

# SPU Lenten Devotional 2017



*An Invitation to Journey with Christ*

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## **Lent 2017 – An Invitation to Journey with Christ**

### **What is Lent?**

The season of Lent marks the period of 40 days leading up to the celebration of Easter. Starting with Ash Wednesday and culminating in Holy Week, Christians throughout history have utilized fasting, prayer, and other spiritual practices during Lent as a means of dying to self in order that we might rise with Christ. This intentional preparation for Easter is marked by postures such as humility, repentance, and self-examination.

### **Why Use this Devotional?**

The Campus Ministries staff at Seattle Pacific University curated this devotional as a means of helping our community grow during this Lenten season. Through reading scripture together throughout these 40 days, it is our deep prayer that our students, staff, and faculty might grow in their love of God and love of neighbor. It is one thing to observe a spiritual practice on your own, but another thing altogether to journey *together* as we pursue Christ, allowing the reflections of our sisters and brothers to shape our engagement with scripture and pursuit of discipleship.

### **Practical Steps**

Starting with Ash Wednesday (March 1, 2017), there is an assigned passage of scripture and a subsequent reflection written by a member of the Seattle Pacific community. You'll notice that there are no readings for Sundays, as Lenten fasting is set aside for these mini-celebrations of Christ's resurrection each week. We would urge you to set aside time each day to read both the text and the reflection, while also carving out space for your own prayer and reflection. No need for guilt or shame if you miss a reading; simply find the appropriate day and start again.

*Sisters and brothers, may we be met by the living God as we make our way to the Easter morning. And in the company of one another, may we perceive the Spirit's movement, hear the calls of faith, and remain steadfast in accepting the loving guidance of God.*

**March 1, 2017- Ash Wednesday**

*Isaiah 58:1-12*

Kelsey Rorem, Associate Director- Campus Ministries

The church I grew-up did not observe Lent. As a child, all I knew of this tradition was that my Catholic friends were not allowed to eat meat on Fridays. Beyond this, I did not understand how fasting had anything to do with the days leading up to Easter. Perhaps you have been in the same boat at some point in your life. Perhaps you're there right now!

Today I hold a different perspective. I see how the practices of abstinence teach us how to die to self, so that we might be raised with Christ come Easter morning. I understand that the realities of our day-to-day lives often dull our hearts and minds, and so it takes a practice like fasting to help reawaken our imaginations to the realities of God's Kingdom.

But that reawakening is not simply about developing an inner piety, strengthening a "vertical" relationship between myself and God. Quite the opposite in fact. In this text that is frequently used to mark Ash Wednesday, the prophet Isaiah says that part of that reawakening ought to involve a renewed commitment to "loose the chains of injustice." If our fasting only turns us inward, then it seems we're missing the point.

Sisters and brothers, as we begin this Lenten journey, may our hearts and minds be enlivened by the presence and stirring of the Holy Spirit. And as the scales fall off of our eyes, may we turn to the needs of the marginalized, knowing that this is the kind of fasting to which we are called.

*Holy and loving God, teach us to die to ourselves as we seek to rise with you. May our hearts be awakened for the cause of justice as we fast and pray in the days to come. Amen.*

**March 2, 2017**

*Joel 2:1-2, 12-17*

Bo Lim, University Chaplain

Repent. I tend to have negative associations with that word, especially when it's a command – (you need to) repent! My guess is that street preachers are the only people today who possess the audacity to actually say it to people. Yet it strikes me that that the Gospel, the *good* news, is summed up in these words, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near*” (Matt 4:17). The opportunity to repent is not a precursor to the gospel, it is a part of the gospel itself. Jesus is good news because he provides an opportunity to repent.

In the Old Testament, the most common word for “repent” is the Hebrew word *shuv* which literally means “to turn, return.” This word could refer to a literal return to a place, but it also could refer metaphorically to a spiritual turning or returning. The OT prophets repeatedly used this term to call Israel back into a right relationship with God and to return home from exile.

The word *shuv* shows up in Joel 2:12, “Return to me with all your heart” and in 2:13, “Return to the LORD, your God.” What is interesting is that this word shows up in 2:14 and describes how God “turns”. Not only can people turn and return to God but God also turns and returns to the people. This is good news.

Lent is a season of repentance. It is a season of turning and returning. It is a season for movement and change. It challenges the complacent, the lazy, and the cynical. Joel 2:1 and 2:15 call for an alarm, the blowing of the trumpet. Lent is a time to be awake, to be “woke”, to God’s concerns for the world.

*Almighty God, we give you thanks for the opportunity to turn away from those things that harm you, ourselves, and others. Awaken us to the ways we have disobeyed you. We pray that today and in the coming weeks, we might return to you with our whole hearts and once again experience your grace, mercy, and steadfast love. Amen.*

**March 3, 2017**

*Psalm 51:1-17*

Lanae Hollingsworth, Math Major, Theology Major, Class of 2017

Psalm 51:1-17 details David's feelings as he comes to a full understanding of the import of his actions with Bathsheba. David used his power as simply a man and ultimately a king to sleep with Bathsheba. To protect himself from further repercussions, he eventually had her husband, a Hittite in his army, killed. In the Psalm, David is beseeching God for forgiveness, trusting God to be just, and believing God still loves him. David's request seems quite audacious when we consider how he used a marginalized person for personal gain and sentenced someone to death who had served him.

And yet, I worry this is how the church comes across to the world. How often do we take advantage of people, knowingly or not? Are we welcoming the stranger into our embrace or sending them back to certain death because of our fear? Together, just as David confesses his sins and seeks God's sustaining spirit, let us acknowledge our complicity and pursue God's presence.

David's psalm is one of petition, lament, and desire directed to God. People of the church, this should be our prayer for our role in institutional practices where power takes from the marginalized and refuses to acknowledge the humanity and loyalty therein. Allow your prayer to be active: an act of solidarity, a donation to organizations who are supporting those marginalized by the church, or engagement in conversations with your church body. Dare to imagine a God who forgives such audacious requests, a God who felt pain, a God who sacrificed, and a God who brings life through a story of reconciliation that is fulfilled through His son.

**March 4, 2017**

*2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10*

Matt Cox, Area Coordinator for Campus Housing and Apartments

In this portion of Paul's letter, we are invited to be reconciled to God and shown an example of how the reconciled ought to be identified with Christ. The term reconciled carries a connotation of peacemaking, harmonizing, and bringing together. However, the effect of this reconciliation seems to transcend mere harmony. We are not merely offered a chance to mend fences with the Divine but to somehow, as part of some ontological shift at the ultimate level, "become the very righteousness of God." Paul implores, pleads, and appeals for us to accept this reconciliation.

The second half of the passage enumerates ways Paul and his compatriots have been "commended" in Christ. If we read this and envision someone arrogantly nominating themselves, we have missed something. Both the context and the original language hint at a standing with, a showing one's self approved, an act of identifying with Christ. As the passage goes on, it becomes clear that one is commended to Christ not through awards, but through sacrifice; not through boasting, but through humility; not through violence, but through righteousness; not through upward mobility, but through taking on the way of the cross with one's treasure, time, pride, and life.

Considered side by side, one half of this passage invites us into an act of acceptance. We cannot earn or add to the divine reconciliation offered to us. We can only accept it, fall backwards into it, and rest in its powerful grace. The second half calls us to follow Paul's example of sacrifice as the path to identification with Christ. Paradoxically, being reconciled to God ought to endow us with confidence to give and sacrifice without fear. For, as C.S. Lewis stated, the one who "has God and everything else has no more than [the person] who has God only."

Before you move from this time of reflection, take a moment to quietly rest in God's reconciling grace. As you leave this space, commit to one simple act identifying with Christ through service and sacrifice during this season of Lent.

**March 6, 2017**

*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

Julie Kae Sigars, Instructor of Voice

When I was in my late twenties, my teacher and I began stripping away the many layers added to my voice over ten years of singing. The goal was to find my “true” voice, the one I had forgotten.

