

LENT

FOR MARRIED COUPLES

2023



MARRIAGE IN CHRIST



All scripture quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV) unless otherwise noted.

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Meditations by William C. Wacker

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Introduction

Lent is a penitential season. It is a good time to grow in love and holiness with our spouse. But it is not always easy for busy couples to find time to do Lenten practices together.

We offer this series to help you and your spouse stay connected during the holy season of Lent. All the Scripture readings are from the Catholic Lectionary for Lent, but the text is from the New Revised Standard version (NRSV) of the Bible. The daily readings in Lent do not change from year to year. However, since the feast of St. Joseph and the feast of the Annunciation fall on the same days each year (March 19th and March 25th respectively), they can show up at different places in the Lenten calendar. This year, the feast of St. Joseph falls on a Sunday and will be celebrated on Monday, February 20th. We will use the readings for those feast days when it is appropriate.

The Sunday readings follow a three-year cycle. We have listed all the readings for the current (2023) year, Year A. The gospel readings for the first two weeks of Lent recount the stories of the Temptation and the Transfiguration of the Lord. The readings are from the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and follow the three-year cycle.

We invite you to take a short time—about 20 minutes a day—to do something for your marriage. On Easter morning, you will find greater unity, an increased appreciation for learning more about each other, and a gratitude for the small ways you've chosen to show your love and affection.

Set yourself up for success! Pick a time of day you can be consistent with. Turn off your phones and other distractions. Light a candle. Sit close together and take turns reading the parts out loud. We have selected one of the daily readings for you to read each day. It is followed by a meditation, a time for quiet reflection, discussion, a blessing, and a prayer for unity.

You might be thinking . . .

“Pray together every day?! Really?!”

If you miss a day or two, don't worry! Start small—say, twice a week. Remember, each effort you make to pray and talk more with your spouse is a victory. Your marriage will grow stronger and you will be happier as a couple. You will begin to see God's grace and the Holy Spirit at work in your relationship. Your example will bring hope to the world.

“We barely see each other; we are running around crazy most days. How do we make time for this?”

Doing something is better than nothing at all. Maybe you just say the Lord's prayer together and offer up what's on your heart that day. Or, you can get creative. Take a break from work, set up a time to videochat, and read through the Scripture and meditation together. Or you can set the alarm an extra 10 minutes early and squeeze in prayer together.

“How will we know our efforts are working?”

At the end of a day or a week, think back to what happened. Was there a moment when you made the choice to withhold a negative comment? Did you choose to compliment your spouse, rather than tear him/her down? Did you smile when you thought about your spouse today? Have you seen an increase in your affection? Are you holding hands more? Are you laughing more? Are you willing to give each other the benefit of the doubt? Do you find yourself wanting to text each other more? These are all signs of the Holy Spirit at work in your marriage!

“How will we keep this up for all of Lent? How can we make it to Easter?”

Ask a friend to support you. Tell them what you intend to do. Give them permission to ask you how it’s going. Ask them to pray for you. Set reminders on your phone leading right up to Holy Week—something like “Have you connected with your spouse today?” Reward yourself! With your spouse, think about a fun thing you can look forward to at the end of each week if you pray 2–3 times together. A date night, a small gift, a massage, breakfast in bed . . . you get the idea.

Trust in the Lord and begin!

Note: Conversation starters and loving actions can be found on page 53.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18

"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁵ And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ¹⁶ And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Meditation

In Jesus' day, the word "hypocrite" meant "actor in the theater." These actors held masks in front of their faces. They spoke from behind them. They pretended to be someone they weren't in real life, just like actors today. As we begin Lent, Jesus reminds us not to pretend to be holy, but to be truly holy. Real holiness comes from inside us, from the heart. The best thing that happens in Lent is a change of heart—to draw closer to the Lord and to love one another better. If we ask the Lord to help us pray, fast, and give alms, then people will see our kindness, generosity, and service. The best thing is that we won't be pretending.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



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Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15–20

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Meditation

Our culture puts a huge premium on choice. We care, above all, about freedom, self-direction, and autonomy. It is all about our personal choice. However, in our culture we have so many choices that rather than bringing freedom, choice often brings paralysis. So, narrowing the options to two should be a great help. “Today, I have set before you life and death.” But if that is so helpful, why then the command to “choose life”? Isn’t it self-evident? Unfortunately, the great lie, the false god, of our day that lures so many astray is that we are autonomous, that we can direct ourselves. The antidote to that lie is the truth that life is found in obedience to the Lord. It is found in holding fast to him and his commandments. The most fundamental and freeing choice is not “What do I want?” but rather, “What does God want?” That is to choose life!

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Friday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:1–9a; Matthew 9:14–15

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Reading: Matthew 9:14–15

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."

Meditation

Imagine you are at a big wedding reception. Everyone is dressed up; there is music and laughter. The guests are enjoying the appetizers, the little kids are running around having a great time. All of a sudden, the D.J. or the host announces that the wedding party has arrived, and it is time for the grand entrance of the bride and groom. This is the real beginning of the party. Now it's time for the best food, the cake, and later the dancing. Nobody would think of fasting when the bride and groom are there. We fast now, because it seems that the Bridegroom has left for a while. We know he hasn't really left, but remains with us in the person of the Holy Spirit. But one day Jesus will return, and then the party will resume and never end.

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Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

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Reading: Luke 5:25–32

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." ²⁸ And he got up, left everything, and followed him. ²⁹ Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. ³⁰ The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" ³¹ Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; ³² I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Meditation

Tax collectors were despised by all the Jews, but especially by the zealously nationalistic Jews who lived in Galilee. Tax collectors were traitors and extortionists. They collected money for the hated Romans and the equally hated Herod. Roman soldiers and Herod's troops enforced not only the "lawful" tax, but also the exorbitant collector's fees that Levi and his collaborators would have charged. In addition, tax collectors dealt with Gentiles. They were unclean and thoroughly despised. Jesus would frequently have passed by Levi's booth on the main road to Capernaum. It was not far from Jesus' headquarters. What about Levi would have caught Jesus' eye and moved him to love Levi so? And what was Levi's response? He threw a big party and invited all his friends. But the only friends a tax collector had were other tax collectors. There in the midst of that great banquet, sitting at the table as an intimate friend, was Jesus. What is it about sinners that moves Jesus to take such a great risk? What moves Jesus to love without limits? Lent is the season in which we must make a choice. Are we like Levi and his friends at the banquet with Jesus, or are we like the Pharisees and the scribes standing outside the banquet room, unwilling to enter?

