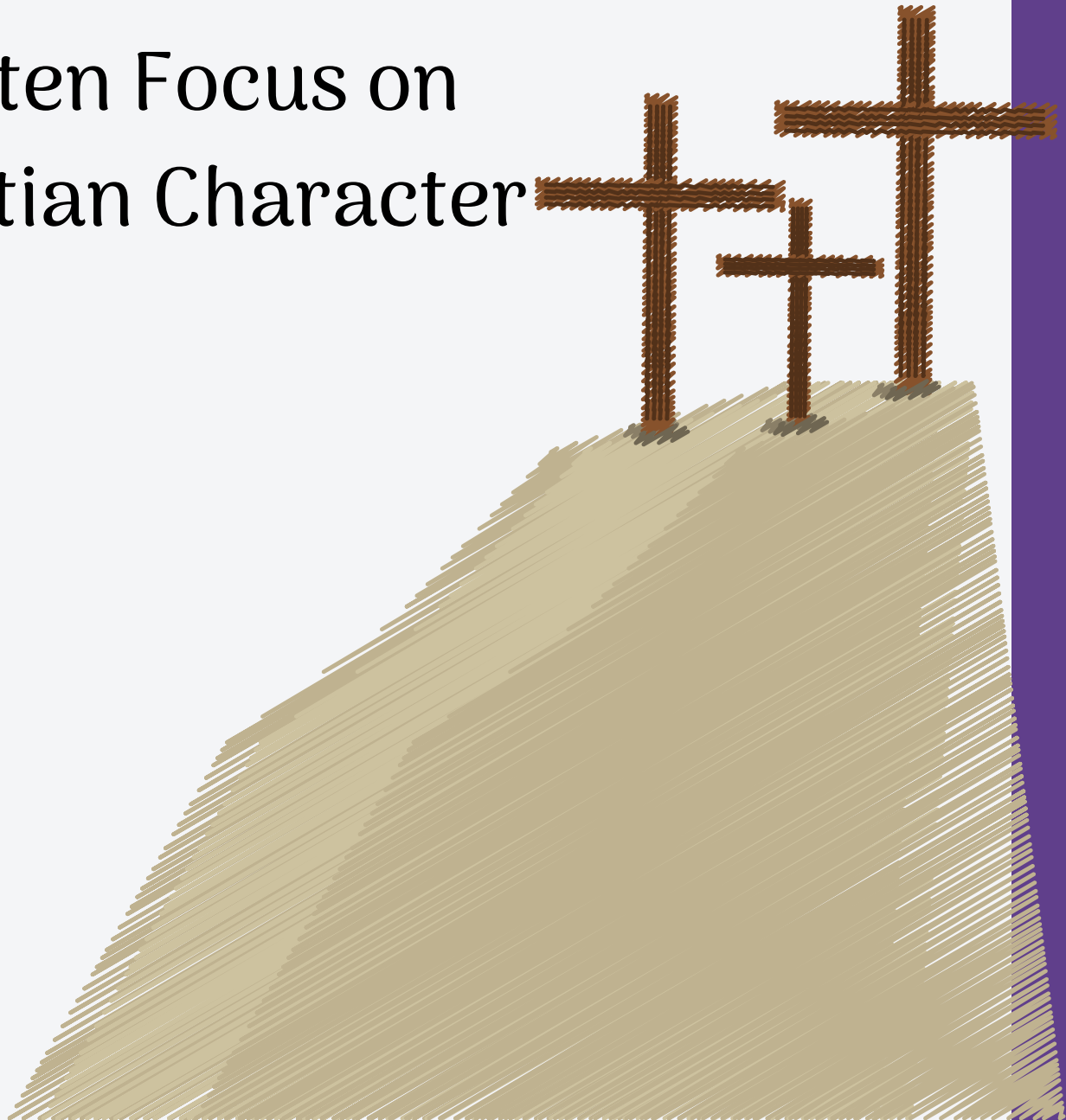


# What Shall We Take Up?

A Lenten Focus on  
Christian Character



# Week 1: Belief

## March 2 - March 8

Scripture Reading for Wednesday, March 2

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

# Week 1: Belief

March 2 - March 8

## Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, March 2

A disciple must believe in something beyond themselves. This may seem obvious, but it really should be stated clearly at the beginning. The choice to follow and to attempt to emulate contains within it an acknowledgement that someone or something is greater than yourself at least in some way. An apprentice follows a master because they believe the master has some skill greater than their own. A disciple emulates Jesus because they acknowledge that Jesus is a source of greater wisdom, peace, and love than themselves. Disciples believe in something beyond themselves.