Lent can be about returning to our true selves, to our baptismal calling as children of God in community. Sometimes our practices can get out of whack. What may seem like good ideas in the short term may bury what we really are, hiding our light, layers covering over our callings as a part of the Body of Christ. What better time than Lent to review, remember, and renew our spiritual practices?

Our reading for this day goes right to the point. We might ask: Wouldn't public prayer be a wonderful sign? Possibly. But it certainly puts us in the position of being called to account when we fail to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless. I could not help but notice how often the word “hypocrite” was in our reading. Many of us have experienced having a “good idea” and see it turn into something less than holy.

Avoiding street corners may be something to watch for, to ponder. But being on the street corner is a chance to notice what is going on. Who is in need? Who is lonely? Who needs just what I have to be able to make it through the day? This discreet “paying attention” can also be brought to our faith communities, to find ways of helping, without it being about “us” but what is best for those in need. Taking the time of Lent to reflect upon returning to our beginnings, our baptismal vows, may just be what we need to get to the heart of ministry, stripping away the layers of “extras” that cover our light to the world.

“By water and the Holy Spirit, we are made members of the church, the body of Christ, and joined to Christ's ministry of love, peace, and justice.”<sup>1</sup> May it ever be so.

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<sup>1</sup> Book of Common Worship p. 432



**March 7, 2017**

*Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7*

Levi Clum, Global Development Studies and Philosophy Major, Class of 2019

Genesis 2:15-17 and 3:1-7 is often characterized as the fall of humanity. It is the moment in scripture when God's seemingly perfect creation—a creation full of beauty and potential—is hurt by the free will of humanity. Within these verses, there is a relationship between death and the knowledge of good and evil. Together, these two concepts tell of the relationship between humanity's mortality and morality.

In verse 17 of Genesis chapter 2, God commands humanity to refrain from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “for in the day that you[humanity] eat of it you shall die” (Gen. 2:17, NRSV). Yet, as we continue through the story, we see that humanity does eat of the tree while still retaining their lives. Instead, “the eyes of both were opened”, now knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:7, NRSV). What is this relationship with death and morality in this story?

To understand good from evil requires one to have self-awareness. A person must be able to recognize the blessings and consequences that come from their actions. In eating of the tree, humanity realized that loss was part of life. It was the fear of death and loss which drove the brokenness of humanity. In a pursuit of self-preservation, we ultimately act in ways which undermine the dignity and respect of others. For this reason, it is through accepting loss, and coming to terms with our morality, that we are able to confront our sin. To live for God, is to accept death, and continue to pursue, for just as Jesus died for us, we must be willing to die for others as well as ourselves.

**March 8, 2017**

*Psalm 32*

Jasmine Hairston, Senior Admissions Counselor for Multi-Cultural Outreach

Ashes are the haunting memory of what once was. They are the diminished, burned, and charred remains of what once had substance, life, and girth. This is the very symbol that marks the commencement of Lent. We choose to bear markings of Ash on our bodies as we enter into a season of repentance and prayer.

However, I find myself entering this season already bearing the mark of ashes. I bear the ashes of Michael Brown, refugees fleeing from Aleppo, and the precious souls lost in the Orlando shooting. All these ashes fell on me and coated me with a paralyzing heaviness.

I, also, find myself increasingly perplexed as to what Lent looks like to those who had so much taken from them. What could the idea of giving up something like soda mean to residents in Flint, Michigan that are without clean drinking water? Or to choose to sacrifice watching Netflix, when there are water protectors at Standing Rock who are watching the re-emergence of generations of systemic violence and violation of treaties and promises? Or to take on fasting when there are those who are being starved of seeing their loved ones and entering into this country? What is Lent to those, who like me, who believe their future to be marred with and marked by ash? What is there to let go?

I now realize that God is calling me to let go of the belief that ashes are the final word in the story. To remember that I serve a God that looks into ashes, dust, and is not overwhelmed but able to breathe new life into them. This same, powerful God that spoke the world into existence surrounds us with *shouts of deliverance*. This is not the end. God is still at work. Ashes are no longer a haunting memory, but a powerful reminder that this is the medium through which God can usher in new life and redemption. For this season of Lent, I am releasing the despair and fear that accompanies believing that all life is just Ash and choosing to trust God to work, form, and breathe new possibilities into them. What will *you* be letting go?

**March 9, 2017**

*Romans 5:12-19*

Owen Ewald, Associate Professor of Classics

This passage is dangerous. It is so familiar to me that I am in danger of thinking that I have salvation figured out. Christ, the New Adam following the same prototype or pattern, saves me and many from all the faults of the Old Adam (Rom 5:19) But the Old Adam is remarkably persistent. His faults are not merely systemic and historical—the faults of King Ahab (1 Kings 16:30-33) or the neglect of Greek widows (Acts 6:1), but personal and continuing.

The Old Adam also wants to perfect himself rather than waiting for God to bring him to completion. The Old Adam yearns for quick fixes—fruit that gives knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:6), fruit that gives eternal life (Gen 3:22), a New Year’s resolution, ‘this one weird trick’, a ‘life hack’—rather than the often slow transformation that happens with experience and with spiritual maturity. On the scale of salvation history, hundreds of years separate Moses, who gave the Law, from the New Adam, Christ, who came and will come again on God’s timetable.

*Gracious Lord, use this season of Lent to keep transforming us away from our sins and disobedience, from the Old Adam who died, toward a more complete spiritual maturity, toward the likeness of the New Adam who rose from the dead and whose sacrifice gives us eternal life (Romans 5:18).*

**March 10, 2017**

*Matthew 4:1-11*

Emma Naden-Johns, Global Development Studies Major, Class of 2017

This past weekend, I attended a conference in San Diego along with hundreds of other members from my church denomination of Seventh-Day Adventists. Perhaps the most distinctive theological belief of Adventism is the observance of Saturday as the “Sabbath”: a 24-hour period in which the everyday activities of the week, such as work or school, are put aside. Creating time to rest, worship, and fellowship becomes a communal act. In that sacred time and space, those of us in attendance at the conference delved deeply into the history of our own church, examining our record of institutionalized power.

The conference focused on the book of Revelation. But rather than traditional end-times, fear-based interpretations, speaker after speaker used Revelation as a basis from which to critique institutions of power, including the very institution of our church itself.

With this framework in mind, I read over Matthew 4:1-11 through a lens of power. The devil does not ask Jesus to perform these tasks because he doubts Jesus’ power. Rather, the devil recognizes the sheer depth of the power that Jesus possesses, and thus, wants to manipulate Jesus’ expression and use of that power.

What is most compelling in this narrative then, is Jesus’ resistance to the devil’s temptations. Without a doubt, Jesus had the ability to not only perform the tasks demanded of him by the devil, but the ability to do infinitely more. And yet, Jesus did not comply with the pressure to exert dominance.

I find this text to be applicable given the reality of our world today. For those of us with an awareness of our own “power” or privilege, I believe that Jesus’ example calls us to acknowledge our own power – to recognize the way in which our power shapes and affects our everyday experiences, and the ways our privilege grants us access to certain spaces. Much like Jesus, we each have domains in which we have the ability to demonstrate our power. Yet, I believe the challenge for each of us is to cultivate the skill that Jesus models for us: a resistance to exert power in order to prove our own “credibility” or “legitimacy”.

An awareness of our power and privilege, and the discernment to know when to step away from exerting it, is a skill that requires practice, but one that will inevitably create space for justice.

**March 11, 2017**

*Genesis 12:1-4a*

Paul Kim, Coordinator for Global Engagement and Small Groups – John Perkins Center

There are at least two unknowns in our short passage. First, it is unknown to us why God chose to speak to Abram and make this promise. To this point, we are unaware of any particular qualities or accomplishments that make Abram stand out. We only have a brief introduction to him in the genealogy that precedes this passage and there is no law that we could say he followed. Perhaps that is the point: God's choosing of Abram was an act of God's grace. God initiated this relationship by speaking to and making a promise to Abram, to whom he owed nothing.