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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Reading: Matthew 4:1–11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Meditation

In the fourth week of the Marriage in Christ seminar, we prayed for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our marriages. It is not uncommon for that peak moment to be followed days or weeks later by our own visit to the wilderness of temptation. Ordinary life is filled with moments that can test our love for the Lord and our spouse: very sick children, aging parents, financial crises, and numbing routines. We can take comfort in today's reading; the Spirit did not abandon Jesus in the wilderness, nor will he abandon us. And we have a Lord who understands the big and little challenges in our daily lives; he will not leave us alone either. While the temptations and trials of Jesus will eventually lead to and through the cross, we know that there was a glorious ending in the resurrection. Lent is a time when we can allow the Lord to refine and purify our faith. We can allow him to deepen our confidence that we are never alone, and that our story will end in the resurrection as well.

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Reading: Matthew 25:31–40 (excerpt)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another. . . ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'”

Meditation

Christians invented hospitals and other social services. Even before medicines were discovered, the first Christians learned that food, water, a bath, clean clothes, and a warm place helped people get well and stay alive. All around them, people without Christian friends or family were dying. Those first believers did these kindnesses because Jesus said that to do them for the least of these was to do them for Jesus himself. Sometimes the Christians caught the diseases and died. But they did not fear death, because they believed in the resurrection and life after death. Eventually, hospitals and other social services became an organized way to put into practice our Lord's command to love one another. Today, think of some simple actions you can do as a couple to improve the lives of your neighbors, family members, and friends.

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Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



First Week of Lent: Tuesday

Isaiah 55:10–11; Matthew 6:7–15

Pray

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Reading: Isaiah 55:10–11

Thus says the Lord: for as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Meditation

Scripture tells the big story about the rescue of humanity and the restoration of creation. From creation to new creation; from the fall of mankind to the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and from the sending of his Spirit to our ordinary life in Christ, God's grand plan is revealed. It is a living word with the power to transform us, heal our brokenness, console us in our sorrows, encourage us in our weakness, challenge us to think clearly, and help us to resist the competing accounts of reality that are on offer in our culture. Daily reading and praying with Scripture allow the word of God to be like the rain and snow that come down from heaven to water our souls and to bring about our unity. They allow us to find the story of our marriage and family woven into the big story of God's great love. This Lent we are called to open ourselves individually and as a couple to that life-giving water that is the word of God. Let the word not return empty but succeed in its purpose.

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First Week of Lent: Wednesday

Jonah 3:1–10; Luke 11:29–32

Pray

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Reading: Luke 11:29–32

When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. ³⁰ For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation. ³¹ The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here! ³² The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!"

Meditation

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the nation that destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and nearly destroyed Jerusalem. They were a truly hated enemy, yet even they repented when Jonah, the reluctant prophet, a man who had made the whale sick, preached to them. The queen of the South, another foreigner, will experience the resurrection on the day of judgment, because she came to listen to Solomon and get wisdom from him. Foreigners repented and listened to Jonah and Solomon. But Jesus' own people would not listen to someone much greater than either Jonah or Solomon. Ouch! Lent is the time when we decide what role we are playing in this great drama. Do we listen to the one greater than Jonah and Solomon—or not?

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Reading: Matthew 7:7–12

"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰ Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! ¹² In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."

Meditation

Look at the action words Jesus uses: "ask," "search," "knock." He follows these with "it will be given," "you will find," "the door will open." But we know from experience that not every request is fulfilled to our specifications. Prayer is not magic, and we can't use God to get what we want. Our loved ones don't always recover from illness or injury. Our finances sometimes run short. Sometimes we must endure hardship and suffering. How then should we understand what Jesus was saying? How do we live with the mystery of suffering? Why continue to pray, if it doesn't work the way we want? This dilemma is about the nature of the Father and our relationship with him. Jesus' own life gives us a context. He asked his Father to let him forgo the intense suffering that awaited him in the crucifixion. We hear of the deep anxiety he felt: he sweated blood. He knew the Father would act, but that knowledge did not change the agony he experienced in the Garden. Jesus had to trust his Father, and he did: "not my will but yours be done." Jesus asked and searched and knocked. He was answered on the other side of his intense suffering and death. To say God's answers are often mysterious is not to take the easy way out, but to remind us that even when things are incomprehensible, we believe that our Father in heaven gives good things to those who ask him!

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Reading: Matthew 5:20–26

“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ²¹ You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Meditation

Imagine that you are on one of the natural amphitheaters that are on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. You have made the trip to Jerusalem many times in your life, and you know that it takes about three days to get there. Why is that important? Well, Jesus has just said that the next time you are in the courts of the Temple with the live animal you have just purchased for the sacrifice, and you remember that you have an issue with your brother that needs to be settled, you are to leave the animal there for the next week while you return to Galilee and reconcile. You may return to Jerusalem after you reconcile. Really? Does he mean that? Or is it a bit of an exaggeration that demonstrates how important and radical his teaching is? In either case, it would be best and easiest if you were to nip your anger in the bud before it causes damage to your relationships. Little hurts become big hurts, and if an entire people can't manage their anger, it leads nations to war. Lent is a time for us to repent, that is, change the way we think about anger. It is a time to root it out of our lives before it does damage.

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Reading: Matthew 5:43–48

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Meditation

What is God really like and how would we know it? It appears that God, the creator of the whole world, loves all human beings enough that he sends sun and rain on all of them— good and bad alike. He is unconditional in pouring out his love. How might the world know that about God? Well, first, they could see it in Jesus. He turned the other cheek and refused to be angry; he carried the Roman cross an extra mile; he forgave those who crucified him with his last breath. The world would know that about God, if they were to watch God's children do the same things that Jesus did. Then we would be perfect like our Father is perfect. I know; I can't be perfect either. So, what does "perfect" mean? The Greek word here is related to the word that describes God's work in creation. Genesis 2:1 says that creation was finished: complete, or whole. We are to be like the Creator, whole and complete, shining our light on the good and bad just like he does. That is how the world will know him.

