



# **Big Book of Lenten Devotionals – Year 2**

## **Based on the Daily Lectionary of the *Book of Common Worship***

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's "Big Book of Lent – Year 2" gives you a valuable resource for personal and corporate Spiritual formation during the Lenten season. From Day 1 through Day 47 (Easter), each section includes multiple biblical passages from the daily lectionary, reflections based on those passages, and accompanying prayers based on each reflection. Seminary alumnae/i, faculty, staff, Board members, and students since 2015 have contributed to this resource to help enrich your Lenten worship for many years to come.



## Lent Year 2

### Day 1

#### Luke 18:9-14

<sup>9</sup>He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: <sup>10</sup>"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' <sup>13</sup>But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' <sup>14</sup>I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

#### Mark Tidd, D.Min. student

Jesus directs his words to unnamed listeners who were far from what the prophet Micah said the Lord expected: "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). The fasting and tithing of the Pharisee in the parable was contradicted by his arrogance, whereas the tax collector felt profoundly his deep need for God. While it's obvious who our model should be, it can perhaps be tempting to reassure ourselves that we are not like "those Pharisees"—and perhaps to take just a little pride in our humility.

Then comes Ash Wednesday, and with it the words of the liturgy: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return; repent, and believe in the gospel." We have the obligation and the opportunity to confess our sinfulness and to cry with the tax collector, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" We receive the cross-shaped mark of ashes on our foreheads as an intimate sign that all we can do is accept our dependence on the mercy of God. And we just might recognize that the mercy of God is enough, and is reason enough for deep thanksgiving and joy.

May we give thanks to God on this Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent for the mercy shown to us in Jesus as we prepare our hearts to observe the shattering goodness of Good Friday and the astounding goodness of Easter.

#### Prayer

God of grace and mercy, grant us the true humility that abandons pretense about our own righteousness. Enable us to repent truly and to believe your Good News with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. Amen.

#### Psalm 147:1-11

*Praise the Lord!*

*How good it is to sing praises to our God;  
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.*

*2 The Lord builds up Jerusalem;  
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.*

*3 He heals the brokenhearted,  
and binds up their wounds.*

*4 He determines the number of the stars;*

*he gives to all of them their names.  
5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;  
his understanding is beyond measure.  
6 The Lord lifts up the downtrodden;  
he casts the wicked to the ground.  
7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;  
make melody to our God on the lyre.  
8 He covers the heavens with clouds,  
prepares rain for the earth,  
makes grass grow on the hills.  
9 He gives to the animals their food,  
and to the young ravens when they cry.  
10 His delight is not in the strength of the horse,  
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;  
11 but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him,  
in those who hope in his steadfast love.*

### **Derek Davenport '05**

“The Lord builds up Jerusalem, he gathers the outcasts of Israel.” You can’t gather what is not scattered. This means the people are far from home. You don’t “build up” unless something is torn down. This means Jerusalem is just a shadow of what it once was. We see this kind of action over and over in this psalm. The Lord lifts, heals, and binds, but only what is downtrodden, broken, and wounded. This psalm was written either in or after tragedy, yet notice the tone. Joy, thanksgiving, and the final word is hope. As we journey through Lent together, the tone of this psalm provides a perfect guide—one of serious reflection, but filled with hope.

### **Psalm 51:1-17**

*1 Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.  
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.  
3 For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.  
4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are justified in your sentence  
and blameless when you pass judgment.  
5 Indeed, I was born guilty,  
a sinner when my mother conceived me.  
6 You desire truth in the inward being;  
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.  
7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
8 Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.*

*9 Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.  
10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.  
11 Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.  
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.  
13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.  
14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.  
15 O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.  
16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;  
if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased.  
17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

**Greg Steible '14**

Could there be a more perfect prayer for the beginning of Lent? After all, what is this season for other than to remember our transgressions, acknowledge our sin, and ask for a clean heart?

It's an odd season in which we find ourselves: a season of self-denial and repentance. At times this season can be daunting in scope and overwhelmingly humbling. We know that in Christ we have already been forgiven of our sin and yet we still live in a broken world as broken people. We know that we have been brought into this world by God and that we will leave this world by God, all the while failing every day. Even so, we are loved by God.

May we all acknowledge our own sin and the sin of our society. May we understand and witness the brokenness of this world. May we also recognize the goodness of Jesus Christ and the blessing of love and forgiveness as we look forward down this long path to Holy Week.

**Prayer**

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. Be with me this season; give me strength and wisdom as I strive to serve you. Give me humility and create in me a clean heart, O God, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Day 2

### Philippians 3:12-21

<sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. <sup>16</sup>Only let us hold fast to what we have attained. <sup>17</sup>Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup>But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup>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.

### Eric McIntosh '12

Do you ever get tired of being tired? I do! I am tired of fighting every day of my life. I see racism every day, and I am tired of it. I see misogyny almost just as often, and I am tired of it. The stock market keeps rising, but my paycheck does not, nor do the paychecks of my friends. My kids and their friends may never do better than their parents because of having to take out huge student loans. The sheer weight of all that I have to negotiate because of the oppressive actions of would-be enemies of the cross makes me tired. Emotionally speaking, it feels like the evildoers are getting away with it.

But I am tired of being tired! And I hear God telling me, "Then give up being tired! After all, their end is destruction. Besides, this isn't your home anyway; your citizenship is in heaven, and this ain't heaven yet!" So this Lenten season, instead of continuing to be tired of being tired, I am pressing on! I am putting the troubles behind me and pressing on! I am putting the pain behind me as best I can and am pressing on! With God's help, I am forgetting the hate that lies behind me and I am pressing on! I am pressing on with expectant anticipation that the Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior, will transform this body of humiliation! This year for Lent, I am just tired enough to give up being tired. I am giving it all to God, and I am pressing on toward His glory!

### Prayer

Lord God almighty, many of us are just fatigued beyond hope. Many of us do not know where to go or what to do. Help us to be honest with you. Remind us to turn to you. Call us as loudly as you can to press toward our Savior, Jesus, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever! Amen.

### Psalm 147:12-20

*12 Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!*

*Praise your God, O Zion!*

*13 For he strengthens the bars of your gates;  
he blesses your children within you.*

*14 He grants peace within your borders;  
he fills you with the finest of wheat.*

*15 He sends out his command to the earth;  
his word runs swiftly.*

*16 He gives snow like wool;  
he scatters frost like ashes.  
17 He hurls down hail like crumbs —  
who can stand before his cold?  
18 He sends out his word, and melts them;  
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.  
19 He declares his word to Jacob,  
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.  
20 He has not dealt thus with any other nation;  
they do not know his ordinances.  
Praise the Lord!*

### **Derek Davenport '05**

This psalm is filled with such rich imagery. Frigid words like snow, frost, and hail are compared to images of warming up after dinner—wool, ashes, and crumbs. After this juxtaposition we switch to the power of God's word to melt away the cold. Though the author describes "his cold," he uses imagery of warmth, and then moves to a springtime image of blowing wind and flowing water. This paradox is perfect for us as we journey toward both the cold dark night of the crucifixion, and then the warmth of sunrise on Easter morning.

### **Psalm 27**

*1 The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?  
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?  
2 When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh —  
my adversaries and foes —  
they shall stumble and fall.  
3 Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war rise up against me,  
yet I will be confident.  
4 One thing I asked of the LORD,  
that will I seek after:  
to live in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to behold the beauty of the LORD,  
and to inquire in his temple.  
5 For he will hide me in his shelter  
in the day of trouble;  
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;  
he will set me high on a rock.  
6 Now my head is lifted up  
above my enemies all around me,  
and I will offer in his tent*

*sacrifices with shouts of joy;  
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.  
7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,  
be gracious to me and answer me!  
8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"  
Your face, LORD, do I seek.  
9 Do not hide your face from me.  
Do not turn your servant away in anger,  
you who have been my help.  
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,  
O God of my salvation!  
10 If my father and mother forsake me,  
the LORD will take me up.  
11 Teach me your way, O LORD,  
and lead me on a level path  
because of my enemies.  
12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,  
for false witnesses have risen against me,  
and they are breathing out violence.  
13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living.  
14 Wait for the LORD;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the LORD!*

### **Anita Stuart-Steva '04/'13**

As we live our lives, we go through rough patches: illness, depression, joblessness, family difficulties. . . . Some of these patches are brief and others encompass an entire season of our lives. Like the psalmist in Psalm 27 we can feel attacked from all sides by these adversaries. The psalmist reminds himself that his light, his protection, his strength, and his courage come from the Lord. Our God lifts us above our circumstances.

Even though we are under attack we are able to face it knowing that God is with us. We can sing songs of joy in the midst of the sorrow; we can shout praises in the midst of the silence; we can hold our heads high in the midst of being bowed down. As we look into the face of our Lord we are able to look away from our troubles and see the goodness of God's provision for us. Listen to your heart saying "seek God's face!" and know that you are never alone.

### **Prayer**

O Lord, your face do I seek. Teach me your way and lead me on a level path that I may see your goodness. I wait for you. Amen.

## Day 3

### **Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32**

*1 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? 3 As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. 4 Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die. 25 Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is unfair." Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? 26 When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. 27 Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. 28 Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. 29 Yet the house of Israel says, "The way of the Lord is unfair." O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? 30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live.*

### **Ben Beres '10**

"Setting teeth on edge" is an old phrase, but its meaning is clear. Perhaps you too have had your teeth set on edge by some distasteful drink or fetid foodstuff. But imagine if you bore tortured taste buds because of another's putrid palate. Someone else samples the forbidden fruits, but you bear the consequences. Surely you would name such a system unjust.

The Israelite children do the same by leveling their accusation against the Lord. While the truth of their proverb lies in the communal nature of sin (for no sin is without corporate consequence), the ultimate price tag to wickedness, the wage, as Paul calls it, is death, and under the Old Covenant, "the one who sins is the one who dies." This is "eye-for-an-eye" in action.

Thank our God that it doesn't end there! Though it's clear that injustice is found in the hands of us sinners, the Lord allows us to repent, to consider the compounded folly of our ways, and to turn away from them. In echo of David, the Prophet pleads for us to take on a new heart and a new spirit. The ones we wield will only wipe us out.

### **Prayer**

Holy One, we are grateful for a season of self-reflection. Help us discover the distaste deep in our souls for the sin in our lives and in our communities. May we purge our lives of our unjust inclinations, and in your Cross and Empty Tomb, may we find hope to live. Amen.

### **Philippians 4:1-9**

*<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. <sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let*



*your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup>Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

### **Jeffrey Sterling '88/'98**

Wouldn't it be something if Christian believers purposed to live a life of "passionate gratitude"? The expression "with thanksgiving" (v. 6) is meant to be more than an add-on in this text, I believe, and it follows the phrase "in everything." I'll bet you have had lots of blessings in your life for which it was *easy* to be thankful. But what about the things that, at least initially, were not perceived as "blessings" at all? Verse 6 says "in everything," doesn't it?

The author of Philippians suggests that approaching God with a thankful attitude makes a difference. Maybe God grooves on hearing us being grateful, even as we come with our "laundry lists" of prayer requests. What if gratitude had nothing to do with whether we had a *reason* to be grateful? I am thankful for my partner of 40-plus years, always, regardless of whether she gives me reason in the moment. And my "passion" for her means that I regularly tell her just how thankful I am. I think she really likes it. Maybe God does, too?

Developing a perpetually thankful heart is a win-win-win situation: God likes it, it makes us feel really good, and others are blessed by it and respond favorably to it. Only being thankful when something positive happens is lame. Passionate gratitude "in everything" makes a powerful witness, dear ones!

### **Prayer**

Dear God, I thank you. I just thank you! Help me develop a truly thankful heart and a passion for gratitude, not just toward you, but around others as well. Teach me the joy and power of giving thanks in everything. In Jesus' name, amen.

### **Psalm 130**

*1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.*

*2 Lord, hear my voice!*

*Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications!*

*3 If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?*

*4 But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.*

*5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;*

*6 my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.*

*7 O Israel, hope in the LORD!*

*For with the LORD there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.*

*8 It is he who will redeem Israel  
from all its iniquities.*

**Derek Davenport '05**

“More than those who watch for the morning.” Today, the sun came up. And the day before. And the day before. In fact, morning is a pretty sure thing. Morning will come.

To say my soul waits and hopes more than those who watch for the morning—that’s more than a sure thing. Though this is a psalm written from the darkness of night, it speaks of a hope that is surer than the hope that the sun will rise tomorrow.

It’s important for us to remember that hope in sunrise doesn’t dispel the night. The psalmist still has to endure the darkness of night, but it’s with the knowledge that sunrise is coming. As we continue our journey through Lent, we are tempted by our experience of instant downloads and overnight shipping. We want to get to the end. We are tempted to skip ahead to Easter morning—to ignore or forget the events of Lent and Holy Week. Instead, let’s sit with the Psalmist and wait. Let’s continue our journey, not only anticipating what lies ahead, but noticing what God is doing at this very moment.

## Day 4

### John 17:20-26

*20 "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

### Karen Baughman '06

The time has come. Change is in the air. Jesus has shared his last meal on earth with his disciples and given them his final instructions and reassurances. Jesus will soon lay his burden down and go to the cross.

Before leaving the safety of the upper room, Jesus begins to pray. He prays for his disciples, but more amazingly, he prays for us who will believe in Jesus in the days, years, and centuries to come.

All of us will know change in our lives. For some of us, it will be as monumental as the disciples knew in the death and resurrection of their Teacher and Lord. For others, it will be small changes throughout our lives. Even our churches and our seminary will know change. Throughout all the changes we will know as individuals and as groups, Jesus prayed for us. He prayed for our unity. He prayed that we will know we are loved by God. He prayed we will live in such a way so that the world may know God. Amazing! Jesus knew we would need God's love and help through it all.

### Prayer

Loving God, thank you for loving us before we were even born. Thank you for sending your Son to show us your love and how we should live. Be with us through all the changes in our lives. Help us always to reflect your face in all that we do and say and think. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.

### Philippians 4:10-20

*<sup>10</sup>I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup>In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. <sup>15</sup>You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. <sup>16</sup>For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. <sup>17</sup>Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. <sup>18</sup>I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup>And my God will fully satisfy every*

*need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.* <sup>20</sup>*To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

### **Christin Thorpe, staff**

In our reading for today, Paul is writing his thanks to the Philippians for their concern and generosity toward him during his time of distress. Paul explains that although the Philippians' actions benefitted him, more importantly, they were pleasing to God. Because their actions were pleasing to God, they could trust God to provide all their needs. But their needs would not merely be met—they would be met according to God's riches in glory in Christ Jesus. In other words, their needs would be met in a measure far greater than any gift they could ever provide to Paul!

This knowledge of God's ability to meet all our needs may be the reason Paul specifies that although he is grateful for their gifts, he doesn't really need them. He has learned to be content with whatever his condition is, whether he has plenty or little. Maybe this contentment stems from his willingness to do the work God has called him to do freely and generously. As a result of Paul's obedience to God, he can state confidently that God will provide his needs far beyond any human gift ever given.

In this Lenten season of self-examination, we should ask ourselves: How can I live a generous life that is pleasing to God and His people? Have I found contentment in whatever I have by resting on the promise that God will fully satisfy every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus?

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, we thank you for your generosity toward us. Remind us that our generous acts could never compare to the generosity you show us when you are well pleased. Help us remain obedient to your work and find contentment in all situations. Restore our faith in our ability to do all things through Christ, who strengthens us.

### **Psalm 149**

*1 Praise the Lord!*

*Sing to the Lord a new song,  
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.*

*2 Let Israel be glad in its Maker;  
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.*

*3 Let them praise his name with dancing,  
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.*

*4 For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;  
he adorns the humble with victory.*

*5 Let the faithful exult in glory;  
let them sing for joy on their couches.*

*6 Let the high praises of God be in their throats  
and two-edged swords in their hands,*

*7 to execute vengeance on the nations  
and punishment on the peoples,*

*8 to bind their kings with fetters  
and their nobles with chains of iron,*

*9 to execute on them the judgment decreed.*

*This is glory for all his faithful ones.  
Praise the Lord!*

**Derek Davenport '05**

The people are glad in their Maker. We understand that, and even expect it from a psalm. But notice that the Lord also takes pleasure in the people. God chooses to enjoy creation and the people who are a part of it. This sense of delight is something we experience in our own relationships. There is something delightful about spending time with friends and loved ones. There is something delightful in friendship, trust, and love. This mutual sense of gladness points us to the fact that God has chosen to enter into relationship with creation. The joy then explodes into song and action—it's worship that comes from deep within, worship that cannot be silenced or stopped.

## Day 5

### Daniel 9:3-10

<sup>3</sup>Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. <sup>4</sup>I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, “Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, <sup>5</sup>we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. <sup>6</sup>We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. <sup>7</sup>“Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. <sup>8</sup>Open shame, O LORD, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. <sup>9</sup>To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, <sup>10</sup>and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

### Heather Vacek, faculty

The annual journey through Lent draws us into a time of contemplation. We are invited to think deeply about God, ourselves, and our communities. Such reflections will likely surface reasons for despair and reasons for hope. In these verses from the prophet Daniel, we find honesty about individual and collective wrongdoing (“we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances”) and the shame that followed. Daniel’s confession, however, is preceded and followed by affirmation of God’s steadfast love, love that is not deterred or diminished by human action. Shame does not drive the prophet away from God; rather, it prompts his plea for the mercy and forgiveness that belong to God. The prophet trusts that God is a God of mercy and forgiveness, despite human rebellion.

Lent provides time for contemplation, time for “fasting, sackcloth, ashes”—or whatever our modern equivalent of those disciplines might be. As we mourn our individual and collective disobedience and seek to live more fully and faithfully into God’s covenant, we do so knowing that we are bound to a community of believers who profess the realities of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. This community of believers—past and present—helps us offer honest confessions of wrongdoing. It also helps us name the never-ending hope grounded in God’s steadfast love, mercy, and forgiveness.

### Prayer

Gracious and steadfast God, in this season of contemplation and reflection, we offer thanks for your unrelenting presence with us. Surround us with the gift of an honest community with whom we can confess our turning away and alongside whom we can continually recommit to embracing your love. Amen.

### Psalms 32

*1 Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,  
whose sin is covered.  
2 Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity,  
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.  
3 While I kept silence, my body wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.*

*4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.  
5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you,  
and I did not hide my iniquity;  
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"  
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.  
6 Therefore let all who are faithful  
offer prayer to you;  
at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters  
shall not reach them.  
7 You are a hiding place for me;  
you preserve me from trouble;  
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.  
8 I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;  
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.  
9 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,  
whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle,  
else it will not stay near you.  
10 Many are the torments of the wicked,  
but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.  
11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous,  
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.*

#### **Derek Davenport '05**

The Psalmist keeps silence while groaning. It seems so contradictory, but the Psalmist's silence isn't absolute. It's silence about sin. Immediately when that silence is broken by confession, the Psalmist experiences a sense of forgiveness and joy. The sound of moaning and confession is overwhelmed by the sound of "glad cries of deliverance."

This psalm is a sharp contrast to the passage we read yesterday. Instead of joy erupting into songs of worship, today we see the Psalmist keep silence while groaning. That phrase seems so contradictory, but the Psalmist's silence isn't absolute. It's silence about sin. The Psalmist moves from groaning and wasting away to a feeling of safety. We find our Psalmist protected from rushing waters, hidden from trouble, and even surrounded by sounds of joy so intense, so palpable, that they seem to act as a shield. The sound of moaning and confession is overwhelmed by the sound of "glad cries of deliverance." The psalm then ends with shouts of joy, returning us to that irrepressible worship that we encountered in yesterday's psalm.

## Day 6

### Genesis 37:1-11

*1 Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. 2 This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. 4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him. 5 Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. 6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream that I dreamed. 7 There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf." 8 His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?" 9 So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words. 9 He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, "Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, "What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?" 11 So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.*

### Robin Craig '10

It's almost impossible to read this passage without hearing the score from Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. But once you shake the music from your mind and get past the reality that the coat is not technicolored, nor any particular color at all, but merely "a long robe with sleeves," you can think anew about what it represents.

Designed to delight and to conceal and to protect, that coat instead arouses envy, exposes innocence, and threatens danger. Joseph, coat on his shoulders, can't resist telling his brothers about the dreams portraying a destiny for him which far outshines their own. He has no inkling that his coat and his dreams will ignite jealousy and propel him into circumstances which threaten his security and even his existence.

As we plunge into our Lenten pilgrimage, we might remember Joseph's journey, from favored son to slave to prisoner to gifted advisor to triumphant rescuer of his people. When we first set out, wearing beautiful coats and dreaming about our own ideas of success, challenges which threaten to overwhelm us may await. And yet, God is preparing us with precisely the gifts needed to fulfill dreams and serve others in ways and circumstances we are not yet capable of imagining.

### Prayer

Gracious God, as we move into the Lenten season, we know that surprises may lie in store for us. Guide us, we pray, through even the harshest of circumstances, so that we might discover the ways in which you call us to serve your people. Amen.

### Mark 1:1-13

*1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3 the voice of one crying out*



*in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"* 4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." 9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." 12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

### **Derek Davenport '05**

At Christmas, we love to read Luke. At Epiphany, we often read Matthew. During Holy week and Easter we read John. But Mark doesn't really get a season. Often, when we read these first verses we focus on the voice that cries out in the wilderness; the voice is sometimes the reason we connect Mark to the image of the winged lion. As we prepare for Lent, though, it is the next words that make Mark appropriate for us: "Prepare the way of the Lord." That's our focus during this season—preparation. So throughout the rest of Lent, we will stay with Mark as we read, pray, and prepare.

### **1 Corinthians 1:1-19**

<sup>1</sup>Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, <sup>2</sup>To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: <sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup>for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—<sup>6</sup>just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—<sup>7</sup>so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup>He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. <sup>10</sup>Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. <sup>11</sup>For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. <sup>12</sup>What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." <sup>13</sup>Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup>I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup>so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup>(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup>For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. <sup>18</sup>For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

### **Jay Howell, D.Min. student**

The church should be united, but it isn't. Here in 1 Corinthians Paul directly describes and denounces the contours of division. The church in Corinth has apparently drawn dividing lines according to those by

whom different sects of the church have either been baptized or been taught—for example, Paul, Apollos, or Cephas (v. 12).

These divisions are simply not compatible with the calling of the church. They were wrong then, and they are wrong now. Instead of Paul or Apollos or Cephas, we insert labels like “Presbyterian” or “Lutheran” or “Roman Catholic” or “Evangelical” or “Progressive.” Categories of understanding a branch of Christian heritage may have their place, but when those labels supplant the primacy of our collective identity as the body of Christ and instead result in tribal sniping and competition, we must remember anew Paul’s question, “Has Christ been divided?” (v. 13).

Lent of course is a season of repentance. Have we for too long overlooked the sin of division within the church? Are we in need of repentance of it? How many of us have quietly resented the fact that a congregation whose theology does match our own grows and flourishes? How many of us have been silently pleased when such a congregation hits upon hard times? Such mentalities are not compatible with Paul’s appeal, “by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” to be “united in the same mind and the same purpose” (v. 10).

### **Prayer**

God of Unity, we confess to you our indifference to division and our complicity in it. By your Spirit, we pray, convict us of this sinfulness, and bind our hearts closer to yours in the unity in the gospel. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

## Day 7

### Genesis 37:12-24

<sup>12</sup>Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. <sup>13</sup>And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." <sup>14</sup>So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. He came to Shechem, <sup>15</sup>and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" <sup>16</sup>"I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." <sup>17</sup>The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. <sup>18</sup>They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. <sup>19</sup>They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. <sup>20</sup>Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." <sup>21</sup>But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." <sup>22</sup>Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. <sup>23</sup>So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; <sup>24</sup>and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

### Don Ewing '72/'81

Young, bright, his father's favorite, not sure of what life will bring but only that it will be great, he heads off on an errand—and so begins the story of Joseph. The story is very personal. We love the story and even as we read it we are pulling for Joseph, for we remember all that has happened before in his dreams. We read quickly through the brothers' jealousy, for we know jealousy never leads to anything worthwhile. We read through their jealousy with great anticipation of how God will extract Joseph from this terrible situation and bring about God's dream of a nation.

We can identify with that pattern (dream, kicked to the curb, restoration), for it is not unlike our own story, or the story of our family. The youthful dive into life includes dreams, like those for career and family. Starting out, we anticipate great things, new things. We aren't exactly certain how they will happen, but the future looks bright. Then suddenly . . . we get thrown into a pit of many sizes and shapes—loss of income, job termination, medical issues, aging-parent concerns, emotional grief and loss. It can go on. Like Joseph at the bottom of his pit, we wonder not *how* is God going to get us out of this mess, but *whether* God is going to get us out.

Then comes grace—we are shown a way out of our pit. And looking back we wonder how we could have doubted God. Where was our faith? Where *is* our faith? In this season we look back at the pits we have been thrown into, and we give thanks for the grace that has raised us then and will continue to do so through faith.