In this passage from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus affirms his own belief in something beyond himself. When Jesus is tempted, he is offered a number of ways to satisfy his own needs or wants. He is offered food. He is offered worldly goods and authority. He is offered the glory of having God care for him in rather spectacular fashion. With his refusal of each temptation, Jesus insists that he will follow not his own way but rather the way of God. By resisting these temptations, Jesus asserts that he believes not in himself but in God.

Asserting our belief in the ultimate authority of God and not ourselves frees us from the desires that tend to prevent us from fully embodying the characteristics of Christ. When we acknowledge the authority of a God who calls disciples to care for others, it becomes easier to set aside our greedier and more self-interested wants and desires. When we assert belief in a God who calls disciples to love others, it becomes easier to quiet our less charitable thoughts and interpretations. As we begin our Lenten journey and study the characteristics of disciples, let's begin by asserting that we believe not in ourselves but in God. And in that way, we shall begin a process of denying ourselves in order to follow Jesus.

# Week 1: Belief

## March 2 - March 8

### Prayer, Wednesday, March 2

Loving and gracious God, help me to step away from myself. Over the course of these forty days let your wants become my wants, let your desires become my desires, and let your ambitions become my ambitions. Give me, O God, the wisdom, courage, and conviction I need to limit my self-indulgent ways of being so that your Spirit may grow within me. Grant that I might be freed from myself in order to follow you. Amen.

### Spiritual Practice for March 2-8

As a way of cultivating the ability to deny our own selfish wants and desires in order to affirm the desire of God, we are asking disciples this week to engage in the spiritual practice of fasting. Remember, however, that a good fast has two parts. The first part is stepping away from a particular habit or practice. The second part is stepping towards a different or alternative practice or habit. Spend a few moments in reflection and consider something you do on a daily basis that is self-inflating. Once you have identified something, take a few more moments and consider how you could replace or adjust that practice to be self-emptying or more closely aligned with the desires of God. For example, how much time do you spend scrolling through social media or watching TV? What if you took a portion of that time to read and study scripture? What if you took a portion of it to write letters and notes of care and thanks to others? What if you used a portion of that time to learn about child poverty and to research groups that are working against it? Fasting isn't just about learning to say no to ourselves. It is about learning to say no to ourselves so that we can say yes to the things of God. So this week let's consider the places we are being a bit self-indulgent and shift them to being more God-indulgent.

# Week 1: Belief

March 2 - March 8

Scripture Reading for Sunday, March 6

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.

You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us."

When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God,

you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous.

When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.

The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God.

Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

Prayer, Sunday, March 6

I thank you, O God, for the spiritual freedom which you offer. Thank you for giving me the grace that I need to step away from my own self-filling desires and towards your self-emptying ambitions. Grant, O God, that during this season of Lent I may learn to follow you more closely, love my neighbor more completely, and forgive as freely as I have been forgiven. Amen.

# Week 2: Discipline

March 9 - March 15

Scripture Reading for Wednesday, March 9

Luke 13:31-35

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

Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, March 9

What does your schedule look like this week? Work? School? Got any big projects you're working on? Maybe some travel plans? Most folks, anymore, do a lot of schedule juggling. Their lives are full of commitments. Work, church, school activities, recreational youth leagues, family obligations, doggy playdates; we fill our lives with just about anything and everything. Sometimes it is truly difficult for us to know if we are coming or going, and even if we wanted to add something to our calendars, truly it may not be possible to do so.

This passage seems to indicate that Jesus is keeping a much simpler schedule. Today and tomorrow he'll be casting out demons and performing cures. That's it. That's his list. Casting out demons and performing cures is essentially helping people. Today and tomorrow Jesus will be tending to those in need. This, of course, doesn't mean he isn't busy. He's just focused. He's not being pulled away by any of the distractions of life which tend to pull us away from doing or living the faith we claim.

- Devotion continues on next page -

# Week 2: Discipline

March 9 - March 15

## Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, March 9, Continued

To be a disciple of Christ Jesus requires a particular kind of discipline. It requires us to maintain our focus on the task of following Jesus and imitating his words and deeds. Today and tomorrow we could be following Jesus into the lives of those in need. That could be it. That could be our list. Today and tomorrow we could be living by the principles of love, mercy, and hope. Today and tomorrow we could be trying to sort out God's calling for our lives. It requires discipline to consistently allow God into our lives. It requires discipline to devote ourselves to the fellowship of the church, to the breaking of bread, and to live by the church's teachings. A billion things pull us away from God, from the created world, and from one another. How will we maintain the discipline to follow the pathways of righteousness in a world so full of distractions? What are you doing today and tomorrow?