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Second Sunday of Lent

Gen 12:1–4a; 2 Timothy 1:8b–10; Matthew 17:1–9

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--As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 17:1–9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Meditation

Imagine you are listening to your favorite author telling you your favorite story. You never tire of the story because you love the sound of his voice and the way the story ends. Then one day he surprises you with a big twist. How do you feel?

The Transfiguration is like that. You just love the story of God revealing his glory and the glory of Jesus here on Mount Tabor. The whole story of Israel is retold and transformed in this short, compact scene. But the last line, about being raised from the dead, alerts you to more, to a very surprising twist. God's glory will be fully revealed not here, but on another hill just outside Jerusalem. Jesus will be flanked not by Moses and Elijah, but by two criminals. There will be a voice not from the cloud, but from a Roman soldier, who says, "truly this is the Son of God." God's glory will be most clearly revealed in the total act of self-giving love on the cross. But wait; there is more. On Easter morning, the Son of Man will be raised from the dead. Now that is a great story!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Second Week of Lent: Monday

Daniel 9:4b–10; Luke 6:36–38

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 6:36–38

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. ³⁷ Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

Meditation

Look at the cross and be honest with yourself. Do you deserve to be forgiven? No, it is a gift, unlooked for, unwarranted, undeserved. Look at the cross. That is how merciful your Father is. See how much his love cost. We are invited to have our love for each other and for our children mirror that of the Father. It is a frightening invitation. But it holds the promise that whatever the cost, the reward will be beyond our comprehension. Think about a time that you had to ask for forgiveness for something you had done to hurt your spouse. Think about the great joy that accompanied the reconciliation. Unity was restored, joy returned, and your marriage was made stronger. This is what it is like to experience the kingdom of God breaking out in your marriage, in your family. It is also a foretaste of the reward that awaits us. This Lent, look at the cross through the Father’s eyes, and try to become a little more like him.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord’s Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Second Week of Lent: Tuesday

Isaiah 1:10, 16–20; Matthew 23:1–12

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 23:1–12

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, ² saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. ³ Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens (hard to carry) and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. ⁵ All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. ⁶ They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, ⁷ greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.' ⁸ As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. ¹⁰ Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you must be your servant. ¹² Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

(Translation from the New American Bible)

Meditation

"Do what I say, not what I do." Have you ever been tempted to say that to your children? Have you ever actually said that to your children? Children learn by watching us as parents. They learn to love, to be kind, and to reconcile. They also learn our bad habits. They notice what we watch on television, the games we play, the way we cheer for them at sporting events. What we do is vastly more important than what we say. If our words and deeds don't match, we will be discovered. It requires a great deal of humility to make our words and deeds match. Jesus was on his way to the cross when he said, "The greatest among you must be your servant." He showed the way by his actions. Lent is a time when we can work hard to align our words and our deeds.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Second Week of Lent: Wednesday

Jeremiah 18:18–20; Matthew 20:17–28

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 20:17–28 (Excerpt)

While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, ¹⁸ "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; ¹⁹ then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised." ²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. ²¹ And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." ²² But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." ²³ He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." ²⁴ When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ²⁶ It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; ²⁸ just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Meditation

James and John, whom Jesus named the "Sons of Thunder," had an ambitious mother. She wanted places of honor for her sons. Perhaps she can be excused because, after all, what parent doesn't want good things for his or her children? Who wouldn't want their children to be at the right and left of a king when he comes into his kingdom, to be right there when he ascends to his throne? She and her sons glibly told Jesus that they would drink the cup, would pay the price. Little did they understand the real cost. Where do we find ourselves in this story? Are we the ambitious parents? The "brave" brothers, who would be proved wrong when it came time to drink the cup? Do we identify with the other ten who complained? Do we seek to serve our spouse, our children, our community? It is possible that we have been all of these characters at one time or another.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 16:19–31

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' ²⁷ He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' ³⁰ He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Meditation

Did you notice that Jesus didn't mention the rich man's name? But the poor man has a name. He is Lazarus. Lazarus was very hungry and wanted only a few scraps of food. He sat outside the anonymous rich man's home, hoping that the rich man would give him something. But the rich man walked around or stepped over the poor man every day. Do you suppose that the rich man pretended that he didn't see him? The rich man stands for anyone who doesn't see the poor, even us. Jesus wants us to think about how often have we walked around or driven past the Lazaruses around us. Lent is the season when we hear Jesus say that the poor have names and we should see and help them.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Second Week of Lent: Friday

Genesis 37:3–4, 12–13a, 17b–28a; Matthew 21:33–43, 45–46

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 21:33–46

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ³⁴ When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵ But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰ Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?" ⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. ⁴⁴ The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls." ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Meditation

The Lord expects a return on his investment. In the Old Testament, the vineyard is God's people. He gave them a land, he watched over them; and he expected that they would be faithful to the covenant they had made with him and live in such a way as to be a light to the nations. When they were unfaithful and failed to produce fruit for him, he gave the vineyard to others. God has made an investment in us, and he expects a return. We have **a mission**; our marriages are not meant simply for ourselves. Our marriages serve the world by pointing beyond ourselves to the great mystery of God's love for his people, Christ's love for his bride the Church, and the mystery of the triune God. Our marriages and families are to be vital cells in the transformation of the world. That is the fruit our Lord is looking for. Today's gospel is a cautionary tale for us.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 15:11–24 (excerpt)

¹¹Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate."

Meditation

The younger son knew that it was possible the townsfolk would meet him at the outskirts of the village and severely beat him for the dishonor he had brought to his father, his family, and the town. He knew too that the best he could hope for was that his father would treat him like a hired hand or a slave. If that were to happen, he might be able to pay back some of the money he had squandered. But the father saw him from afar and, in a very costly act of love, ran out to meet his son before any harm could come to him. He wrapped his arms around his son and kissed him repeatedly. The young man's planned speech stopped short. He realized that he really was not worthy to be called "son"—but his father would have none of that. The father honored him with his finest robe, gave him the signet ring that was the seal of the family, and shoes for his feet. Slaves go barefoot; sons wear shoes. The father's mercy had restored the son who was dead to new life with the father.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

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-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 4:5–42 (excerpt)

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." ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" 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."