### Prayer

O Lord of light and darkness, of mountain tops and deep abyss, open our eyes and hearts to your grace shown to us in the past and awaiting us in our future. We pray that the darkness and depth of the pits we are thrown into would not only turn us to You in trust but also remind us of your power to redeem, and your joy in doing so. In hope and with joy we lift to you our lives in the knowledge of your sure grace and love through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Mark 1:14-28**

*14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." 16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea - for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. 21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24 and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." 25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" 26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching - with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." 28 At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.*

**Derek Davenport '05**

I love the Gospel of Mark, in part because he gets so much mileage out of so few words. "He taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes." Mark does a great job using this short phrase to tell us not only who Jesus is, but also who the scribes were. The encounter with the unclean spirit is also fascinating. It's something we aren't really comfortable with today. Nonetheless, these encounters run throughout Mark's account. Some prefer to view these passages as straightforward supernatural encounters. Others lean toward more psychological or physiological explanations. Others may pursue a different alternative altogether. However you choose to understand the unclean spirit, Mark's point stands—he's not really talking about the unclean spirit. Whatever afflicts the man, Jesus heals him with His words, and the people are amazed. Mark's point is the amazing grace found in Jesus Christ.

**Ryan Pixton '10**

The Common English Bible's translation of verse 15 says, "Now is the time! Here comes God's Kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news." As we go through Lent it should be a time of preparation for what comes at Easter. We should have the urgency that is evident in verse 15. Now is the time. Not in five minutes or whenever it's convenient for us, but now. Our excitement at the ushering of God's Kingdom into the here and now changes our hearts and lives as we trust this good news.

We should continually ask, "What is God doing in my life and in the lives of those around me? Where and how is God acting?" When we get the answer to the question, we need to respond with the same urgency and excitement that we read about in verse 15. God has great things in store for us. But it takes willingness to keep our eyes open, drop our nets, and follow God even when strange things happen.

**Prayer**

Faithful God, thank you for your faithfulness to me when I have been unfaithful, doing things I should not do and leaving undone things I should do. Prepare my heart and mind during this season of Lent, so that I am ready for your arrival to earth. Help me not only to pray "Come Lord Jesus," but also to be ready to follow you when you show up and want to use me to build your Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

## Day 8

### Genesis 37:25-35

*25 Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. 26 Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. 28 When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt. 29 When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes. 30 He returned to his brothers, and said, "The boy is gone; and I, where can I turn?" 31 Then they took Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood. 32 They had the long robe with sleeves taken to their father, and they said, "This we have found; see now whether it is your son's robe or not." 33 He recognized it, and said, "It is my son's robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." 34 Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. 35 All his sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father bewailed him. 36 Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.*

### Keith McIlwain '00

Long centuries have passed since the sons of Jacob sold Joseph into slavery. It seems to us an act of the highest cruelty to sell one's own brother into slavery and almost certain death to remove an annoyance or even to eliminate a rival. Knowing that ultimately God uses Joseph's misery to save Israel helps to lessen our shock, to be sure, but perhaps in this season of penitent reflection we should not be too quick to move on from this moment.

What must have been the dark clouds of sin and alienation in the hearts of the sons of Jacob that killing or selling their brother seemed at all acceptable? How far can envy or ambition drive a person? How deep into selfishness and shadow must one crawl to find this act in any way tolerable?

Lest we condemn Judah and his brothers too quickly, we ought to ask ourselves if indeed we have ever "sold out" a brother or sister for convenience, comfort, or profit. Have we ever avoided the cries of the hurting or the lost because it seems far easier to focus on another project or ministry, even a worthwhile one? Have we ever ignored the demands of faithful discipleship because obedience is difficult in a culture which doesn't know the Holy One of Israel . . . and, in so doing, "sold out" Jesus himself?

The act of Judah and his brothers is barbaric and easy to denounce. Perhaps a more fruitful response would be to ponder prayerfully how we as disciples and as the Body of Christ have acted similarly when faced with challenging moments of decision.

### Prayer

Eternal God, who finds a way for the broken even in the midst of chaos, forgive us where we have failed to seek obedience, and, by the Spirit's power, grant us your strength and a deep desire for faithfulness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Mark 1:29-45**

*29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. 32 That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. 35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 38 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." 39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons. 40 A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean." 41 Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" 42 Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. 43 After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, 44 saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." 45 But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.*

### **Derek Davenport '05**

We could probably spend all of Lent reflecting on any one passage from Mark. "He went to a deserted place, and there he prayed." Jesus spends the night before responding to the needs of the people around him, and he then makes both the space and the time to pray. It's fascinating that Jesus is intentional about both space and time as he prays here. Sometimes, we're intentional about neither. Sometimes we pay attention to one, but not the other. This week as we continue our journey through Lent, try to be intentional about both space and time for prayer—at least once during this week, set aside time in a specific place to do nothing but pray.

### **Psalm 5**

<sup>1</sup>*Give ear to my words, O LORD;  
give heed to my sighing.*  
<sup>2</sup>*Listen to the sound of my cry,  
my King and my God,  
for to you I pray.*  
<sup>3</sup>*O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;  
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.*  
<sup>4</sup>*For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;  
evil will not sojourn with you.*  
<sup>5</sup>*The boastful will not stand before your eyes;  
you hate all evildoers.*  
<sup>6</sup>*You destroy those who speak lies;  
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.*  
<sup>7</sup>*But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,  
will enter your house,  
I will bow down toward your holy temple  
in awe of you.*

<sup>8</sup>*Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness  
because of my enemies;  
make your way straight before me.*  
<sup>9</sup>*For there is no truth in their mouths;  
their hearts are destruction;  
their throats are open graves;  
they flatter with their tongues.*  
<sup>10</sup>*Make them bear their guilt, O God;  
let them fall by their own counsels;  
because of their many transgressions cast them out,  
for they have rebelled against you.*  
<sup>11</sup>*But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;  
let them ever sing for joy.  
Spread your protection over them,  
so that those who love your name may exult in you.*  
<sup>12</sup>*For you bless the righteous, O LORD;  
you cover them with favor as with a shield.*

**Kimberly Greway, D.Min. student**

One of the hardest books of the Bible for me to read is the Psalter. It is not difficult because of its poetic language and structure or because of its symbolism and allusion. In fact, those attributes make it one of my favorite books.

Rather, the Psalter is difficult for me to read because I can't help singing the songs that are drawn from it when I come upon those passages. I might be happily reading or praying a psalm when suddenly a verse leads me into a well-known song. The melody plays in my mind and the words of the song, rather than the psalm, drift into my consciousness. The music takes me to a place that I didn't intend when I began reading. Often the experience deeply enriches the reading.

When I read verse 8 of Psalm 5, the words and music of Samuel Wesley, grandson of hymn writer Charles Wesley, waft into my mind:

*Lead me, Lord, lead me in thy righteousness,  
make thy way plain before my face.  
For it is thou, Lord, thou, Lord only,  
that makest me dwell in safety.*

The repetition of "thou, Lord only" in the song emphasizes the uniqueness of the Lord's protection. The drawn-out syllables in "safety" settle us securely in a protective shelter. Rather than detracting from the psalm, these elements of the song complement the psalmist's themes and enhance the experience of reading or praying. So, this Lent, let us find our refuge in God and ever sing for joy!

**Prayer**

Protector God,  
Who straightens our paths and harkens to our cries:  
Hear our words,  
Heed our sighings,  
Hide us from our enemies,

That we may take refuge in you  
and rejoice in your protection with songs and exultations;  
Through Jesus Christ the Crucified,  
Amen.



## Day 9

### Mark 2:1-12

*1 When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. 3 Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? 10 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" - he said to the paralytic - 11 "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." 12 And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"*

### Derek Davenport '05

What a great passage. This is one of the stories that children love. It presents such a vivid mental picture, and it's actually quite humorous. Four desperate people battle the crowds, scale the building, and descend through the roof—all to bring a paralyzed man to Jesus. When Jesus sees him, clearly unable to walk, he immediately responds by saying, "Son, your sins are forgiven." That's it.

Jesus doesn't even acknowledge the obvious condition of the man before him. It's only when Jesus realizes the confusion of the people around him that he heals the paralysis. The people are shocked—not by the authority over sin, but the ability to bring physical healing. They only perceive one part of what happened, and it's enough to amaze them.

Nonetheless, our author still packs so much into these words. Again we see what appears to be a supernatural healing, and our narrator explicitly highlights the fact that the healing is not the point. The event is merely to point us to Christ. The people respond appropriately, crying out, "We have never seen anything like this."

### 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:15

*2:14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. 16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. 3:1 And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? 4 For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? 5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive*

wages according to the labor of each. <sup>9</sup>For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. <sup>10</sup>According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. <sup>11</sup>For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup>Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—<sup>13</sup>the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. <sup>14</sup>If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

### **Mark Whitsel '04**

Why is it so important that Paul explains the importance of unity within the Church? Is he really concerned to press upon these early Christian believers, who are like children, the importance of getting along? While getting along seems rather trivial in the sweeping narrative of Christ's Kingdom—ushering death and resurrection, such a lesson appears to be foundational for how the Church understands itself—both as individuals and as a whole. Here Paul reminds the church (and her leaders!) that our work—our efforts—are, in the final analysis, not ours at all. They are part of a broader work that God is doing within His people. To recognize this truth is to give oneself over to a more unified vision of the Church. Clearly the church in Corinth was struggling with this very issue.

Throughout the years, I've witnessed how easily the Church at any level can fall into such behavior or thinking. We pick our people, set up shop, and build our silos. We've all seen it happen. Especially those in leadership should remember that we are not immune to this tendency. Consider the temptation for Paul and Apollos to feed into the cult of personality developing before them. How easily one could succumb to such allure! But Paul reminds us that "we are God's servants, working together," building on the one "foundation," who is Christ. For a leader, keeping a clear light of sight on this truth is always to the benefit of the people of God!

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, today we thank You for Your call into the Church through the death of Jesus Christ. As we go about the hard work of leadership, guide us in paths of clarity, unity, and humility. May we model and mirror the gospel faithfully. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Psalm 27**

*1 The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?  
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?*  
*2 When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh —  
my adversaries and foes —  
they shall stumble and fall.*  
*3 Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war rise up against me,  
yet I will be confident.*

*4 One thing I asked of the LORD,  
 that will I seek after:  
 to live in the house of the LORD  
 all the days of my life,  
 to behold the beauty of the LORD,  
 and to inquire in his temple.*  
*5 For he will hide me in his shelter  
 in the day of trouble;  
 he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;  
 he will set me high on a rock.*  
*6 Now my head is lifted up  
 above my enemies all around me,  
 and I will offer in his tent  
 sacrifices with shouts of joy;  
 I will sing and make melody to the LORD.*  
*7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,  
 be gracious to me and answer me!*  
*8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"  
 Your face, LORD, do I seek.*  
*9 Do not hide your face from me.  
 Do not turn your servant away in anger,  
 you who have been my help.  
 Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,  
 O God of my salvation!*  
*10 If my father and mother forsake me,  
 the LORD will take me up.*  
*11 Teach me your way, O LORD,  
 and lead me on a level path  
 because of my enemies.*  
*12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,  
 for false witnesses have risen against me,  
 and they are breathing out violence.*  
*13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD  
 in the land of the living.*  
*14 Wait for the LORD;  
 be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
 wait for the LORD!*

### **Ellen Little, staff**

The world seems to be full of things we could or do fear, from seemingly minor things (such as spiders, the dark, or snakes) to the overwhelming things (such as the loss of a loved one, terrorism, cancer, or death). And yet this Psalm says that we need not be afraid, because the Lord is our refuge. Verse 3 says that the Psalmist is confident in his God even when war is waged against him.

How are we to develop this confidence? At times when life seems to be more than we can handle, how can we trust that God will be with us? Read verse 14 again. We are to wait for the Lord. Spend time this Lenten season developing your relationship with our Lord so that you know His voice and can learn to

wait for Him. Wait, for He died and rose and will come again. Wait, for He (and He alone) will bring you peace. Wait.

**Prayer**

Dear Lord, thank you for loving us more than we can ever imagine. Help us to know You better, to trust You more, to live with the confidence that You are always with us even to the end of the age. May we bring You glory in all that we do and say in this most holy season. Amen.

## Day 10

### Mark 2:13-22

*13 Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. 14 As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. 15 And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples - for there were many who followed him. 16 When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." 18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 19 Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. 21 "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. 22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."*

### Derek Davenport '05

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners." This is one of those paradoxes that is easy to forget. Jesus came to call sinners. The image of healing is also helpful in this way. You have to admit you're sick before you look to be healed.

When Jesus talks about sinners, we like to imagine them as people who are different from us, people who live, think, vote, choose, and act differently from us. But of course, when Jesus speaks of sinners, that category includes us as well. Lucky for us, Jesus came to call sinners.

### 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

*<sup>16</sup>Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup>If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. <sup>18</sup>Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. <sup>19</sup>For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," <sup>20</sup>and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." <sup>21</sup>So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, <sup>22</sup>whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, <sup>23</sup>and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.*

### Ken Woo, faculty

Self-awareness is empowering. This is the lesson the Apostle put before the church at Corinth: Do you not know who you are? The Corinthians are holy, set apart. The point? God is with you and for you. To press this point, Paul makes several lofty claims: "You are God's temple . . . God's Spirit dwells in you . . . You belong to Christ . . . All things are yours." Self-awareness, in this case, meant freedom from attempts to impose identity, priorities, and strategies contrary to God's mission. It's freedom to resist. To be different. Why? God is with you.

Self-awareness is empowering, but it's also dangerous. Because self-deception is easy. Rather than resisting cultural markers of success that separate winners from losers, the Corinthians embraced them. They confused them with God's power. Similar opportunities for self-deception abound today. "All things are yours"—God is with you—quickly becomes license to seize the levers of political advantage, grasp after wealth and prestige, boast at another's expense. We trade security in God's presence for the insecurity of needing to prove God's presence with us by winning.

Making ourselves great seems prudent enough, but it's not the gospel. In Christ, God's power is revealed in setting aside glory, defying expectations. The gospel surprises. It subverts. God doesn't conform to business as usual. Neither should we. Do not be deceived. In the face of injustice perpetuated by insecurity, resistance requires self-awareness, even self-denial. Dare to defy expectations. How? God is with us, we belong to Christ, God's Spirit dwells in us.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, when our eyes—and the eyes of our hearts—deceive us, show us the futility of securing ourselves by ensuring we always side with the winners. Teach us to resist false power, to live differently as those confident in the promise that Christ has sided with us. Amen.

### **Psalm 22**

*1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?  
2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.  
3 Yet you are holy,  
enthroned on the praises of Israel.  
4 In you our ancestors trusted;  
they trusted, and you delivered them.  
5 To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.  
6 But I am a worm, and not human;  
scorned by others, and despised by the people.  
7 All who see me mock at me;  
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;  
8 "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver—  
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"  
9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb;  
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.  
10 On you I was cast from my birth,  
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.  
11 Do not be far from me,  
for trouble is near and there is no one to help.  
12 Many bulls encircle me,  
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;  
13 they open wide their mouths at me,  
like a ravening and roaring lion.  
14 I am poured out like water,  
and all my bones are out of joint;  
my heart is like wax;  
it is melted within my breast;*

15 *my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,  
 and my tongue sticks to my jaws;  
 you lay me in the dust of death.*  
 16 *For dogs are all around me;  
 a company of evildoers encircles me.  
 My hands and feet have shriveled;  
 17 I can count all my bones.  
 They stare and gloat over me;  
 18 they divide my clothes among themselves,  
 and for my clothing they cast lots.  
 19 But you, O LORD, do not be far away!  
 O my help, come quickly to my aid!  
 20 Deliver my soul from the sword,  
 life from the power of the dog!  
 21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!  
 From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.  
 22 I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;  
 in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:  
 23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!  
 All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;  
 stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!  
 24 For he did not despise or abhor  
 the affliction of the afflicted;  
 he did not hide his face from me,  
 but heard when I cried to him.  
 25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
 my vows I will pay before those who fear him.  
 26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
 those who seek him shall praise the LORD.  
 May your hearts live forever!  
 27 All the ends of the earth shall remember  
 and turn to the LORD;  
 and all the families of the nations  
 shall worship before him.  
 28 For dominion belongs to the LORD,  
 and he rules over the nations.  
 29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;  
 before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,  
 and I shall live for him. 30 Posterity will serve him;  
 future generations will be told about the Lord,  
 31 and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
 saying that he has done it.*

### **Hallie Isadore, staff**

In reading Psalm 22, we are reminded that from the beginning of our time on this earth, God has pursued, cared for, and treasured His creation. As David reflects in verse 9, we are brought into this world as part of God's beloved. From the beginning of our time on this earth, we are participating in this story (verse 10), even though sometimes in life it may feel like all hope is lost, as David points out

(verses 12-18). But God is near, and our strength comes from Him (verse 19). God listens to us (verse 24) and gives us the strength to be renewed.

During the season of Lent, we celebrate Jesus' resurrection—his life-giving, renewing resurrection. It is because of this gift that all of creation can go on to sing God's praise (verses 25-31). During this season of reflection, prayer, and self-examination, may we live into that story even when we do not know what is going on.

### **Prayer**

O God of all hope, may we be thankful for this life, however brief it is. Help us to live in a way that speaks to the truth that you have pursued and treasured us since the beginning of time. Teach us to draw near to you, to live lives that sing your praise both verbally and through action in caring for those with whom we have the privilege of sharing this life. Thank you Lord Jesus for your freeing, life-giving, finished work on the cross. Amen.



## Day 11

### Mark 2:23-3:6

*23 One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" 25 And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? 26 He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions." 27 Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; 28 so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath." 1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2 They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." 4 Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5 He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.*

### Derek Davenport '05

"The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath." Jesus turns our entire concept of Sabbath upside down. The concept of Sabbath is meant to be a blessing, not a curse. It should be freeing, not restraining. It's funny how easily we take blessings like this and turn them into curses. We become slaves to the very things that should set us free.

After this pronouncement, Jesus further demonstrates the beautiful, life-giving concept of Sabbath as he heals a man. In response, the scribes are furious, and we see the first movements that will eventually lead to the events of Holy Week. They begin to plot his death because he healed a man. They were more comfortable with slavery than freedom, and they were willing to kill for it.

### 1 Corinthians 4:1-7

*<sup>1</sup>Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. <sup>2</sup>Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. <sup>3</sup>But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup>I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. <sup>5</sup>Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God. <sup>6</sup>I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, "Nothing beyond what is written," so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another. <sup>7</sup>For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?*

### Lisa Bunting, staff

In this scripture, we are reminded that everything we have, do, and accomplish is not achieved solely by our own doing but is, in fact, a precious gift bestowed on us by the grace of God. Paul says, "For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" God's gifts are all-encompassing in our lives and give us the strength to achieve all things. We should keep a humble spirit and not boast; we should also keep a

gracious heart to acknowledge the gifts God has graciously bestowed on us. In the same way, we would not receive a present from a friend or family member and behave as though we bought it for ourselves; rather, we would be grateful, thankful, and appreciative that our friend or family member generously provided us with a gift. We should follow this example in our everyday lives, since it is God's grace that sustains us. God is the source of strength in our lives and intervenes in our behalf—God always shows up strong and mighty. During this Lenten season, we should examine ourselves to see whether we have a gracious heart and a humble spirit. We should also give thanks to God for all the strength we have been provided and all the gifts we have been given.

### **Prayer**

Dear Heavenly Father, first, we thank you for all the gifts you have lovingly and graciously bestowed on us. Help us not to take them for granted, but instead, to continuously acknowledge your love. We also ask that you humble us, so that we do not become consumed with our own ego and pride but, rather, maintain a modest heart and spirit. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Psalm 143**

*1 Hear my prayer, O Lord;  
give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness;  
answer me in your righteousness.*  
*2 Do not enter into judgment with your servant,  
for no one living is righteous before you.*  
*3 For the enemy has pursued me,  
crushing my life to the ground,  
making me sit in darkness like those long dead.*  
*4 Therefore my spirit faints within me;  
my heart within me is appalled.*  
*5 I remember the days of old,  
I think about all your deeds,  
I meditate on the works of your hands.*  
*6 I stretch out my hands to you;  
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.*  
*7 Answer me quickly, O Lord;  
my spirit fails.*  
*Do not hide your face from me,  
or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.*  
*8 Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning,  
for in you I put my trust.*  
*Teach me the way I should go,  
for to you I lift up my soul.*  
*9 Save me, O Lord, from my enemies;  
I have fled to you for refuge.*  
*10 Teach me to do your will,  
for you are my God.*  
*Let your good spirit lead me  
on a level path.*  
*11 For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life.*  
*In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.*

*12 In your steadfast love cut off my enemies,  
and destroy all my adversaries,  
for I am your servant.*

**Brad Rito '15**

"I don't want to bother God with something so menial." This is a thought many of us have had when we hit a rough patch on the path God has set before us. We wonder whether or not asking God for help is appropriate, whether or not God would even answer our cries.

But it is in these moments that one must remember that Jesus, the greatest person ever to live, the Son of the Most High, cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In much the same way, we all experience trouble, hardship, feelings of loneliness or abandonment—however you want to put it. If Jesus cried out in such times, why do we question the power such cries can have in our lives? We are humans, perfectly and wonderfully made in God's image, but imperfect by nature. If we were perfect, we wouldn't face these adversities. We as God's children must therefore always remember that our loving Father is ever-present in our lives, by our sides, walking the path with us, and knows our pains and our need for God in our lives. We are never forsaken, and nothing is inappropriate to lift up to God.

**Prayer**

Almighty God, we thank you for your ceaseless presence at our side and for your unwavering love as expressed through your Son, Jesus Christ. We must admit though, Lord, that we are not always the quickest to turn to you in our times of need. We think some things are too menial or insignificant for someone as great as you to deal with. Help us never to question your power or your involvement in even the most minute affairs of this world. You hear our prayers, and you most graciously answer them, more than we could ever earn on our own. We thank you and pray all of this in your name, Father, through your Son, Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Day 12

### Genesis 41:14–45

<sup>14</sup>Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurriedly brought out of the dungeon. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. <sup>15</sup>And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” <sup>16</sup>Joseph answered Pharaoh, “It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.” <sup>17</sup>Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile; <sup>18</sup>and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. <sup>19</sup>Then seven other cows came up after them, poor, very ugly, and thin. Never had I seen such ugly ones in all the land of Egypt. <sup>20</sup>The thin and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows, <sup>21</sup>but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had done so, for they were still as ugly as before. Then I awoke. <sup>22</sup>I fell asleep a second time and I saw in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good, growing on one stalk, <sup>23</sup>and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouting after them; <sup>24</sup>and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. But when I told it to the magicians, there was no one who could explain it to me.” <sup>25</sup>Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. <sup>26</sup>The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. <sup>27</sup>The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of famine. <sup>28</sup>It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. <sup>29</sup>There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. <sup>30</sup>After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land. <sup>31</sup>The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous. <sup>32</sup>And the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. <sup>33</sup>Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. <sup>34</sup>Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. <sup>35</sup>Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. <sup>36</sup>That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.” <sup>37</sup>The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. <sup>38</sup>Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?” <sup>39</sup>So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. <sup>40</sup>You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you.” <sup>41</sup>And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” <sup>42</sup>Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph’s hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck. <sup>43</sup>He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command; and they cried out in front of him, “Bow the knee!” Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. <sup>44</sup>Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.” <sup>45</sup>Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt.

### Charissa Howe '14/'16

When Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream, he was not being called to do something new. He’d done it before. This wasn’t even the first time he’d done it right. The first time he’d done it right, it got him into some seriously hot water. His brothers didn’t appreciate that previous interpretation, nor were they fond of their father’s favor of Joseph. As a result, they shipped him off to Egypt in the hands of slave traders and acted as though he were dead.

I wouldn't blame Joseph if he'd just packed it in right there. "That's it! I'm not interpreting any more dreams. It's not worth the trouble!" What courage it must have taken for Joseph to continue to interpret dreams for those around him—to help others see what it was God was speaking to them through their dreams. And yet, he continued.

Here we see that, in spite of the trouble that speaking God's word to others caused for Joseph early on, eventually he was recognized for it. Eventually, it bore clear fruit and made a huge difference. In fact, had he not warned Pharaoh of the coming famine, Joseph's own brothers who had betrayed him would have starved. What strange but wonderful ways God works in through our courage!

### **Prayer**

God of all, thank you for the way you speak in our lives. Make me a vessel of your Word, so that, through my courage and willingness to speak up, others' lives might be touched by you and changed. Grant me the strength to speak your Word, even when it's difficult or unpopular.

### **John 5:19-24**

*19 Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. 20 The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. 21 Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. 22 The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. 24 Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life."*

### **Derek Davenport '05**

In this morning's passage, it's striking just how different the Gospels of Mark and John are. The tone, the style, even the vocabulary are completely different. Although the person we encounter is the same, it's helpful that throughout Lent we have the chance to encounter two different voices in describing Jesus.

In this passage Jesus talks about life. The language is different, the tone is different, but this Jesus is consistent with the accounts we have encountered in the Gospel of Mark—encounters when Jesus heals the paralytic, cures on the Sabbath, and calls sinners. Whether it's the abstract and poetic words about moving from death to life, or concrete stories about healing, Jesus is concerned with bringing healing, life, and forgiveness.

## Day 13

### Mark 3:7-19a

*7 Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; 8 hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. 9 He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; 10 for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. 11 Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" 12 But he sternly ordered them not to make him known. 13 He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. 14 And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, 15 and to have authority to cast out demons. 16 So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); 17 James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); 18 and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

### Derek Davenport '05

In this morning's passage we find multitudes gathering around Jesus. The story has begun to spread, and people flock to Jesus, just to touch him and gain healing. It's gotten so bad that Jesus has to seek refuge on a boat.