## Prayer, Wednesday, March 9

Dear God, we know that you call us to follow. We know that you ask us to live by your precepts. And we know that you want to be in relationship with us. During this week, O God, give us the diligence we need to tend to that relationship. Help us to move past our distractions and enter into meaningful time with you. As we study the holy scriptures, reveal your wisdom to us. As we continue our Lenten journey, allow our spirits to draw near to your own. Amen.

## Spiritual Practice for March 9-15

Last week, through the practice of fasting, we were invited to work on denying our own selfish impulses and desires. This week, we will more fully focus on embracing the ways of God. Specifically, this week you are invited to read and reflect on scripture on a daily basis. Luckily, the good people from the Consultation on Common Texts have created a set of daily scripture readings based on the Revised Common Lectionary. Below you'll find a reading for each day this week. Each day, read the assigned passage and listen for how God may be speaking to you through the text. If last week was about saying "no" to ourselves, this week is about saying "yes" to God.

Suggested Readings - March 10: Phil 3:2-12, March 11: Phil 3:17-20, March 12: Matt 23:37-39, March 13: Phil 3:17-4:1, March 14: Rom 4:1-12, March 15: 1 Cor 10:1-13

# Week 2: Discipline

March 9 - March 15

## Scripture Reading for Sunday, March 13

### Philippians 3:17-4:1

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

## Prayer, Sunday, March 13

More like you, O God. I desire to be more like you. Let me imitate your boundless hospitality. Let me mimic your selfless love. Let me reproduce your eternal forgiveness. Help me, O God, to commit to the task of being your disciple. Help me to move past my own barriers and my own distractedness so that I may maintain the life of faith. You, O God, have dedicated your son to my eternal benefit. Let me so dedicate myself to the ways of love and mercy. Amen.



# Week 3: Holiness

March 16 - March 22

Scripture Reading for Wednesday, March 16

Luke 13:6-9

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, March 16

As we delve more deeply into some of the various characteristics of a disciple of Christ, it may be helpful to spend a bit of time reflecting on an important question. Is character an inward or outward quality? Or, stated another way, is character a state of being or a state of action? A fig tree that doesn't produce figs isn't really a fig tree is it? It's a tree, certainly. But figs are kind of its whole deal. How would you know it was a fig tree if it never made a fig? The fig is the outward sign of the inward character of the tree.

If you thought you spotted a false dichotomy at the outset of the previous paragraph then good for you! Character is both a state of being and a state of action. How would you know a person was funny if they never told or wrote a joke? How would you know a person was holy if they never loved their neighbor or cared for the vulnerable? Of course some actions, such as thinking charitably of others, do not necessarily have an outward expression, but you get the idea.

- Devotion continues on next page -

# Week 3: Holiness

March 16 - March 22

## Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, March 16, Continued

To be holy is to be dedicated or consecrated to God, and holiness tends to bear fruit in the world. However, a theologian might wonder, “if we aren’t bearing fruit, then are we holy?” Perhaps. A fig tree that isn’t bearing fruit is still genetically a fig tree. But if it isn’t generating figs, then is it still practically a fig tree? Sometimes it truly isn’t the right season for us to bear fruit and sometimes the conditions in our lives simply do not allow us to produce acts of holiness. These things must be acknowledged and accepted. Part of the grace of this passage is that the gardener loves and cares for the fig tree regardless of its production. And yet there is still a clear directive for the tree to produce fruit. We’ll need to hold these things in tension as we move through the week and consider what this passage means for us. What holy fruit do we produce? Why? Why not? What conditions in our lives do we need to address so that we can more readily and easily produce the fruit of God?

## Prayer, Wednesday, March 16

Our prayer this week is part of the lyrics to “Holiness Is What I Long For” as performed by Jesus Army.

Dear God, holiness is what I long for. Holiness is what I need. Holiness is what you want from me. So take my heart and mold it. Take my mind; transform it. Take my will and conform it to yours, O Lord. Amen.