Meditation

The sun was high, and it was hot. It was the middle of the day—not the usual time of the day for a woman to gather water at the local well. She came alone. This was also not usual; just as gathering water was done in the cool of the day, it was also done with the other women from the village. This was part of the social fabric that held the tight-knit community together. It made the heavy daily chore of hauling precious water more bearable. But she was an outcast, spurned by the others because of her complicated—some would say disgraceful—marital status.

But that day, she was surprised to find out that she was not alone. A strange man was sitting on the edge of the well. He looked tired and thirsty, and contrary to the usual custom of such encounters, he did not move a respectful distance away so that she could draw water. He sat there, letting her approach. And then he spoke to her and changed her life.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

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-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 4:24–30

And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. ²⁵ But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷ There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Meditation

Nazareth was a small settlement in a hostile environment. Jews had moved in to take back the land from the hated Gentiles. They believed that God would act and when he did, he would bless Israel and take vengeance on the Gentiles; he would smite the unclean and all their enemies. But Jesus had skipped that line when he quoted Isaiah 61. He omitted "a day of vengeance for our God." They shouted, "Isn't he Joseph's son? Didn't he grow up here? Doesn't he know how we think here in Nazareth?" Jesus had indicated that not only would God not smite the Gentiles, but he actually came for them and not for the "true believers" in Nazareth! "Grab him," they shouted, "throw him off the cliff!" Not yet. It was not time for Jesus to die at their hands, but it was a dark foreshadowing of the type of reception he would receive from the equally zealous Jews in Jerusalem at a Passover in the near future. Lent is the season in which we try to grasp the extraordinary love of Jesus for all human beings—even the ones with whom we are at odds.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 18:21–35

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. ²³ For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Meditation

When Jesus told stories, he loved to exaggerate. He wants you to imagine two people who owe someone more money than they can repay. The first person—let's call him Pat—owes his boss the largest amount of money you can imagine. Pick a really big number and then multiply it by a million—and you are close! If Pat lived a thousand lifetimes, he could not repay that debt. But the boss forgave it! Now the second person—let's call her Joanna—owes Pat about what she would make in four months. Unfortunately, it is more than she can pay. Now, instead of Pat and his boss, it is you who owe God so much more than you can pay; but God says, "I forgive you." Then, instead of Joanna, use the name of your spouse, your children, your friends, or whoever you need to forgive. Now, how often should you forgive?

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 5:17–19

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Meditation

Consider the awesome responsibility we have as parents and, for some of us, as grandparents. When we teach our children how to keep the law, we will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. But how do we do that? In the simple words and deeds of ordinary daily life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our actions teach our children, even more loudly than our words, how to pray, how to reconcile, how to worship, and how to express gratitude. Lent is the time when we can intentionally begin to develop habits that will lead to greatness in the kingdom of heaven.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Third Week of Lent: Thursday

Jeremiah 7:23–28; Luke 11:14–23

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 11:14–23

Now he was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. ¹⁵ But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." ¹⁶ Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven. ¹⁷ But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house. ¹⁸ If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?—for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹ Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. ²¹ When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. ²² But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder. ²³ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Meditation

There is a beautiful mosaic on the ceiling of the baptistry of the main church in Florence, Italy. Of the many images that are depicted, one of the most striking is a hideous picture of the devil with the legs of a man sticking out of his mouth. It evokes 1 Peter 5:8: "Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour." I was looking at it with a friend who was doing doctoral work in moral theology at one of the prestigious universities in Rome. He turned to me and said, "I'm glad we don't think like that anymore." I said, "Like what?" He replied, "You know, the devil devouring people. No one believes there is a devil anymore." I felt a little old-fashioned, because I did and do believe that he exists. What is at stake? If there is no devil, then Jesus is very mistaken about the real enemy of humankind. And even if the devil does exist, if Jesus is casting out demons by the power of the devil, then he is in league with our mortal enemy. But believing that Jesus has defeated our enemy and established his kingdom means we believe that we are saved. It also means we must change to enter his kingdom. The really good news is that change is possible, because Jesus has defeated our very real enemy.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Mark 12:28–34

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ³² Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; ³³ and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Meditation

The central prayer of Israel, the prayer that separated this people from every other people in the world, was "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one." There is, contrary to what everyone else in the world was saying, only **ONE** God. All the other "gods" are mere idols. What the good scribe and the whole audience did not yet understand was that Jesus was expanding the notion of **Oneness** to include himself and the Holy Spirit. One God, three persons. But how is it that three can be ONE? It is the mystery of deep personal love. It is a love that seeks to live one life with the other, to be one with the other without losing our own identity. We are invited to participate in that relationship of love with our whole soul, mind, and strength. That mystery of love then includes our neighbors—the closest of whom is our spouse.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



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Reading: Luke 18:9–14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ 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. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' ¹³ 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!' ¹⁴ 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."

Meditation

The Pharisee was standing off by himself in the Temple. He distanced himself from the rest of the worshipers, lest he be made unclean by them. His prayer was more like a resume of pious actions than an actual prayer. In his own mind, he was clearly better than everyone else. He was not afraid to say it out loud for everyone to hear how he went over and above what the law required. His "resume" was his proof of his righteousness! The tax collector was a sinner, and he knew it. He stood far off, not out of pride, but barely hoping that God would have mercy on him. Two men standing apart, but for very different reasons. This Lent we are invited to identify with one of these characters. Which one are we?

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

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Reading: John 9:1–41 (excerpt)

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. . . . ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." . . . ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." . . . ²⁴ For the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." . . . ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."