The second unknown is the destination. God leaves the promised land unnamed. It is not hard to imagine that Abram had many questions, so we might wonder why Abram would start a journey to a land unspecified. However, Abram's response to the divine promise was to set out on the journey to live into the promise of God's blessings to him and to "all the families of the earth." In other words, he went in faith. A faith that even caused him to leave all that was familiar into unfamiliar territory, relying on God's direction and God's presence.

As we reflect upon our own faith journeys, we can be reminded of the gracious God, who chooses to speak into our lives. We may be unsure of what the journey will be like and have many unanswered questions. However, we also know that the God who chose to speak into our lives is also the one who chooses to be for us and journey with us.

*What are the questions that keep us from stepping out in faith? What are the things we need to let go for our journey? What is God promising us today?*

**March 13, 2017**

*Psalm 121*

Kathryn Bartholomew, Associate Professor of Foreign Languages and Linguistics

*I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?*

This is a song for people on the road, both physically and metaphorically. Journeys make demands on the traveler. On flat land, the horizon recedes with every step, calling for patience as well as stamina, but you can see what's coming from a long way off. The hills are another story—you never know what awaits you around the next turn, what help you may need.

In his 1939 Christmas broadcast to the Empire, during the false, uneasy calm of the beginning of WWII, George VI quoted these lines, a preamble to an obscure poem by an unknown author, shown to him by his daughter Princess (now Queen) Elizabeth. They so resonated with his listeners that they are inscribed at the entrance to St. George's Chapel, Windsor, and to this day they hang on the walls of many British homes.

*And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."*

*So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.*

The author of these words was soon identified as Minnie Louise Haskins (1875-1957). She worked with the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in London's East End and then in India, returning to England at the age of 40 to pursue a distinguished academic career at the London School of Economics.

May we all be blessed in our Lenten journeys.

**March 14, 2017**

*Romans 4:1-5, 13-17*

Kyla Farris, Music Education Major, Class of 2019

In a world where perfectionism is celebrated and the pressure to always do/say the right thing is overwhelming, this passage is both challenging and hopeful. Paul's exhortation is to courageously surrender the notion that you are not enough. Not smart enough, not experienced enough, not confident enough. Fill in the blank however you may, it is simply not true.

The undeniable truth, as we see here in Romans, is that you are *justified* by your faith. It is easy and often acceptable to believe that you have to accomplish A, B, & C to somehow earn righteousness. "For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith" (Romans 4:13). There is no way that righteousness can be earned. It is the grace-filled, imparted recognition of an eagerness to follow Christ. Righteousness is a part of your identity as a Christian, so let's stop trying to climb a mountain of shame and confusion to obtain the badge that says "I'm competent!" That mountain never needed to exist in the first place! As Christians who are intentional about boldly believing in God's promises, we have been imparted righteousness from the start.

The beauty in living for a relational, gracious God is that He simply wants you. The imperfect, flawed, vulnerable you. He isn't concerned with who you think you can be once you reach the top of the mountain, because He knows who you *already are*: qualified, equipped, and more than enough. By faith you are qualified to live a life of growth and freedom. By faith you are equipped to live out the calling God has placed on your life. By faith in a God who loves you indefinitely, you are and always will be more than enough.

**March 15, 2017**

*John 3:1-17*

Jackson Stava, Athletics Director

Perspective can be a powerful thing. In today's social and political climate, thoughts of perspective (or lack thereof) often dominate the landscape of our society. As Christ followers, we are not immune to moments or thoughts where our perspective becomes the pervasive lens through which we view our culture, society, the world, and our faith.

This challenge of perspective is true to Nicodemus in this passage as well. A learned, talented, wise man who has the chance to see firsthand the works of the Christ, is hidden from the fullness of Jesus' redemptive power due to his limited perspective. None of us are immune to this challenge, as our society rewards and perpetuates a cycle of understanding our faith through only what we have seen, heard, or experienced first-hand. If our experience dominates our spirituality, will we not miss the central message of Christ as Nicodemus does in this passage?

What might it look like to spend a minute, a day, or this season of Lent seeking not how to fit the work of Christ into your context; but waiting, wanting, fasting, and praying for more clarity as to the essence of a God who would send His Son to save the world? In this place I hope and pray that we all can recognize more of the fullness of Christ's work, and a deeper understanding of the ways in which we are being invited to join in that celebration of the coming Kingdom of God.



**March 16, 2017**

*Exodus 17:1-7*

Katie Kresser, Associate Professor of Art

The season of Lent can take on many meanings. Originally, Lent was meant to be a time of self-deprivation, during which Christians tried to “earn” the honor of Christ’s sacrifice for them. Thus we traditionally give up pleasures for Lent: maybe desserts, alcohol or TV. But over the centuries, Lent has taken on a different meaning: it has become more and more about coming to terms with our own weakness. Thus our Lenten fasting (if we choose to engage in it), becomes not so much about proving our piety as about experiencing suffering and its ramifications, so that we can both experience our own limitations and empathize with others who suffer. And while we do this, we are bound to acknowledge all the petty temptations that come with suffering: shortness of temper, irritability, impatience, covetousness and self-pity, to name a few.

In Exodus 17:1-7, the Israelites share a multi-faceted “Lenten” (literally “long days”) experience. After setting out from the “Desert of Sin” and arriving at their new camp, they discover there is no convenient water source. This results in a radical kind of fasting (water deprivation!) that they do not handle well. The Israelites complain to Moses and eventually threaten violence against him; meanwhile Moses accuses them of “putting God to the test.” In the end, of course, God is faithful, and He guides Moses to a rock from which water miraculously comes. But before their eventual deliverance, the Israelites have to come to terms with many things: their own faithlessness and impatience, their evident incapacity to weather suffering, God’s own unpredictable faithfulness, and above all, God’s indulgent grace. If we approach the Lenten season honestly, with a deep commitment to self-transformation, perhaps we can learn the same lessons the Israelites did.

So let this be our prayer:

*Heavenly father, we acknowledge that you are the source and support of our good impulses – so we can’t earn your favor. And we acknowledge that we grow irritable and impatient when we don’t get what we want. So this Lenten season, we pray for the gift of acceptance, which is really just the gift of trust. May we accept our circumstances, may we accept the consequences of our choices, and may we move forward in humility, trusting that you will help us just as you helped the Israelites at Massah. Amen.*

**March 17, 2017**

*Psalm 95*

Mikayla Puterbaugh, Communication Major, Class of 2017

Being thankful seems like such an easy concept, something that can easily be checked off our 'to-do' lists. Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, hitting every green light when you are running late, getting an 'A' on a test you really didn't study for. Those are times when 'thank you's' can roll off your tongue without you even realizing it. But, what about when you feel like you are in a hole that you can't get out of, what are you thankful for? How can you find joy?

Psalm 95 urges us to not harden our hearts during trials and tribulations, to not forget that we are worshiping, praising, and thanking the God that created the earth and the mountains and all of Seattle's trees. He had His hands in all of that, and He has His hands in the dark times too. "We are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand" (Psalm 95:7).

In one of those late-night theology discussions that tend to happen in the dorms of SPU, someone once mentioned the idea that joy is not an emotion, it is not temporary, it is a state of the heart that is chosen. That idea has stuck with me over the years and the more I learn about joy and read the Word the more I see the truth of that statement unravel itself. In Philippians 4, Paul writes that we must rejoice always, stop worrying, pray, and give thanks, and only then will we experience God's peace. Philippians show us how someone can be so full of joy and thankfulness toward God even when they are placed in an impossibly bleak situation. This passage has always convicted me because I know that in any difficult time, my first reaction is to keep my head down and push through it, but Paul challenges that tendency and pushes us to look to God and see all the blessings around us.