Jesus then climbs a mountain to call the disciples. These backdrops, the sea, the mountain, call to mind the stories of Moses, Elijah, and Jonah. As a storyteller, the narrator is letting us know that something important is happening. And Jesus then chooses 12 disciples, many of whom we've already encountered in Mark's pages.

It's also worth noting that even as Judas is first selected, we are introduced to him as a traitor. This is our first exposure to Judas in the book, and he is identified as a traitor. It's something so painful yet true—legacy can be defined by a single action. We never know of Judas as anything but a traitor.

### Keith Sandell '16

I'm sure at some point the disciples wondered why they were following Jesus. They encountered uncomfortable situations, such as rubbing shoulders with outsiders, living life on the road away from family and friends, facing opposition from the religious elite, and having their master turned over to the cross. The disciples probably thought to themselves during these times, Why did I agree to this life? I imagine they were sustained during these times by returning to Jesus' call to them as described in Mark 3. Remembering Jesus' call reminded them why they agreed.

Perhaps now in this dreary season you might wonder about your ministry. Perhaps the hard times of ministry have made you question why you agreed to a life of ministry. Or perhaps the mundane seasons of session meetings and capital campaigns have left you wondering whether this is the life for you. It is during these times when we must remember Jesus' call to us. The life of ministry is not always filled with miracles and Easter—sometimes it's filled with February and finals. But in returning to our call, we can gain renewed purpose even in the cold and dreary times.

## Prayer

Lord and Sustainer, we thank you that you are a God who hears our prayers. We thank you that you are a God who has spoken into our lives with purpose and peace. We ask, Lord, that during the difficult times in ministry you remind us of our call. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

## 1 Corinthians 4:8-21

*<sup>8</sup>Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you! <sup>9</sup>For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. <sup>10</sup>We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. <sup>11</sup>To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, <sup>12</sup>and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup>when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day. <sup>14</sup>I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. <sup>15</sup>For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. <sup>16</sup>I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. <sup>17</sup>For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church. <sup>18</sup>But some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant. <sup>19</sup>But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. <sup>20</sup>For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. <sup>21</sup>What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?*

## Joseph Hedden '97

I have often wondered about the church in Corinth. Why would anyone want to minister there? The congregation is divided along class lines and is split into factions. Sexual immorality is prevalent. People are suing each other. Pretty much any conflict you can think of grows in the Corinthian soil!

Paul's frustration with the whole situation flows over into his sarcastic tone. He rightly names their arrogance. He writes, in effect, that their 'talk is cheap' (verses 20 and 21). He diagnoses their conflict.

Yet, diagnosis is not enough—not then, and not today. How does one heal from this disease? In marked contrast to the talkers of Corinth, Paul demonstrates that the gospel must be embodied and practiced. If the gospel is to mean anything, it must bear fruit as a counter-witness to the conflict of Corinth. "When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly" (verses 12-13).

The raw materials that make for conflict are a given in the human condition. When we are wounded, we are tempted to lash out. When the congregation and its pastor are most stressed, we automatically look for scapegoats, exit plans, and so on. We react out of base instinct, rather than live up to our professed values. That's not a rationalization for bad behavior; it's a fact of life. Paul calls us to look to the values of Jesus Christ as examples of new ways of living and new ways of dealing with conflict.

## Prayer

O God, we know too well what conflict looks like. We have witnessed it. We have contributed to it. Help us to confess our sinful attitudes and to live lives of repentance. Give us the grace to embody the gospel values that make for peace. Amen.

## Day 14

### Mark 3:19b-35

*19b Then he went home; 20 and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21 When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." 22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." 23 And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27 But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered. 28 "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" – 30 for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit." 31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." 33 And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" 34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."*

### Derek Davenport '05

"Then he went home." This phrase comes immediately after the words "Judas Iscariot who betrayed him" and shortly before the words "He has gone out of his mind." Jesus went home.

Jesus had fled to the sea to escape crushing crowds, he had appointed his followers, one of whom would betray him, and he returns home. But when he gets there, people question his sanity, and his own family tries to restrain him.

It's at this point that Jesus again turns everything upside down. He doesn't shrink his concept of family or trust; he expands it. After the foreshadowing of Judas' betrayal, and a betrayal of sorts from his own family, we might expect Jesus to tighten his circle, but instead he does the opposite, opening it to "whoever does the will of God." Looking around him, he proclaims, "here are my mother and my brothers."

### 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

*1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you? 3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment 4 in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? 7 Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*



## Christian Brooks '17

This time of fasting is a time to examine ourselves. Much like the Corinthians, as we go through life we pick up habits and desires that are not pleasing to God. Satan is crafty. He tries many ways to capture our attention and cause us to sin. Sometimes we do not realize that we are giving in to his advances. So during this time of fasting, examine your life. Observe any areas where you have allowed sin to enter, and submit those areas to God. For just as a little leaven spreads and causes dough to rise, so does a little sin spread and cause the believer to fall. During this Lenten season, set aside the distracting things that have been capturing your attention and seek God.

## Prayer

Lord, I ask you to forgive me for the sin that I have committed. Reveal to me anything in my life that is not pleasing to you. Help me to submit those areas of my life to you. Give me the strength to resist the advances of Satan and overcome temptation. I am overjoyed for the redemption that I have because of the risen Savior. Lord, I thank you for the grace and mercy that you pour out on me every day. God, help me to be more like you. Amen.

## Psalms 91

- <sup>1</sup>*You who live in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,*
- <sup>2</sup>*will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust."*
- <sup>3</sup>*For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
and from the deadly pestilence;*
- <sup>4</sup>*he will cover you with his pinions,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.*
- <sup>5</sup>*You will not fear the terror of the night,  
or the arrow that flies by day,*
- <sup>6</sup>*or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,  
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.*
- <sup>7</sup>*A thousand may fall at your side,  
ten thousand at your right hand,  
but it will not come near you.*
- <sup>8</sup>*You will only look with your eyes  
and see the punishment of the wicked.*
- <sup>9</sup>*Because you have made the LORD your refuge,  
the Most High your dwelling place,*
- <sup>10</sup>*no evil shall befall you,  
no scourge come near your tent.*
- <sup>11</sup>*For he will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways.*
- <sup>12</sup>*On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.*
- <sup>13</sup>*You will tread on the lion and the adder,  
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.*
- <sup>14</sup>*Those who love me, I will deliver;  
I will protect those who know my name.*

<sup>15</sup>*When they call to me, I will answer them;  
I will be with them in trouble,  
I will rescue them and honor them.*

<sup>16</sup>*With long life I will satisfy them,  
and show them my salvation.*

**Buena Smith Dudley, D.Min. student**

All humankind cries out for help in our most desperate situations. When we face circumstances that render us helpless, our reflex response is to reach beyond our inadequacy, beyond our helplessness, and beyond the ineffectual power of humankind. Whether destitute, ill, or in need of emotional support, we recognize that God and God alone rotates the universe and remains in full control. Hence, we who love God choose to trust in the faithfulness of our Lord.

Psalm 91 reminds us of God's unfailing promises to all who live by faith. When we trust the Most High from day to day, from moment to moment, God shelters and protects us from human and natural attack. The psalmist tells us God's infinite compassion and care are solely activated by our consistent walk with the Lord.

In this reciprocal relationship we experience God's faithfulness in the details and the dilemmas of our lives. As we abide in the Lord, we have no need to fear the unknown or to faint under threat. Not only will God's faithful receive deliverance and protection, but also God's faithfulness will ensure an answer from on High, divine companionship despite the challenge, rescue from the threat of peril, and honor from the Lord. Ultimately, we find satisfaction and salvation as we rest in God's love.

**Prayer**

Lord, thank you for being our dwelling place. Though we face an onslaught of trials and terror, remind us of your safety and sustenance that lifts our hearts above our circumstances. Increase our faith as we delight in your presence and trust in your promise.

## Day 15

### Genesis 42:18-28

<sup>18</sup>On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: <sup>19</sup>if you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here where you are imprisoned. The rest of you shall go and carry grain for the famine of your households, <sup>20</sup>and bring your youngest brother to me. Thus your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they agreed to do so. <sup>21</sup>They said to one another, "Alas, we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother; we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this anguish has come upon us." <sup>22</sup>Then Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." <sup>23</sup>They did not know that Joseph understood them, since he spoke with them through an interpreter. <sup>24</sup>He turned away from them and wept; then he returned and spoke to them. And he picked out Simeon and had him bound before their eyes. <sup>25</sup>Joseph then gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to return every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. This was done for them. <sup>26</sup>They loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed. <sup>27</sup>When one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money at the top of the sack. <sup>28</sup>He said to his brothers, "My money has been put back; here it is in my sack!" At this they lost heart and turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

### Kendra Buckwalter Smith '12/'13

During Lent, we remember that the way of the cross, the way to resurrection, is through death. New life requires a daily surrendering of the old life, a letting go of the present order, so that we may embrace the new humanity. When Joseph saw and heard the brothers who had sold him into slavery, he wept. The weight of it all must have been overwhelming. Moving forward, embracing a new way of living, required Joseph to lay to rest the hurt of his brothers' hatred, the bitterness and resentment over what they had done to him, the longing for the family life that could have been, the pride of having been elevated to a place of power over those from whom he might be tempted to seek revenge. And so he wept.

Sometimes, all we feel we can do is weep. As Jesus wept over Jerusalem, we weep for our own circumstances and for our weary world. When the weight of everything overwhelms us, perhaps all we can do is join our voices with Jesus' from the cross in crying out, "Father, forgive them." Perhaps all we can do is tell God that the weight is too heavy for us, the brokenness of this world too powerful, the pain put upon us too unforgivable. Perhaps all we can do is weep under its weight . . . and then remember that, even now, it is all at the foot of the cross and being pieced back to wholeness through the sacrificed body of Christ—it is being redeemed by the blood of Jesus shed for the forgiveness even of those sins that are too painful for us ourselves to forgive.

### Prayer

Eternal God, forgive us where we have failed to seek reconciliation, where we have sought revenge rather than reunion. By the power of your Spirit, help us to weep for all that breaks your heart. Then, as we trust in your forgiveness and reconciling work, give us the grace to lay to rest the old and live in the newness of life you have brought. Amen.

### Mark 4:1-20

*1 Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 He began to*

*teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." 9 And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" 10 When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. 11 And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; 12 in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'" 13 And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. 16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. 17 But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. 20 And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."*

#### **Derek Davenport '05**

Jesus returns to the sea here, and once more is only safe in the sea itself. He stays on a boat, allowing the often chaotic forces of nature to protect him as he preaches.

The parable he tells is another story beloved by children and adults alike. One of the things that I've always loved about this story is the way the sower works. Some of the seeds grow, and some do not, yet that doesn't stop the sower from casting the seeds. There is a boldness, almost stubborn determination from a sower who plants amongst thorns, rocks and roads. There's a sense of abundance in a sower who scatters seeds even where they aren't likely to grow. Then we are given a framework to interpret the parable, and we find that the sense of growth and abundance carries over to the interpretation as well as the parable. There is something about Jesus that calls us to participate in this bold, determined abundance.

#### **Psalm 147:1-11**

*1 Praise the Lord!*

*How good it is to sing praises to our God;  
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.*

*2 The Lord builds up Jerusalem;  
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.*

*3 He heals the brokenhearted,  
and binds up their wounds.*

*4 He determines the number of the stars;  
he gives to all of them their names.*

*5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;  
his understanding is beyond measure.*

*6 The Lord lifts up the downtrodden;  
he casts the wicked to the ground.  
7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;  
make melody to our God on the lyre.  
8 He covers the heavens with clouds,  
prepares rain for the earth,  
makes grass grow on the hills.  
9 He gives to the animals their food,  
and to the young ravens when they cry.  
10 His delight is not in the strength of the horse,  
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;  
11 but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him,  
in those who hope in his steadfast love.*

**Connie Gundry Tappy, staff**

Reverence for the Lord. Expectant trust in God's love. These qualities, not self-sufficient strength, are what make a person pleasing to God, says the Psalmist (vv. 10-11). They are qualities that take God seriously. They exhibit true humility. They demonstrate dependence on the Lord and recognition of God's unwavering character. And yet . . .

In Mark's parable of the sower (4:1-20), Jesus himself makes it clear that a response of obedience to God's love is a necessary component of authentic discipleship. Insufficient is the mere hearing of the gospel—even the hearing of it joyfully. Only by soaking it in, growing deep roots, weeding out distractions, and growing up in the gospel can we become abundant fruit-bearers of it.

And who produces this growth, this fruit—the “strength of the horse” or the “legs of a man” (Ps 147:10)? No! “Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Cor 3:7).

Reverence for the Lord. Expectant trust in God's love. These are the qualities that make a person pleasing to God—and productive for God's work in the world.

**Prayer**

O Lord God in heaven and here present with us, please grant that in the midst of each moment we would humble ourselves to kneel before your supremacy, lean on your loving kindness, and respond with joyful obedience to your faithfulness toward those who love you—for the sake of your matchless Name. Amen.

## Day 16

### Genesis 42:29-38

<sup>29</sup>When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, <sup>30</sup>"The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly to us, and charged us with spying on the land. <sup>31</sup>But we said to him, 'We are honest men, we are not spies. <sup>32</sup>We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.' <sup>33</sup>Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. <sup>34</sup>Bring your youngest brother to me, and I shall know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will release your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'" <sup>35</sup>As they were emptying their sacks, there in each one's sack was his bag of money. When they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. <sup>36</sup>And their father Jacob said to them, "I am the one you have bereaved of children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has happened to me!" <sup>37</sup>Then Reuben said to his father, "You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." <sup>38</sup>But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should come to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."

### Walt Pietschmann '90

The long story between Joseph and his brothers is one that is full of jealousy, hatred, and backstabbing, but also one that is ultimately about forgiveness and redemption. In this section of the story, Joseph has given his brothers food to return to Canaan and has requested that the youngest brother, Benjamin, be brought back to Egypt when the brothers return. Even though the brothers brought money to pay for the food, Joseph has secretly given it back to them. Upon returning to Canaan the brothers tell their father, Jacob, all that has happened. Jacob is beside himself with grief. He doesn't want to let go of Benjamin and thinks he's already lost Joseph and perhaps now Simeon, who has been bound and held for ransom in Egypt.

There is an old saying that "blood is thicker than water," meaning that relationships and loyalties within a family are the strongest and most important ones. Since the beginning of time, however, those ties have served as some of our most difficult and toxic relationships as well. During this Lenten season, perhaps we need to examine our closest relationships and see how we can turn any difficulty we might have with a brother or sister, mother or father, son or daughter, into a more nourishing relationship. With hope and expectation, we can perhaps allow God to make all things new by turning jealousy and hatred into forgiveness and redemption.

### Prayer

Redemptive God, my relationship with (*friend or relative*) hasn't always been a reflection of Your love for me. Fill my heart with a new spirit of grace and allow opportunities for us to heal our relationship. Forgive me any arrogance or contempt and replace it with hope and joy. Amen.

### Mark 4:21-34

*21 He said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? 22 For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. 23 Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" 24 And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. 25 For to*

*those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” 26 He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27 and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28 The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.” 30 He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” 33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34 he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.*

### **Derek Davenport '05**

Parables can be so confusing. They defy our attempts to make them into fables or allegories. They're not systematic. They're word pictures. Poems. Sculptures. They create an impression, a sense, a hunch, an idea, a thought, a feeling.

These parables speak of growth, attention, work, blessing, urgency, life, provision, safety, shelter, productivity, creation. Notice that those who have ears to hear don't automatically hear. They are called to listen, and to pay attention. This calling is helpful for us to bear in mind as we encounter the parables. As much as we want to tie them down to easy interpretations, there is value in simply listening, paying attention, and soaking up the strangeness of the stories.

### **Psalm 126**

*1 When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.  
2 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.”  
3 The LORD has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.  
4 Restore our fortunes, O LORD,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.  
5 May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.  
6 Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.*

### **Jim Durlleser '78**

Psalm 126 is one of the Psalms of Ascents (Psalms 120 through 134). It is often thought that the Psalms of Ascents were sung by the Israelites as they were on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as they were “going up,” as they were “ascending,” the hill of Zion to worship at the Temple.

The season of Lent is a pilgrimage, a spiritual journey to Jerusalem, a journey to the Cross of Christ. Psalm 126 invites us to think about joy during our Lenten pilgrimage. Verses 1-3 speak of the joy that the people of God have because of what God has already done. Verses 4-6 anticipate the joy that the people of God will have because of what God will do in the future.

On our Lenten journey, we rejoice when we think about what God has already done for us. And we look forward to the ways in which God is going to continue to work in our lives. We see the darkness of Good Friday. But beyond Good Friday is Easter, when the tears of mourning of which the Psalmist speaks will become a harvest of joy.

**Prayer**

LORD, we rejoice in the great things you have done for us. And we rejoice when we think about all the things that you are going to do for us in the future. Be with us during these solemn days of Lenten pilgrimage. May our tears of mourning become a harvest of joy. Amen.



## Day 17

### Genesis 43:1-15

<sup>1</sup>Now the famine was severe in the land. <sup>2</sup>And when they had eaten up the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go again, buy us a little more food.” <sup>3</sup>But Judah said to him, “The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’ <sup>4</sup>If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food; <sup>5</sup>but if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, ‘You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.’” <sup>6</sup>Israel said, “Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?” <sup>7</sup>They replied, “The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, ‘Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?’ What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down?’” <sup>8</sup>Then Judah said to his father Israel, “Send the boy with me, and let us be on our way, so that we may live and not die—you and we and also our little ones. <sup>9</sup>I myself will be surety for him; you can hold me accountable for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. <sup>10</sup>If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice.” <sup>11</sup>Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry them down as a present to the man—a little balm and a little honey, gum, resin, pistachio nuts, and almonds. <sup>12</sup>Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the top of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. <sup>13</sup>Take your brother also, and be on your way again to the man; <sup>14</sup>may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, so that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin. As for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” <sup>15</sup>So the men took the present, and they took double the money with them, as well as Benjamin. Then they went on their way down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph.

### Lois Swestyn '03

Jacob/Israel, one of the great Patriarchs of the Bible, is not showing his best leadership at this time, but we can learn from his actions. He's in a time of crisis, a famine in the land. Decisions need to be made about purchasing grain. God has already provided grain through Jacob's son Joseph, who is now in Egypt. But for the family to get more needed grain from there, Jacob will have to risk sending along his beloved son Benjamin, Joseph's youngest brother. That's part of the deal Joseph made with his other brothers when they came for grain the first time. Jacob resists sending Benjamin, for much deceit had been played out in this family before. Perhaps understandably, Jacob thought that the less others knew about him, the better off he and his family were.

Many Christians operate on this same principle. They think that keeping others from knowing them well avoids problems. But like Jacob, such people are misled. For it is sin that loves darkness and secrets. Righteousness, on the other hand, loves light and truth. Good communication is a must in all relationships—especially in our relationship with God. And trust is the key.

In this passage we see that Jacob relied on God, but only as a last resort. God had been and would continue to be active in this family's life in times of trouble, famine, and reconciliation. Likewise, God is active at all times in our lives.

Is there a famine in your life today? Are you seeking God for direction? Are you trusting God with all your life?

## **Prayer**

All knowing God, we thank you for being active in all times of our life. We pray to be drawn closer to you through our honesty with you and others. May we rely on you first in our life and not as a last resort. Help us to recognize the ‘famines’ in our life and to trust you through every step of the journey to be fed, encouraged, hopeful, and in right relationship with others, especially with you. Amen.

## **Mark 4:35-41**

*35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” 36 And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. 37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” 39 He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. 40 He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” 41 And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”*

## **Derek Davenport ’05**

Jesus returns to the sea. There are so many phrases that are worthy of thought in this passage, but for today, it’s worth just thinking about that image of the sea. Throughout Mark, Jesus has turned to the sea for refuge and protection. We haven’t seen Jesus rest often in the book of Mark. We’ve seen him healing into the night and praying before sunrise, but this is the first time in the book that we’ve actually seen Jesus sleeping. This first moment of rest comes in the midst of a storm on the sea. Even as “the waves beat into the boat,” Jesus finds comfort and solace for the first time. Naturally, the disciples immediately interrupt him. When he wakes, Jesus offers two rebukes. The first is to the sea, the second is directed at the disciples who feared it. After all this time, all the escapes to the sea, the disciples still don’t realize that the man in the boat is more powerful than the storms without.

## **Leanna Fuller, faculty**

As Christians, we affirm that we can learn about the nature of God by looking at the life and ministry of Jesus. In today’s reading, Jesus’ words and actions make powerful claims about who God is. First, we learn that while the waves swamped the boat, Jesus slept. The disciples think this means that Jesus doesn’t care about them. Instead, Jesus shows us that God brings peace and rest even in the midst of the world’s chaos. Our God is a firm foundation; God is our refuge and strength (Ps 46).

Then, when Jesus perceives his disciples’ distress, he commands the wind and the waves, “Peace! Be still!” From this we learn that our God brings comfort; when we cry out to God, God will be present with us. Yet our God is also a God of challenge, as we see from Jesus’ response after the storm has calmed: “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” While God comforts us, God does not wish us to remain mired in despair. Instead, God calls us forth from our anxiety and fear, inviting us to trust God completely, no matter what storms may rage around us.

## **Prayer**

Gracious God, in this season of Lent, help us to learn to listen for your voice in the midst of the storm. Even when it seems to us that you are sleeping, or that you are indifferent to our plight, remind us that you are always near, ready to calm the chaos that swirls around and within us. Most of all, give us the strength and courage to respond when we hear you calling us beyond our fears to follow wherever you may lead. Amen.

## Day 18

### Genesis 43:16-34

<sup>16</sup>When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, 'Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon.' <sup>17</sup>The man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph's house. <sup>18</sup>Now the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, 'It is because of the money, replaced in our sacks the first time, that we have been brought in, so that he may have an opportunity to fall upon us, to make slaves of us and take our donkeys.' <sup>19</sup>So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the entrance to the house. <sup>20</sup>They said, 'Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food; <sup>21</sup>and when we came to the lodging-place we opened our sacks, and there was each one's money in the top of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it back with us. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, we have brought down with us additional money to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.' <sup>23</sup>He replied, 'Rest assured, do not be afraid; your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your sacks for you; I received your money.' Then he brought Simeon out to them. <sup>24</sup>When the steward had brought the men into Joseph's house, and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, <sup>25</sup>they made the present ready for Joseph's coming at noon, for they had heard that they would dine there. <sup>26</sup>When Joseph came home, they brought him the present that they had carried into the house, and bowed to the ground before him. <sup>27</sup>He inquired about their welfare, and said, 'Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?' <sup>28</sup>They said, 'Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.' And they bowed their heads and did obeisance. <sup>29</sup>Then he looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, 'Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!' <sup>30</sup>With that, Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into a private room and wept there. <sup>31</sup>Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, 'Serve the meal.' <sup>32</sup>They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. <sup>33</sup>When they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, the men looked at one another in amazement. <sup>34</sup>Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.

### Adam Davis, field education supervisor

This passage from the first book of the Bible details the beautiful reunion of Joseph with his estranged family. In large part, this account is why Joseph is held high before us as a model of biblical forgiveness. In spite of the (beyond) ill treatment Joseph received at the hands of his brothers, not to mention the cascading disasters that followed, Joseph was able to arrive at a place of forgiveness and reconciliation.

What is not highlighted in this particular passage, however, is Joseph's own role in provoking the ire of his brothers, or the ways that Joseph, in turn, tortured his brothers before arriving at this blessed place of reunion. Certainly one can understand the difficulty Joseph would have experienced in encountering his brothers so many years later, with the tables having been turned in the dynamics of their relationship in such a profound way.

So, while we admire Joseph and his willingness to forgive, we look beyond Joseph to Jesus as our model—Jesus, who calls us to turn the other cheek; Jesus, who calls us to bless, heal, and forgive.

## **Prayer**

Most gracious God, we thank you for those who have modeled for us what it looks like to follow you. Thank you for the many times we have been forgiven. Make us faithful to give as we have received. As we continue to face our own humanity throughout this season, make us your instruments of healing and peace. Amen.

## **Mark 5:1-20**

*1 They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. 2 And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. 3 He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; 4 for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. 6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; 7 and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." 8 For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" 9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." 10 He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. 11 Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; 12 and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." 13 So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea. 14 The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. 15 They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. 16 Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. 17 Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. 18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. 19 But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.*

## **Derek Davenport '05**

Once again in Mark we find a story that appears to be a supernatural healing. However you interpret the healing itself, the most frightening part of the story is the end. The man with the reputation, the man with a past, the subject of rumors and urban legends, is told to "Go home to your friends." As we've previously seen in the book of Mark, "home" can be a difficult place to return, and yet that's where Jesus sends him.

Yet he obeys. Because he was obedient, he discovered that he was uniquely prepared for the ministry to which he was called. No one had a better opportunity to demonstrate the mercy of Jesus than the subject of rumors and urban legends.