Meditation

Physical sight is a precious gift indeed, but it is not as precious as "seeing" and "believing" in the person of Jesus, who is the true light of this world. But the world and his own people did not comprehend the light that was in their midst. "In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not understand." And worse, even "his own people did not accept him" (John 1:4–5,11). We are invited to find ourselves in this story. Are we one of his own people who claim to see, but are actually blind? Or are we the formerly blind man, saying with our words and our lives, "I was blind, but now I see"? Lent is the time for us to choose to live in the light.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 1:16, 18–21, 24a

Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. ¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

Meditation

It seems a bit out of place to be recalling the Christmas story in Lent. However, the feast of St. Joseph today and the feast of the Annunciation on Saturday give us a chance to reflect on the dignity of marriage and family. When God was free to do anything he wanted, what he chose to do is revelatory. In this case, he chose to become a human being and entered the world by becoming part of a human family. He underscored for all time the importance of having a father and a mother. The complementarity of husband and wife provided two indispensable ingredients in the human life of the incarnate son of God. While his conception was out of the ordinary, Jesus, the human child, needed to be brought up by a loving father and mother. Let the blending of the two seasons, Lent and Christmas, cause us to marvel at the complementarity of Joseph and Mary. Only a man could do what Joseph did. Only a man could be the human stepfather of Jesus. Only a woman could do what Mary did. Only a woman could be the mother of God. God told Joseph that was what he wanted for Jesus, and Joseph said yes!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Fourth Week of Lent: Tuesday

Ezekiel 47:1–9, 12; John 5:1–16

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

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Reading: (excerpt) John 5:1–9

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ² Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. ³ In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵ One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" ⁷ The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." ⁸ Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." ⁹ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath.

Meditation

Not far from the Temple was a pool that people believed had magical healing powers. If you were the first one in the pool when the water was stirred, you would be healed. It was like winning the lottery: it happened, but not often. The poor man in this story was waiting there for thirty-eight years. Then something better than winning the lottery happened. Jesus came into his life. "Do you want to be healed?" he asked. Jesus told the man to stand up and walk—and he did! Jesus spoke, and the man was healed. It was not magical power, but the power of love.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

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Pray

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Reading: John 5:17–32

But Jesus answered them, "My Father is still working, and I also am working." ¹⁸ For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God. 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. 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. ³⁰ I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³¹ If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true."

Meditation

There is an eruv wire that circles Jerusalem today. It is designed to create a symbolic enclosure that allows observant Jewish communities to link several private and public spaces together into one larger private area. In the enclosed space they can carry objects like keys, tissues, medicines, use strollers and canes outdoors on the Sabbath. The presence or absence of an eruv thus especially affects the lives of people with limited mobility and those responsible for taking care of babies and young children. That is how seriously the Jews take and took the command to not work on the Sabbath. Both the formerly lame man and Jesus "worked" on the Sabbath. Jesus got into even more serious trouble when he said that he was just doing what he saw his Father doing. If God the Father causes children to be born on Sabbath or if he calls them home in death, then the Father is working on Sabbath. Jesus is simply acting like a good son in doing what his father is doing. They understood what he was saying and wanted to kill him.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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Reading: John 5:31–47

"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. ³³ You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. ³⁴ Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶ But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, ³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent. ³⁹ You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. ⁴⁰ Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. ⁴¹ I do not accept glory from human beings. ⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? ⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?"

Meditation

According to Jewish law and practice, it was not permitted to charge someone with a capital crime without at least two witnesses. For that matter, two or three witnesses were required for any criminal accusation. One needed two or three witnesses to the signing of a deed or to verify a prophetic action. So, it is not surprising that Jesus said, in essence, "Don't take my word for it; but I have witnesses." Who were Jesus' witnesses? John the Baptist, his Father in heaven, and the Scriptures, including Moses. But as it said in the prologue to this gospel (John 1:11), "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him." In Lent we, like the Jews, are confronted with the testimony of three witnesses. What will we do?

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

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Reading: John 7:1–2, 10, 25–30

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. ² Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. ¹⁰ But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. ²⁵ Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill?" ²⁶ And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? ²⁷ Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." ²⁸ Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. ²⁹ I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me." ³⁰ Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.

Meditation

The festival of Booths was another of the great festivals that celebrated the national hope of Israel that she would be rescued from her enemies—in this case, the hated Roman oppressors. But it was not this fall festival that would provide the stage for Jesus' dramatic action of rescuing the nation. That would occur during the spring festival of Passover, when the paschal lamb was slain. But the question here is, how can you really know if someone is the Messiah? There was one tradition that said that the Messiah would almost magically or miraculously appear, and no one would know where he came from. Since they knew where Jesus was from, he couldn't possibly be the Messiah. Jesus' response is filled with deep irony. Hear what he says as a statement, then as a question. "You know where I'm from: Galilee." "You know where I'm from? The Father!" So, you don't really know where I'm from; that means I am the Messiah. It is easy to hear what Jesus says and does at one level. But listen again: he is speaking and acting at another level altogether. Lent is the season when we must listen carefully too.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Fourth Week of Lent: Saturday

March 25, Feast of the Annunciation. Isaiah 7:10–14; Hebrews 10:4–10; Luke 1:26–38

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 1:26–38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do

not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most

High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be,

since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here

am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Meditation

We have another familiar passage from the Christmas season set in the midst of Lent. It should cause a bit of disruption in our Lenten journey, like an unexpected chord in a piece of music. In the big story of God's rescue of the world, the entry of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity as a small child is itself a disconcerting note. It is profoundly surprising. Now in Lent, we are reminded that there are some darker moments ahead for this child before he is finally revealed in all his glory on the cross and in his resurrection from the dead on Easter morning. Today we also reflect on the role Mary played when she said yes, allowing the Holy Spirit to come upon her and the power of the Most High to overshadow her. We are invited to play a similar role. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to fill us and our marriage with the power of the Most High!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



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Reading: John 11:1–45 (excerpt)

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." ²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was **greatly disturbed in spirit** and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸ Then Jesus, again **greatly disturbed**, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Meditation

The English words "he was greatly disturbed in spirit" translate a Greek phrase which can be used to describe the sound made by an angry warhorse. In Jesus, God came face to face with one of the great enemies of humankind: death. In Jesus, God shares our grief and anger. In Jesus, God defeats our great enemy. One day our grief will be transformed into unimaginable joy. While we wait for that day, our hope is in the resurrection.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 8:1–11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Meditation

How do religious leaders catch a woman in adultery? And where is the man? The law prescribes the death penalty for both (Leviticus 20:10). This clearly isn't about justice; it's a trap for Jesus. If Jesus agrees that she is guilty and calls for her to be stoned, a riot will ensue, and Jesus will be arrested for inciting violence. The Romans did not permit the Jews to carry out capital punishment, and they dealt severely with those who caused unrest. But, if Jesus goes against the law of Moses, he will be discredited. The impossible choice is between provoking Rome and following Moses. It is not recorded what he wrote in the dust, but when stood up he offered them the same choice: provoke Rome, or follow Moses. They knew that the first one to throw a stone would be arrested by the Romans. Jesus had shamed them into slinking away. But then he revealed the real justice and mercy of God. He said to her, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and do not sin again."