When you feel like you are in the dark, try and remember that your God is the one who made light. Remind yourself of all the blessings in your life, soften your heart, and praise God, because He is watching over you.

**March 18, 2017**

*Romans 5:1-11*

Tali Hairston, Director- John Perkins Center

Take a moment and reflect on what it feels like to be graciously pursued by someone who deeply loves and cares for you. Are you blushing yet? Songs of Solomon says, "Behold you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves" (1:15, ESV). Now process how such an unconditional declaration of love might further transform the very character and way of being for the recipient. Add into this experience the rejoicing personified when one realizes the pursuit occurred at their most vulnerable and helpless moment. For it is not at our best or brightest moment but at the lowest point does the writer of Romans described this pursuit of us by God. And the outcome of God's pursuit of humanity culminates in being declared righteous and reconciled and thereby able to rejoice.

Can there be any greater demonstration of love and relationship than what Romans 5: 1 -11 unpacks for us as the story of God? Drawn by faith, the tenderness of God's love is made evident, not as friends but while we were enemies, reconciliation is proffered as the bridge between creator and created.

Today, let us pray earnestly for a heart fully accepting of our helplessness while rejoicing in our hope in God. Let us with intention seek ways to rejoice in suffering knowing it will create in us a depth of personhood. May we find courage in our relationship with God who has given us access to Godself, fully aware of our beauty and struggles, and yet his pursuit to be reconciled with humanity is an unwavering one.

Be encouraged today to live out your relationships in a similar fashion. For it is God who seeks to be reconciled with us so that we may one day one day be reconciled to each other.

**March 20, 2017**

*John 4:5-42*

Kathryn Baumheckel, Visual Communication Major, Class of 2018

Read the passage from John 4:5-42 and imagine yourself as the woman at the well. Imagine a man who comes to you and asks for water, then proceeds to tell you of water that would make you thirst no more. And more than satisfying a physical thirst, Christ offers to satisfy the very thirsts of our soul. And while he knows your thirst, he also knows your story. Christ says in Ephesians 2:10 that he created us as masterpieces and knows us full well. Really take a moment to contemplate that. He knows how your hurt, he knows what brings you joy, and he knows what secrets you keep from the world, yet he loves you more than you could ever fathom. With the woman at the well, Christ knew her history of marriages and knew why she desperately desired a water that would make her thirst no more. In your own life God knows the thirsts of your soul. He knows the most desolate places of your heart and He can provide a life giving, soul satisfying solution.

Write down on a piece of paper what areas in your life you are feeling thirst in. Invite God into these places in your life where you feel the most thirst and the most need. He has the living waters that can satisfy the thirsty, but you have to invite Him into your situation to allow these waters to flow through your life. Place this paper in an area that will remind you daily to continue to pray for God to provide the living waters in your place of need.

*Father God, thank you for knowing me holistically in my sin and in my blessings. Thank you for fully understanding all I have done and all I will ever do and choosing to love me still. God, today I face a thirst that leaves me wanting. I invite you into this place in my life in full surrender and offer it up to you and your living waters. Grant me peace, grant me healing, and let the thirsts of my soul be satisfied. In Christ's name, amen.*

**March 21, 2017**

*1 Samuel 16:1-13*

Shannon Smythe, Associate Professor of Theological Studies

Our passage opens with a striking picture of Samuel's encounter with God. Having been the one to anoint the tall and mighty Saul as king over Israel, he's now grieving over Saul's failed leadership and disobedience to God (see 1 Samuel 15 for an example). Judging by the words of the Lord, it seems that Samuel's time of mourning has long run its course. God has moved on and is ready to act in faithfulness to God's people. Yet in the face of God's clear instructions to go forth and anoint a new king—the one provided by God himself, Samuel is afraid, fearing for his life should Saul find out. In response to Samuel's fearful, "How can I go?" (16:2) God does not pander to Samuel's fear. Instead, God provides a clear plan of action for Samuel to follow—what to bring, what to say, who to involve, and the promise that God will indeed show Samuel what to do: "you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you" (16:3). God does not respond to Samuel's reticence with a calming assurance: "Don't worry Samuel, Saul won't kill you. You are okay. Fear not." Rather, Samuel gets a strong dose of God's clear vision for God's people. That's all. And to Samuel's credit, he responds in obedience, playing his final part as the Lord's prophet by anointing David as king.

Lent is a time to prepare for the lived and joyful celebration of the resurrection. Often, it is a time of introspection as we journey with Christ through the wilderness, preparing ourselves to die with Him so that we might be raised with Him. But, Lent is not just about our individual spiritual lives, as important as that may be. Lent is communal. It is a time in the church year when the community of faith opens itself, in humility, to repentance and a renewed devotion to God so that God may sanctify the community. Lest we forget, God has a great plan a salvation, liberation, and healing for the whole world. As disciples of the living Jesus, God has called each of us to be Christ's "co-sufferers" (Rom. 8:17) as God's shalom continues to be worked out in all the earth. Rather than remaining in grief or being stifled by fear, let's take our cues from Samuel and join as obedient participants in God's vision of grace and faithfulness for all.

*Lord, hear our prayer. Come, Holy Spirit.*

**March 22, 2017**

*Psalm 23*

Ted Haase, Student Financial Services Coordinator

Rest. Trust. Rest, trust, and follow God. These are some words that emerge within me when I read this Psalm. I lean on them, for they remind me that the Lord is my shepherd—and that I am not my own shepherd responsible for leading myself. My worried soul will be calmed, and gently cared for with rest and restoration. I cannot do this for myself.

Belonging. I belong to God. I do not belong to other shepherds, as there are many others attempting to coax me into following. Some of these other shepherds are people; some are within me, such as my fears—fear can be an intense, demanding shepherd. Some of these other shepherds are seen, are known and named.

Others are unseen, are unknown and unnamed—even though they feel familiar. They are often easy to follow, such as distraction, anxiety, depression, despair. Some shepherds exert influence on me with electronic methods. Some attempt to lead and feed me with discouragement.

I am able to distract myself. I can focus on tasks, find food and some comfort. However, the focus remains on myself, and not on following our Risen Savior. I often am distracted and self-absorbed and unable to pause, breathe deeply and ask, “How can I offer compassion, kindness and light to another, to others in this moment?” Can I step away from those forces, those other shepherds and go against them, even if for just a moment? Maybe for two moments?

Psalm 23 offers me the unconditional love of God. I know that I cannot restore my own soul. The gentle compassion of our Lord will do this, when I am open to following. We can follow to the gentle waters of rest and restoration. The Holy Shepherd brings us the waters of life.

**March 23, 2017**

*Ephesians 5:8-14*

Lindy Pearson, Administrative Assistant- Office of University Ministries & Campus Ministries

Here we find ourselves midway through Lent, and I can't help but notice the longer days, and the pull to get to Easter Sunday. The task of remaining present to the liturgical season growing darker is wearying at best, as we draw nearer to Good Friday and Holy Saturday. If I'm patient I have learned that to skip over these important narratives is detrimental to my understanding of Easter altogether.

It is at this place in time where we encounter this passage where themes of darkness are juxtaposed against themes of light. After wrestling with the scripture for a bit, I realized a hesitation to throw out darkness altogether. This is connected to a similar hesitation to rush to Easter Sunday without acknowledging the implications of Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

In order to understand the full narrative, we must sit in a place of curiosity regarding the origin, the interior, the meaning of darkness. Just as we are called to a yearly practice of the church calendar, we are called to understand the light and the dark, and how they interact. In other words, the implication that is pertinent to the Christian story.

In just the same ways the author is reminding the Gentile Christians of a season of darkness before Christ, is the reminder for us... "you were once in darkness, but now you are in light...***in the Lord***". The latter part of this statement is alluding to the very thing I'm longing for, which is the presence of Christ in Easter.

So as I reflect with the ashes lingering on my forehead I have a reverence for the darkness and a growing desire to *remain, remain, remain...* While at the same time I acknowledge that I long for the light, and eagerly await the approach of Easter.

In this space of "in between" may we awaken. May we return to consciousness, committing ourselves to a stance of justice and compassion as we acknowledge the illumination of light on the Gospel story.

*May we live in the light of the grace that has been given to us in Christ Jesus.*

**March 24, 2017**

*John 9:1-41*

Stephanie Anderson, Theology Major, Class of 2017

Jesus teaches us about sight through the story of a blind man. After Jesus gave sight to a man that had been blind for his entire life, the Pharisees quickly assume that this man had sinned or was lying about who healed him. The Pharisees ask him time and time again who healed his sight, and the Pharisees proudly claims their allegiance to Moses who spoke directly with God. Their statement that they do not know where [Jesus] elicits the response from the blind man: “Why, this is an amazing thing!” The blind man might be talking about his sight being healed, but I’d like to think that he is amazed at the Pharisees and their own blindness.

The Pharisees trusted their history, but refused to see the way that God was appearing before them in the present. As Christians, we have to face the same difficult task. It is so simple for us to point out our trust issues with God, yet refuse to look at where God is moving in our here and now. This Lenten season, I want to prayerfully recommit to finding my own blind spots. Who are the people that are in need of my attention? In what ways can my privilege become advocacy? What am I blind to, and how can my eyes be opened?

*Lord, with your never ending sight that is so unlike my own, show me what I cannot see. Help me to trust in the present, rather than dwell on the past. Give me the wisdom and the courage to let go of my own selfishness and agenda to embrace the truth of where you are working right now. Amen*



**March 25, 2017**

*Ezekiel 37:1-14*

Peter Moe, Assistant Professor of English; Director of Campus Writing

A month ago, I stood within the ribcage of a blue whale. It was a young whale, 12-years-old and 70 feet long when it washed ashore decades ago in Santa Barbara, now on display at the entrance to the Natural History Museum. I wrapped my hands around the ribs, then walked toward the jaw to run my fingers along the bone which once held sheets of baleen. I turned to walk from snout to tale, counting the vertebra, wondering about the hip bones high above my head.

There is a sense of majesty, of power, of strength, in those bones, inanimate and lifeless though they are—a sense, almost, of potential energy. When I followed the curve of its spine, I couldn't help but imagine the whale alive, thrusting its way through the ocean waters.

But these whale bones do not move, cannot move, will not move, save for some divine intervention—and divine intervention is what Ezekiel sees in his vision. God gathers up the bones laid waste and assembles them into an army ready to fight for Israel's deliverance. It is an image of resurrection, of rebirth, an image of God reclaiming what has been cast aside and breathing new life into it for his glory.

*Lord, as we journey through Lent, gather up the dry, sun-bleached, brittle bones around us. Assemble them. Breathe new life into them. May these bones work toward your glory.*

**March 27, 2017**

*Psalm 130*

Addie Davis, Executive Assistant- Vice President of Student Life

Have you ever been in a season of waiting or longing? Perhaps for the next stage in life, for a decision to be made that will impact you deeply, for healing, for restoration, for God to show up in a specific way. There are so many times in life that our path forward is a mystery to us—it could paralyze us if we let it. It could cause us to doubt God’s steadfast love.

But Psalm 130 shows us how we might navigate those seasons, how to move from despair, to acknowledgement of sin, to attentive waiting, and finally to assurance and hope. The Psalmist reminds us that even in the pain and uncertainty of the unknown, in the dark of night that comes before morning, in the death that is necessary before the glory of resurrection, God’s promises and goodness are still present there. His redeeming, steadfast, and plentiful love is available to us even when we are in a season of doubt, despair, or bogged down by sin and shame. In the midst of the pain and suffering we see and experience, it can be easy to lose sight of the knowledge that He is with us even when we don’t “feel” Him, when He seems to be absent. Lent is that waiting, that anticipatory hope. We grieve for the pain of the world, for the pain and sin in our own lives, while still hoping and trusting in Christ’s redemption.

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“...maybe this silence, this absence, is a gift. Maybe what began as punishment is being converted to gift, maybe that is how God works. Maybe this absence will become an experience of God’s strangeness, God’s mystery. You think: Maybe I am being shown something here, if I would look, if I would see. You think of these words from the prophet Zephaniah: He will shout with joy for you, He will jump for you in jubilation, He will be silent in his love.”

- Lauren Winner, *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*

**March 28, 2017**

*Romans 8:6-11*

Thane Erickson, Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology; Director of Clinical Training in Clinical Psychology

This passage features what some might consider to be a hard teaching. Perhaps even a “downer,” if given only a cursory reading. Paul, under the Spirit’s inspiration, declares that the mind not only does not naturally submit to God, but *cannot* submit to it. Moreover, our minds are naturally “hostile to God”—so much so that Paul equates our minds with death! Furthermore, the “body is dead because of sin.” This is not gnostic dualism that pits evil matter against good spirit, for we have already heard that the mind resists God’s ways. Rather, the contrast is between our “sinful nature” (*both* body and mind) and the Spirit of God. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. Apart from Him, we cannot trust our own minds or bodies.

It is not easy to accept this diagnosis. And yet, we need to retain an accurate diagnosis of our condition as part of receiving the appropriate treatment. Bad news before the good news. We need to maintain awareness of our shadowy nature, as a foil to the bright reality that we are “no longer controlled by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit.” We are assured that if Christ is in us, not only are our spirits enlivened, but life will also flow into our mortal bodies by the One who was raised at Easter.

Thus, this challenging text reminds us of the contrast between Lent and Easter. We can engage in Lenten practices such as fasting and self-denial because they encourage continued intervention for mind and body, which are not yet fully whole, but look forward to their ultimate healing. Such self-mortification in this light is not morbid, but rather a way to participate and identify with Christ, who underwent trials before triumph.

*Lord, as we reflect on our own hostility toward you, give life to our minds and bodies. Infuse us with the same Spirit who powerfully raised Christ. We want to please you.*

**March 29, 2017**

*John 11:1-45*

Courtney Rutzer, Illustration Major, Class of 2018

Reading over this passage, I am especially drawn to the image of Mary coming to Jesus and throwing herself at his feet to confront him with her agony over the death of her brother Lazarus. She is candid in the way she approaches him and openly cries out in pain, asking Jesus “why?”

Jesus responds out of compassion for her and the rest of the gathered, hurting people and outright weeps with them. He is so present and in-tune with their pain even though he knows what is to come.

I noticed that Mary, Martha, and the others who came to Jesus, whether it had been by choice or by following the women, saw the glory of God revealed through Christ when he rose Lazarus from the grave days after his death. I believe they saw this glory in part because they chose to come to Christ with their feelings of agony, sadness and maybe even feelings of doubt and betrayal toward God.

Maybe, it would take me openly falling at the feet of Christ as I am, doubtful and asking, to see his glory that I might more fully believe! Can I expect to receive healing or see great works from the One who does them if I'm not honest with myself before him?

I take great comfort in knowing that my God will not shame me for not fully believing in his power, but that he will empathize and sit with me because he cares.

I imagine he would then gently remind me as he did Martha, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” May it be true for us as well.

**March 30, 2017**

*Jeremiah 31:31-34*

Bryan Jones, Director- Alumni & Parent Relations

In today's passage, the prophet Jeremiah foretells a *new covenant that God will have* with the people of Israel and the people of Judah, God's people-us! This new covenant, which was fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, is different than the first covenant God had with Israel, in which God led them out of captivity and gave them laws to abide by.

The good news we have, as we look towards Easter and Jesus's death and resurrection, and the good news that Jeremiah foretells in this passage, is that the new covenant God has given us through Christ Jesus is that God *forgives our wrongdoings and never again remembers our sins*. How hopelessly lost in the desert would each of us be, if we were still under the law of the first covenant God made with Israel?

What's more, Jeremiah says that all will know this new covenant, from the least to the greatest. God's new covenant, the good news that through Jesus, God forgives and forgets our sins, is a new covenant meant for all, not just for any one chosen people, tribe, or nation.

*Lord God, we come to you this day, acknowledging that we are sinful and broken, and would be lost, wandering in the desert, were it not for the gift of grace you give us freely in your son Jesus and his death and resurrection. Help us today to rejoice in your goodness and the new covenant you have given us, and not forget that this gift you have given is one for all human kind. Amen.*

**March 31, 2017**

*Psalm 126*

Caenisha Warren, Budget Manager & Coordinator for Events & Student Clubs-  
John Perkins Center

*We give a praise of thanks to who God is; for the God of what has gone, what is and what will come.*

When we walk into darkness, we cannot see ahead. And so to move forward, we step out in faith, and we may rely on memories formed from experiences and images of our past. Looking at what is rooted in our past is a part of the discipleship we practice. A word I appreciate is the West African word Sankofa, in simple terms meaning looking back in order to move forward. It reminds me to remember, to regain, to recreate, to reinvent, to continue the things that may have come before.

In Psalm 126, they offered praise for the restoration of Zion's exiles by God – reminded of the joy. This was a restoration and joy that did not go unnoticed as nations acknowledged that God had done great things. Now this same memory is the prayer of those exiled. The toils of their investment, those bearing tears and weeping in labor, will once again be among those who will come to bear fruit, eventually sowing joy, and still give praise to a good harvest from the Lord.

Even in this present season, whatever toil or burden you may feel or bear, let us be disciples of our day, being able to look to the past for the way that joy actually alters in who God is, a joy that is even in places of struggle or pain.

*Lord, we give a praise of thanks for who you are. We are reminded of the joy that comes from who you are, even the mystery of a sometimes pain filled and altering joy. Help us to look to remember your power, faithfulness and assurance. For in it, we may find help, true community and hope.*

**April 1, 2017**

*Hebrews 5:5-10*

Peter Olthoff, Theology Major (Educational Ministry), Class of 2020

Christianity is a process. There is no starting point or ending point, and God will work with us in whatever stage of life we are at. Christ was not immediately exalted to the position of Priest on earth, He cried out to God and wept in sorrow because death was a reality that He did not think He was ready to face. Even though it felt as if the responsibility of His ministry was too heavy for Him to bear, Jesus never lost faith that God would carry Him through, and He was rewarded for that.

In times of trial, it is so easy to put our faith in the world; our family and friends can often seem much more readily available for help, and closer to us than God. What He asks of us, however, is that we put our faith in Him alone. In the same way that trial and tribulation were necessary for Christ to become our source of eternal salvation, God places challenges in front of us so that we may grow to be more like His son.

The challenge that we are given with this scripture is to look towards God when we face difficult times. Through those trials, God will be shaping us so that like Christ, we may one day place all of our hope in the Lord.  
The peace of Christ be with everyone.

**April 3, 2017**

*Luke 13:1-9*

Clint Kelly, Communications Specialist- University Communications

At least one Bible expositor has said that if you are looking for “Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,” this Scripture passage is not the place to find it.

No, at this point in his preaching and teaching, Jesus reinforces the fact that human life is fragile, at times incomprehensible. Disaster might strike without warning, as when a tower in Siloam collapsed and 18 people died. Roman rule could be capricious, even diabolical, as when Governor Pilate committed shocking brutality against ordinary Galileans. These were likely fresh news events of the day that weighed on everyone’s minds. No one was exempt from sudden calamity, and where is the Easter in that?

Death can overtake us, anywhere and without warning. A safe, tragedy-free life is guaranteed neither saint nor sinner. Doesn’t that place Easter, with all the ferocity of the Resurrection, in a new light? It tells me that Easter transcends our pastel-colored Christian pageantry, that it is, in fact, a blinding-bright reminder of the urgency to repent. He is risen *today*. I mustn’t gamble on my next breath.

We know that when something is repeated in Scripture, it conveys the importance of the point. After each of these buzz-worthy events, Jesus warns the people listening, “unless you repent, you too will all perish.” He speaks of spiritual death. To go about our lives without confronting our eternal destiny produces a dangerous sense of false security as precarious as banking on our temporal existence.

What of the unfruitful fig tree? That’s me when I resist God and do not live up to my Easter potential. Like the tree in the parable, if I am given one more year to produce and bear fruit, it is entirely by God’s grace. I’d best not test it and risk being cut down. The time to repent, Easter morning reminds us, is right now.

*Gracious Father, teach me to number my days, to fully embrace the Way and to love you here and now with a joyous Easter love.*



**April 4, 2017**

*Isaiah 55:1-9*

Lori Brown, Employer Relations Manager- Center for Career and Calling

When I'm trying to get the attention of my children, I often say the same thing over and over. And I wonder if God does the same thing when He's trying to get the attention of us, His children, because in the first three verses of this passage, God says the word "come" five times.

He uses the word come as a show of abundance – of what is possible beyond ourselves, of the richness of a life with Him. And He instructs us on why we should come, where we should come, what we should do when we come. Are you thirsty? Come. And when you do come – come *to the waters*, buy *what you need*. More than anything, *come to Me*.

I remember running after my son when he was two, "Come here, Zechariah!" I was full on pregnant with baby #2, and my son thought this was a game. I stopped running, hoping *he* would stop before reaching the edge of the cement barrier – a barrier between us and the lake below. He tried to stop, teetering on the edge, but it was too late. Over he tumbled into the waters of Lake Washington. I jumped into the lake and grabbed him as he lay face down in the water. I didn't scold him. I picked him up and held him tightly.

In the same way, when we run away from God and find ourselves in a precarious position, he doesn't scold us. He grabs us, picks us up and holds us too – tightly. He whispers, come. "Come here, Lori! Come to Me because your thoughts are not My thoughts, your ways are not My ways. Come. I have what you need *in abundance*." We come, we die, we rise. An Easter within. We come so that our soul may live.

*Lord, help me to remember to come to You. When I am weary, or when I am overwhelmed with life, or don't even want to come to you, please turn my heart towards you. I want to come and receive from your deep abundance. In this season of Easter, raise me up with You.*

**April 5, 2017**

*Psalm 27*

Hannah Martin, English Creative Writing Major, Philosophy Minor, Class of 2018

Psalm 27 reminds me of running your finger against a wooden table only to come away with a splinter. *The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?* I read this and reality seems to decry against this statement. *Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear,* I repeat these words knowing that I am afraid, and that this fear is warranted in a world rife with systemic evil and broken rhythms. I wonder, where do we go from here, when the words, *I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living* feel more like a far-off hope than a tangible future, when fear seems closer than faith? In the space Lent provides, this question blooms like an unmasked-for flower.

Perhaps it is in the recognition of our own fear and the contrast of our hope to our reality that faith draws near. When I am face to face with the darkness of the world and the darkness in my own heart, when the days draw heavy around me, and when offering a sacrifice with a shout of joy feels like an impossible cry, I turn towards the Psalm and let the words act as a prayer. It is not so much that the Psalm exists as an affirmation, but as an invocation.

When I am incapable of trust, I press into the space afforded by Lent and ask for belief to emerge in the absence of all else. *Wait for the Lord*—this waiting is not a call to inaction, but to exhumation within ourselves. As we wait, we work, we seek to make right the violence we press against, we learn to face each other with more grace and compassion, and we repeat the words of a prayer we yearn to be made into, a prayer that often feels like lighting a candle against the darkness. It is the repetition of this action that shapes us. And it is in our shaping that we are able to respond to the world.

*Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud*—in my wrestling, ruminating, yearnings, be near. In my movements, be known.

**April 6, 2017**

*Philippians 3:17-4:1*

Destinee Nelons, Theology Major (Educational Ministry), Class of 2018

In the state of our world, I often find myself caught between pain and hope. Many people have voiced their cries of 'where is God in the midst of our struggle?' These laments are real, they are valid. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul encourages believers to remain steadfast in communities that will build them up and turn them toward God. We cannot bear the work of the kingdom on our own, which is why we gain our identity within the body of Christ.

Evil is present in this world, and I must acknowledge this tragic reality to effectively understand what needs to be done, and where redemption is needed. There are people who live as enemies of Christ. This even comes from within the church community, from those who claim to be Christian, yet live in contradiction to what Jesus was working towards. As humans, we are susceptible to falling into distraction from the various spheres of our world. As the body of Christ, however, we have one common factor that is not weakened by state or national lines. We are called to band together with our brothers and sisters across the world and stand firm for the kingdom of God.

We await this time when the Lord comes and establishes the harmony we have been groaning for through the ages. Until then, we must find redemptive work in the community of followers. We must allow the face of God to be seen through the work of *our* hands. We must not lose sight or turn our eyes from God, but rather seek him to learn what our next step is. Where is God amidst struggle? He is right here among us, waiting for us to listen and make a move for His kingdom.

**April 7, 2017**

*Ephesians 2:1-10*

Rod Stiling, Associate Professor of History

Like most of us, I too have been completely disarmed and won over by God's generous and measureless *grace* toward all of broken humankind, but most especially toward me. This unbelievable idea, more perhaps than any of astonishing theological truths that I was trying to grasp in college as a new follower of Christ, drew me into a full and committed trust relationship with our Creator. The mysterious notion--that the Creator and Sustainer of the universe would not only desire a love and trust relationship with me, but also would provide all of the necessary essentials to make it happen and keep it going--gradually solidified into a bedrock of faith for my own Christian experience.

In this passage, Paul develops the theme of God's gracious love in Christ reaching into the deepest and darkest depths of death and raising us to life by His mercy and love. The culminating words of this important stretch of the epistle are found in verses 8-10:

*For you have been saved by grace through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

These weighty and welcoming words constitute some of the densest theological language in the New Testament, almost more than we can take in. One great way to consider these two sentences is simply to take pen in hand and write the words out longhand, proceeding slowly, and pausing to consider each of these remarkable and powerful key concepts: Grace. Saved. Faith. Not of ourselves. Gift. Works. Boast. Workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus. Good works. Prepared beforehand. Walk.

Even better, I found, is to write out the passage in the first person singular and listen to the message being spoken to us each individually:

*For I have been saved by grace through faith; and that not of myself, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that I might not boast. For I am His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that I should walk in them.*

And then we see a paradoxical wonder: we ourselves (both individually and as a collective body) constitute both God's *project*--the object of His craftsmanship, as He graciously shapes us into Christlikeness and corporate wholeness-- as well as His *agents*, who are to live into the good works that He Himself intends for us. Because of the gracious salvation and restoration we have received, let us therefore gratefully embrace the twin realities that we stand both as God's project and God's agents, and remember "that He who began a good work in us will perfect it."

**April 8, 2017**

*Isaiah 43:16-21*

Kelsey Rorem, Associate Director of Campus Ministries

Sometimes the way before us seems impossible, doesn't it? Sometimes we look all around and all we can see is barrier after barrier toward the fulfillment of God's Kingdom. Sometimes we wonder if faith, hope, and love will really emerge victorious in the end, or if death will have the final word.

The prophetic words of Isaiah 43:16-21 speak courage and new vision into these spaces. We are reminded that we serve a God "who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters." In this is a call to lift our heads so that we can see; a call to tune our ears in order that we might hear. New life is springing up all around us—streams of living water quenching our thirst as we journey through barren deserts.

These days of Lent have carried us through reflections on death, sin, and brokenness. And even beyond this church season perhaps you have been experiencing death, sin, and brokenness as your everyday reality. Sisters and brothers, it will not always be so. For we serve a God who is faithful to fulfill each and every one of God's promises.

As we turn toward Holy Week, let us be attentive to the ways in which God is doing a new thing all around us. Let us be people who are quickened to life as we drink from these living springs, or step foot on a clear path amid the wilderness. The darkness may feel heavy all around us, but redemption is on its way.

*Creating, redeeming, and sustaining God, in our weariness, give us a foretaste of your Kingdom to come, for we yearn to see you.*

**April 9, 2017- Palm Sunday**

*Matthew 21:1-11*

Deb Nondorf, Minister of Discipleship- Campus Ministries

How do I hang on to hope in the midst of uncertainty, sorrow, or fear? The story is always the same for me: one of struggle and of hope. Does my struggle lead to hope? Does my hope sustain me in struggle?

Hope. This word is the work of my life. I do not come by hope easily or naturally. Yet hope persists. It insists, really, that I pay attention to the possibility. In the Tuscan region of Italy, there is a phrase, 'speriamo' which means always we have hope. What caught my attention when first stumbling upon these words was "always." Always, Lord, always? Even when people disappoint me, or worse, I disappoint myself? Yes. Even when the way of the world is foreboding, and I can't see a way forward? Yes.

Even when I know how this week ends? Yes. Hope because I do know how this week ends, not on Friday, but on another Sunday. This, then, is what today brings to me: the hope that swells among those around me, and the hope that dwells within me. To catch a glimpse of the possibilities that this Jesus brings. To follow his lead with humility. To hope.

Blessed is the one  
who comes to us  
by the way of love  
poured out with abandon.

Blessed is the one  
who walks toward us  
by the way of grace  
that holds us fast.

Blessed is the one  
who calls us to follow  
in the way of blessing,  
in the path of joy.

- Jan Richardson

**April 10, 2017**

*John 12:1-11*

Derick Harris, Director of Seminary Administration

*Towards Remembering Our Sisters*

The time was just before Passover, the location was Bethany, and the setting and occasion were to banquet with and honor the One called Christ. Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and the disciples were all in attendance. And if you're familiar with the previous episode of John's gospel, you know that Lazarus and his siblings had reason to feast. After all, Jesus had recently performed the miracle of restoring life to Lazarus—but not without also making matriarchs of Martha and Mary.

A careful reading of John 12:1-11 reveals something that can easily be overlooked: contrasting behaviors. The sisters described in the eleventh chapter of John's Gospel are depicted as mournful and anxious pallbearers situated in grief and loss, while the sisters described in the twelfth chapter are depicted as ministers with new and embodied commitments to service and sacrifice (John 12:12-19).

Although it is rather easy to give attention to the obvious occasion of the text (a banquet to recognize Christ and his raising of Lazarus from the dead), one mustn't neglect this transformation within Martha and Mary. Christ had certainly raised Lazarus from death, however, He didn't do so without also raising these sisters from the grips of lament to a new level of leadership.

If you're familiar with the synoptic Gospels, you know that John's Gospel beats to a different drum. That is to say, the author's intent isn't necessarily to portray a chronological order of events. John often shifts his narrative towards themes. Therefore, I believe it to be no coincidence that John positioned the actions of Martha and Mary so close to Palm Sunday. Is it possible to understand the actions of Martha and Mary as pivotal factors leading to Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem? And if so, might we gather that service and sacrifice are not as far from triumph as we may be led to think?

**April 11, 2017**

*John 12:20-36*

May Tag Yang, Graduate Enrollment Counselor & Seattle Pacific Seminary Student

Before I relocated to Seattle, my sister and I ventured to Yosemite National Park—we lived about two hours away. Luckily, she had never been and wanted to go, and the trip was on my list of things to do before I left California. On the way there, is a lookout called the Wawona Tunnel View, in order to get there you must drive through a long tunnel. The actual tunnel itself, dark and smelly, is forgettable because when you come out of it, you are greeted with the most spectacular view. Before your eyes are giant granite monoliths surrounded by greenery, onlookers exchange oohs and awes, and your sense of smell is taken over by the aroma of ponderosa pine, incense-cedar, white fir and giant sequoia trees. You hear the shutter and flashes of cameras and your gaze fixates, attempting to capture the very image canvassed before you! All is well. Your body and mind are no longer preoccupied with the uneventful murky tunnel; something of the past because of the present view that has captivated your entire being.

As I think about the life and personhood of Jesus I think of this experience with my sister at the Wawona Tunnel View. The darkness of our world and my sins are heavy burdens that overshadow His light. But Jesus invites me to live into the present moment, to gaze upon Him, and to allow this *light* to engulf me. Staying in darkness is an isolating and desolate place to be.

Thus, the challenge for us this Lenten season is to choose to embody *and* walk in this light. Jesus said: “Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you.” What needs to happen for you to embody this light? What are you inclined to, the light or the darkness?



**April 12, 2017**

*John 13:21-30*

Phillip Ferrell, Minister of Worship- Campus Ministries

Here in John 13, starting with the 21st verse, Jesus explains that one of the twelve would betray him. As expected, the disciples look around confused wondering who and what Jesus was talking about. In an aside conversation, Simon Peter asked Jesus who is the traitor. Jesus' response is where we will land today. Jesus makes two statements that remind us "He still covers us".

*He Hears and Answers Us*

I think it's safe to assume that you are one who spends time with Jesus (considering you are reading a devotional series currently). In a world where nothing seems to be cut and dry, we are often looking for a simple direct response, yet more frequently than not we are still left wanting. Jesus shows us that he does care about us, and he simply just answered Peter's question. This scripture reminds us that when we are close to Him, He hears us and He answers us.

*He Still Loved Judas*

Considering where we are in the story of Jesus on Earth, He could have very easily exposed Judas as the one who was to soon betray Jesus, but He did not. How many times do we know the truth about someone, but choose to keep it concealed? Yep, if you were like me, not as many times as we'd care to share. Maybe not at all. Jesus reminds us that he is our covering. Even when we are completely wrong to Him, He still loves us enough to cover us.

In conclusion, let us pray:

*Lord, thank you for reminding us that You desire to be close to us and Your desire is for us to want to be close to You. We thank You that you hear us and answer us. We thank you that you cover us.*

*Lord, continue to forgive us of our acts of betrayal against You. Thank you for loving us beyond our sin and still allowing us to come close to You. We thank You that You cover us.*

*It is in Your name Jesus we pray, Amen.*

**April 13, 2017- Maundy Thursday**

*John 13:1-17, 31b-35*

Joshua McBrayer, Program Coordinator- Center for Biblical and Theological Education

When I read this text what strikes me most is that Jesus knows all that is going to happen because the father revealed it to him. He knows that “his hour had come to depart from this world,” additionally he knows “who was to betray him.” Yet with that knowledge, his response is to wash everyone’s feet. I don’t think this is something I would do if put in a similar situation.

Sometimes when I watch a movie or read a book where I, as the “viewer”, know more than the characters know, my mind starts to race. I am thinking about the possible scenarios that might play out. When something bad is obviously going to happen in the story I think through how to mitigate the negative results, how to get the character out of the bind they’re in. In this passage Jesus, in some respects, has the same “viewer” knowledge, and yet doesn’t act on it to save himself or stop his impending death. Instead, he washes everyone’s feet, including the feet of his betrayer. This seems odd to me and begs the question, “what just happened?”

Fortunately, this is one of those somewhat rare instances where Jesus actually explains himself. In this act, he demonstrates a radically different love than they know, than the world knows. He goes on to tell them, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

And so I, as someone who counts myself a follower of this Jesus, am left asking, “Am I living out this ‘foot-washing’ sort of love in my life?” furthermore, “Am I loving my ‘betrayers’ in this way?”

## **April 14, 2017- Good Friday**

*John 18:1-19:42*

Ben Crook, Sociology and Theology Major, Class of 2018

The events of Good Friday paint a distinctly potent image through which we can peer into the inseparable communion between a faithful God and Her fickle people: Out of unfathomable love and mercy, Jesus subjects himself to the Cross—to unbearable suffering, to mockery, and to death at the hands of humanity—out of self-emptying love. In return, we, like Judas and the Pharisees, often come to him “with lanterns and torches and weapons.” (Jn. 18.3) Or like Peter, we deny the very truths that we claim to be the cornerstone of our lives.

When faced with uncertainty or danger, we quickly abandon our God in search of the comforts and safeties of this world. Even as God became flesh, we missed His presence; when God looks on us directly, we often miss His gaze; when God says “I have said nothing in secret” (Jn. 18.20), truth often remains obscured to our ears.

On this Good Friday, we feel the sharp sting of indicting culpability and guilt rightly shoved into the ribs of humanity. Today should be one spent on our knees as we lament and confess our complicity in systems of evil and injustice, our passive participation in mechanisms that stifle God’s image-bearing witnesses. To live into a Christian identity requires that we bring to a boiling point our lukewarm and moderate witness pointing towards truth, justice and love. We confess that we are not so different from Judas or Peter; we crucify righteousness and bury truth just as they did.

Today, as we reflect on Jesus—crucified and nailed to a cross—let us be a people moved to respond accordingly. Christ’s crucifixion demands from us a life of discipleship marked with an obedience that is disruptive, a faith that subverts, and a prophetic voice that speaks truth to power. We are prompted to resist apparatuses and systems of injustice so as to embody a holy resistance against the “Kingdoms” of this earth that crucify God’s redemptive work in the world. Today, as we reflect on Christ’s lifeless body hanging on the Cross, we pray for the courage to live each day in accordance to the tragic reality of Christ’s willing sacrifice, and the world’s rejection of that love.

**April 15, 2017- Holy Saturday**

*Job 14:1-14*

Bruce Baker, Associate Professor of Business Ethics

“But man dieth, and wasteth away: Yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?” [Job 14:10, KJV]

Job asks the age-old question. The question we cannot avoid. It follows our every turn, always close at heel, yet noiseless as sifting sand in the unseen hourglass that numbers our days. We mute the question with clamorous work and legacy dreams. But the question stands undeterred in the shadows of each day, waiting patiently for those chosen moments in which our soul turns restless and searches the horizon, straining to find the source of living water. In those determined moments, we hear the question once more, carried on the wind.

In the wake of the age-old question, there floats the utter incoherence of silence in response. This singular silence foreshadows the cross, and as we live, we hear the silence and see the shadow. We have arrived at Holy Saturday. Again. We live in it. Each day is Holy Saturday—a day of living with the futility of death while longing for communion with the only One who can break the silence. If there be one capable of answering the age-old question, his word must mean the shattering of this silence for all time, and the utter transformation of this mortal soul’s longing for life.

To hear the question answered is to receive eternal life.

*Lord, God, have mercy on us. Sustain us on this day of living with our brokenness, and guide us into hope even as we stand in the shadow of the cross.*

**April 16, 2017 – Easter Sunday**

*John 20:1-10*

**“Jesus Lives, and So Shall I”**

*Words:* Christian F. Gellert; *Music:* Johann Crüger

Jesus lives, and so shall I: death, where is your sting so threat'ning?  
Jesus for me chose to die, turned the grave to life unending.  
God shall raise me from the dust: Jesus is my hope and trust.

Jesus lives: his kingdom comes over earth as well as heaven.  
I shall rule with God's own Son through the grace that shall be given  
God shall raise me from the dust: Jesus is my hope and trust.

Jesus lives: his death atoned for my sin; I am forgiven.  
Rule my heart, O Lord enthroned: may my life be Spirit driven.  
God shall raise me from the dust: Jesus is my hope and trust.

Jesus lives: this truth is sure. What from Christ can separate me?  
Evil's pow'rs I shall endure; death nor hell can thwart my safety.  
God shall raise me from the dust: Jesus is my hope and trust.

Jesus lives: be not afraid! Take by faith God's promised surety.  
All our sins in Christ are paid: death is swallow'd up in vict'ry.  
God shall raise us from the dust: Jesus Christ, our hope and trust!

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**From the dust of Ash Wednesday  
to the glorious hope of Easter morn.**

**He is risen! He is risen indeed!**