## **Psalms 31**

*1 In you, O LORD, I seek refuge;  
do not let me ever be put to shame;  
in your righteousness deliver me.  
2 Incline your ear to me;*

*rescue me speedily.*  
*Be a rock of refuge for me,*  
*a strong fortress to save me.*  
 3 *You are indeed my rock and my fortress;*  
*for your name's sake lead me and guide me,*  
 4 *take me out of the net that is hidden for me,*  
*for you are my refuge.*  
 5 *Into your hand I commit my spirit;*  
*you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.*  
 6 *You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols,*  
*but I trust in the LORD.*  
 7 *I will exult and rejoice in your steadfast love,*  
*because you have seen my affliction;*  
*you have taken heed of my adversities,*  
 8 *and have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy;*  
*you have set my feet in a broad place.*  
 9 *Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;*  
*my eye wastes away from grief,*  
*my soul and body also.*  
 10 *For my life is spent with sorrow,*  
*and my years with sighing;*  
*my strength fails because of my misery,*  
*and my bones waste away.*  
 11 *I am the scorn of all my adversaries,*  
*a horror to my neighbors,*  
*an object of dread to my acquaintances;*  
*those who see me in the street flee from me.*  
 12 *I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;*  
*I have become like a broken vessel.*  
 13 *For I hear the whispering of many—*  
*terror all around!—*  
*as they scheme together against me,*  
*as they plot to take my life.*  
 14 *But I trust in you, O LORD;*  
*I say, "You are my God."*  
 15 *My times are in your hand;*  
*deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.*  
 16 *Let your face shine upon your servant;*  
*save me in your steadfast love.*  
 17 *Do not let me be put to shame, O LORD,*  
*for I call on you;*  
*let the wicked be put to shame;*  
*let them go dumbfounded to Sheol.*  
 18 *Let the lying lips be stilled*  
*that speak insolently against the righteous*  
*with pride and contempt.*  
 19 *O how abundant is your goodness*  
*that you have laid up for those who fear you,*

*and accomplished for those who take refuge in you,  
in the sight of everyone!*  
20 *In the shelter of your presence you hide them  
from human plots;  
you hold them safe under your shelter  
from contentious tongues.*  
21 *Blessed be the LORD,  
for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me  
when I was beset as a city under siege.*  
22 *I had said in my alarm,  
"I am driven far from your sight."  
But you heard my supplications  
when I cried out to you for help.*  
23 *Love the LORD, all you his saints.  
The LORD preserves the faithful,  
but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily.*  
24 *Be strong, and let your heart take courage,  
all you who wait for the LORD.*

**Anne Malone, staff**

I have a small pocket Bible that I keep in my desk drawer in my office. I like to mark verses or passages that are significant to me. While I was reading this Psalm and deciding which lectionary reading I would focus on for this devotional, I noticed that verses 9 and 21 are aligned next to each other in their respective columns. I drew a box around each verse and an arrow across from one verse to the other looking something like this:

9 Be gracious to me, O Lord, 21 Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously  
for I am in distress ----> shown his steadfast love to me . . .

I don't recall why I marked these verses as such, but as I reflect on them now, I am struck by how descriptive they are of how I journey through the Lenten season. I begin in a place of "distress," because I have fallen short yet again when it comes to maintaining spiritual disciplines, and then journey toward blessing the Lord for his steadfast love and faithfulness as I strive to deepen my relationship with God. For me, the Lenten season is not so much a time to "give up" something, but instead to refocus and establish consistency again in places where I have gone off track. In this passage in my Bible, I also have a box drawn around the final verse of the Psalm: Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord. This is my encouragement during the rest of the year—to take courage when I'm distressed about falling short again.

**Prayer**

Almighty God, help us all to be strong and take courage as we examine our lives during this Lenten season to see how we may draw into a closer and deeper relationship with you. Amen.

## Day 19

### John 5:25-29

25 "Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26 For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; 27 and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. 28 Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and will come out - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

### John 4:5-42 (departing from the Daily Lectionary)

5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. 7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)(a] 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." 16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you[b] say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I am he,[c] the one who is speaking to you." 27 Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" 28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah,[d] can he?" 30 They left the city and were on their way to him. 31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33 So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. 36 The reaper is already receiving[e] wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." 39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him,

*they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."*

### **Derek Davenport '05**

One of the wonderful things about the structure of Lent is that each week we are given a reminder of Easter; we have respite in the midst of our intense reflection. In addition to the 40 days of preparation, we are given Sundays to stop and focus on what is coming. Today, we return to the Gospel of John, and once again we read words of death transformed into life—words that send us forward to Easter. As we take refuge from our time of preparation, we are reminded of where this story is going. We are reminded that whatever is coming in the weeks ahead, the ultimate authority rests in Jesus. We are reminded that death does not have the last word. We are reminded that Easter results in life.

### **Romans 8:1-10**

*<sup>1</sup>There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. <sup>3</sup>For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup>For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law - indeed it cannot, <sup>8</sup>and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup>But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup>But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

### **Brenda Henry '17**

In this passage, Paul reminds us of what was at stake when Jesus allowed himself to be sacrificed on the cross—humanity's salvation. Paul makes a distinction between two types of people—the person who is “in Christ Jesus” and the one who “lives according to the flesh”—and their relationship to God. To be “in Christ Jesus” means to be guided by the Spirit of God who dwells within us. To be “in the flesh” is to be hostile to God and refuse to submit to God's commands. Paul was careful to note that humanity's separation from our sinful nature can only be done if the Spirit of Christ dwells in us. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross conquered the nature of sin that held us bound. No longer are we condemned to death; rather we have been made alive through the righteousness of Christ Jesus.

In the face of the many concerns that surrounds us—the ravages of natural storms and disasters, the tension from the threat of nuclear warfare, the strife of social injustices—we are also reminded that we do not have to live and act out of our sinful nature, for we have been freed to act through the Spirit of God that dwells in us. Being set free from the bondage of sin and death, we are called to reflect the Spirit of God within us in all that we do and toward all those whom we encounter. This Lenten season, may we reflect on God's abiding love that has set us free, and may we in turn love and care for others as we ourselves are loved.



## **Prayer**

Triune God, thank you for the gift of life granted through the death and resurrection of your son Jesus. Thank you for your Spirit that dwells in us and guides us. Lord, may we seek to please you and follow your commands always. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## **Psalm 84**

*1 How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O LORD of hosts!*  
*2 My soul longs, indeed it faints  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and my flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.*  
*3 Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
my King and my God.*  
*4 Happy are those who live in your house,  
ever singing your praise.*  
*5 Happy are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.*  
*6 As they go through the valley of Baca  
they make it a place of springs;  
the early rain also covers it with pools.*  
*7 They go from strength to strength;  
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.*  
*8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
give ear, O God of Jacob!*  
*9 Behold our shield, O God;  
look on the face of your anointed.*  
*10 For a day in your courts is better  
than a thousand elsewhere.  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than live in the tents of wickedness.*  
*11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
he bestows favor and honor.  
No good thing does the LORD withhold  
from those who walk uprightly.*  
*12 O LORD of hosts,  
happy is everyone who trusts in you.*

## **Nancy Hammond, staff (retired)**

I am reminded today of a friend's story about sitting in a parking lot waiting for an extraordinarily crucial business meeting to begin. Darting around the shrubbery separating the lot from the cars on Main Street, a grey squirrel passed his car window with a huge acorn in its mouth, actively hunting for a place to bury its treasure.

It found the perfect place and dug a huge hole as its underground safe. Then it carefully dragged new dirt over the place, rearranged the soil, patted it down, eyed its work, made a few adjustments, and scampered away for another nugget.

It dawned on my friend that this squirrel ritual of finding, burying, hiding, covering, patting, and evaluating had been going on for thousands of years . . . an unbroken history of squirrel work in the Lord God's creation. Suddenly my friend's vital work for the day didn't seem all that important.

The author of Psalm 84, verse 3, had exactly the same experience some 3,000 years ago, as he watched swallows and sparrows flit in and out of a man-made altar wherein they no doubt nested. He too longed to lay down his burden and place himself in the hands of a loving Lord God.

Whether sparrows or swallows or squirrels . . . or each of us in this hectic world . . . Happy are those this Lenten Season who live in the Lord's house, ever singing Your praise.

### **Prayer**

God of hosts, even in this time of Lent our hearts and flesh sing for joy to you, the living God. Amen.

## Day 20

### Genesis 44:18-34

*18 Then Judah stepped up to him and said, "O my lord, let your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are like Pharaoh himself. 19 My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' 20 And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead; he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' 21 Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, so that I may set my eyes on him.' 22 We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' 23 Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.' 24 When we went back to your servant my father we told him the words of my lord. 25 And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' 26 we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother goes with us, will we go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' 27 Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; 28 one left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since. 29 If you take this one also from me, and harm comes to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol.' 30 Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, 31 when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. 32 For your servant became surety for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I will bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life.' 33 Now therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers. 34 For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father."*

### Alina Kanaski '16

This passage is from the middle of a story, one that is about Joseph but also about so many others. Take Judah, the speaker here: he was one of Joseph's older brothers—a son of Leah and the brother who suggested selling Joseph into slavery.

Yet here he is, offering himself as Joseph's slave to save his younger brother Benjamin from the same fate. Benjamin is Rachel's other son, so beloved by their father that Jacob didn't want to let Benjamin go to Egypt. He's not too different from Joseph, but still Judah offers his life in exchange for Benjamin's. Joseph isn't the only one who's changed as this story has unfolded.

Judah has offered himself as a surety for his brother Benjamin. Judah is responsible for Benjamin in their father's eyes.

As I read this passage, I remember another Son—a "son" of Judah and one who also offered Himself for another. He also took on the responsibility for not just one, but for many, by giving His life in order to save them. He offered Himself not into slavery but into death. There is no sordid history behind Jesus' sacrifice—not on God's end. Yet there is the same love, the same desperate desire to save. God's love, enacted in and through Jesus, is powerful, proven, and acted out through His life, His death, and His resurrection. As we sit in this period of waiting, of remembering the pain and the darkness, let us also remember God's love, which Jesus enacted and which is the source of our hope.

## Prayer

God, thank You for Your love, made visible and physical in Jesus Christ. Help us to see its echoes all around us, whether in the Bible, in the people around us, or in the small moments of life. In Your name we pray, Amen.

### Mark 5:21-43

*21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. 22 Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet 23 and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." 24 So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. 25 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. 26 She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. 27 She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." 29 Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30 Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" 31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" 32 He looked all around to see who had done it. 33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." 35 While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" 36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." 37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. 38 When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." 40 And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" 42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. 43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.*

### Derek Davenport '05

"So that she may be made well and live." The sequence of that request has always fascinated me. Made well is first, and live is second, not the other way around. It's as if being made well is more important, more vital.

From one perspective, this is obvious. To live again without having the underlying problem addressed will yield the same results. But there is more to it. There is something deeper. When Jesus heals the woman in the middle of this story, he proclaims healing and also wholeness. He doesn't use either phrase with the little girl, but he tells them to feed her. Feeding—an action that indicates growth, strength, health, wholeness.

Jesus makes them both well. He doesn't just bring the little girl back to life and cleanse the bleeding woman. He makes them well. Their prayers are bigger than simple removal of symptoms. They don't want to be unsick. They ask to be well.

## **1 Corinthians 7: 25-31**

<sup>25</sup>Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. <sup>26</sup>I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. <sup>27</sup>Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. <sup>28</sup>But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. <sup>29</sup>I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, <sup>30</sup>and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, <sup>31</sup>and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

### **R. Drew Smith, faculty**

This passage's focus on eschewing spiritual distractions and social entanglements (including those that may accompany marriage) is perhaps a bit discomfiting to most who encounter it. We may shield ourselves perhaps from the passage's sacrificial demands by rationalizing that it applies only to a selected group of Christians uniquely called to lives of heightened spiritual discipline, self-denial, and service. This group could include, for example, persons devoted to religious sisterhood and monastic priesthood traditions. But confining the passage's applications only to persons who ecclesially (or less formally) devote themselves to this kind of ascetic living would obviate what the passage portends about spiritually consecrated living and service in a broader sense.

Although the scriptures often reference the "few" versus the "many" (as in "many are called, few are chosen" [Matthew 22:14]), such distinctions do not necessarily apply to this passage in 1 Corinthians. It is not simply the few whom the passage beckons into deeper spirituality and service through consecration and sacrifice—it is the many, irrespective of social status or station, profession or livelihood, family structure or marital status.

There is a selflessness written into this passage, but also an urgency—both of which are quite pertinent to the Lenten season. Through crucifixion, Christ "laid down" His life in an act of supreme selflessness to rescue a perishing humanity. As Christ demonstrated so clearly through His life and death, it is in losing ourselves that we find ourselves, it is through emptying ourselves that we become full, and it is through sacrificing ourselves in behalf of others that we show our love for each other and for God (Matthew 10:39; Philippians 2:7; John 15:13). In recalling the meaning of Christ's sacrifice, let us also assess how much of ourselves we are giving to God and to a world of people in peril.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, in a world preoccupied with self, may we be so giving to others and so surrendered to you that we hold nothing back. Let your words, your ways, your will be entirely ours. Let us seek you with our whole heart, and let us draw nearer to you through our service to others. Take our lives and consecrate them to you and to the service of your people.

## Day 21

### Genesis 45:1-15

<sup>1</sup>Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. <sup>2</sup>And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. <sup>3</sup>Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. <sup>4</sup>Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup>And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup>For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. <sup>7</sup>God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. <sup>8</sup>So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. <sup>9</sup>Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. <sup>10</sup>You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. <sup>11</sup>I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ <sup>12</sup>And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. <sup>13</sup>You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” <sup>14</sup>Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. <sup>15</sup>And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

### Susan Blank ’15

Sibling rivalry has been around a long, long time. In fact, it rears its ugly head on page three of my Bible. Many of us have experienced struggles with siblings. I was the middle child of seven; there was always someone who was teasing, tattling, or cheating at Monopoly. Often we outgrow sibling rivalries. But in my work as a chaplain, I sometimes encounter the estrangement of those brothers and sisters who have disagreements over the care of their elderly parent. Family bonds can be stretched thin—even broken.

Our scripture passage tells us the story of Joseph, the braggart, the favorite son, sold into slavery by his brothers. Joseph’s fortunes rise; his brothers come looking for a handout during a famine. Joseph, once powerless at the bottom of a pit, now has all the power. Will the blood that ties these men together now be spilled upon the ground? After some manipulation and testing of his brothers, Joseph forgives them and provides generously for their needs. Then he sends them back to Canaan to fetch their father. Humorously, Joseph cautions, “Do not quarrel along the way.”

Is Joseph a paragon of mercy? Was he able to write off his brothers’ crime as a “boyish prank”? Are the ties to their common ancestor that strong? Or was God the primary agent in this drama? Was Joseph able to extend mercy after he himself experienced God’s mercy? Was Joseph able to extend grace after he himself received God’s grace?

### Prayer

Gracious and loving God, Open my eyes to see my sin and the signs of your grace. Teach me to be grace-full. Open my heart that I might extend mercy. Open my mind that I might seek forgiveness and that I might give it generously. In Christ’s name I pray. Amen.

**Mark 6:1-13**

*1 He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2 On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. 4 Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." 5 And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6 And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching. 7 He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8 He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9 but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10 He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11 If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." 12 So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. 13 They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*

**Derek Davenport '05**

Once again Jesus returns home, and once again it's not pleasant. In fact, Jesus himself was amazed at the "unbelief" he encountered there.

We also see a shift in the story here. Jesus sends the 12 out in groups of two. They're not sent out alone, but they are sent. In this way, we see the disciples taking a more direct role than they have in the past. They are called to participate and proclaim this good news—they are not passive bystanders. They are active participants. This may call to mind the parable of the sower—the disciples are given the chance to exhibit the bold determination of those who "sow the word."

**Psalm 25**

*1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.  
2 O my God, in you I trust;  
do not let me be put to shame;  
do not let my enemies exult over me.  
3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;  
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.  
4 Make me to know your ways, O LORD;  
teach me your paths.  
5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all day long.  
6 Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love,  
for they have been from of old.  
7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;  
according to your steadfast love remember me,  
for your goodness' sake, O LORD!  
8 Good and upright is the LORD;  
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.*

9 He leads the humble in what is right,  
 and teaches the humble his way.  
 10 All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,  
 for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.  
 11 For your name's sake, O LORD,  
 pardon my guilt, for it is great.  
 12 Who are they that fear the LORD?  
 He will teach them the way that they should choose.  
 13 They will abide in prosperity,  
 and their children shall possess the land.  
 14 The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,  
 and he makes his covenant known to them.  
 15 My eyes are ever toward the LORD,  
 for he will pluck my feet out of the net.  
 16 Turn to me and be gracious to me,  
 for I am lonely and afflicted.  
 17 Relieve the troubles of my heart,  
 and bring me out of my distress.  
 18 Consider my affliction and my trouble,  
 and forgive all my sins.  
 19 Consider how many are my foes,  
 and with what violent hatred they hate me.  
 20 O guard my life, and deliver me;  
 do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.  
 21 May integrity and uprightness preserve me,  
 for I wait for you.  
 22 Redeem Israel, O God,  
 out of all its troubles.

### **Katie Galicic, student**

At the end of the day, when watching the evening news or checking the notifications on my phone, I have often found myself feeling great loss in the pain and suffering so readily displayed in our “news” outlets. I see updates about political candidates demeaning and criticizing people of different cultures and heritages, I read sharp judgment and hate exchanged between those in disagreement with each other, and I hear about growing violence and countless lives lost. My soul aches. I feel lonely and afflicted as the growing distress of the world weighs down my heart. All I can taste and feel is the salty brine and harsh rub of sin. I imagine the despair that many of Jesus’ followers must have felt in the hours and days following his death, all hope lost. My hope lost.

I look to the Psalms and am reminded to lift my soul to the Lord and put my trust in God. I can rest in the comfort of the Lord’s steadfast love for me and find new hope, my old sin and pain washed away.

### **Prayer**

Holy God, through desolate deserts, turbulent seas, and stormy nights you have comforted your people. In the midst of persecution, violence, and sin your steadfast love has sustained us. You have washed away our sins through the sacrifice of your son. Lord, be with us in our pain and sorrow, and teach us your paths. We lift up our souls to you in trust and thanksgiving. Amen.



## Day 22

### Mark 6:13-29

*13 They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. 14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." 15 But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." 17 For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. 18 For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. 21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. 22 When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." 23 And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." 24 She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." 25 Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, 28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb."*

### Derek Davenport '05

Here we return to John the Baptist, and find the haunting tale of Herodias and John the Baptist. We've been speeding through the life of Jesus, and here take a rare detour to learn another story altogether.

This story has fascinated artists, authors, poets, and playwrights for centuries. Often, it is assumed that the daughter of Herodias was named Salome. Her dance has been interpreted as everything from a display of acrobatics to seduction. The details of the dance, however, don't change the tragedy of the story. The characters manipulate each other, deceive each other, and mistreat each other. The result is the death of an innocent victim. Yet despite the tragedy of the story, we end with a body laid in a tomb—a scene we will revisit later, with a much different outcome.

### 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

*<sup>1</sup>Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. <sup>2</sup>Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; <sup>3</sup>but anyone who loves God is known by him. <sup>4</sup>Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "no idol in the world really exists," and that "there is no God but one." <sup>5</sup>Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—<sup>6</sup>yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. <sup>7</sup>It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. <sup>8</sup>"Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. <sup>9</sup>But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup>For if others see you, who*

*possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? <sup>11</sup>So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. <sup>12</sup>But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup>Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.*

### **Andy Greenhow, staff**

By this point in Lent, I have long given up any observances that have to do with food. I'm back enjoying a glass of beer, eating meat, or chowing down on chocolate. A big part of my justification for doing so goes roughly along the lines of this passage from 1 Corinthians. "I'm free in Christ, justified by faith! I don't need to withhold the pleasure of this steak/wine/ice cream! I'm not spiritually immature like those folks who have to give up food—this vegetarianism has served its purpose and I get it now."

Hey, at least I abandoned my integrity theologically . . . .

But maybe the best part of Lent is the sweet relief of not pretending we're mature or advanced in the faith. It's an opportunity to entertain the notion that maybe we are weaker than we thought, that we stumble more readily than we would like to admit. There is freedom in saying, "I need help. I am not where I want to be." And just like the believers living together as the early church, so we, in observing Lent together, get to look out for one another.

I hope we feel free enough to get in touch with our own weakness and lack of knowledge this Lent and, in so doing, grow in compassion for those around us, who are struggling along just like we are.

### **Prayer**

Loving God, thank you for the opportunity in this season to reflect on our weakness and to know more of your power made perfect in weakness. Make us attentive to you and to one another. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **Psalm 147:1-11**

*1 Praise the LORD!*

*For it is good to sing praises to our God;  
for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.*

*2 The LORD builds up Jerusalem;  
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.*

*3 He heals the brokenhearted  
and binds up their wounds.*

*4 He determines the number of the stars;  
he gives to all of them their names.*

*5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;  
his understanding is beyond measure.*

*6 The LORD lifts up the humble;  
he casts the wicked to the ground.*

*7 Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;  
make melody to our God on the lyre!*

*8 He covers the heavens with clouds;  
he prepares rain for the earth;*

*he makes grass grow on the hills.  
9 He gives to the beasts their food,  
and to the young ravens that cry.  
10 His delight is not in the strength of the horse,  
nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,  
11 but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,  
in those who hope in his steadfast love.*

**Charissa Clark Howe '14/'16**

Lent is a season in which we reflect on our need for Jesus. For 40 days, we give up things like Facebook and chocolate. Some of the more hardcore Lent-fasters might give up meat or coffee. It is a somber time, in which we tend to focus on our brokenness and our despair without Jesus. But in Lent there is a hope to be found—a hope that we are remiss to forget if we focus only inwardly on what we've gotten wrong.

This Psalm, like many Psalms, offers us a look at both sides of the coin—both the desperation and the hope. There are outcasts—and God gathers them up. We are brokenhearted—but God binds our broken hearts. The humble are lifted up. And God is given pleasure by our hope.

As we continue to enter deeper into this season, let us remember that when we fall down, God lifts us up. When we are hopeless, God gives us hope. Even though we walk through the dark passage of the Lenten season, we walk toward The Great Light—Jesus Christ.

**Prayer**

God, remind us not only of our need for you in our despair, but also of the great hope that is offered to us. Help us to allow your light to shine into the darkest corners of our lives. Bind up our broken hearts. Give us hope in the hopeless times. Take pleasure in the hope we find in your steadfast love. Amen.

## Day 23

### Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34

<sup>1</sup>When Israel set out on his journey with all that he had and came to Beer-sheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. <sup>2</sup>God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” <sup>3</sup>Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. <sup>4</sup>I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph’s own hand shall close your eyes.” <sup>5</sup>Then Jacob set out from Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. <sup>6</sup>They also took their livestock and the goods that they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, <sup>7</sup>his sons, and his sons’ sons with him, his daughters, and his sons’ daughters; all his offspring he brought with him into Egypt. . . . <sup>28</sup>Israel sent Judah ahead to Joseph to lead the way before him into Goshen. When they came to the land of Goshen, <sup>29</sup>Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to meet his father Israel in Goshen. He presented himself to him, fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. <sup>30</sup>Israel said to Joseph, “I can die now, having seen for myself that you are still alive.” <sup>31</sup>Joseph said to his brothers and to his father’s household, “I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, ‘My brothers and my father’s household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. <sup>32</sup>The men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have.’ <sup>33</sup>When Pharaoh calls you, and says, ‘What is your occupation?’ <sup>34</sup>you shall say, ‘Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our ancestors’—in order that you may settle in the land of Goshen, because all shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians.”

### Antony Andrews, D.Min. student

Joseph is a type of Christ. As the second-youngest of 12 brothers, Joseph finds that his grandiose dreams and visions cause his brothers to hate him. Their hate is so severe that it ultimately leads them to sell Joseph into slavery and to grieve their father, Jacob, by telling him that Joseph has been killed.

Of course, Joseph is not dead, but like Christ he is betrayed by his own, sold for a sum of silver, and ends up “saving the world.” Joseph’s revealing of himself to his brothers in Egypt is, for them, a sort of “resurrection” of their brother, thus making Joseph a type of Christ.

Their father Jacob’s journeying to Egypt to see Joseph before this son’s “own hand shall close [Jacob’s] eyes” makes a further parallel between the stories of Joseph and Jesus: The “righteous and devout” Simeon, after seeing the baby Jesus in the Temple, says “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” Both Jacob and Simeon can die in peace after seeing in the flesh God’s timely provision for salvation.

The goodness of God is evident in his dealings with Jacob, with Joseph and his brothers, and with us this Lenten season as we experience Christ’s giving himself up for the life of the world.

### Prayer

My Lord Jesus Christ, give me the eyes to see your salvation that you have so wonderfully accomplished for me on the tree of the cross. Let me gaze at it as the children of Israel gazed upon the bronze serpent in the wilderness when they were stung with sin. Amen.

**Mark 6:30-46**

*30 The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. 33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. 34 As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. 35 When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; 36 send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." 37 But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" 38 And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." 39 Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. 41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And all ate and were filled; 43 and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men. 45 Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.*

**Derek Davenport '05**

After our interlude with John the Baptist, we return to the disciples. More precisely, they return to us. Jesus had sent them out, and they now return to report what they experienced. At this point, we find them tired and weary, and they turn (as Jesus does throughout Mark) to the sea for refuge.

As soon as they return to the land, there is a crowd waiting. Despite the picture we often carry in our minds, the scene here is not particularly pleasant. The passage opens with an explanation that the disciples haven't even had the leisure to eat. The crowds have started to become dangerous; we've seen Jesus retreat from them several times already throughout the book. The people are far from home, wandering as if lost. At this point, the crowds also grow hungry. It's growing dark. The scene is of desolation, hunger, and darkness.