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

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Reading: John 8:21–30

Again he said to them, "I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." ²² Then the Jews said, "Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?" ²³ He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. ²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." ²⁵ They said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Why do I speak to you at all? ²⁶ I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him." ²⁷ They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. ²⁹ And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him." ³⁰ As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Meditation

Over the next three days (as we continue in the Lenten readings from John 8), the tensions will escalate to the point where the Jews will attempt to kill Jesus. But even before we get to the end of chapter 8, even at this point in the story, we can imagine the pain and disappointment that Jesus must be experiencing. He has come to his own people. He has come to rescue them. He pleads, "You will die in your sins if you don't believe that **"I am."** Oops, what did he just say? All they need to do is believe that he is **"I am"**? That sounds suspiciously like a short form of the name of Israel's God. Hear the challenge from the crowd, this time louder: "Who are you!?" Jesus simply says, "When you see the Son of Man lifted up, then you will realize that **I am."** On the cross, God, who is total self-giving love will be fully revealed in all of his glory. Amazingly, some in the crowd here believe him. But the tension is only building.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

Share one idea with your spouse.

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Reading: John 8:31–42

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." ³³ They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. ³⁸ I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father." ³⁹ They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, ⁴⁰ but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹ You are indeed doing what your father does." They said to him, "We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me."

Meditation

Ethnic identity, that is, being a child of Abraham, was one of the most important Jewish symbols after Temple and Torah—and now we hear Jesus challenge that central symbol. Again, this scene would be laughable if it didn't end in attempted murder. Hear the angry crowd shout, "We are not illegitimate. We know who our father is. Do you, Jesus? We've heard the rumors about Joseph and Mary." "Abraham is our father. We have one father, God himself." Oh, the irony. They are talking to the only-begotten Son of the Father and calling him illegitimate. Jesus responds that if God were really their father, they would welcome him, because they would be brothers. Alas, their father is really not either Abraham or God; rather, their father is the devil himself, as Jesus will point out in the next few verses of this chapter. Jesus is challenging their ethnic identity. If they were legitimate children of Abraham, they would be doing what their father did: they would believe in Jesus. But they are acting like their real father, the devil. This can't possibly end well for Jesus.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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Reading: John 8:51–59

[Jesus said,] "Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death."⁵² The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.'⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?"⁵⁴ Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, 'He is our God,'⁵⁵ though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word.⁵⁶ Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad."⁵⁷ Then the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?"⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am."⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Meditation

"How can you promise that someone won't die? Even Abraham and the prophets died. Who do you think you are? Do you think you are you greater than Abraham?" I suppose it is unfair to have expected the crowd to have read the prologue to John's Gospel, where we learn that Jesus is the Word of God come to dwell with humanity. It is also not fair to expect them to have read chapters 20 and 21, where we learn about the resurrection. But they could have trusted Jesus, who had already proven himself to them. In time they would have found out the whole truth. It is tragically ironic that they are looking at Abraham's God and asking him if he thinks he is greater than Abraham. Well, yes, he is. But is that what Jesus is really claiming? Yes! "Before Abraham was, **I am.**" They tried to kill him, but it wasn't time yet.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



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Reading: John 10:31–42

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" ³³ The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'?" ³⁵ If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods'—and the scripture cannot be annulled—³⁶ can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'? ³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. ³⁸ But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." ³⁹ Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. ⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. ⁴¹ Many came to him, and they were saying, "John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." ⁴² And many believed in him there.

Meditation

It is winter now. This scene follows what Jesus said about being the good shepherd. He was co-opting another of their great national festivals: Hanukkah, the festival that celebrates the cleansing of the Temple at the time of the Maccabean revolt. Why were they trying to kill him this time? Well, he had just said that he and the Father are one. The central prayer of Judaism, the prayer they would have said every day, is "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is **One**." Jesus has said, "Before Abraham was, **I am**." And now he says, "The Father and I are **One**." With his word and actions, Jesus is saying that the temple is corrupt, and Yahweh has returned to make things right. Only, the Temple is not a building. The Temple, the unique dwelling place of God on earth, is a person. It is Jesus. The Temple building will be judged and destroyed, but he will be vindicated as the true Temple.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

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Reading: John 11:45–56

Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰ You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." ⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. ⁵³ So from that day on they planned to put him to death. ⁵⁴ Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples. ⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?"

Meditation

Prophecy is not really about revealing the future. The prophets of Israel did much more than that. They delivered God's word to their own people. It is appropriate that the high priest would prophecy. Again, the irony is that Caiaphas the man meant one thing and Caiaphas the high priest/prophet meant something else entirely. What did Caiaphas the man mean? He meant that Jesus had become a political nuisance, and therefore he must go. Revolution was in the air and the people were expecting a Messiah. They longed for a king to lead them in a battle that would overthrow the hated Romans. The Romans were nervous because the city was being flooded by pilgrims, whose hopes for deliverance were well known to them. Whether Jesus posed a real threat to Rome was not Caiaphas' concern. He was afraid that the Romans would react as they usually do to would-be kings, with great violence. The Romans were brutal in putting down insurrection. He knew that it would be better for one man to die than to provoke the Romans' brutal reaction. He was right, but for the wrong reason. Jesus and his Father had something else entirely in mind.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

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Palm Sunday

Procession: Matthew 21:1–11; Isaiah 50:4–7; Philippians 2:6–11;

Passion: Matthew 26:14–27:66

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

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Reading: Matthew 21:1–11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately. " ⁴ This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, ⁵ "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." ⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Meditation