## Spiritual Practice for March 16-22

This week, it will behoove us to recognize and attempt to emulate the fruit producers that we know. Who do you know that is producing holy fruit in the world? Is there someone who generates a lot of love? Can you think of someone who produces near limitless amounts of charitable thinking, or empathy, or acts of service? Each day this week, think of someone you know who you would consider to be holy, dedicated to God. Spend time in prayer thanking God for their witness and asking God how you might produce such fruit. Then maybe go ahead and do it!

# Week 3: Holiness

March 16 - March 22

## Scripture Reading for Sunday, March 20

### 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

## Prayer, Sunday, March 20

O God, we know that you are unique in all the universe. You alone are the source of joy and spring of hope. You are set apart from the corruption, the greed, the warring madness of the world. You call to us and ask us to set ourselves apart from such things as well. You remind us that we are your children, and as such, we are holy. Due to your Spirit, we, too, are set apart from the world. Or at least we can be. Help us to maintain the holiness you offer. Help us to keep our feet upon the righteous path, to refrain from judgment, and to build up peace in the world. Amen.

# Week 4: Reconciling

March 23 - March 29

Scripture Reading for Wednesday, March 23

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So he told them this parable:

“There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

- Scripture continues on next page -

# Week 4: Reconciling

March 23 - March 29

## Scripture, Wednesday, March 23, Continued

“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

## Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, March 23

Did you know that the literal definition of “reconciliation” is “the restoration of friendly relations”? That means that when we seek forgiveness via a prayer of confession (either in worship or on our own), we are seeking a restoration of friendly relations with God. Something has happened (most likely we’ve offended God in some way), and the once-friendly relationship has become something else, which is why we seek out some sort of mechanism to return the relationship to what it once was. As Christians, we believe that we receive reconciliation with God via the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. And since we know the joy of such reconciliation, a desire for it becomes a part of our character.

The parable of the Prodigal Son/Forgiving Father/Resentful Brother provides for us a glimpse into the kind of reconciliation we receive and that God desires for us. The ties that bind these three characters are broken, frayed, or bent into something other than friendly relationships. Each actor ends up with their own set of reasons to be either frustrated with the others or embarrassed to be around them. They have a whole lot of reasons to avoid one another. Yet the passage clearly insists that forgiveness and reconciliation should be at the heart of who they are and how they relate to one another.

- Devotion continues on next page -

# Week 4: Reconciling

March 23 - March 29

## Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, March 23, Continued

Like the prodigal son we were dead to God, and still God offered us reconciliation. We are often dead to God, and still God continues to offer us reconciliation. Should we not offer the same generosity to others? Should we not seek the same from those other humans and creatures we have offended? Our very beings are marked by the notion that when we offended God, God didn't simply avoid us but rather offered us a means of reconciliation. As such, we know what it is to live at peace with God, and so we seek to live at peace with others.

## Prayer, Wednesday, March 23

This week, gracious God, I offer a prayer of confession. I confess that I have hurt my brothers and sisters. I have mocked them. I have taken their joy. I have prevented their peace. I have not dealt kindly with all those who dwell upon your holy mountain. By what I have done and by what I have left undone, I have sown and tended the seeds of separation, distrust, and anxiety in the world. Forgive me, O God, for my many sins. Release me from my burden and encourage me to seek reconciliation between myself and those whom I have hurt. Please, O God, let me be reconciled to you and to my neighbors. Amen.

## Spiritual Practice for March 23-29

Sometimes our minds tell our bodies how to feel, and sometimes our bodies tell our minds how to feel. This week, we will draw upon the potential of the latter in order to deepen our felt understanding of what it means to be reconciled with God. Each day this week, at some point in the day, spend time offering a prayer of confession, and as you do this, begin by assuming a penitential pose (such as kneeling or even lying prostrate on the floor). When you have concluded your prayer of confession, allow your body to take on a pose that expresses understanding of the reconciliation with God that you have received. Feel free to be creative with this; examples include standing up, raising arms/hands, jumping, singing, allowing a broad smile to grace your face, and so on. As your body takes on this reconciled pose, your heart may want to offer prayers of thanksgiving, or you may wish simply to have a personal conversation with God, now that your "friendly relations" have been restored.

# Week 4: Reconciling

March 23 - March 29

## Scripture Reading for Sunday, March 27

### 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

## Prayer, Sunday, March 27

God of infinite mercy and limitless possibilities, you have declared that I am a new creation in your spirit! You have acted with kindness towards me and given me a new beginning. Thank you for your abundant grace. Thank you for your unending kindness. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to see others in the same light. Help me, O God, to view others as new creations full of the limitless possibility for love, which you provide. Amen.

# Week 5: Perseverance

March 30 - April 5

Scripture Reading for Wednesday, March 30

Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.  
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it  
was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."

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

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

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

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts  
of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, March 30

In approximately 587 BCE (formerly BC), Jerusalem was utterly decimated by the Babylonian empire. The event was not only devastating to the Israelite people, it was brutal, and cruel, and the destruction of the temple caused the people to question the very presence and reality of God. Those who were allowed to live were either scattered to the wind, left to fend for themselves without the protection of a ruler or army, or taken to live in exile in the Babylonian capital of Assyria. There is not enough space to quote it here, but a stunning depiction of the desperation caused by this calamity can be found in the fifth chapter of the book of Lamentations. There you can catch a glimpse of a community bereft of hope.

Psalm 126, in contrast, was most likely written when those who had been taken into exile returned to Jerusalem in 539 BCE. As such, it contains the joy of a people who have somehow survived. Their faith in the sustaining nature of God—even in the midst of death, starvation, and despair—has helped them to hold firm to who they are. It has carried them forward into better days. They can now return home and rebuild what once was. Like honey from the hive, the joy absolutely oozes out of this text.

- Devotion continues on next page -



# Week 5: Perseverance

March 30 - April 5

## Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, March 30, Continued

We too, face great devastations in our lives. Our dreams fall apart. Our careers crumble. Our relationships fade. We wrestle with the ruin caused by illness and death. We come to places where we sow in tears and go out weeping and yet we can persevere through our faith in the sustaining nature of God. It is God who delivers. It is God who mends. It is God who binds up the broken-hearted. During this season of reflection, let us offer our thanks and praise to God for seeing us through.

## Prayer, Wednesday, March 30

Sustaining God, when my heart is broken, I come to you. When my dreams are dashed, I rest on your promises. When it feels as though life is slipping through my hands, I trust you to hold me. Give me that which I need in order to face this life full of trouble. Remind me of the many ways you have held your faithful servants throughout history. Let their words of faith become my own. Let their resolve fill my own reserves. Let the perseverance of my ancestors in faith carry me through life's trying moments. Amen.

## Spiritual Practice for March 30-April 5

As a means of cultivating an attitude of perseverance and faith in the sustaining nature of God, this week we'll spend time in reflection and thanksgiving for the ways which God has already provided for us. Each day this week, name or write down a gift of grace that God has given to you. What sustaining gifts has God already given? Think back through moments of difficulty in your life. What held you up even when you were about to fall? Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for those things. And if you currently could benefit from a bit of sustenance, ask God to provide that for you. Let us persevere through life with God and with one another.

# Week 5: Perseverance

March 30 - April 5

## Scripture Reading for Sunday, April 5

### Philippians 3: 4b-14

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

## Prayer, Sunday, April 5

It seems nothing can pull the hearts of people away from greed and malice. Still I press on toward the goal. It feels as though nothing will cure our warring madness. Still I press on toward the goal. The world may forever be drawn toward animosity and resentment. Still I press on toward the goal. I press on toward love even when it seems perpetually out of reach. I press on toward understanding even when it seems I will never fully grasp it. I press on, as best I'm able, toward your gracious ends even though your kingdom may not be fully known in my living. Be my light, O God, while I run this race. Amen.

# Week 6: Humility

April 6 - April 12

Scripture Reading for Wednesday, April 6

Luke 19:28-40

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it." Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, April 6

Part of the humility of this scene is well-trod territory by now. The way that Jesus, God's anointed, enters Jerusalem is depicted in sharp contrast to the way Caesar, the worldly ruler, would have gone about it. When Caesar came to town, he was escorted by soldiers and war horses. He came in on the main drag with a show of force and expensive regalia. Jesus enters on a borrowed ride. If Caesar comes in on the ancient world equivalent of a tank, Jesus comes in on your neighbor kid's old bike. It is certainly a mark of humility and the sort of thing meant to demonstrate the different values by which Jesus lived and therefore invites us to live as well.

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# Week 6: Humility

April 6 - April 12

## Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, April 6, Continued

But there is also a more subtle type of humility on display in this passage. For whom would you spread your coat on the ground? A whole group of people take their cloaks and spontaneously spread them on the ground so that Jesus, and the colt he rode in on, need not sully their feet by placing them upon the ground. Who in the world would you think is too good to put their feet on the ground? In a few days (narrative hours), Jesus will give a further demonstration of his humility by bending down and washing the feet of the disciples. But here the followers of Jesus demonstrate their humility by bending down and acknowledging his holiness. In this act, they show that they believe in something beyond themselves. And in declaring Jesus as king, they publicly proclaim that it is him upon whom they will rely. It is to Jesus that they will look for salvation and purpose. In these declarations and actions, they demonstrate their humility and willingness to follow Jesus.

## Prayer, Wednesday, April 6

For you, O God, I lay down my cloak. For you, as well, I lay down my pride, my arrogance, and my unnecessary self-inflation. For you, O God, I lay down my very self so that I may serve you. I humble myself in your presence so that your glory may be more fully known. Amen.

## Spiritual Practice for April 6-April 12

One aspect of humility, from a Christian perspective, is a recognition of our utter dependence on God. We are incomplete beings, and we rely on God to make us whole. Similarly, as incomplete beings, we find that we are dependent on others on a regular basis. None of us makes it through a single day without the assistance of someone or something else. This week, as a means of practicing humility, we will acknowledge at least some of those people who fill in gaps for us, which we couldn't fill ourselves. Each day this week, think of someone upon whom you rely. Who collects your trash? Who keeps the shelves stocked at the store? Where does the oxygen come from that you need to survive? It is okay that we are incomplete beings. Let us humbly give thanks for the ways we are supported by others.

# Week 6: Humility

April 6 - April 12

## Scripture Reading for Sunday, April 10

### Philippians 2: 5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

## Prayer, Sunday, April 10

To confess that you are Lord is also to confess that I am not. It means, among many things, that I understand that my wisdom is insufficient, my empathy is lacking, and my mercy is something short of all-encompassing. And so I turn to you, O God. In your holy name, wipe away my iniquity and expand my heart to be truly loving. Lead me. Guide me. Teach me your ways so that I may boast not in myself but in you. Amen.

# Holy Week: Confidence

April 13 - April 17

Scripture Reading for Wednesday, April 13

Luke 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, April 13

Does it seem odd to follow a week about humility with a week about confidence? Yeah, probably it does, but hear us out because this is a specific kind of confidence that we are talking about. To begin with, this is not confidence in ourselves; disciples have confidence in God. That's a big difference. And to follow that up, specifically, disciples have confidence that God will provide a victory over and against the powers of sin and death. Certainly, the resurrection of Jesus is illustrative of this and so is the hoped for resurrection of our own bodies and selves. But beyond these things, consider all of the moments of desperation and anguish within the scriptural witness, which God transforms into moments of grace.

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# Holy Week: Confidence

April 13 - April 17

## Weekly Devotion, Wednesday, April 13, Continued

A son sold into slavery becomes a means of salvation. A woman weeping in desperation in the temple is given a child who anoints kings. A mother and child alone and starving in the wilderness are fed and nourished. People are freed from slavery. Exiles return home. People are healed. Others are given second and third chances. Some learn to forgive. Hearts become generous. People of faith learn to welcome the stranger and protect the vulnerable. Time and time again, tears are transformed into fits of laughter because God works to assure the possibility of life beyond devastation.

As we move through the events of holy week, it will be helpful for us to keep this promise of God in mind. As we observe the betrayal, the trial, the anguish, the devastation, and the confusion, we will need to be reminded that God will not allow such things to have the final word. Let us have confidence in the victory which God provides.

## Prayer, Wednesday, April 13

I thank you, O God, for the moments when you have helped to turn my tears into laughter. I offer my praise for the times when you have provided hope amid my devastations. For you, O God, sin is not the final word. Through the life, death, and resurrection of your son, you provide salvation and hope beyond measure. Thank you, O God, for these things. Amen.

## Spiritual Practice for April 13-April 17

During this holy week, we are encouraged to join in the victory work of God. To that end, you are invited to perform intentional acts of kindness for others as a way of joining in the work of love and hope that conquers sin and death. Each day this week, do something intentionally kind for someone else. Write a note. Deliver a meal. Babysit. Walk a dog. Do something intentionally to bring about more peace, love, and hope in the world. Find some ways, large or small, to bring some light to someone in need.

# Holy Week: Confidence

April 13 - April 17

## Scripture Reading for Sunday, April 17

### 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

## Prayer, Sunday, April 17

On this Easter day, we thank you for the new life you offer to us. We thank you for not leaving us to ourselves. You redeem us, O God, and make us whole. You offer us, time and again, fresh starts and new beginnings. Grant, O God, that we, having been more fully formed into disciples during this season of lent, may do likewise for others. Amen.