That's where Jesus wants the people to sit. He wants them to sit in groups in the midst of the desolation, hunger, and darkness. Then, he feeds them. Then, Jesus goes to the mountains to pray.

## Day 24

### Mark 6:47-56

*47 When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. 49 But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; 50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 51 Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. 53 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. 54 When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, 55 and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56 And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.*

### Derek Davenport '05

This passage opens with Jesus on the shore, and the disciples struggling on the water. The sea and the storm were too much for the disciples to handle, and Jesus saw them struggling.

By this point in the Gospel according to Mark, we've seen Jesus seek refuge amongst waves, find protection in the storms, and even speak to the sea. When seeing his disciples in danger, in some way it should be logical for us to expect Jesus to demonstrate his mastery over the sea once more. Yet what happens next is beyond anything we've seen thus far. More shocking than even conversing with the elements, Jesus simply treads on the sea itself. The disciples, upon witnessing this mastery over nature itself, are shocked. But notice what shocked them. It wasn't Jesus walking on water. It wasn't even the obedience of the wind. They were still shocked about the loaves. One of the great things about this is that God's blessings weren't contingent on their understanding. Jesus continued to bless them even though they could hardly even see it.

### 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

<sup>16</sup>*If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!* <sup>17</sup>*For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission.* <sup>18</sup>*What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.* <sup>19</sup>*For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them.* <sup>20</sup>*To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law.* <sup>21</sup>*To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law.* <sup>22</sup>*To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.* <sup>23</sup>*I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.* <sup>24</sup>*Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it.* <sup>25</sup>*Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one.* <sup>26</sup>*So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air;* <sup>27</sup>*but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.*

**Kellie Wild '09**

It's all about relationships. I work with many people whom some would refer to as the disinherited or those who are marginalized by society. Many of the folks with whom I spend my time do not feel comfortable around Christians or in our churches because they do not feel welcome and accepted. On the other hand, I am often approached by individuals in churches about what they can do to get the people who are marginalized to come into their churches. What I say to these well-intentioned church folk is that people who feel marginalized are not going to come into your churches just because you say your doors are open. Until you are willing to go *out* of the church's doors and engage in building genuine relationships with others, your doors are not open. We need to get to know people and their stories so that we can then share the story of the gospel. I have heard many times over the years that people do not care what you know until they know that you care. You see, we in the church are focused on getting people to come into the church when, like Paul, we need to be going out to the people and speaking to them in a way that shows we care about them as persons. What would it look like if, instead of focusing on getting people into the church, we took the message of the gospel *out* of the church and *to* the people?

**Prayer**

Gracious God, you speak to each of us in unique ways so that we know of your love for us. Help us to go out of the safety of our churches and into the world to build genuine relationships with those who may not know the message of the gospel so that we may be able to speak and act in ways that allow your love to be shared with others.

**Psalm 130**

*1 Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;  
2 Lord, hear my voice.  
Let your ears be attentive  
to my cry for mercy.  
3 If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,  
Lord, who could stand?  
4 But with you there is forgiveness,  
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.  
5 I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.  
6 I wait for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.  
7 Israel, put your hope in the Lord,  
for with the Lord is unfailing love  
and with him is full redemption.  
8 He himself will redeem Israel  
from all their sins.*

**Jillian Jones, student**

You cry, you beg, and you scream trying to make God hear you. It's all in vain; He already does. He listens when you whisper. He listens when you don't say a word. He listens when your heart breaks or when you can't make a sound or even form a coherent thought.

He listens, He hears, He knows. He knows every thought, feeling, and sin. There is no hiding or covering up. We are all naked before Him. Yet he doesn't have a long list in his back pocket of all we've done wrong and all the ways we've messed up. If He did, we'd all be done for. Instead, He forgives us our wrongs, teaches us what we can learn from our mistakes, and comforts us when it's all too much.

So instead of crying, begging, and screaming for attention, breathe and wait. Inhale, exhale, and wait at his feet.

**Prayer**

Abba, thank you for being my Immanuel, my God with me. You're with me through the good and the bad. Thank you for being my El Roi, my God who sees me. You see me when I bring you glory and when I bring you disgrace and love me the same. Lord, teach me to wait in your presence. Amen.



## Day 25

### Mark 7:1-23

*1 Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, 2 they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. 3 (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; 4 and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) 5 So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" 6 He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; 7 in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' 8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition." 9 Then he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! 10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' 11 But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban' (that is, an offering to God) - 12 then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, 13 thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this." 14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: 15 there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." 17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 He said to them, "Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, 19 since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. 21 For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, 22 adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."*

### Derek Davenport '05

The religious officials return here, for the first time since chapter 2. The last time we saw them, they had determined to kill Jesus. In this passage, we see them putting their plans in motion. They make accusations as if testing their opposition, or perhaps taking the first steps toward building their case. They accuse the disciples of breaking from tradition, and Jesus responds by pointing them beyond tradition to the commandments of God, and the ways that their traditions can violate God's commands. The traditions had gotten out of control. They had lost their original intent and become dangerous; they had overshadowed their original purpose. It's important to evaluate our own traditions and practices with this tendency in mind. Our individual routines and even our corporate traditions can fall into the same trap.

### Alyson Pope, staff

During both the Advent and Lenten holiday seasons, my family revels in seemingly innumerable traditions. That has played a large part in my enjoyment of the holidays, as the familiarity of ritual and tradition is, to me, calming and soothing, a welcome reminder of familial intimacy and shared history. As much as we may rejoice in those traditions, however, it is a mistake to confuse them with holiness. "For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come." Putting too much focus on old, comfortable external practices can blur the line between that which is understandably precious, and that which is truly sacred, and in its worst iteration, it can breed an attitude of "otherness" much like the disciples encountered from the Pharisees. Take joy in traditions, but not at the expense of spiritual

introspection, while remembering that they can neither defile nor purify. All human hearts are flawed, and it is through Christ alone that we find redemption.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, help us always to remember to keep our hearts close to you in preparation for your kingdom—and be bold enough to step outside of our traditional comfort zones. Let our spiritual growth be surrendered to you, Lord, as we relinquish our need to control and find that which truly calms and soothes. Amen.

### **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

*<sup>1</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup>and all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup>and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup>Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup>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.” <sup>8</sup>We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup>We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. <sup>10</sup>And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. <sup>13</sup>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.*

### **Jane Larson '17**

Although writing to a primarily Gentile audience, Paul frames this passage by remembering the ancestors whom Moses led out of slavery in Egypt. These Jewish ancestors became inherited ancestors of the Gentiles through their “ingrafting” into the Hebrews’ faith community. Paul acknowledges the unity of all these people through their eating “the same spiritual food” and drinking “the same spiritual drink.” More importantly, Paul identifies the spiritual rock, the source of this unity, to be Christ.

As Christ unites the community in Corinth, Paul offers guidance on how to live in community and warns against the mistakes of the past. As a finite people living in a broken world, the Corinthians will inevitably experience trials in striving to maintain this unity. People are coming from diverse backgrounds and social locations, so coming together as one collective will require preparation by the entire community. Despite the difficulties, however, Paul calls the community to remember that God will provide them with the same kind of strength and perseverance as God has provided in the past.

In this season of Lent, when we practice self-examination, let us not forget that our faith is inherently communal. We are called to live with one another in beloved community united by Christ. So let us examine ways in which we can grow as a communal body. How might God be calling us to refine our relationships and heal our divisions? As we encounter adversity, let us remember God’s faithfulness and walk together in times of trial.

**Prayer**

Steadfast God, we give you thanks for your faithfulness. Guide us through this season that we may not avoid the hard work of seeking peace in our communities. Teach us to serve one another with justice and mercy. In your grace, strengthen us to walk together in times of adversity and to remember Christ as the source of our unity. Amen.

## Day 26

### Genesis 48:8-22

<sup>8</sup>When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" <sup>9</sup>Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." <sup>10</sup>Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, and he could not see well. So Joseph brought them near him; and he kissed them and embraced them. <sup>11</sup>Israel said to Joseph, "I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also." <sup>12</sup>Then Joseph removed them from his father's knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. <sup>13</sup>Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them near him. <sup>14</sup>But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn. <sup>15</sup>He blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, <sup>16</sup>the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude on the earth." <sup>17</sup>When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. <sup>18</sup>Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." <sup>19</sup>But his father refused, and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." <sup>20</sup>So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will invoke blessings, saying, 'God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.'" So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh. <sup>21</sup>Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your ancestors. <sup>22</sup>I now give to you one portion more than to your brothers, the portion that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow."

### Richard Wingfield '02/'13

Has God ever reversed your plans? You had good intentions. You did your homework. You set things in their proper order. Then when the time came to proceed, God had something different in mind and upset your proverbial apple cart. So it happens to Joseph in today's Scripture reading from Genesis. He brings his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to his father, Israel, to receive the patriarchal blessing. Joseph positions them so that Manasseh is at Israel's favored right hand and Ephraim, the younger son, is at Israel's left hand. Israel, however, crisscrosses his hands to place his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh. Joseph tries to rectify the issue. But Israel knows exactly what he's doing; for though his physical sight has diminished, Israel still possesses keen spiritual insight. Though the descendants of both of Joseph's sons would be a great people, Israel sees something in Ephraim that would surpass Manasseh.

As humans, we tend to operate according to cultural norms. We are often influenced by social convention or personal bias because we're accustomed to functioning in this way. As such, we miss the big picture. The prophet reminds us that God's thoughts are distinct from ours. We must be open to and in tune with God's desires, not our own. Are you influenced by social convention or personal bias in your choices? Do you make choices based on social convention or human preferences? Or, alternatively, are you in tune with God so that you can choose based on divine directives? Jesus reminds us from Gethsemane, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."

## **Prayer**

God of glory, help us to be open to your will so that we may see things as you see them. Open our hearts that we may adjust to your desires. Open our spirits that we may accept your will. Amen.

## **John 6:27-40**

*27 “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” 28 Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” 29 Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” 30 So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” 32 Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” 34 They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” 35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; 38 for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”*

## **Derek Davenport '05**

Once again we turn to John. As we have noticed each Sunday, the tone and style of John are completely different from those we've encountered in Mark. Here, Jesus makes a comparison that sends us back to Exodus, reminding us of God's provision to Israel in the wilderness. The story Jesus chooses is one of salvation at a moment of desperation. The people had left their homes to find themselves starving in the wilderness. The manna saved their lives. Jesus is calling to mind a time when God brought life from the jaws of death. Jesus also talks about bread and life, both sending us back just a few days and forward to the Last Supper, and also to Easter Sunday. Once again, we are given this moment of refuge in the midst of our preparation that provides a glimpse of what is coming.

## **2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (departing from the Daily Lectionary)**

*16 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. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 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. 20 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. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

## **Alan Olson '14**

Have you ever described someone as “a good person?” What does that even mean? I suppose it means you approve of that other person, but it doesn't give much information. Perhaps she's kind. Or maybe

he's helpful. Those are useful adjectives—I can see acts of kindness. A better question might be, “Are you in Christ?” Certainly, as Christians, we believe that we are in Christ.

In this passage, the Apostle Paul tells us that if we are in Christ, then it is our duty to see other people, not in a human way, but as God sees us. The truth is, it's much easier to see people in flawed, human ways: good or bad, pretty or ugly. The problem with seeing others in human ways is that we are called to the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul instructs us that we are called to be reconciled with one another, just as Christ has reconciled us to God. But our own perceptions get in the way. We hold on to our opinions, our anger, our pain and hurt, and in doing so, we continue to see things in human ways. In this season of self-examination, let us look at all of the human ways that we are holding on to—the things that we must cast off before we can be reconciled to one another.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, pour your Holy Spirit upon us, so that we may see all your children as you see us. Help us to reconcile with one another. Equip us for this work; help us to let go of our anger and our hurt, our pride and our selfishness, our fear and our arrogance. Help us to know others as we are known by you and love others as we are loved by you. Make us instruments of your peace and reconciliation. Thanks be to God. Amen!

## Day 27

### Mark 7:24-37

*24 From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 28 But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go - the demon has left your daughter." 30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. 31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. 33 He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. 34 Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35 And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."*

### Derek Davenport '05

After the accusations of the scribes, we see Jesus doing the same thing he did to anger them in the first place—healing. But this time, he heals a Gentile in Tyre. The mere sequence of the stories here is so fascinating. As the Jewish officials hurl accusations at Jesus, he leaves, seeking refuge amongst Gentiles. Word gets out, and Jesus again has mercy on those who come to him, this time healing a Gentile.

Having found no refuge even amongst the Gentiles, Jesus again heads toward the sea, healing on his way there. It's as if nothing can stop Jesus from healing. It happens wherever he goes. No feature of the landscape, no threats from the authorities, no danger from the elements can stop healing from pouring forth from an encounter with Jesus.

### 1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1

*<sup>14</sup>Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. <sup>15</sup>I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. <sup>16</sup>The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup>Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. <sup>18</sup>Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? <sup>19</sup>What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup>No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. <sup>21</sup>You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. <sup>22</sup>Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? <sup>23</sup>"All things are lawful," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. <sup>24</sup>Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other. <sup>25</sup>Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, <sup>26</sup>for "the earth and its fullness are the Lord's." <sup>27</sup>If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. <sup>28</sup>But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, out of*

*consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—<sup>29</sup>I mean the other's conscience, not your own. For why should my liberty be subject to the judgment of someone else's conscience? <sup>30</sup>If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks? <sup>31</sup>So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. <sup>32</sup>Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, <sup>33</sup>just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. <sup>11:1</sup>Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

### **Cathy Brall, staff**

For many years I subscribed to a monthly newsletter, *Nutrition Action*, because of its thorough research on the sourcing, processing, packaging, and marketing that contribute to the hidden risks or long-term benefits of the food we encounter in grocery stores and restaurants. Reading *Nutrition Action* educated me about the multiple dimensions of the food choices I faced, thus leading me to ponder the complex web of relationships belied in the simple bumper-sticker phrase, "You are what you eat."

In a similar vein through this passage from 1 Corinthians, Paul writes to encourage the Corinthian Christians to consider their own 'nutritional' actions. He exhorts them to remember the deeper significance of the bread and wine they bless and share when they gather. It is a sharing in Christ to feed them spiritually and join them together as one body such that they are becoming what they eat. If they (and we, too!) become more Christ-like through this meal, then actions and attitudes ought gradually to grow to reflect those that Jesus exhibited in his earthly life. Thus Paul asks them to take God and others into consideration when they are making their choices. They are to seek the advantage of the other, accept the hospitality that others offer to them, and, perhaps most importantly, eat, drink, and do all things to the glory of God.

What would it mean for us to seek someone else's advantage in our food choices? Do we take into account the wages and working conditions of those who gather and produce our food or those who prepare and serve us in restaurants? Is our food sustainably grown or sourced? Do we eat hastily and mindlessly to feed our urges or "partake with thankfulness" for every good gift God provides? Are we mindful about giving and working toward eradicating famine and hunger, locally and systemically? Might we take the time to invite someone to share a meal with us and graciously partake of the hospitality the other will offer us by their very presence? In this season of fasting, may we partake of those nutritional actions that would truly benefit us and the reign of God's justice and provision for all people.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, giver of all good gifts, help us to eat thankfully, while recognizing that all things come from you. Help us to eat wisely and responsibly, that our food choices may satisfy our nutritional needs and not cause harm to those who procure, produce, or provide the items we consume. Finally, God, in your great mercy, keep us mindful of those who have little or nothing to eat this day. Through the Holy Spirit may we reach out and serve them as Christ came to feed and serve us. Amen.

### **Psalm 121**

*1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
from where will my help come?  
2 My help comes from the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth.*



*3 He will not let your foot be moved;  
he who keeps you will not slumber.  
4 He who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.  
5 The LORD is your keeper;  
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.  
6 The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
7 The LORD will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.  
8 The LORD will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and for evermore.*

### **Rebecca DePoe '16**

For me, Lent is often a season of anxiety, because Lent is often a time of discernment. Especially for those of us in ministry, Lent is usually the time where we discern whether God is calling us to stay in our current ministerial context, or if we might serve God more faithfully elsewhere. And this discernment produces anxiety because our decisions do not affect only us. They affect our families, our friends, and our communities of faith.

What I love about Psalm 121 is the Psalmist's proclamation that God will protect us. "The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore." God's protection is not just good news for today, but also good news forevermore! As we enter into this time of discernment, the Psalmist reminds us that we need not be anxious, because God promises to protect us. The assurance of God's protection gives us the freedom to follow God's call wherever it leads us without the crippling anxiety that often surrounds major life changes.

### **Prayer**

God we rejoice in your assurance of protection. We pray that you would give us the courage to follow your call wherever it may lead, each and every day. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

## Day 28

### Genesis 49:29-50:14

29 Then he charged them, saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my ancestors - in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the cave in the field at Machpelah, near Mamre, in the land of Canaan, in the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite as a burial site. 31 There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah - 32 the field and the cave that is in it were purchased from the Hittites." 33 When Jacob ended his charge to his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people. 50:1 Then Joseph threw himself on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. 2 Joseph commanded the physicians in his service to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel; 3 they spent forty days in doing this, for that is the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days. 4 When the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph addressed the household of Pharaoh, "If now I have found favor with you, please speak to Pharaoh as follows: 5 My father made me swear an oath; he said, 'I am about to die. In the tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.' Now therefore let me go up, so that I may bury my father; then I will return." 6 Pharaoh answered, "Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear to do." 7 So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, 8 as well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household. Only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen. 9 Both chariots and charioteers went up with him. It was a very great company. 10 When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed a time of mourning for his father seven days. 11 When the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning on the part of the Egyptians." Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim; it is beyond the Jordan. 12 Thus his sons did for him as he had instructed them. 13 They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, the field near Mamre, which Abraham bought as a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. 14 After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

### Derek Davenport '05

This passage shows us the burial of Jacob. Joseph asks the Pharaoh for permission to leave, and the Pharaoh agrees. Joseph then leads Pharaoh's servants out of Egypt along with their chariots. He completes his mourning, and returns. It's amazing how much difference time can make. In just a few generations, that story will be completely reversed. The next time a Hebrew asks Pharaoh to let him lead workers into the wilderness there will be plagues, floods, and death. But for now; the relationship is healthy and look at the difference that makes.

### 1 Corinthians 11:2-34

<sup>2</sup>I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. <sup>3</sup>But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. <sup>4</sup>Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, <sup>5</sup>but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. <sup>6</sup>For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. <sup>7</sup>For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. <sup>8</sup>Indeed, man was not made from woman, but

woman from man. <sup>9</sup>Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. <sup>10</sup>For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup>Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. <sup>12</sup>For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. <sup>13</sup>Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? <sup>14</sup>Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, <sup>15</sup>but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. <sup>16</sup>But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. <sup>17</sup>Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. <sup>18</sup>For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19</sup>Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. <sup>20</sup>When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. <sup>21</sup>For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. <sup>22</sup>What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! <sup>23</sup>For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, <sup>24</sup>and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup>In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup>For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. <sup>27</sup>Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup>Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup>For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. <sup>30</sup>For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup>But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup>But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. <sup>33</sup>So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. <sup>34</sup>If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things I will give instructions when I come.

### **Edwin Chr. van Driel, faculty**

The Lord's Supper is not only a celebration. It is also a moment of judgment. We have largely lost that sense. A story told by the American missionary Vincent Donovan can help us rediscover it. In his *Christianity Rediscovered* Donovan writes about a eucharistic celebration among the African tribe of the Sonjo. The Sonjo were known as very experienced dancers. Vincent noticed that the members of the tribe approached the table while performing their dances, deliberately and carefully. Some of these dances were decidedly secular. Donovan was confused as to why they would perform such dances while going to celebrate communion. But the elders of the tribe told him they did so on purpose. The celebration of the Eucharist would help them to make a decision. If they could perform the dance without hesitation while going to meet the Lord at the table, they could perform the dance whenever. But if they felt shame in dancing the dance while going up, that dance should have no place in their lives at all.

The table is an anticipation of the messianic meal of God's kingdom. What cannot be brought to the table will not be brought into the Kingdom. And what cannot be brought into the Kingdom we may as well let go of now. It has no future—therefore, it warrants no place in our lives at all.

### **Prayer**

Lord, help me today to discern what parts of my life I cannot bring into your presence—and which I therefore should not hang on to at all. Amen.

### **Psalm 146**

*1 Praise the LORD!*

*Praise the LORD, O my soul!*

*2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live;*

*I will sing praises to my God all my life long.*

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

*4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth;  
on that very day their plans perish.*

*5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD their God,*

*6 who made heaven and earth,  
the sea, and all that is in them;  
who keeps faith forever;*

*7 who executes justice for the oppressed;  
who gives food to the hungry.*

*The LORD sets the prisoners free;*

*8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.  
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;  
the LORD loves the righteous.*

*9 The LORD watches over the strangers;  
he upholds the orphan and the widow,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

*10 The LORD will reign forever,  
your God, O Zion, for all generations.  
Praise the LORD!*

### **Jennifer Haddox '06**

As our dear friend, Jannie Swart, was often heard saying, “God is up to something in the world!” He, along with this Psalmist, was confident to proclaim it. Read again the saving acts of the Lord proclaimed in this Psalm—he keeps faith, executes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets prisoners free, opens blind eyes, lifts up the lowly, loves the righteous, watches over strangers, and upholds orphans and widows. This is what God is up to!

As I worship with these words, I see these actions in the life of Jesus, who indeed set people free, fed the hungry, opened blind eyes, and lifted up the lowly. And I also see in these words a call to Christ’s body to live into these saving acts of our Lord.

If we want to draw near to the Lord, then we must come near to the oppressed, the hungry, the prisoner, the blind, the lowly, the stranger, the orphans and widows. In doing what can be seemingly risky things, like welcoming refugees, parenting foster children, or working on behalf of the homeless or those in prison, we declare our trust in a God who has faithfully acted in these ways for generations. In doing so, we proclaim, “The LORD will reign forever!”

**Prayer**

I praise you, O Lord, for your saving love at work in the world. Give me eyes to see what you are up to in the world around me, and a heart that is ready to trust you by coming alongside you in that work. Amen.

## Day 29

### Genesis 50:15-26

<sup>15</sup>Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" <sup>16</sup>So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, <sup>17</sup>'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. <sup>18</sup>Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." <sup>19</sup>But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup>Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. <sup>21</sup>So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. <sup>22</sup>So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's household; and Joseph lived one hundred ten years. <sup>23</sup>Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were also born on Joseph's knees. <sup>24</sup>Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die; but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." <sup>25</sup>So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, "When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here." <sup>26</sup>And Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old; he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

### Rebecca Hickok '93

An hour before the Christmas Eve service. Choir rehearsing in the sanctuary. Greeters gathering up bulletins and candles before arriving at their stations. Communion being arranged. Sound levels being checked. All systems go until the teen in charge of putting out the luminaria runs up to me, a worried look on her face. "I've looked everywhere and I can't find them." Down the stairs to the social hall. "Why do I smell burnt coffee?" I ponder aloud. "AA is setting up," the teen tells me. "AA?!" "AA?! What are they doing he. . . oh . . . it's Sunday night." And it hits me. Soon 27 children will arrive to get ready for the bathrobe drama and 250 people will start streaming into the sanctuary. AA? Tonight? No. Uh uh. Not possible. I walk over to the people setting up chairs and setting out pamphlets. "I'm so sorry, You can't meet here tonight. It's Christmas Eve. I mean, there will be children down here running around and lots of people upstairs and the parking lots full and" . . . and I see their faces, strained and stunned. And I stop. And I start again. "And it will all be fine. You'll be down here and we'll be upstairs and it will be fine." And it was. Angels and shepherds and donkeys and drunks. All thrown together one Christmas Eve. In a place of God.

### Prayer

In this season of Lent and throughout the whole year, thank you, Sweet Baby Jesus, for rearing up out of the cradle and gobsmacking us when we forget one of our most important jobs: showing hospitality. Amen.

### Mark 8:11-26

*11 The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. 12 And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation." 13 And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side. 14 Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. 15 And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out - beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod." 16 They said to one another, "It is because we have no bread." 17 And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not*

*perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" They said to him, "Twelve." 20 "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven." 21 Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?" 22 They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" 24 And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." 25 Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village."*

### **Derek Davenport '05**

The religious authorities continue to test Jesus. They ask for a sign. Thus far, Jesus has cured paralytics, healed the sick, fed the hungry, cast out demons, calmed storms, walked on water, and even raised the dead. Then they ask for a sign. Jesus' response is perfect. "No sign will be given to this generation." Just a few short verses later he restores sight to a blind man. This is quite a humorous juxtaposition. If they can't see the cured, the healed, the fed, the raised, then they won't get a sign. A sign isn't much good if you don't see it.

Yet, the man who asks to see has his sight restored. The authorities don't ask to see, they ask for a sign. They (like us) overestimate their own abilities to see.

## Day 30

### Mark 8:27-9:1

*27 Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" 28 And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." 30 And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. 31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." 34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." 9:1 And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."*

### Derek Davenport '05

Here it is. Peter makes his confession of faith, which he doesn't seem to fully understand. That's such a great feature of Peter. His faith isn't dependent on full understanding. Peter follows Jesus, learns from him, and grows in his understanding, but his faith isn't a product of perfect wisdom. It doesn't result from his intellectual pursuit; his faith fuels it. His faith spurs his intellectual pursuit to greater heights—and he will make mistakes. It's just a few verses later that Jesus calls Peter "Satan." But imperfect as he is, Peter continues to strive, to grow, and to learn.

After this confession, Jesus tells the disciples what we, as readers, already know. He explains quite clearly that he will be killed, but that the story won't end there.

### Dave Keys, staff

Who is Jesus? Great Prophet, Preacher, Teacher. That is who the people of the villages of Caesarea Philippi say Jesus is. Theologically speaking, "That is just the tip of the iceberg."

Jesus picked this exact moment to announce his true divine self. Through Peter's great faith we discover that Jesus is the anointed one, the Christ, the Messiah. Peter is the first disciple to come to this astonishing realization.

Then Jesus discloses to his disciples that he must endure extreme suffering, humiliation, and torture leading to his death. Peter's faith waivers as he takes Jesus aside to question this shocking declaration. Jesus is angered at Peter and makes it perfectly clear that the disciples are not to dwell on human suffering but on the divine way. He will die human and then rise again three days later in order to win our salvation by defeating sin and death. The Son of the Living God.

"Take up the cross and follow me." To do this, we must deny ourselves and commit fully to Jesus. This is the only way to stand in the glory of the Father and enter his Kingdom. There is only one answer to the question, "Who am I?" And that is, "You are my Christ!"



## Prayer

Gracious God, help us to overcome our great unbelief.

Let the Holy Spirit fill us with the faith of Peter as he proclaimed Jesus the Messiah.

Make us holy.

Make us people who pray.

Make us people who believe.

Make us like Jesus.

Amen.

## 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

<sup>12</sup>For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup>For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup>Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup>But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup>If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup>The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; <sup>24</sup>whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup>that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

## Corey Rugh, student

An incredible aspect of being a Christian is that no matter what political, economic, ethnic, racial, sex, or any other phenotypic characteristic you possess, you are a member of *one* body: the body of Christ. The members of the Corinthian congregation were no exception to such amalgamation. It seems, however, that they were diverse in some negative ways. Paul writes at the beginning of the letter, “Now I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters” (1 Corinthians 1:10-11). Clearly, there were some who did not have the same mind or same purpose, thus causing dissension. Anyone familiar with church life can likely conjure up a situation where such disagreement has occurred.

In an attempt to rally the Corinthians back together, Paul expounds the body-metaphor. Each member of the human body plays its specific and unique purpose. The eye cannot do what the foot can, nor can the ear perform the tasks that the hand can. Furthermore, the weaker members, such as the eyes and ears, are “indispensable.” Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to treat the seemingly weaker members of Christ’s body with greater respect and honor! Doing so is contrary to our natural instinct, by which we tend to give honor and respect only when we believe they have been rightly earned. In short, Paul is

promoting equity. The result he intends is that the same care will be given to each member of Christ's body. How blessed are we that "God has so arranged the body"!

**Prayer**

Loving Father, we thank you for bringing us into the body of Christ. May we give honor and respect to those around us who are feeling weak. Teach us to deny ourselves so that we may properly care for others and encourage our fellow members in their roles as indispensable parts of the body of Christ. And when we are the ones who are weak, help us accept the care given to us by other members of the same body. So we pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Day 31

### Exodus 2:1-22

*1 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. 3 When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. 4 His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. 5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. 6 When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" 8 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 9 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. 10 When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water." 11 One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. 12 He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?" 14 He answered, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "Surely the thing is known." 15 When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well. 16 The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. 17 But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. 18 When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" 19 They said, "An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock." 20 He said to his daughters, "Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread." 21 Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. 22 She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, "I have been an alien residing in a foreign land."*

### Rebecca Dix '15

My parents' home is situated on a flood plain. Nestled neatly beside the West Fork River, cradled in a shallow valley, almost yearly the flood waters would come, invade our home, ravage the roads and newly sown fields, damaging buildings, equipment, and occasionally the lives of our animals. Our parents would try their best to keep us from swimming in it, because flood currents are strong and dangerous and the waters carried chemicals from fertilizers and pesticides, not to mention bull snakes and other unsavory critters. So it is no stretch of my imagination for water to represent death.

Yet in the midst of drowning in the death of sin, Jesus, like the Pharaoh's daughter, draws us out of the water. Jesus reaches out his pierced hands and pulls us into life.

### Prayer

I will praise you, My God, for you have not forsaken me. I will praise you because you came and bore my sin on the cross. You have lifted me out of the dark waters into your life and light. Amen.

**Mark 9:2-13**

*2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" 8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10 So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. 11 Then they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 12 He said to them, "Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? 13 But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him."*

**Derek Davenport '05**

The transfiguration is a passage that raises so many questions and so many thoughts. I can't pretend to understand all that happens on that mountain. I do understand Peter though. He's such a lovable character in this part of the Gospel. He's just confessed his faith, and immediately after he is given this incredible vision. Naturally it terrifies him. But look how he responds. He doesn't let his fear paralyze him—he attempts to take action. He tries to do something. It may not have been a great plan, but he was trying to be faithful.

This is one of Peter's characteristics that is worthy of emulation. When he doesn't know what to do, he does his best to do something, anything, that's faithful. His decisions aren't always perfect, but at his best, he tries to be faithful.

**1 Corinthians 12:27-13:3**

*<sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup>And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup>Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup>Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup>But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. <sup>13:1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

**Kimberly Goxhe '07**

Faith without works is dead, and works without love are nothing. Some of us strive and toil under the banner of Christ . . . but with so many of the wrong motivations or approaches. A church planter enters a community without first consulting the faith leaders already in the neighborhood. A pastor fervently serves all the people at church while the minister's own immediate family starves for attention and affection. A layperson "does for" people in need without empowering their self-sufficiency.

Often we can become consumed by the drive, repetition, and demands of service without entertaining whether the service is relevant and/or contextually healthy for oneself and for those being served. In doing so, we can very well find ourselves relating more to a Martha preparing food than a Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. Once we untangle ourselves from the work and focus on the true need, then perspectives can change toward healthy, balanced living.

What is your motivation? Why do you do what you do? Is love at the center of it all?

**Prayer**

Lord, reveal to me the things I may be blind to see that cause others harm or pain. May all my actions be of pure intent and benefit most the most vulnerable. May I be a good steward of the giftings and talents given unto me, and may they fully bring you glory. Amen.

## Day 32

### Mark 9:14-29

14 When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. 15 When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. 16 He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" 17 Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; 18 and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so." 19 He answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me." 20 And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. 21 Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." 23 Jesus said to him, "If you are able! - All things can be done for the one who believes." 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" 26 After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. 28 When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" 29 He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer."

### Derek Davenport '05

They were arguing. A child was sick and they fought about it. It was easier to fight than to heal him. We do this all the time. As people, as churches, as organizations, we all have these fights. They're different from situation to situation, but you know what they are in your own context. These are the fights that have no clear winner, and continue far longer than they should. They steal our focus from the people in our midst that need our help. The topics change from day to day or decade to decade or generation to generation, but it's rare for us to be without one.

Notice that Jesus asks what they're fighting about, and they don't answer. This fight that was so important just moments ago disappears from their lips when Jesus asks about it. Throughout the rest of the book, we never find out what they were fighting about.

### Exodus 2:23-3:15

23 After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. 24 God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 25 God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them. 3:1 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he

*was afraid to look at God. 7 Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9 The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. 10 So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12 He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." 13 But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations."*

### **Rebecca Dix '15**

How to be remembered: A step by step guide.

First, learn your own name. Let the syllables carve your name's existence on your tongue. Begin slowly pressing ink or pencil to paper in awkward strokes and slashes. Practice over and over till it is legible to more people than just you yourself. Write your name on everything—every assignment, every paper, every note, every book. "Graffiti" it on walls and empty spaces to ensure that when people encounter the particular item upon which your name has been scrawled, they 1) know the object is yours, and 2) that you exist.

Second, introduce yourself to all. Have a firm handshake and look them directly in the eye. Take a chance and be someone's friend. Or, better yet, fall in love. Make yourself a home and build a family.

Third, build great big things. Melt and mold steel and wield it into edifices that pierce the sky and make people stare up, mouths gapping open and minds overcome by its daunting magnificence. Scheme, plot, plan—harvest all the money you are able to, and conquer every land. Place statues of your likeness on the borders with your hand extending outward in the unspoken promise of where you have yet to go.

Fourth, plan for someone else to write your name for the last time on a slab of granite. Make sure they understand that your full name is to be used. Request the letters to be large and clear.

And fifth and finally, understand that metal rusts, stone erodes, and memory fades—and so will your name. Understand that the sandcastle towers of your achievements will crumble. Understand that there will be dark days in which you are utterly invisible. And understand and trust that the God of Sarah, Rebekah, Hagar, Tamar, and Rachel has remembered you, has heard your cry in the desert, and will bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey.

### **Prayer**

Almighty God, you saw us before our seeing could even be. Grant us the strength and wisdom to trust not in our own achievements and accomplishments but in your steadfast love and faithfulness, as perfectly revealed in Jesus the Messiah, in whose holy name we pray, Amen.

### **Psalm 143**

- <sup>1</sup>*Hear my prayer, O LORD;  
give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness;  
answer me in your righteousness.*
- <sup>2</sup>*Do not enter into judgment with your servant,  
for no one living is righteous before you.*
- <sup>3</sup>*For the enemy has pursued me,  
crushing my life to the ground,  
making me sit in darkness like those long dead.*
- <sup>4</sup>*Therefore my spirit faints within me;  
my heart within me is appalled.*
- <sup>5</sup>*I remember the days of old,  
I think about all your deeds,  
I meditate on the works of your hands.*
- <sup>6</sup>*I stretch out my hands to you;  
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.*
- <sup>7</sup>*Answer me quickly, O LORD;  
my spirit fails.  
Do not hide your face from me,  
or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.*
- <sup>8</sup>*Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning,  
for in you I put my trust.  
Teach me the way I should go,  
for to you I lift up my soul.*
- <sup>9</sup>*Save me, O LORD, from my enemies;  
I have fled to you for refuge.*
- <sup>10</sup>*Teach me to do your will,  
for you are my God.  
Let your good spirit lead me  
on a level path.*
- <sup>11</sup>*For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life.  
In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.*
- <sup>12</sup>*In your steadfast love cut off my enemies,  
and destroy all my adversaries,  
for I am your servant.*

### **Edith Humphrey, faculty**

Today we approach Holy Week; in preparation we read Psalm 143, a poignant cry of repentance and supplication. St. John Chrysostom tells us that this psalm provides the remedy for haughtiness: “if your well-doing makes you arrogant,” then verse 2 (“No one living is righteous before You”) “will make you immediately lowly” (Romans Homily 28). But the psalm is also for the poor, the harried and the lowly. We enter with David into the cave, crushed to the ground, harassed by enemies, parched for God, and seeking refuge with God. True refuge comes in the form of remembrance: “I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands” (verse 5). What are those divine deeds? The creation of this beautiful world, His provision for sinful Adam and Eve, His calling and guidance of Israel, His promise of the Messiah through the prophets, His coming as the God-Man, His living the perfect human life; His sacrificial and representative death; His glorious resurrection, His



ascension in glory; His promised coming again; and His giving of the Holy Spirit! God has not hidden His face, but has offered us everything we need, including a thirst for Him—for we, like David, live in a “parched land.” Even our longing, even our calling out, is a sign of His goodness and promise to us. How wonderful that He, anticipating our times of distress and need, has given this honest psalm!

**Prayer**

Hear me, Holy Father, as you heard your Son in distress. Bring me low when I am mindless of you, and lift me up when I am close to despair. By your Holy Spirit, recall to my mind and heart all you have done, and make me thirsty for you.

## Day 33

### Exodus 3:16-4:12

<sup>3:16</sup>“Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. <sup>17</sup>I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ <sup>18</sup>They will listen to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.’ <sup>19</sup>I know, however, that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. <sup>20</sup>So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders that I will perform in it; after that he will let you go. <sup>21</sup>I will bring this people into such favor with the Egyptians that, when you go, you will not go empty-handed; <sup>22</sup>each woman shall ask her neighbor and any woman living in the neighbor’s house for jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; and so you shall plunder the Egyptians.” <sup>4:1</sup>Then Moses answered, “But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you.’” <sup>2</sup>The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.” <sup>3</sup>And he said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. <sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail”—so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand—<sup>5</sup>“so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.” <sup>6</sup>Again, the LORD said to him, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” He put his hand into his cloak; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous, as white as snow. <sup>7</sup>Then God said, “Put your hand back into your cloak”—so he put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his body—<sup>8</sup>“If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. <sup>9</sup>If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.” <sup>10</sup>But Moses said to the LORD, “O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” <sup>11</sup>Then the LORD said to him, “Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? <sup>12</sup>Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.”

### Robin Sharp, student

Like so many of us do, Moses is trying to convince God that He has chosen the wrong person for the job. Moses sounds like someone trying to worm his way out of a responsibility so he can just continue to enjoy the calm life he knows. First, in so many words, he asks the Lord, “Why should anybody believe me?” The Lord responds with three tools to show His power in Moses. None of them are delightful: a staff that becomes a snake, a hand that turns leprous, and water that changes to blood when poured on the dry ground. Three signs showing the power of God, and *still* Moses argues. “I am not eloquent of speech.”

How many tools has God given each one of us for responding to His call? How many times do we hesitate in answering that call? How many times do we find excuses for answering “No” just to stay in our comfort zones?

### **Prayer**

Loving God, thank you for your persistence in pursuing us to be active parts of your ministry and for providing us with the tools we need. The places to which you call us and the instruments you provide are not always ones we would choose, so help us to

### **John 12:1-8 (departing from the Daily Lectionary)**

*1 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" 6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."*

### **Chad Bogdewic '10/'13**

I remember that when I was a child I looked forward to my birthday and Christmas every year. I looked forward to receiving gifts; it was a way for people to show their love for me, and it made me feel special. I think there is something about receiving and giving gifts that makes us feel special and loved. I now watch with glee as my kids open their gifts for their birthdays and Christmas.

In the Gospel reading, Mary, the sister of Martha, gives Jesus an extravagant gift, a jar of costly perfume that she used to anoint Jesus' feet. As the scheming Judas watches, Jesus explains the use of the perfume: anointing him for burial. In this small exchange we are reminded of what is to come, the death and burial of our Lord, Jesus Christ. As we prepare for the sacred memory of the death of our Lord, His resurrection, and through that our salvation, let us give to God our gift of devotion. Let us come to our Lord, much like Mary, and offer ourselves to the One who offered Himself to us.

### **Prayer**

Lord, allow us to be like Mary, devoting ourselves to you in heart, soul, and might. Give us the strength to love you more, to be the people you have called us to be. Amen.

### **Psalm 42**

*1 As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
so my soul longs for you, O God.*

*2 My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.*

*When shall I come and behold  
the face of God?*

*3 My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
while people say to me continually,  
"Where is your God?"*

*4 These things I remember,  
as I pour out my soul:*

*how I went with the throng,  
and led them in procession to the house of God,  
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,  
a multitude keeping festival.*

*5 Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help 6 and my God.*

*My soul is cast down within me;  
therefore I remember you  
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,  
from Mount Mizar.*

*7 Deep calls to deep  
at the thunder of your cataracts;  
all your waves and your billows  
have gone over me.*

*8 By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,  
and at night his song is with me,  
a prayer to the God of my life.*

*9 I say to God, my rock,  
“Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I walk about mournfully  
because the enemy oppresses me?”*

*10 As with a deadly wound in my body,  
my adversaries taunt me,  
while they say to me continually,  
“Where is your God?”*

*11 Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.*

### **Derek Davenport '05**

Psalms 42 speaks about longing for God as a deer longs for streams. There is an interesting thing about deer longing for sustenance. They search for it. Deer come through my backyard rather frequently, and every once in a while I catch them through the window. Their movements appear random, but on closer observation, they are searching. They look over every inch of my yard, sometimes stopping to smell or even taste the plants, grasses, and weeds. To “long like a deer” is to move, to search, to work, to look, to examine and consider. To see and smell and touch and taste. It’s to seek and strive. A longing deer does not stand still—not for long. It has to move, to find that for which it longs.

## Day 34

### Exodus 4:10-20, 27-31

<sup>10</sup>But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." <sup>11</sup>Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" <sup>12</sup>Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." <sup>13</sup>But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." <sup>14</sup>Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. <sup>15</sup>You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. <sup>16</sup>He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. <sup>17</sup>Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs." <sup>18</sup>Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, "Please let me go back to my kindred in Egypt and see whether they are still living." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." <sup>19</sup>The LORD said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt; for all those who were seeking your life are dead." <sup>20</sup>So Moses took his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey and went back to the land of Egypt; and Moses carried the staff of God in his hand. <sup>21</sup>And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. <sup>22</sup>Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. <sup>23</sup>I said to you, "Let my son go that he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son.'" <sup>24</sup>On the way, at a place where they spent the night, the LORD met him and tried to kill him. <sup>25</sup>But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, "Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" <sup>26</sup>So he let him alone. It was then she said, "A bridegroom of blood by circumcision." <sup>27</sup>The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went; and he met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. <sup>28</sup>Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him, and all the signs with which he had charged him. <sup>29</sup>Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. <sup>30</sup>Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and performed the signs in the sight of the people. <sup>31</sup>The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

### Erin Davenport '05

Grace is a strange thing. Here in this story Moses seems to be on the way to the wrath of God. Refusing God's call on his life, he makes excuses for all the things he is unable to do. When the Lord speaks to Moses and promises to supply all that he needs, Moses still refuses. God is angry, and rightly so.

This is our daily walk with God, isn't it? God calls us; we make excuses. God tells us that all our needs will be met and that we are not alone; we still refuse. God is angry, and rightly so.

But Moses' story, like ours, does not end with God's anger. God, for some reason (which is beyond me), listens to us mere mortals. The Lord of all listens to Moses and gives him what he wants. God forgives Moses and gives him Aaron as his mouthpiece. How often is that true of us as well? How often does the Lord of all listen to us and let us off the hook? Daily.

Daily we refuse the grace and goodness and love of God in Jesus Christ. And daily God gives it to us again. Moses did nothing right to deserve God's listening ear. Yet God listened. God listens to us as well, this day, and every day, in the fullness of grace we do not deserve.

## **Prayer**

Thank you for grace, O God. Thank you that though I so often refuse the grace that is extended to me in Jesus, your love extends to me with each breath. Thank you that your anger is replaced by love because of the work of your Son, my Savior. Amen.

## **Mark 9:30-41**

*30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." 32 But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. 33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" 34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." 38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 Whoever is not against us is for us. 41 For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward."*

## **Derek Davenport '05**

In case we missed it in the previous chapter, Jesus again explains what's coming. We've come through the halfway point of the book now, and once again Jesus points us to what is coming. We also see a continuation of a theme that popped up earlier in this chapter, this attention to children. We saw Jesus heal the child at the foot of the mountain, and here we see Jesus doing something interesting. In the previous story, the people were focused on an argument, which caused them to neglect a child in need. In this passage, Jesus physically places a child in their midst. We actually get a lot of physical description in the story—at least compared to the rest of Mark. We're told that Jesus sat down, that he put a child in the middle of the conversation, and then picked the child up in his own arms. Mark actually describes Jesus' posture here, and what we see is Jesus sitting down, holding a child. He is physically correcting the errors of the previous passage. In the midst of another argument, Jesus is forcing them to focus on a child. He then takes it even farther and encourages them not only to notice children, but to welcome children as if they were welcoming Jesus himself. Once again, he highlights how silly some of their arguments are when the arguments overshadow the people around them.

## **Jessica Kelecava '13**

Do we ever notice how patiently Jesus teaches, enlightens, and corrects his disciples? He has had the chance to tell them once more what will come of him. The disciples are still bothered and shocked by this revelation. So they distract themselves with bragging rights of the greatest in saying, "Well, I'm the best at this important thing—surely I'm more important than you," and back and forth they go along the road. And Jesus stops and challenges them once more and says, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (Mk 9:35).

Are we not the same as the disciples? How quickly do we forget or misunderstand the sacrifice Jesus made for us? In our own struggles we turn to ways of bettering ourselves and doing our best. We

become the best at something and find the right to brag to others about it. Jesus is showing the disciples not just to serve for themselves or selflessly, but to remember him. The disciples were only beginning to understand the miracle of Jesus himself as the Son of God. And every day and through every pain in life and every puff of pride or burst of anger, we can try to remember how Jesus serves us through his sacrifice to bring us life. Jesus is the greatest of all. May we strive to be like him, but in all blessings and good things may we recognize him.

**Prayer**

Dear Lord, as we walk through the wilderness of life and reflect on how you did the same, may we remember your humble service to us. May we remember the ultimate sacrifice you willingly gave so that we in turn may show your greatness and life to all. Amen.

## Day 35

### Exodus 5:1-6:1

1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.'" 2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go." 3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword." 4 But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!" 5 Pharaoh continued, "Now they are more numerous than the people of the land and yet you want them to stop working!" 6 That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors, 7 "You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.'" 9 Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words." 10 So the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw. 11 Go and get straw yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.'" 12 So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw. 13 The taskmasters were urgent, saying, "Complete your work, the same daily assignment as when you were given straw." 14 And the supervisors of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, "Why did you not finish the required quantity of bricks yesterday and today, as you did before?" 15 Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, "Why do you treat your servants like this? 16 No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!' Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people." 17 He said, "You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.'" 18 Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks." 19 The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, "You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks." 20 As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them. 21 They said to them, "The LORD look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us." 22 Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, "O LORD, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? 23 Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people." 1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land."

### Mark 9:42-50

42 "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. 47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, 48 where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched. 49 "For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."



### **Derek Davenport '05**

This passage is in Mark one of the most frightening passages in the book. Jesus threatens to tie stones around people's necks and throw them into the sea.

Again we see this strange familiarity with the sea, and in this passage, the sea assists Jesus in defending the defenseless. It's interesting that the Exodus reading for today is the beginning of Moses' encounter with Pharaoh—which will culminate with the sea assisting the Lord in defending the defenseless. Notice that the defenseless, in this case, are children. This continues the theme we've encountered over the last few days.

We haven't seen much of this kind of anger from Jesus up to this point in Mark—it's a threat to the helpless that brings it out. This should be comforting when we feel helpless and frightening when we threaten those who are.

### **Psalm 34**

*1 I will bless the LORD at all times;  
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.  
2 My soul makes its boast in the LORD;  
let the humble hear and be glad.  
3 O magnify the LORD with me,  
and let us exalt his name together.  
4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me,  
and delivered me from all my fears.  
5 Look to him, and be radiant;  
so your faces shall never be ashamed.  
6 This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,  
and was saved from every trouble.  
7 The angel of the LORD encamps  
around those who fear him, and delivers them.  
8 O taste and see that the LORD is good;  
happy are those who take refuge in him.  
9 O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,  
for those who fear him have no want.  
10 The young lions suffer want and hunger,  
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.  
11 Come, O children, listen to me;  
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.  
12 Which of you desires life,  
and covets many days to enjoy good?  
13 Keep your tongue from evil,  
and your lips from speaking deceit.  
14 Depart from evil, and do good;  
seek peace, and pursue it.  
15 The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,  
and his ears are open to their cry.  
16 The face of the LORD is against evildoers,  
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.*

*17 When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,  
 and rescues them from all their troubles.  
 18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,  
 and saves the crushed in spirit.  
 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
 but the LORD rescues them from them all.  
 20 He keeps all their bones;  
 not one of them will be broken.  
 21 Evil brings death to the wicked,  
 and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.  
 22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants;  
 none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.*

### **Jake Horner '15**

Today's lectionary passages take on the theme of affliction. The Gospel passage tells us that "everyone will be salted with fire." And Psalm 34 states that "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all."

The Christ was prophesied to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Jesus is a righteous man—THE righteous man in fact—and he was salted with fire and endured affliction. But the LORD did not deliver him out of them, but rather delivered him up to be crucified. The truth is, Jesus is the only human being whom God has treated unjustly. We get what we deserve, that is, death, for our failure as children of God. Jesus did not. As a Son who kept covenant in his Father's house, he deserved life.

Yet because he tasted death on our behalf, affliction has been turned on its head. What was once the fruit of sinners living in a cosmos subjected to futility is now, in the hands of the risen Christ, a sharpened scalpel shaving the rottenness of unrighteousness away from our lives.

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, when there is affliction in my life, give me grace to endure patiently and trust in your purpose to bring about righteousness. Amen.

### **Psalm 146**

*<sup>1</sup>Praise the LORD!  
 Praise the LORD, O my soul!  
<sup>2</sup>I will praise the LORD as long as I live;  
 I will sing praises to my God all my life long.  
<sup>3</sup>Do not put your trust in princes,  
 in mortals, in whom there is no help.  
<sup>4</sup>When their breath departs, they return to the earth;  
 on that very day their plans perish.  
<sup>5</sup>Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
 whose hope is in the LORD their God,  
<sup>6</sup>who made heaven and earth,  
 the sea, and all that is in them;  
 who keeps faith forever;*

<sup>7</sup> *who executes justice for the oppressed;  
who gives food to the hungry.*  
*The LORD sets the prisoners free;*  
<sup>8</sup> *the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.*  
*The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;*  
*the LORD loves the righteous.*  
<sup>9</sup> *The LORD watches over the strangers;*  
*he upholds the orphan and the widow,*  
*but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*  
<sup>10</sup> *The LORD will reign forever,*  
*your God, O Zion, for all generations.*  
*Praise the LORD!*

### **Lori Arnold, staff**

It is the 35<sup>th</sup> day of the 40 days of Lent. Lent—a period of reflection and preparation for Holy Week and Easter that is to be a parallel reminder of the time that Jesus spent in the desert. I have been pondering how Jesus may have felt on his 35<sup>th</sup> day in the desert. Did he know that his time there would end in five more days? And, if he did, was there relief in his heart because the time of being in the desert was almost at an end? Or was it sadness because of what he would face upon returning to the city? Or might it have been joy because all that would come to pass during and after Holy Week would mean a new birth for all people and hope for each new morning. When we carefully consider Psalm 146 as a prayer Jesus may have prayed on that 35<sup>th</sup> day in the desert, I think we know that praise was on his lips and joy was in his heart. May it be so for us as well.

### **Prayer**

Dear Creator of all that we survey, may we open our eyes and lift up our voices for the gifts bestowed upon us. And may we praise the Lord for the one true gift of Jesus. Let us move through this day with trust and happiness in the Lord. In your blessed name, we pray. Amen.

## Day 36

### Mark 10:1-16

*1 He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around him; and, as was his custom, he again taught them. 2 Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" 3 He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." 5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. 6 But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 7 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." 10 Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11 He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." 13 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 15 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

### Derek Davenport '05

Jesus teaches. That's not surprising; he's spent much of his time throughout the gospel doing just that, and the people had a chance to sit and learn from Jesus. But notice what the Pharisees do. They try to test Jesus. The students test the teacher. They've got it backwards! How can a student learn if she is too busy testing the teacher?

Yet, look at Christ's response. He doesn't admonish them for asking. He handles the test and teaches them from it. Perhaps it's not as much as they could have learned if they had listened obediently, but even then, the Teacher teaches.

### 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6

*<sup>14</sup>But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. <sup>15</sup>For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; <sup>16</sup>to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? <sup>17</sup>For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence. <sup>3:1</sup>Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? <sup>2</sup>You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; <sup>3</sup>and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. <sup>4</sup>Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup>Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, <sup>6</sup>who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

### Michelle Spomer, faculty

While updating your CV or resumé for a job search can be a good reminder of your experience and skills, it is often the letter of recommendation from a trusted colleague that reveals what makes you an

outstanding candidate for the position. The best letters will effectively communicate your most significant accomplishments and how you might even transform an organization for the better.

While the letter Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 3:3 isn't exactly a letter of recommendation as we know it, it is a metaphorical letter of recommendation that included evidence of Paul's influence and the transformative power of the gospel of Christ in the lives of the Corinthian believers. The letters of their Christian lives were to be "read" by all those who encountered them—and were to inspire others to follow Jesus.

This passage is a beautiful and challenging one for the Lenten season. What do the letters of our lives say to others? Would they read Christ in our letters? Do they reflect the love and insight that other believers have poured into us?

### **Prayer**

Lord, may we "show that we are letters of Christ" to all we meet. Thank you for all those throughout our lives who have shown us how to be Christian. Amen.

### **Psalm 147:1-11**

*1 Praise the Lord!*

*How good it is to sing praises to our God;  
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.*

*2 The Lord builds up Jerusalem;  
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.*

*3 He heals the brokenhearted,  
and binds up their wounds.*

*4 He determines the number of the stars;  
he gives to all of them their names.*

*5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;  
his understanding is beyond measure.*

*6 The Lord lifts up the downtrodden;  
he casts the wicked to the ground.*

*7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;  
make melody to our God on the lyre.*

*8 He covers the heavens with clouds,  
prepares rain for the earth,  
makes grass grow on the hills.*

*9 He gives to the animals their food,  
and to the young ravens when they cry.*

*10 His delight is not in the strength of the horse,  
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;*

*11 but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him,  
in those who hope in his steadfast love.*

### **Heather Runser '14**

Praise the Lord.

But how can I praise the Lord when I'm surrounded by darkness? How can I praise the Lord when there

is violence and war and all sorts of injustice? How can I praise the Lord in the midst of the storm that I find myself in?

Praise the Lord.

Not a suggestion, but a command. It is so easy to lament, and even easier to complain, because life is hard and cruel sometimes. No one understands this better than the Lord himself, who bore the darkness of sin and cried out in agony.

Praise the Lord.

How can we not praise Him for all He has done, and for all He has given? As we journey closer to the cross, let us not forget that after the darkness comes the brightest dawn of an empty tomb. No matter how dark this life can be, we can trust that the victory over the darkness is won.

Praise the Lord!

### **Prayer**

Lord over darkness and Lord of light, it is easy to look around us and wonder at the state of the world. It is so easy to worry about the future and our place in it. Thank you that the simplest thing we can do is put our trust in you, the One who holds our past, our present, and all the years to come. Amen.

## Day 37

### Exodus 7:25-8:19

<sup>7:25</sup>Seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile. <sup>8:1</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. <sup>2</sup>If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs. <sup>3</sup>The river shall swarm with frogs; they shall come up into your palace, into your bedchamber and your bed, and into the houses of your officials and of your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. <sup>4</sup>The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your officials.'" <sup>5</sup>And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, the canals, and the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.'" <sup>6</sup>So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. <sup>7</sup>But the magicians did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs up on the land of Egypt. <sup>8</sup>Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, "Pray to the LORD to take away the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD." <sup>9</sup>Moses said to Pharaoh, "Kindly tell me when I am to pray for you and for your officials and for your people, that the frogs may be removed from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile." <sup>10</sup>And he said, "Tomorrow." Moses said, "As you say! So that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God, <sup>11</sup>the frogs shall leave you and your houses and your officials and your people; they shall be left only in the Nile." <sup>12</sup>Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh; and Moses cried out to the LORD concerning the frogs that he had brought upon Pharaoh. <sup>13</sup>And the LORD did as Moses requested: the frogs died in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. <sup>14</sup>And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank. <sup>15</sup>But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart, and would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said. <sup>16</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt.'" <sup>17</sup>And they did so; Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and gnats came on humans and animals alike; all the dust of the earth turned into gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt. <sup>18</sup>The magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, but they could not. There were gnats on both humans and animals. <sup>19</sup>And the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God!" But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

### Helen Blier, staff

"Won't they ever learn?" I think each year when the lectionary revisits the ten plagues. It's one of those cinematic or literary devices that just packs on the anxiety—we know the pattern, we anticipate the outcome, and despite all our frets and protests . . . it happens. Again. And again. And again. And I admit to feeling a bit smug when I see how stubborn and clueless Pharaoh and his minions are.

Today's exercise in frustration brings us strikes two and three in the "Pharaoh-just-won't-get-the-memo" storyline. And strike three is followed by seven more; I mean seriously. How many of us would like to think we'd have cried "Uncle!" at cleaning up piles of dead frogs? Enough, already! No one should need the gnats, boils, darkness, and the rest!

But it goes on. And because they just won't see, children die. And I think, "Lord, have mercy."

This year, I am struck by the ways in which we are more Pharaoh than Hebrew. I bet that, given a pen and a few minutes, anyone reading this devotional could come up with a list of plagues that bring suffering to our fellow human beings—and the creative ways we harden our hearts by resigning ourselves to the suffering because "it is what it is" or—forgive us—we blame the victims. Whether it's opiate-related deaths in Allegheny county (over 700 in 2017), children dying from gunshots in the U.S.

(1300 a year), people dying from hunger worldwide (an estimated 9 million each year), or the persistence of racism, human trafficking, the elevation of profits over persons in economic systems . . . Lord, have mercy.

### **Prayer**

God of redemption, Lent marches inexorably to the death of another firstborn. As we turn toward Holy Week, may you finally peel away the parts of our hearts that have become like Pharaoh's and commit ourselves to seeing and responding to the suffering of our neighbors near and far. We make this petition in the name of your own Son, whom you saw suffer and die as well.

### **Mark 10:17-31**

*17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" 20 He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." 21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." 22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. 23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." 26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." 28 Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." 29 Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age - houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions - and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."*

### **Derek Davenport '05**

"He went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions."

We typically read this story with the assumption that the rich man is sorrowful because he won't sell his possessions, but sometimes I wonder. The story doesn't necessarily say that. Could it be that the man grieves precisely because he intends to obey? Perhaps he knows exactly who Jesus is, and he intends to follow the command. He's been told to give away his "stuff," and it's not easy. Giving is tough. Obedience is tough. He grieves the loss of his favorite things. He grieves the loss of the little luxuries that he knows he doesn't need, but enjoys nonetheless. Perhaps he grieves at the loss of the old, because he's not yet ready to rejoice at the birth of the new.

### **Scott Hagley, faculty**

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The question comes from a man bowing before Jesus, still heaving to catch his breath. The wealthy man catches Jesus just before his journey to Jerusalem. Jesus' short response leaves the man in grief and the disciples perplexed. If a man with such wealth, intentionality, and moral certitude cannot be saved, then who can?



We find ourselves asking the same question today. Saturated with middle-class anxieties, we wonder whether Jesus really meant for the man to sell all he has, or what it means to leave family for the sake of God's call. But Jesus' response to the disciples rebukes their (and our) concerns. The wealthy man will not achieve God's salvation; neither will we. The point is not where God draws the line for acceptable sacrifice, but rather the proximity and mobility of the disciple in relationship to the living Lord. Jesus asks: "will you go with me even to places of suffering, poverty, death?" The man's wealth and the disciples' family offer ready excuses to answer Jesus with a well-meaning "not yet."

Verse 32 shows a small band of disciples walking behind Jesus in amazement and fear. Mark seems to suggest that this is eternal life; even better, this is the way of eternal life. Lent is about turning and returning to this way in repentance and belief. Let us find ourselves on the road and in our neighborhood with Jesus, wherever he may be heading.

**Prayer (Psalm 27:1-5)**

*1 The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?*

*2 When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh—  
my adversaries and foes—  
they shall stumble and fall.*

*3 Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war rise up against me,  
yet I will be confident.*

*4 One thing I asked of the Lord,  
that will I seek after:  
to live in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life,  
to behold the beauty of the Lord,  
and to inquire in his temple.*

*5 For he will hide me in his shelter  
in the day of trouble;  
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;  
he will set me high on a rock. Amen.*

## Day 38

### Mark 10:32-45

*32 They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, 33 saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; 34 they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again." 35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" 39 They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." 41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

### Derek Davenport '05

Look at these guys! They're not even listening. Jesus attempts to prepare them, again, for what is to come, and they're so busy thinking about what they'll say next that they don't even listen. They're too busy hatching a scheme, and look what happens.

They don't get what they ask for, instead they get something they didn't expect. They get something that they may not want, but something connected to the request.

Do they end up in the right and left hand seats? Jesus doesn't say. Ultimately, it doesn't really even matter.

### 2 Corinthians 4:1-12

*1 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made*

*visible in our bodies. 11 For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.*

### **Rebecca Dix '15**

"This little light of mine . . ." shines even when the world is dark, even amidst the slow decay of the earth, crumbling under the weight of our sinfulness, all the spilled blood and shed tears.

"I'm going to let it shine . . .," even when all seems lost and hope is a simple whisper of yesterday.

"This little light of mine . . ." may seem small and fragile, flickering anxiously against all the forces that try with all their might to snuff it out.

"I'm going to let it shine . . .," for this very light, small but burning bright, is given to me from the Light of the world, the Light to all nations, the great Healer and Redeemer.

"Oh, this little light of mine . . ." is the promise that God has been with us, is with us, and will be coming again—that our stories are woven together, no longer to be forsaken or destroyed, left unraveling, but to be remembered.

"I'm going to let it shine . . .," for Jesus Christ has made a claim on me—and has made a claim on you. So I will carry my little light as a witness to that amazing and steadfast love.

"Let it shine. Let it shine. Let it shine."

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, may the light of your glory, truth and love, which remains bright and present in our darkness and in our blindness, be unveiled to and in us, the Church your Bride. Amen.

### **Psalm 22**

<sup>1</sup>*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

*Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?*

<sup>2</sup>*O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;  
and by night, but find no rest.*

<sup>3</sup>*Yet you are holy,  
enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

<sup>4</sup>*In you our ancestors trusted;  
they trusted, and you delivered them.*

<sup>5</sup>*To you they cried, and were saved;  
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.*

<sup>6</sup>*But I am a worm, and not human;  
scorned by others, and despised by the people.*

<sup>7</sup>*All who see me mock at me;  
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;*

<sup>8</sup>*"Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver —  
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"*

<sup>9</sup>*Yet it was you who took me from the womb;  
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.*

<sup>10</sup>On you I was cast from my birth,  
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

<sup>11</sup>Do not be far from me,  
for trouble is near  
and there is no one to help.

<sup>12</sup>Many bulls encircle me,  
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

<sup>13</sup>they open wide their mouths at me,  
like a ravening and roaring lion.

<sup>14</sup>I am poured out like water,  
and all my bones are out of joint;  
my heart is like wax;  
it is melted within my breast;

<sup>15</sup>my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,  
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;  
you lay me in the dust of death.

<sup>16</sup>For dogs are all around me;  
a company of evildoers encircles me.  
My hands and feet have shriveled;

<sup>17</sup>I can count all my bones.  
They stare and gloat over me;

<sup>18</sup>they divide my clothes among themselves,  
and for my clothing they cast lots.

<sup>19</sup>But you, O LORD, do not be far away!  
O my help, come quickly to my aid!

<sup>20</sup>Deliver my soul from the sword,  
life from the power of the dog!

<sup>21</sup>Save me from the mouth of the lion!  
From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

<sup>22</sup>I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

<sup>23</sup>You who fear the LORD, praise him!  
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;  
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

<sup>24</sup>For he did not despise or abhor  
the affliction of the afflicted;  
he did not hide his face from me,  
but heard when I cried to him.

<sup>25</sup>From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

<sup>26</sup>The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.  
May your hearts live forever!

<sup>27</sup>All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the LORD;  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before him.

<sup>28</sup>*For dominion belongs to the LORD,  
and he rules over the nations.*  
<sup>29</sup>*To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;  
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,  
and I shall live for him.*  
<sup>30</sup>*Posterity will serve him;  
future generations will be told about the Lord,*  
<sup>31</sup>*and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
saying that he has done it.*

#### **B. De Neice Welch '04**

We often think of prayer as an act of faith initiated by us. We seek the Lord with all our hearts in times of great need, in times of devotional meditation, and in times of thanksgiving. We are often taught to strengthen our spiritual discipline through the practice of prayer. Since we believe that we initiate the act, we struggle with words: we struggle with eloquence, and we struggle with articulation, whether we are praying privately or publicly. But as we turn our attention to the depth of the meaning of Lent, we should remember that prayer is an act of the heart where God is the constant observer. God calls us to prayer and then “words” our mouths, because God gives speech to mortals. God will teach us as God reads our hearts and understands what mere words cannot possibly capture. It is never our initiation that meets God in “the deep,” where only deep calls. It is always God who summons us by the Spirit to answer the longing of our hearts. Our public prayers should not be a function of the mind, wit, or language without being connected to our hearts that long for the Divine. Let God guide your prayers and give you speech this Lenten season.

#### **Prayer**

Holy One, We are ever in your mind and you are ever present in our lives. Word our mouths and give us speech so that we might thank you, praise you, adore you in our private time and in our public lives. Lead us to the place where the cross is overcome by the empty tomb so that we might know that our eloquence will never match your power. Amen.

## Day 39

### Mark 10:46-52

*46 They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." 50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." 52 Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.*

### Derek Davenport '05

Bartimaeus has an incredibly energetic faith. He shouts. Then he shouts louder. Then when the people who seem to be silencing him suddenly tell him to get up, he springs to his feet. He is excited about Christ. The apparently healthy people around him don't seem to share that excitement. It's the blind man who seems to truly see what's happening—we've seen this before in Mark. Notice how Jesus responds to Bartimaeus. Jesus doesn't say, "Your sight is restored." Jesus responds by saying, "Your faith has made you well." This emphasis on being "well" should also sound familiar. Jesus isn't only concerned with Bartimaeus' sight, Jesus is concerned with making him well. Even better than that, Jesus charges him to "go." Bartimaeus is made well in order that he can go out and live. He is called to action.

### Ellen Dawson '09

"... When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'"

When reading the story of Bartimaeus, we often focus on his actual healing from being blind. But instead, I encourage us to notice the first thing Bartimaeus says: He asks for mercy—and he continues to ask for mercy despite the reprimands from the crowd. Now that took faith.

Perhaps we too can ask for mercy today and let this be an expression of our own faith. Praying the Jesus Prayer is one way to do just that. Take a moment now to pray the Jesus Prayer aloud or in silence several times: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Jesus says to Bartimaeus, "Your faith has healed you." May this prayer for Christ's mercy bring healing today.

### Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, may the mercy you have washed us in bring us the healing for which our brokenness so desperately hungers and thirsts. Amen.

### 2 Corinthians 4:13-18

<sup>13</sup>*But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, <sup>14</sup>because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. <sup>15</sup>Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. <sup>16</sup>So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being*

*renewed day by day.<sup>17</sup> For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,<sup>18</sup> because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.*

**Scott Hagley, faculty**

In one of his broadcasts of the radio show “A Prairie Home Companion,” Garrison Keillor tells a story about a young boy who grows up believing he has royal bloodlines. Shortly after the boy’s father left him and his mother, we are told, the boy began receiving anonymous letters claiming the family’s connection to Scandinavian royalty. The promise offered in the letters sustains the child throughout the insecurities of childhood and buffers him from fears of abandonment. His unseen identification with royalty enables him to endure all kinds of hardship with peace and equanimity.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul reflects on the different challenges faced by him and his companions for the sake of the gospel. They, too, are vulnerable and have every reason for fear. But Paul has entrusted himself to Jesus Christ and has a gospel-shaped imagination. His sufferings share in the death of Christ and place him at the mercy of the resurrection power of God: “we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us with Jesus, and bring us with you into his presence” (verse 14).

As with the boy in Garrison Keillor’s story, identification reframes Paul’s experiences so that what is hidden—his life in Christ—can re-narrate what is visible—his present circumstances . . . but with one large difference: Paul’s hope stems not from anonymous letters, but from the real presence of Christ in the Spirit and through the grace poured out on the community of Christ.

**Prayer**

(adapted from Psalm 43:3)

Creator God,

Send out your light and your truth;

let them lead me;

let them bring me to your holy hill

and to your dwelling.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

raised from the dead;

and by the power of your Spirit,

Amen.

## Day 40

### Luke 19:41-48

*41 As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. 44 They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.' 45 Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; 46 and he said, 'It is written, "My house shall be a house of prayer"; but you have made it a den of robbers.' 47 Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; 48 but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.*

### Derek Davenport '05

At the beginning of Holy Week, the daily lectionary gives us passages that differ from the traditional passages we associate with each event. Today, we read Luke 19:41-48. In Luke, this passage comes immediately after the triumphal entry, and it's not what we would expect. Following the joy and shouts, the excitement and celebration, Jesus weeps. He knows what's coming. Regardless of the joy of the day, Jesus never loses sight of where he's heading.

### 1 Timothy 6:12-16

*<sup>12</sup>Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. <sup>13</sup>In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you <sup>14</sup>to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup>which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. <sup>16</sup>It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.*

### George Barr, student

In this passage, Timothy is exhorted to “fight the good fight,” a biblical idiom now firmly planted in the English language. But what does it mean? The verb *agōnizō* (here rendered “fight”) is meant to evoke an athletic competition, but it might also refer more generally to a fight or struggle. Is the Christian life a race or a boxing match? Perhaps both.

Whatever is implied by the use of *agōnizō*, one thing is certain: it is not easy. To remain faithful to the message of the gospel and to obey the Lord's commands is no small task, nor is it without its perils. One thinks of English theologian John Owen's words to “be killing sin or it will be killing you.”

Yes, the Christian life is indeed a hard-run race and veritable slugging match, but its wreath is worth all our toils. Timothy is exhorted to “grasp” or “take hold of” that eternal life. At some point, we will know God more fully than ever. We will draw near to Him in his resplendent glory. And at that time, our constant longing will be satisfied. At last we will finally hear the words “Well done, good and faithful servant.”



## **Prayer**

Almighty and eternal God who dwells in unapproachable light, grant that we might fight our fight and run our race in faithfulness to your will as revealed in your word. Set our sights on you and on the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. May that be our reward. Amen.

## **Philippians 2:5-11 (departing from the Daily Lectionary)**

*5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*

*6 who, though he was in the form of God,*

*did not regard equality with God*

*as something to be exploited,*

*7 but emptied himself,*

*taking the form of a slave,*

*being born in human likeness.*

*And being found in human form,*

*8 he humbled himself*

*and became obedient to the point of death—*

*even death on a cross.*

*9 Therefore God also highly exalted him*

*and gave him the name*

*that is above every name,*

*10 so that at the name of Jesus*

*every knee should bend,*

*in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

*11 and every tongue should confess*

*that Jesus Christ is Lord,*

*to the glory of God the Father.*

## **Sarah Sedgwick '10**

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” The Apostle Paul sets a pretty high standard for the Philippians and us in this passage of his letter. Most of us try very hard to be like Jesus, but we fail miserably! I think of the number of times I’ve woken up determined to be more like Jesus throughout the day but usually find I’ve failed before lunch. Do you ever feel that sort of failure?

I want to be like Jesus; I try to be like Jesus; but the reality is I will never be Jesus. It doesn’t mean I don’t try to live the characteristics Jesus modeled in his life on earth. It doesn’t mean that I don’t try to love the least of these or have compassion toward those who grieve, or offer grace to those in need of forgiveness. I try very hard to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in my life, but I remember to extend grace to myself when I mess up.

And then I give thanks to God for the beautiful gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, who was born Emmanuel, God-with-us, and as Paul reminds us was “obedient to death, even death on a cross.” Paul helps to remind us that during this Lenten season we should turn to gratitude for eternal life given to us through the death of Jesus Christ. We thank God and proclaim, “Jesus Christ is Lord!” And remember that tomorrow is a new day to be more like Jesus.

**Prayer**

Dear God, we give you thanks this day that in the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, we have received eternal life. Help us to be more like Jesus in our daily lives, but remind us to extend the same grace to ourselves that you give to us when we fail. In the name of your Son, we pray, Amen.

## Day 41

### Mark 11:12-25

12 On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it. 15 Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; 16 and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." 18 And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. 19 And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city. 20 In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. 21 Then Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." 22 Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. 24 So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."

### Derek Davenport '05

After reading Luke's account of the cleansing of the temple, we now turn to Mark's account. As Jesus invades the temple, assaulting the commerce within, he enrages the authorities. They recommit themselves to the plotting that they had started so long ago, and they begin to move forward rapidly. As we continue our journey through Mark, we know that the time is coming. In less than one week we will see the culmination of their schemes—and God's response.

### 2 Corinthians 1:1-7

<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia: <sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, <sup>4</sup>who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. <sup>5</sup>For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. <sup>6</sup>If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. <sup>7</sup>Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

### Karen Rohrer, staff

*The leaves are falling, falling as if from far up,  
as if orchards were dying high in space.  
Each leaf falls as if it were motioning "no."*

*And tonight the heavy earth is falling  
away from all other stars in the loneliness.*

*We're all falling. This hand here is falling.  
And look at the other one. It's in them all.*

*And yet there is Someone, whose hands  
infinitely calm, holding up all this falling.*

Rainer Maria Rilke

We know the reality of suffering. We know that pain is all too real, injustice all too prevalent, cruelty all too common in a fallen and seemingly endlessly falling world. The wounds of affliction are deep and abiding. In the midst of Lent, we acknowledge the reality of death and limitation, of pain and affliction. We sit with and lament the way that our world crushes the vulnerable and exploits the weak. We admit and remember the reality of death—the ones we have lost, the ones we will lose, even the life we will one day leave behind. We take time to recognize that those losses are real.

This passage in 2 Corinthians, in its repetitive, clunky style, bears witness to the fact that suffering, pain, and affliction are no less real for those who follow Christ. We don't live on a continuum between affliction and consolation as though hoping to stay closer to the consolation side and avoid affliction by luck or divine favor. No, the world this spiraling text offers looks more like concentric circles—when affliction is closing in, the truth beyond our affliction is the God who consoles, the God who holds us up beyond all falling.

### **Prayer**

God of all things, uphold us as we recognize all the ways we and those we love are afflicted. Console us amid the pain we cannot move through on our own. Dwell within us and grant us strength, stand guard with your gentleness on every side of us. Make us brave and make us kind as we walk through your hurting, beloved world. Amen.

## Day 42

### Isaiah 49:1-7 (departing from the Daily Lectionary)

*1 Listen to me, O coastlands,  
pay attention, you peoples from far away!  
The LORD called me before I was born,  
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.*

*2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword,  
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;  
he made me a polished arrow,  
in his quiver he hid me away.*

*3 And he said to me, "You are my servant,  
Israel, in whom I will be glorified."*

*4 But I said, "I have labored in vain,  
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;  
yet surely my cause is with the LORD,  
and my reward with my God."*

*5 And now the LORD says,  
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,  
to bring Jacob back to him,  
and that Israel might be gathered to him,  
for I am honored in the sight of the LORD,  
and my God has become my strength—*

*6 he says,  
"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to restore the survivors of Israel;  
I will give you as a light to the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*

*7 Thus says the LORD,  
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,  
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,  
the slave of rulers,  
"Kings shall see and stand up,  
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,  
because of the LORD, who is faithful,  
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."*

### Alina Kanaski '16

Here the Servant of the Lord speaks, recalling his service: his call to servanthood (vv. 1-3); his service in Israel (vv.4-5); his call to minister not just to Israel but also to all the nations (v. 6); and, finally, his promised glorification (v. 7).

It's not clear who the Servant was intended to be, for he is never named, but Christians saw Jesus in the Servant—for who else was called to suffer but ultimately be glorified, and who else was called to be "a light to the nations"?

Even in the darkest moments, when our work seems "in vain" and "for nothing," when we are "deeply

despised,” when we suffer and are discouraged, let us remember that Jesus went through the same. Let us take comfort from His presence and solidarity in those times. Let us remember, as the Lord reminds the Servant here, God is our strength. For Jesus died, but He also rose again. Jesus suffered, but God worked through that suffering to bring about the salvation of the world. Hallelujah!

### **Prayer**

God, we thank You for Your light, shining in the darkness of even the darkest night. You sit with us in that darkness, even when we cannot see Your light. Give us faith in Your strength rather than our own. Amen.

### **2 Corinthians 1:8-22**

<sup>8</sup>We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. <sup>9</sup>Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. <sup>10</sup>He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, <sup>11</sup>as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. <sup>12</sup>Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God—and all the more toward you. <sup>13</sup>For we write you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand until the end—<sup>14</sup>as you have already understood us in part—that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast. <sup>15</sup>Since I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double favor; <sup>16</sup>I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on to Judea. <sup>17</sup>Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? <sup>18</sup>As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been “Yes and No.” <sup>19</sup>For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not “Yes and No”; but in him it is always “Yes.” <sup>20</sup>For in him every one of God’s promises is a “Yes.” For this reason it is through him that we say the “Amen,” to the glory of God. <sup>21</sup>But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, <sup>22</sup>by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.

### **Brandon Shaw, student**

“Why the tough seasons?” The answer to such a question is not always as immediately lucid as Crystal Pepsi, but my own life’s winters serve as times in which God’s grace shined the brightest . . . more brightly than in the “winning” (to steal the over-hashtagged term) moments. God’s Isaiah 41:10 promise of presence at all times is a “yes” and gets my hearty “amen” because he has shown up at hours when I thought hope was more sunk than the S.S. Titanic was on April 16, 1912.

Sometimes God breaks the world around us to convey that he alone is enough, that his promises are true, and that we can say we concur in the midst of all earthly hellishness. As someone once told me, “You don’t know God is all you need until God is all you’ve got.” Cliché? Maybe. True? As true as the Penguins’ 2017 winning of Lord Stanley for the second time in a row.

From a humble, broken-world posture, we are often most able to see God’s astounding magnificence and give God praise . . . not to mention that we have a comforting Christ, who understands us fully in affliction. And that makes all the difference.

To God, the One who rescues us from our seeming death sentences so that we see his omnipotent hand and everlasting grace and love more fully, be all glory around the globe and forevermore.

### **Prayer**

Father, we might not understand our afflictions fully in this life, but we know you are always with us because of the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and reigning of dear Jesus. Please shower us with your grace during troubled times that we may magnify your name. In Jesus' name. Amen."

### **Psalm 36:5-11 (departing from the Daily Lectionary)**

*5 Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,  
your faithfulness to the clouds.*

*6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,  
your judgments are like the great deep;  
you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.*

*7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God!  
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.*

*8 They feast on the abundance of your house,  
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.*

*9 For with you is the fountain of life;  
in your light we see light.*

*10 O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,  
and your salvation to the upright of heart!*

*11 Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on me,  
or the hand of the wicked drive me away.*

### **Kimberly Gonxhe '07**

I will never forget my first night sleeping in the bush in northern Uganda. I was a five hour drive away from the nearest electrical grid. The stars appeared so close; it seemed I could reach out and touch them. In contrast, city dwellers are known for being at a disadvantage when it comes to stargazing. The lights within the city obscure one's ability to see fully the stars within the night sky.

These contrasts are not the case with God; verse 9 in our passage states that within God's light we see light. The exposure to God's brilliance actually sensitizes us to recognize light around us all the more. It gives us hope in tragedy, food in famine, clean water in drought, unfailing love when abandoned, and refuge in times of despair.

In this world where we live and are destined to die, our God is a fountain of life. And when we put our hands out to touch the stars, God's love reaches the heavens, God's faithfulness to the skies. We need not be discouraged, for we are people of the Light.

### **Prayer**

Lord, there are those who would delight to see us fall. There are circumstances which seem way beyond our reach. But you, oh Lord, have surpassed them all. We can rest in knowing that you take care of your people. As we enter the light of your presence, renew our minds so that we may see light in all around us. Amen.

## Day 43

### Isaiah 50:4-9a (departing from the Daily Lectionary)

*4 The Lord GOD has given me*

*the tongue of a teacher,*

*that I may know how to sustain*

*the weary with a word.*

*Morning by morning he wakens—*

*wakens my ear*

*to listen as those who are taught.*

*5 The Lord GOD has opened my ear,*

*and I was not rebellious,*

*I did not turn backward.*

*6 I gave my back to those who struck me,*

*and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;*

*I did not hide my face*

*from insult and spitting.*

*7 The Lord GOD helps me;*

*therefore I have not been disgraced;*

*therefore I have set my face like flint,*

*and I know that I shall not be put to shame;*

*8 he who vindicates me is near.*

*Who will contend with me?*

*Let us stand up together.*

*Who are my adversaries?*

*Let them confront me.*

*9 It is the Lord GOD who helps me;*

*who will declare me guilty?*

### Katie Yates, staff

This passage of Scripture speaks of God's great power, available to all who call on His name, and also of the struggles His people inevitably face in this world. It is a word of power and a word of warning.

As we reflect on the meaning of Lent and look forward to the remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection, we are reminded that even Jesus, God Himself, did not shrink from suffering. Who are we to think that our lives will be free of hardship? And yet we know that we are equipped with the power of God—our vindication and worth does not come from any human, or anything within ourselves, but from God.

This doesn't mean we're free to do whatever we want. We are reminded in other parts of Scripture of the damage we do to others and ourselves through our sins; we are called to throw off the things that entangle us and to live for God, joyously allowing God to transform us into who we are really meant to be.

### Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us. Forgive us that we do not always see You, or ourselves, clearly, but look through our own perspectives of sin and self-advancement. Give us pure hearts to love You and serve You in power, knowing that nothing can take away the love You have freely offered to us



through Your sacrifice. Open our ears and quiet our spirits, so that we might listen to You in all that we do. Amen.

### **Mark 12:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>*Then he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.*

<sup>2</sup>*When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. <sup>3</sup>But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>4</sup>And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. <sup>5</sup>Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. <sup>6</sup>He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ <sup>7</sup>But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ <sup>8</sup>So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. <sup>9</sup>What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. <sup>10</sup>Have you not read this scripture: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; <sup>11</sup>this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’?”*

### **Hunter Farrell, staff**

The Gospel of Mark’s hard-hitting parable echoes the violent story told in Isaiah 5, where “the house of Israel” is identified as a chosen, privileged vineyard. Even though Yahweh had done everything possible to prepare His vineyard to produce fruits of justice and righteousness, it yielded only “bloodshed” and injustice. So the Lord destroyed the vineyard. Today’s text from Mark takes the Isaiah story a step further by introducing the vineyard-owner’s son into the story: when the unruly vineyard workers refuse to listen to the pleas of the owner’s messengers to produce desirable fruit, the owner sends his own son, but “they seized him, killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.”

The temptation to early Christians was to misinterpret their “chosenness” as license to disobey God’s call to right relationship with God and neighbor—wrongly to assume, as Israel had done, that God’s saving acts in history did not require from them the fruits of repentance and justice. American Christians have been abundantly blessed: we have enjoyed economic prosperity (relative to many parts of the world), freedom of religion and expression, and a strong democratic tradition. Yet many global Christians question whether U.S. Christians allow our faith to guide our social and political choices. Has our *privileged* position as “the redeemed” dulled our memory of the time when we were immigrants?

### **Prayer**

God of Life, As we consider all you have done for us in Christ, give us hearts that overflow with gratitude and guide our choices in relationship with the poor and oppressed in ways that please You. Show us clearly what the fruits of righteousness look like today around issues of racial justice, immigration, and poverty. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

## Day 44

### Mark 14:12-25

<sup>12</sup>On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" <sup>13</sup>So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, <sup>14</sup>and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" <sup>15</sup>He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." <sup>16</sup>So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. <sup>17</sup>When it was evening, he came with the twelve. <sup>18</sup>And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." <sup>19</sup>They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" <sup>20</sup>He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. <sup>21</sup>For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." <sup>22</sup>While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." <sup>23</sup>Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. <sup>24</sup>He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. <sup>25</sup>Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

### Shan Overton, staff

In a prayer-poem titled "Meditation," the Polish American poet Czeslaw Milosz writes of a God whose glory it is to wander along with us in our daily lives, to know our faults so intimately, and to approach us with great kindness. The poet prays to God-with-us, "You felt compassion for them, forgiving their mistake, / Their falsity, of which they were aware, pretending they did not know it, / And even their ugliness, as they gathered in their churches." Echoing Mark's Gospel on this Maundy Thursday, Milosz depicts a God who offers gracious compassion despite human duplicity and infidelity. In his institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus acknowledges to all his friends assembled in the Upper Room that he will be betrayed by one of them; then, he breaks bread and pours wine and shares both in a stunning act of hospitality. His lament of human unfaithfulness and ugliness is paired with his generosity and tenderness. Even as he grapples with the inevitability of his own betrayal and death, this Jesus, our Emmanuel, proffers warmth, food, and friendship in the face of human hunger and failing.

### Prayer

Holy God, you know better than we do our faults, our hunger, and our pain. Help us be ever mindful of the generosity and care shown to us by your Son, Jesus Christ, who offered kindness and hospitality when confronted with human unfaithfulness and ugliness. Walk with us as we endeavor to offer compassion to ourselves and others when we are faced with human flaws, falsity, and failings.

### Psalms 27

*1 The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?  
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?  
2 When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh —*

*my adversaries and foes —  
 they shall stumble and fall.*  
 3 *Though an army encamp against me,  
 my heart shall not fear;  
 though war rise up against me,  
 yet I will be confident.*  
 4 *One thing I asked of the LORD,  
 that will I seek after:  
 to live in the house of the LORD  
 all the days of my life,  
 to behold the beauty of the LORD,  
 and to inquire in his temple.*  
 5 *For he will hide me in his shelter  
 in the day of trouble;  
 he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;  
 he will set me high on a rock.*  
 6 *Now my head is lifted up  
 above my enemies all around me,  
 and I will offer in his tent  
 sacrifices with shouts of joy;  
 I will sing and make melody to the LORD.*  
 7 *Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,  
 be gracious to me and answer me!*  
 8 *“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”  
 Your face, LORD, do I seek.*  
 9 *Do not hide your face from me.  
 Do not turn your servant away in anger,  
 you who have been my help.  
 Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,  
 O God of my salvation!*  
 10 *If my father and mother forsake me,  
 the LORD will take me up.*  
 11 *Teach me your way, O LORD,  
 and lead me on a level path  
 because of my enemies.*  
 12 *Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,  
 for false witnesses have risen against me,  
 and they are breathing out violence.*  
 13 *I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD  
 in the land of the living.*  
 14 *Wait for the LORD;  
 be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
 wait for the LORD!*

### **Britney Vokish '16**

The Lord is righteous, merciful, strong, and a very present help in time of trouble. So, why do we still fear? Fear is a very real thing to all of us. For some of us those fears are small—public speaking or spiders, for example. For others, fear consumes our whole day—a health concern that became a very

real and debilitating disease, or the fear of losing a child too soon because of an addiction he or she cannot overcome.

But the Psalmist in Psalm 27 reminds us that fear is only the result of not putting our full trust in the One who created everything. We fear when we put our faith solely in ourselves. We are reminded that the Lord is in control. In this sometimes uncertain, violent, and anxious world, still be confident in this: The Lord who created you and calls you has already made a pathway to salvation for you.

Fully trusting is hard to do, so sometime today, as you are praying, write down all your fears and speak them to the Lord.

**Prayer**

Merciful God, you are my light and my salvation. You are the stronghold of my life. So I come before you now and lift up to you every fear and anxiety I have. I need your help. Trouble surrounds me, but I am confident in you, God, because you have given your Son to us as a hope and a sign of our salvation. Amen.

## Day 45

### John 13:1-17, 31b-38

1 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. 14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16 Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. . . . 31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33 Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." 36 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward." 37 Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." 38 Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times."

### Derek Davenport '05

In the Gospel of Mark we've read both Peter's confession of faith and his confused attempts at faithfulness. We've seen the contrast to his faithfulness in the authorities. Yet here in John, we discover that even Peter will crumble. If we had reason to hope that any disciple would stand firm, it would be Peter. Yet here, we find that Peter will fail not once but three times. Peter naturally disagrees, but we know he's wrong. Not even Peter will stick with Jesus.

### Don Dawson, staff (retired)

"How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me?" the Psalmist asked in Psalm 116 after a near-death experience. We can't! It is all a gift through God's unmerited grace.

Is there anything we can do? Ps 116:13 says, "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord." Today, many of us will literally lift up the cup of eternal salvation as we participate in the Lord's Supper (Eucharist = "Thanksgiving"). Proclaiming our thanks to God by our worship and sacramental remembrance is the essential response we can make: "for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

When Jesus initiated the “Thanksgiving,” he began by washing the feet of the disciples and telling them that “servants are not greater than the one who sent them.” Jesus made plain that their “Thanksgiving” extended from the intimacy of worship to the living of each day in humble service of those around them. He concluded, “Just as I have loved you, you should love one another.” By our worship, serving, and proclaiming, we offer thanks to God, whom we can never repay.

### **Prayer**

All praise and thanks to you, Almighty God, for you have created us, redeemed us, and continue to provide for us. As an act of worship and devotion, we offer our witness to the saving love of Jesus. Help us to speak the good news boldly and serve others humbly, so that in all we do, we honor you. Amen.

### **1 Peter 1:10-20**

*<sup>10</sup>Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, <sup>11</sup>inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. <sup>12</sup>It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look! <sup>13</sup>Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. <sup>14</sup>Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. <sup>15</sup>Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; <sup>16</sup>for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” <sup>17</sup>If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. <sup>18</sup>You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, <sup>19</sup>but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. <sup>20</sup>He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.*

### **Tucker Ferda, visiting faculty**

When you consider that 1 Peter was written to Gentiles who had little to no former contact with Judaism, the claims of this text are remarkable. The passage seeks to graft these Gentiles into God’s covenant with Israel and challenges them to live within the mantra of the Holiness Code in Leviticus: “Be Holy, as I am Holy.” Moreover, it offers a new perspective of time and value for persons seemingly marginalized and persecuted by their contemporaries. They are to see that they actually live at the dawn of the end of the age and that, as Christ “ransomed” them with his very life, they have unsurpassable worth in the eyes of God.

In short, to consider what God had done in Jesus Christ meant that this community had to tell itself a new story about its past, its present, and its future. Today, Good Friday, we are called to a similar reorientation. The Christian claim is that the cross, far from being the failure of Jesus’ message, is actually the moment in which we see most clearly the heart of God. How does that change the stories we tell ourselves? Are we open to see the cross as our *axis mundi*—the center around which time, value, and purpose rotate and depend? To re-center around the cross will look different for different people, and we trust the action of the Holy Spirit among us for this good work. For those our world labels outsiders, or for those who feel uncertain of their worth, the cross may tell a story of true belonging, while for those who stand at the center of what our society adores and privileges may be invited to “lose their life” so that they may truly “find it.”

In verse 13 we find a marvelous image for this process. “Therefore”—in the light of what God has done—“gird up the loins of your understanding.” In other words, prepare for your understanding to move to a new place. Expect to travel. Our prayer today should be that, as we ponder the cross, we may find that our typical, status-quo “understanding” of priority, value, worth, and the purpose of life *may be moved* closer to the self-emptying love of God in Jesus Christ.

### **Prayer**

Lord, our text reminds us that we have been “ransomed” from a former way of life. Our text reminds us that we live at the dawn of the new age declared by the prophets. But we too often live in the old age. Forgive our tardiness. Create in us that love you showed us on the cross. Break our hearts of stone with this love, and write it on new hearts of flesh that ache with the pains of our world. Move us to actions that mirror and embody the character of Christ. Amen.

## Day 46

### Lamentations 3:37-58

*37 Who can command and have it done, if the Lord has not ordained it? 38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? 39 Why should any who draw breath complain about the punishment of their sins? 40 Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD. 41 Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven. 42 We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven. 43 You have wrapped yourself with anger and pursued us, killing without pity; 44 you have wrapped yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through. 45 You have made us filth and rubbish among the peoples. 46 All our enemies have opened their mouths against us; 47 panic and pitfall have come upon us, devastation and destruction. 48 My eyes flow with rivers of tears because of the destruction of my people. 49 My eyes will flow without ceasing, without respite, 50 until the LORD from heaven looks down and sees. 51 My eyes cause me grief at the fate of all the young women in my city. 52 Those who were my enemies without cause have hunted me like a bird; 53 they flung me alive into a pit and hurled stones on me; 54 water closed over my head; I said, "I am lost." 55 I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit; 56 you heard my plea, "Do not close your ear to my cry for help, but give me relief!" 57 You came near when I called on you; you said, "Do not fear!" 58 You have taken up my cause, O Lord, you have redeemed my life.*

### Derek Davenport '05

"I have forgotten what happiness is." Desolation, bitterness, and taunting. These are the images from Lamentations. It's no shock that we don't read Lamentations often. But it's there. And we need it. There are times in life that we feel like the author of this passage. Naturally there are days of joy and elation, but sometimes we can't even remember what those days feel like. On this day, we read from Lamentations and remember that even God has felt that kind of pain.

### Chris Brown '08

"Who can command and have it done, if the Lord has not ordained it?" The destruction described in Lamentations is horrific. Even more horrific is the thought that our God is responsible for such desolation and destruction . . . until we read these words through the lens of Holy Saturday.

Read the passage again. Imagine Jesus gasping its words. On the cross, Jesus experienced the terror and pain, the mocking and shame, the judgment and the despair described here. He bore our sins in his body, suffering both as a consequence of our sin, and in solidarity with all who suffer the effects of sin. And so he grieves: "My eyes flow with rivers of tears because of the destruction of my people." And so he was cast down to the realm of the dead: "My enemies without cause have hunted me like a bird; they flung me alive into a pit." And so from that place of death—like Jonah in the belly of the fish—he offers a call for salvation: "I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit."

### Prayer

God in heaven, our Father, we thank you that our Lord Jesus Christ knows the full depths of our suffering. Thank you that you heard his voice when he called from the pit. Raise us up with Him, that we may say with Christ, "You have taken up my cause, O Lord, you have redeemed my life." Amen.

### Hebrews 4:1-11

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. <sup>2</sup>For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message



*they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.<sup>3</sup> For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “As in my anger I swore, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” though his works were finished at the foundation of the world.<sup>4</sup> For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows, “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.”<sup>5</sup> And again in this place it says, “They shall not enter my rest.”<sup>6</sup> Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience,<sup>7</sup> again he sets a certain day—“today”—saying through David much later, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”<sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day.<sup>9</sup> So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God;<sup>10</sup> for those who enter God’s rest also cease from their labors as God did from his.<sup>11</sup> Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.<sup>13</sup> And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.<sup>14</sup> Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.<sup>16</sup> Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

#### **Brenda Barnes ’07, D.Min. student**

Jesus was dead. There is no denying it. In words from the movie “The Wizard of Oz,” he was “spiritually, physically, positively, absolutely, undeniably and reliably dead.” His body lay in the tomb while his disciples mourned his death and, since it was the Sabbath, they rested. The women returned home to prepare the burial spices to honor him, and then they rested. At the tomb, the guards did their job of watching the tomb to make sure that none of Jesus’ followers came to steal his body. They rested in the grass at the rock, because the disciples were celebrating their Sabbath—they wouldn’t come.

But those pictures are earthly pictures—human pictures. While humans were resting on the Sabbath, Jesus was working. According to Paul’s letter to Ephesus, Jesus descended to the lower parts of the earth (Ephesians 4:9). Peter tells his readers that Jesus preached to the imprisoned spirits (1 Peter 3:19-20).

In chapter 4 of Hebrews, the writer reminds us that the promise of entrance into Christ’s rest “still stands,” and the promise is only realized when we remember the work of Christ on earth, below the earth, and in heaven. The whole Easter mystery of resurrection becomes much clearer in the context of Holy Saturday, namely, that Christ’s work continued even in his death and continues even in his resurrection and reign. Salvation has been finished since the creation of the world (v. 3). That reality should give us rest and confidence, not in our works, but in the work of him who created all. Holy Saturday—Holy Sabbath.

#### **Prayer**

Holy, mysterious God: In your mercy, help us to find true Sabbath rest in you. Help us to rest in the promise of your glory here and forever. May our Holy Saturday truly be a day of remembrance in the promise of that glorious rest. For the sake of the One who died and rose again, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

**Psalm 43**

*1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause  
against an ungodly people;  
from those who are deceitful and unjust  
deliver me!*

*2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge;  
why have you cast me off?  
Why must I walk about mournfully  
because of the oppression of the enemy?*

*3 O send out your light and your truth;  
let them lead me;  
let them bring me to your holy hill  
and to your dwelling.*

*4 Then I will go to the altar of God,  
to God my exceeding joy;  
and I will praise you with the harp,  
O God, my God.*

*5 Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.*

**Karen Bowden Cooper '98**

For the disciples of Jesus this was a day of grief, isolation, and fear. In the shadow of the cross, they are vulnerable, now threatened with the scorn and mistreatment suffered by their beloved teacher. For us it is a day to confront death and to recall the desolation of those who experience violence and who are left to mourn in its wake.

The psalm expresses the conflicting emotions of one who has known God's protection but who now is beset by enemies. He demands justice and accuses God of casting him off, but his wavering soul is steadied as if by the prayer itself. In "O send out your light and your truth, let them lead me," the psalmist entrusts himself to God and opens his still unquiet heart to hope.

**Prayer**

Loving and gracious God, we thank you for Jesus, and the hope that his life brings even in the darkness. Help us to witness that hope in the world. Amen.

## Day 47

### Luke 24:1-35

*1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 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. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8 Then they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 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. 13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19 He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." 25 Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. 28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

### Cathy Brall, staff, and Derek Davenport '05

The women in Luke's account of the resurrection start out so well. They begin at daybreak to do everything that they know to do—as they've been taught by their culture and traditions—to honor, mourn, and properly care for the body of their friend and Rabbi, Jesus. The first surprise comes when they find the gravestone has been unexpectedly rolled away. Undeterred, they bravely enter the tomb to proceed with their work. The lack of a body leaves them perplexed and perhaps wondering what to

do next. It is only when the two angels suddenly appear to explain what's really going on that the women become terrified.

Then the walk to Emmaus. It's so real, this encounter between traveling strangers—one "in the know," and two who are clueless. But of course, when these strangers eat together, no longer side by side but face to face, the two recognize Jesus for who he is. This meal is the mirror image of the meal we encountered just a few days ago. But it's on the other side of death. The people eating with Jesus will go on not to deny or betray, but to preach and proclaim. The hope has been realized. It is no longer time for mourning, but for rejoicing. Christ is risen!

Our carefully prepared and well intentioned plans are no match for the radical disconnect that we, too, can encounter in our attempts faithfully to follow our Risen Lord Jesus. Resurrected living challenges us in our own moments of terror to see and listen, to seek for God's perspective and meaning in the midst of circumstances we didn't anticipate and can't understand. Resurrected living invites us to remember the promises our God has made to us in the Word. Finally, resurrected living calls us to bear testimony and share what we have seen, experienced and learned.

### **Prayer**

Thank you, Jesus, for the glory of your Resurrection and the amazing ways you continue to work in and through your people even in these present times. Help us, Lord, to put away terror and to seek past blindness when things don't go according to our plans and we are left perplexed about how to do the work we believe you have called us to do. Grant us, Risen Lord, to see, know, and trust the truth of Your Resurrection and the power and wisdom provided through Your Holy Spirit for each and every day of our lives. Amen.

### **John 1:1-18**

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. <sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup>(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.") <sup>16</sup>From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

### **Christine Chakoian, staff**

The light shining in the darkness. Usually we link this image from John with Christmas, when the winter solstice brings the longest night, and we light our candles to testify to the inextinguishable light that is born in Jesus Christ.

Yet Holy Week reminds us that there is still more terrifying darkness on earth than the yearly limitation of the sun—the darkness produced by the sin of humanity. Christ's death on the cross exposes that darkness, manifested by cynical political powers, well-intended religious leaders, passive crowds, and frightened followers.

Christ's crucifixion did not eradicate the darkness born of sin. We know it still. Yet this we also know: Christ's resurrection reveals that all the darkness in the world can never overcome the light. God's will is stronger than the will of our flesh; God's grace is more enduring than our sin; and God's true light will someday enlighten everyone. This is the promise of Easter.

**Prayer**

Gracious God, we praise you that your light prevails; for no darkness can ever overcome it. Open our eyes today, and in this season to come, that we might see signs of your light everywhere: in places of grace, in testimonies of truth, in acts of Godly power, and in the glory of your risen Son. In his enduring name we pray. Amen.