Over 175 years before Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt, the Jews celebrated the defeat of a great enemy and the cleansing of the temple. They waved palm branches, sang songs, and shouted hymns of praise to God. Many years before that great event, one of the prophets said that the King they were waiting for would ride triumphantly on the back of a colt. So with this grand action, Jesus is saying, "I am the king you are waiting for, and I will defeat your greatest enemy." They probably thought he meant the Romans. What they didn't know was that their greatest enemy was sin and death. Within one week they would crucify the one they were proclaiming as their king. The other thing they didn't know was that Jesus was offering himself out of his great love. And on Easter morning, he would rise triumphantly from the dead.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



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Reading: John 12:1–11

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." ⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Meditation

Jesus did not have to come to Jerusalem to restore his friend Lazarus to life; he could have healed him from afar, as he did for the royal official's son. He did not have to stay in the vicinity after he restored Lazarus' life. He could have gone back to the relative safety of the land on the other side of the Jordan River. Yet here he was, eating with his dearest friends, only a couple of miles and a few days from his death. Jesus knew what would happen and he had chosen to provoke the issue now. This was the feast where God would once again act to rescue his people from slavery. This time, the blood on the doorpost would be that of the true Lamb of God. But today he was eating with friends. Intimate friends, and one of them would betray him. Did Jesus not know about Judas? He must have. But there is one more meal with Jesus. There was one more opportunity to get to know him. Mary saw him, and anointed him with perfume that was worth about a year's wage. What a gift. Judas was a thief, and squandered his last chance. Jesus must have loved Judas even to the end.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

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Reading: John 13:21–33, 36–38

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. ²³ One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; ²⁴ Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. **And it was night.** 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.' 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.

Meditation

"And it was night." Three little words in Greek bring us back to the first chapter of the Gospel of John. The light shines in darkness, but the darkness has not overcome/arrested/understood the light. But now it is night. Satan has had his way with Judas. Judas, an intimate companion of Jesus, will betray him. The darkness will do its best to extinguish the light. But darkness will not win in the end. In this holiest of weeks, we suffer with Jesus, but we are full of hope in the resurrection. Good Friday is part of the story, but it is not the end.

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Reading: Matthew 26:14–25

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests¹⁵ and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver.¹⁶ And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.¹⁷ On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?"¹⁸ He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'"¹⁹ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.²⁰ When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve;²¹ and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."²² And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?"²³ He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me."²⁴ 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."²⁵ Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

Meditation

We know he was a thief, but is several months' pay enough money to betray a friend? Judas would probably have had to move out of town, perhaps to a foreign land, and start all over. Several months' pay is not a lot of money. If it was not the money, what could cause Judas to betray a friend? Was he angry that Jesus would really not be the kind of messiah he had hoped for? It's possible that Judas was expecting to manage the king's treasury, where he could certainly have skimmed a lot of money. Did that anger and disappointment lead to betrayal? Did Judas have nationalistic hopes that were clearly going to be disappointed? We are left with a story of greed, shattered dreams, spite, and betrayal of a friend—all of which would lead to despair and two deaths: Jesus' and his own.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

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-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 13:1–15

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.

Meditation

We often take our shoes off when we visit someone's house because we don't want to track mud and dirt into our friend's home. Now imagine a time when you must walk everywhere because there are no cars or trucks. You have open sandals instead of shoes and socks. There are horses, donkeys, oxen and sheep all over the place. The roads must have had a lot of icky stuff on them and it would be hard not to step in it! When you arrive at your friends' house, they would make sure that there was water for you to wash your feet. If they were a really good host, one of their slaves would do the unpleasant job of washing your feet for you. But the host would **never** wash your feet. What was Jesus saying about himself when he did the lowly work of a slave? What is he saying about us, when he invites us to imitate him?

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 19:5, 14–22 (excerpt)

So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "**Here is the man!**" ¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "**Here is your King!**" ¹⁵ They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." ¹⁶ Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; ¹⁷ and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

Meditation

The chief priest had been prophetic but did not know it. Now, Pontius Pilate is prophetic: "Here is the Man!" "Here is your King!" But he doesn't know it, either. John began his gospel by deliberately echoing Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning. . . ." In that same creation story human beings were created on the sixth day. Pilate announces that Jesus is the true Man bringing to a conclusion God's act of rescuing his creation and establishing a new humanity in a new creation. Pilate, who is ironically the cruel representative of Caesar, the enemy king, announces to the Jews that the one they had longed for all these centuries is here. "Here is your King!" Only the Jews couldn't see it. They rejected their king and opted for Barabbas, which means "son of the father." They could have had their king, who was the true Son of the Father. We, too, can have the Son of the Father as our true king.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Holy Saturday, Easter Vigil

Genesis 1:1— 2:2; Genesis 22:1–18; Exodus 14:15—15:1; Isaiah 54:5—14;
Isaiah 55:1–11; Baruch 3:9–15, 3:32—4:4; Ezekiel 26:16–17a, 18–28; Rom 6:3–11;
Matthew 28:1–10

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 28:1–10

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." ⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Meditation

What a strange story. This is not at all what we expected. Jesus was not a bright light. He was not shining like the radiant heavenly being we expected from Daniel 12 or Wisdom 3. He was not even dressed in the brilliant white clothes of the Transfiguration story. We could not have made up the story this way. And as first-century Jews, we certainly would not have had women be the first witnesses. Why, you might ask? Because women did not have legal standing in court. In this strange story, Jesus is embodied but different. Like a normal person, he ate fish and was solid, but at the same time most unlike a normal person, he appeared in rooms as if he could walk through walls. He appeared and disappeared; this is not like a normal person! He was solidly physical. He was recognized and yet not recognized. It is like he belonged to two dimensions at once: heaven and earth, the human and divine dimensions of reality. We will have the whole Easter season to contemplate this great mystery. But today, the tomb is empty! He is risen! Alleluia!

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Easter Morning!

Acts 10:34a, 37–43; Col 3:1–4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6b–8; John 20:1–9

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 20:1–9

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Meditation

By "resurrection," what the Scriptures mean is that our dead physical bodies will no longer be dead. We will come out of our tombs; our bodies will be transformed; and we will never die again. The Jews at the time of Jesus believed that the general resurrection for all the righteous would happen at the end of the present evil age. God would act in a definitive way to set the world to rights. He would defeat his enemies, establish his kingdom, and transform all of creation. Resurrection did not mean finally escaping this evil world. It did not mean escaping this evil physical body that is holding me back from real communion with God. It did not mean being with God in eternal bliss as a disembodied spirit—which, quite honestly, is the prevailing belief in much of modern America. To return as a disembodied spirit is to be a ghost or an angel (see Acts 12)—but that is not resurrection. Resurrection is defined as the transformation of this body, never to die again. And it is as integral to the doctrine of the Incarnation as the line in John 1:14, "the Word became flesh." If there is no resurrection of the body—if Jesus in fact is somehow alive only spiritually—then Jesus did not become a real human being. The tomb has to be empty, or it's not a resurrection. That was why the unlikely alliance of the chief priests and Pharisees risked violating Sabbath to ask Pilate to put a guard on the tomb. They knew it wasn't about ghosts and disembodied spirits; it was about the body. But people had to see him alive, or it would only be considered a cruel story. Empty tomb and appearances of the risen Jesus go together.

Quiet meditation: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

The Tomb is Empty

He is Risen!!!



Lent 2023 Conversation Starters and Loving Actions

Conversation starters:

The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What did you like best about the town/city in which you grew up?
- What was your most successful experience of fasting? Was a prayer answered?
- If I could have lived during a different time period, it would be...
- What is one thing your parents did in their marriage that you would like to replicate in our marriage?
- What is usually the first thing that comes to mind when you think about God?
- If we could just drop what we are doing and go do something fun, what would it be?
- What do you do when a homeless person asks you for money?
- What made you happy/sad/excited/angry in the news today? Why?
- What is the best way or me to encourage you today/this week?
- Has there been a time in the past year or two when God seemed especially real or close to you?
- If we could be roadies for any musical talent, I would choose...
- I would so enjoy reading out loud together...
- Describe your relationship with God the Father.
- If you could change one element in our home, what would you change?
- What would you do if you were present at the Transfiguration?
- What was the most memorable moment of mercy you have ever experienced?
- If I could spend 24 hours doing anything in the world with you, it would be...
- What pets did you have growing up? Which one was your favorite?
- How does our marriage invite others to love God more deeply?
- If you could completely get rid of one part of your daily routine what would it be?
- What is the most heroic thing you have ever witnessed someone do?
- I feel you love me the most when you...
- When you were a child, what career/job did you dream of having?
- How or where did you see God working today?
- What is your funniest memory from our dating days?
- A “bright spot” is a sign that God is at work in your marriage and things are changing. What “bright spots” have you seen recently?
- Who was your favorite saint/holy person growing up?
- What was the funniest thing you heard or did this week?
- If you could redo Mount Rushmore, which faces would you carve on it?
- What is the most difficult/hardest thing for you about sharing our resources with others?
- What gesture of hospitality would we like to extend as a couple? Whom should we reach out to?
- When you think about Lent, is it harder to give something up or to add a new practice?
- How are we doing with our Lenten practices?
- How can we be more involved in our church?
- Describe your favorite Easter traditions and if there are any “can’t miss” activities for you.
- Which act of mercy is the most challenging for you to implement in your daily life?
- What changes have you observed in yourself since we started this Lenten series?

- Was there a time in your childhood when you remember God answering a prayer for you?
- What does it mean to say that love is a great risk?
- What is the most sacrificial act you have ever witnessed?
- Lent is nearing its climax. Are we ready for Easter?
- If you could spend only \$10 for a date, what would you do?
- What does Jesus' great sacrifice mean to you?
- What do you love most about the transition from Winter to Spring, which parallels the journey from Lent to Easter?
- If you could possess any extraordinary talent in one of the arts, what would you choose?
- What is the hardest thing you ever did for someone else?
- As you think about the passion story listen to the words of the song, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Were you?
- Talk about the fact that because of the resurrection, everything we do matters!

Loving Actions:

Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Plan this week's Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.
- Offer a simple prayer of committing your marriage to Christ this season.
- Let the children see our affection.
- Take 15 to 30 minutes of "us time" with no distractions.
- Fridays in Lent are good days to reflect on the way of the Cross. Many churches have special services on Fridays. Consider attending one together.
- Listen attentively to your spouse.
- Do something for your spouse that they normally do i.e., take out the trash, fill the car, empty the dishwasher, make dinner.
- Put your phone away when you are talking to each other.
- Stick to a Lenten resolution that won't be easy to do today.
- Be humble and apologize quickly when your spouse is hurt by your words, actions, or omissions.
- Simplify your life by choosing a drawer or closet in your house to clean out.
- Hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer together before you go to bed.
- Go to a mid-week church service together.
- Tell your spouse something that makes you proud of them.
- Tell your spouse that you appreciate his/her creativity, gentleness, friendship, etc.
- Text an uplifting, loving message to your spouse during the day today.
- Take your spouse to lunch. (Impromptu!)
- Exercise together.
- Do one special act of service for the other.
- Volunteer together.
- Get out in nature.
- Join a couple's bible study.
- Go to bed at the same time.

- Go on a special date, such as a concert, the theater, or a romantic dinner.
- Experience something new or different.
- Put your phone away when you are talking to each other.
- Say “Good-bye, I love you” when leaving for the day.
- Greet your spouse with a hug and a kiss when you see him/her after a long day.
- Give your spouse a neck rub.
- Do a fun activity together.
- Find a hobby that you can do together.
- Occasionally run errands together. Resist the temptation to always save time. Love is willing to spend time extravagantly!
- Visit a sick friend or relative.
- Silence your phone during all meals.
- Listen to your spouse without interrupting or having a phone in the room.
- Pray for your spouse during your break at work today.
- Do a service project together.
- Consider skipping a meal and donating that money or food to a food shelf.
- Offer a simple prayer of committing your marriage to Christ this season.
- Prepare for your Holy Week celebrations together.
- Review priorities—God, spouse, children, and then everything else, in that order.
- List the positive things your spouse did for you this week.
- Make a list and thank the Lord for the blessings in your life.
- Read a Psalm together.
- Consider donating your alms and volunteering at a food shelf or local shelter.
- Attend a Lenten service together.
- Finish Lent well: pray and read Scripture together.
- What does Jesus’ great sacrifice mean to you?
- Take time to quietly read the passion of Jesus together.
- Watch a Holy Week movie and discuss it.
- Celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior!