



Lenten Devotional 2022



United Methodist Churches of **Indiana**

ISAIAH 58:1-12

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"

As a child, I remember looking forward to Palm Sunday. Why Palm Sunday, you ask? Because it was a Sunday that children and adults got something to take home.

Palm branches were part of the processional march with children and choir participation. In fact, no one left without the gift of a palm branch or crosses made from those branches. Years later, I learned that some of those branches were saved to be burned and used for Ash Wednesday services.

Ash Wednesday marks the first day of Lent, the period of 40 days prior to Easter Sunday. Ashes are a biblical symbol of purification (Numbers 19:9), symbolizing repentance and commitment to humbly draw nearer to the One who lived, sacrificed, and died for us, Jesus Christ.

We walk quietly away from Ash Wednesday service after a time of prayer into a season of study, reflection, prayer, and fasting. We walk away with the mark of ashes often in the form of a cross on our foreheads.

When I was pastor at Aldersgate Church before becoming a bishop, I was humbled and honored by those who came by the church at 6:30 a.m. on Ash Wednesdays before their shifts at the hospital located adjacent to our parking lot. I marked their foreheads with imposition of ashes often saying, "From dust we come and dust we shall return, but today you are a living witness for Jesus Christ."

Lent is often associated with a time of sacrifice and fasting (giving something up for 40 days), but we must do so with caution. In Isaiah 58:1–12, the prophet Isaiah reminds us that our religious rituals can advertise our hypocrisy if we think we are impressing God.

“Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high” (vs 4). Isaiah is clear that the fast God chooses is related to loosing the “bonds of injustice” and letting the oppressed go free.

As you approach this season of Lent, may you be inspired by the things that are near to God’s heart, like “sharing your food with the hungry and providing the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood” (vs 7).

Go today knowing that you are a living witness for Jesus Christ. Our light shines brightest as we are helping others and are guided by the “the Lord continually” (vs 11).

Be encouraged.

Loving God, help me journey these 40 days of Lent as a living witness for Jesus with a commitment to do no harm, do good with a spirit of gratitude, and stay in love with you. Amen.

ACTS 7:30–34

“I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Let me tell you a story ... a story that I am always happy to tell over and over again. During my childhood, my siblings and I lived in the rural areas of Zimbabwe with my grandparents. My grandfather was a long-serving lay speaker in The United Methodist Church. On Sundays, everyone was expected to go to church except if one had some household chores to take care of at home.

The outbreak of the war of liberation in Zimbabwe in the early 1970s saw the closure of all churches in the rural areas, a situation reminiscent to the COVID-19 lockdowns. The prominent war propaganda was that the Bible was a colonialist's book meant to brainwash the locals and take over their land. Due to this propaganda and the prolonged war, many people gave up their faith. Others, like my grandfather, hung onto their Christian faith. My grandfather continued gathering us to pray every evening before going to bed. When word got to the freedom fighters, he was labeled a “sellout,” and he was eventually killed for defying the propaganda teachings.

We may not all face physical death, but we surely do have many situations that challenge us to renounce our faith. To what extent will we hold on?

My grandfather loved reciting the verse, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1: 21). Admittedly, my grandfather's death was a great pain and loss to us. In spite of this, I remain strengthened by such great faith. Like Stephen (Acts 7), my grandfather saw Jesus' glorious face in persecution.

Dear God, help us to hold on to the faith of our forefathers even in the toughest of times. Amen.

Pastor Wellington Chiomadzi, Reynolds UMC; Northwest District

PSALM 91:1-2, 9-16

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

When my mother was approaching the end of her life on earth, we engaged in a conversation about her future. I asked her if she was afraid to die. Her response has been a blessing to me as I now contemplate my future. She said that she was not afraid of death because she believed in God's promises.

Psalm 91 assures us that we live “in the shelter of the Most High” and that God is our refuge and fortress. God's promises proclaim that we can trust God for God will deliver us from all kinds of evil. Most of us have not lived charmed lives absent of tragedy or heartache. We have the assurance that no matter what occurs, God has promised that God's presence with us in any kind of trouble.

My mother had many challenges, disappointments, and heartbreaks in her 89 years. In the face of significant trial, she maintained an active prayer life that kept her faith strong and enduring. What a wonderful legacy she left for our family. Her strength and faith have been an example in my own life as I face each new challenge.

I thank God daily for my parents and the faith they modeled for me, the way they taught me about a loving God and that Jesus was an example of how I should live my life. After becoming frightened as a child by a Sunday School teacher who told us that God was writing down all the bad things we did in a big book which would be used to judge us one day, my mom and dad assured me that God was forgiving and loved me unconditionally.

God, As we remember Jesus' sacrifice for us, may our lives be living examples of Your love. Amen.

Kathie Clemenz, United Methodist Women of Indiana President;
Indiana Conference

JOHN 12:27–36

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”

Being an Air National Guard Chaplain in an Intelligence Wing, “time” is one of the most important components of mission success. Everything revolves around timing. Without an understanding of time, we fail.

John 12:27–36 reminds us that Jesus knew that mission success was grounded in the timing of Jesus’ life. This was the time for the new commonwealth of God to be bestowed upon the powers and principalities of this age. There was no denying that the time was right for Jesus to proclaim a new reality.

Lent is our time to recognize our lives are instruments of this new reality. This season of introspection is a gift. It is meant to be uncomfortable at times, such as when we realize how much time we waste on frivolous pursuits or unhealthy habits.

What could we do with our life if we had a deeper understanding of this time being the time for us to proclaim the new commonwealth of God? What would that really look like? Would we readily stand against the culture’s rampant consumerism or our addiction to violence? Would we refuse to see the world in only two groups (my “right” way and everyone else)?

Mission success for people of faith means we truly are living and witnessing in our time the new realities of God in Christ Jesus. May it be said of us some day that we were fully alive to the Spirit in this time.

Jesus, help me to live conscious of the new work You are doing today. Show me how You want me to be part of it. Amen.

Pastor Kent Lundy, Lt. Col., Chaplain, 181st Intelligence Wing, IN Air National Guard; West District

LUKE 4:1-13



Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

1 CHRONICLES 21: 1-17

“Then David said to Gad, “I am in great distress; let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is very great...”

What would life be like if God had never sent God's son to die on the cross for us? This is the question that rested on my mind as I read 1 Chronicles 21:1-17.

In this passage, King David has been incited to take a census of Israel in order to gain glory and claim ownership to what was rightfully God's. This census meant determining how many men were able to fight. Joab, David's nephew and a military commander, was the one in charge of taking the counts, and he didn't want to do it.

Verse 7 says, “This command was also evil in the sight of God; so God punished Israel.” David, in the next verse, confesses he has sinned and begs God to take away “the guilt of your servant.” So, God gives David a choice: he can pick his own retribution. David picked the plague and ended up letting seventy thousand Israelites die.

How lucky we are that we don't have to make these kinds of choices anymore. Jesus suffered the agony of the cross so we can be washed clean from sin and guilt and shame. We can have confidence in confessing our sins and receiving God's forgiveness. Love has come to save us. May the love of Christ be in our hearts.

God of Grace and Mercy, thank You for the relief of forgiveness. Let me receive it anew today. Amen.

Mya Taylor, Christ Indianapolis UMC; student at University of
Indianapolis

ZECHARIAH 3:1-10

“The angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Take off his filthy clothes.’ And to him he said, ‘See, I have taken your guilt away from you...’”

In today’s reading we have the story of Clean Garments for the High Priests. Written by Zechariah at the time of the rebuilding of the temple, this chapter is part of a prophetic series of visions given to Zechariah by God.

Verses 3–4 show Joshua having his “filthy clothes” removed. This removal symbolizes the removing of Joshua’s priestly office. In verse 5, when a clean turban is placed on his head, Joshua’s priestly function was returned. This is powerful imagery about the releasing of something no longer fully dedicated to God and the restoration of someone to righteousness with God.

- What does it mean to you in this Lenten season to know what has been ruined can be removed?
- What would you like to take off and hand over to God?
- What does it mean to you in this Lenten season to know your life can be fully restored to Godly righteousness?
- What will you ask God to make new within you?

Lord of the Ages, I confess I have not dedicated all the ways of my life to You. Help me to remove those things that keep my life from honoring You. Thank You for Your promise of restoration. I offer You the work of my hands, the words of my lips, and the hopes of my heart. Thank You for making me new – again. Amen.

Pastor Shannon Stringer, Director of Leadership Development;
Indiana Conference

LUKE 21:34–22:6

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down...”

Staying vigilant can be so tiresome in times of crisis. For more than two years, we’ve been asked to stay vigilant about hand-washing, mask-wearing, and staying home to stay safe. Who isn’t tired of the stress of the pandemic? And yet, when we think about the pandemic in terms of living a life of preparedness, it can shift stress into awareness and vigilance into everyday practices.

In Luke 21:34–22:6, Jesus cautions the disciples to stay alert and pray for strength to make it through difficult times that lie ahead. The scripture goes on to introduce Jesus’ betrayal by Judas. As a disciple chosen by Jesus as one of the twelve, Judas is often defined by this betrayal, not by his previous following or his vigilance as a disciple. Yet, Jesus washed the feet of Judas just like the feet of the other disciples. Judas was loved by Jesus with the same love as the other disciples. Judas had a seat at the table with Jesus.

Consider these questions:

- Do we betray the life of Judas when he’s defined by this act of betrayal?
- Would you want someone to pick out a single event from your life and say that it defines who you are, who you’ve always been, and who you will always be?
- Have you wondered what Judas must have felt when he was called by Jesus? What were his hopes? What excited him about Jesus?

We know Judas was trusted by Jesus, a fact often forgotten. Trust of some kind always comes before betrayal can happen. Before Judas was ever the betrayer, he was trusted to remain vigilant in sharing the Good News. Who among us can say they have successfully navigated every complexity, every contradiction, every pandemic-induced stress that constitutes our lives? So as we journey through this Lenten season, let us stay vigilant in prayer and in healthy practice. Let us also become strong in trust and forgiveness, compassion and love, mercy and grace; and be vigilant in sharing what excites us about Jesus.

Loving God, as challenges present themselves, prompt me to pray continually and love at all times. Amen.

Lisa Trigg, Gobin Memorial UMC; West District Lay Leader

GENESIS 13:1-7, 14-18

“The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, ‘Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.’”

When we are living during such unique and uncertain times, the world can feel incredibly heavy. Time and time again we worry over the future and all of the unknowns it can hold.

In Genesis 13:1-7 we are reminded that Abram took everything he had alongside his wife and Lot to Negev. They didn't know what they were going to come across on their journey, but they went from place to place until they reached Bethel. There, Abram called upon the name of the Lord. Soon enough the land could no longer support them due to their numerous possessions so they could no longer stay together.

Sometimes God knocks us out of our comfort zones, and that's because God has already been to where we are going. There is no mountain too great when the Lord is on our side. As you take time to pray during this season of Lent, pause and reflect on all of the times you've done something you didn't think you could do. Remember that God has this, which means that you have this. May you be blessed, always.

God, thank You for Your steadfast guidance. Lead me, like Abram, to where You want me to live, serve, love, and work. Amen.

PSALM 27

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

There was an old R&B song that came out when I was young that had a first line that went something like this: “If it ain’t one thing, it’s another...” The whole song lifted up the challenges of life everyone experiences. The song offered no solutions.

King David, the writer of Psalm 27, faced many challenges; those who had encamped around him; those who sought to devour his flesh; those who wanted David to have a heart of fear.

King David, however, focused on the “One thing” that would address every challenge life could throw his way. What shall one do when the words “If it ain’t one thing, it’s another...” speaks to one’s day? Choose the “One thing” David asked for in the midst of everything and you will find, as David did, that the Lord is your Light, your Stronghold; your Shelter in the day of trouble; and the Lord will never forsake you.

Loving God, let me live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life! Amen.

MATTHEW 23:37–39

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

Often Jesus met the religious leaders when he spoke to the crowds at the synagogue, and often they would try to trip Him up with questions. By this time in His ministry, Jesus may have been sick of the harassment, as early in this chapter Jesus revealed the Pharisees to be deceivers and egotistical. Jesus grew more impassioned as he spoke “Woe to you” sentences, not pulling any punches. Jesus was not trying to be tactful or inoffensive to the religious leaders, even calling them “snakes” and a “brood of vipers.”

In verse 37 Jesus turned to Jerusalem more heartbroken than angry, perhaps thinking about the time growing short for ministry before being arrested and put to death. Jesus speaks of longing to gather the children of Jerusalem together, like a hen gathering her chicks under her wing. It is a heart-warming comparison, as we think of Jesus feeling emotional thinking of the people.

Jesus was, after all, God in human form, feeling all of the emotions that we ourselves feel—loss, fear of what is to come, disappointment. Christ surely must have wished that things were different, and that more people had been successfully gathered in. I have always found this scripture to be touching, as Jesus seems to have felt compassion for the people.

Jesus, help us view others with Your compassion and love so that our witness is not a barrier to others being gathered into You. Amen.

LUKE 13:31-35



At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”

He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’”

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

ROMANS 4:1–12

“But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.”

Why do we make everything so complicated? That’s what we do as human beings, I guess. Even Confucious in the 5th century said, “Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.” Many of us think that if something is too simple it must not be right or true or valuable.

But in our passage for today, Paul teaches us something different. Abraham, father of many nations, was not declared righteous because of his act of circumcision, or because he followed the prescribed rituals, or because he adhered to the Law. These acts of faith were not even known to Abraham nor instituted by God at this point.

Abraham was declared righteous simply because of his faith in the one true God. Now I don’t want to discount acts of faith like rituals, adhering to scripture, baptism, communion, and the like. They are all important and essential to our faith. Rather than being prerequisites, however, they are evidence and validation of our faith. We don’t have to complete a checklist or a to-do list to be justified or accepted by God. What resides in our hearts and in the depths of our souls is more important than the signs and symbols that represent our faith. As spiritual descendants of Abraham, we too are declared righteous if we only believe. It’s just that simple! Praise God!

God, what a gift it is to know that grace is given, not earned. Strengthen my faith today in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Kim Arnott, Conference Director of Lay Servant Ministries; Indiana
Conference

NUMBERS 14:10B-24

“Then the Lord said, ‘I do forgive, just as you have asked.’”

God, who was revealed in the plagues of Egypt and the wonders of Exodus, developed an impressive reputation among people on the outside. God's mighty power to free an entire population from captivity was well known and so was God's intimate, caring nature. God stays with God's people: meeting them face to face and leading, protecting, and providing for them day and night. As if that weren't enough, Moses further describes God's character: slow to anger, abounding in love, forgiving sins and rebellion. It is not surprising then that God wonders how long people who have been shown such grace and goodness will continue in defiance.

God's abilities and character have not changed. God still is revealed in small and large ways every day. Pause now to consider how you have seen God working lately.

Now look at yourself; examine your contempt for God, your rebellion against God's instruction, and your disbelief in God's power and love.

- How long will I give someone or something else first place in my everyday life?
- How long will I quench the Spirit's work in me?
- How long will I refuse to follow Jesus' radical mission into the unknown and uncomfortable?

Thankfully, our God who has the power and right to destroy also has the desire to remake and start anew. Take this opportunity to confess your sins and have them forgiven. As God's abounding love pours over you changing your heart and life, may you delight in God's promises.

God, forgive me of the things I have done and the things I have left undone. I receive Your grace and promise of new life today. Amen.

Pastor Heather Foley, Chesterton UMC; North District

PSALM 105:1-42

“O give thanks to the Lord, call on God’s name make known God’s deeds among the peoples. Sing to God, sing praises to God; tell of all God’s wonderful works.”

Psalm 105 reminds us of God’s goodness and faithfulness. It shares God’s covenant with Abraham, God’s amazing love, abiding care, and ceaseless blessings to Israel.

We must not forget or take God’s goodness for granted. We should pray continuously thanking God for blessings we receive. We should proclaim God’s greatness and gladly share what God has done for us. For God alone is worthy to be praised.

Each day is an adventure. God did not promise us blue skies and sunny days; however, God promised never to leave us nor forsake us. God will be with us always.

We experience hardships and sufferings, maybe with relationships, grief, medical diagnosis, unemployment, depression, and so on. These life challenges can feel like more than we can handle.

The good news: God promised that suffering will never have the final word. God does not bring unjust suffering upon God’s people. God will force such things to serve God’s good purposes. God will walk with us through the fires and floodwaters. God promises that “the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). As God’s promises to Abraham were kept, God will keep the promises to us. Our God is faithful.

God, there are areas of my life that are undone and in-process. Remind me again of Your faithfulness. You are with us. Praise the Lord! Amen.

Stant Clark, United Methodist Men of Indiana President; Indiana
Conference

PSALM 63:1-8

“Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.”

Psalm 63 begins with David's confession of his longing for God. David is searching and thirsty, looking for God's presence. He declares his urgent need for God and the desire to have a relationship with God as he declares where God is not. His whole being feels dry and tired.

At different seasons in life each of us go through periods when we feel spiritually dry, exhausted, and drained. Times when our longing for God is so deep that it is in fact painful—our hearts hurt, our bodies ache, our souls become parched and dehydrated. We groan from within while searching for God's presence in our lives. We are desperate for God to be present with us—for God to make God's self known to us. I believe there are times when we just can't see God—feel the presence of God working in and through us.

And yet—David proclaims—he knows God is very present. When David can't feel the presence of God he goes back to a time when he did. He goes back to a time when he has seen God's power and glory at work in his life and recalls God's faithful love which he describes as “better than life itself.”

This Psalm reminds us that it is remembering God's loving care for us that we can recall our joy in the Lord which ushers in our praising of God. Despite the dryness of our souls, when we recollect those times when God has been present and faithful in love towards us, when we remember where and when we have seen God's power and glory at work in our lives, when we give praise to God, David tells us we will be “fully satisfied.”

Loving God, our souls are thirsty and You are our living water. Pour over us with Your grace. Amen.

Pastor Roberta Cook, Elwood First UMC; North Central District

REVELATION 3:1–6

“I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead.”

Do you sometimes feel as though you’re just going through the motions of church? You show up on Sundays, you give, you volunteer, you even read a devotional thought during Lent, but there’s something missing. Your faith seems shallow, lacking, even empty.

Do you sometimes feel your church is the same way? It has all the trappings of a church that’s alive—weekly worship services, a pastor, a website, even an annual chicken–noodle dinner. On closer inspection, do you feel it’s more dead than alive?

Hear these words to the church in Sardis: “I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up!” (Revelation 3:1–2) The writer of Revelation goes on to say, “I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.”

No matter your age, no matter whether you’ve been a Christian all your life or just the past month, you’ve still got work to do. God isn’t done with you.

So, get out of your comfortable recliner and turn off your screens, it’s time to get going. According to this scripture passage, we need to replace rest and relaxation with remember and repent. We need to remember our calling, our mission. And we need to repent and acknowledge when we’re just going through the motions, when our faith is stale, even dead.

God, wake us up and renew our faith! Stoke our passion and zeal once again! Amen.

Ed Fenstermacher, Associate Director of Church Development;
Indiana Conference

PSALM 63:1–8

“My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.”

There have been seasons in my life when I have read this Psalm and longed for it to feel true, wishing to have my closeness and desperate reliance upon God rekindled. In those times, when I am weary, when my burdens feel heavy, and when cynicism separates me from Christian community, I often blame myself for feeling that way.

It can be tempting to read this and think that my soul should always feel satisfied, and that my mouth should always be praising. If that's where you are today, take a moment and re-read verse 1. Is not the weary and cynical soul thirsting for living water? Wouldn't you say the over-burdened flesh feels too faint to take on a single new thing?

The power and glory of God is in the sanctuary, yes, but it is also readily available to us—to you—right now. Instead of reading this as a description of an ideal spiritual state of which I am falling short, I can reframe it as a retrospective. The author has been where I am now and is writing this from the oasis they found in the steadfast love of God, which offers help, sustenance, strength, and joy ceaselessly, regardless of where we are on the journey, regardless of the season in which we are dwelling. That oasis may be just around the corner, but God is already with me, and with you, right here in the desert.

Loving God, whether a trickle or a flood, Your stream of grace is ever present in each season. Thank You! Amen.

Pastor Janelle Ohlemiller, Lafayette Grace UMC; Northwest District

ISAIAH 55:1-9



Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

ROMANS 2:1-11

“Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

“God does not show favoritism” is an astounding word of grace for a world believing the rich and powerful are above others. The powerful, beautiful, worthy, and accepted seem exempt from all but token consequences of laws. People of any race in lower economic strata receive full punishment.

God created justice as a circle. All equally stand together within the God who loves them without favoritism. All are needed to hold everything together. Exploiting others to rise above, or to cast them out, damages the whole circle. The judgment comes back upon us. The connections weaken and move toward disintegration. God’s grace makes it a slow process. Yet, it is breaking.

The world has judged “the different” of no worth unless “they” conform. Yet, all are created in the image of God as surely as every other race or nation. People of faith restore God’s circle by accepting and empowering this divine worth in all.

More difficult is equally loving the unrighteously judging ones. They, too, require God’s grace and love. We are not of greater value than they. Our task of faith is to love them as God does and call them to their best selves in valuing all life. We heal the circle together in realizing this truth. If others reject it, their judgment is their own.

Know this: all of us are included when Jesus cries from the cross, “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they’re doing!”

Father, can we do any less? Amen.

Pastor Fred Shaw, Committee on Native American Ministries
Leader; North Central Jurisdiction

PSALM 39

“Hear my prayer, O Lord, listen to my cry for help.”

I wore a muzzle. I was silent. I was still. And yet, my anguish increased, laments the author of this ancient Psalm.

I quarantined. I wore a mask. I was vaccinated. And yet, the pandemic rages on, laments the human of this present day.

“Is my life so fragile? Is life so short? Is my wealth worth nothing?” wonders the author of this prayer.

“Will this Lenten journey through deserts, valleys of dry bones and pointed, painful teachings ever bring me to the mountain top teeming with life?” wonders the human in the middle of this liturgical season.

Now, Lord, what do I look for? (Psalm 39:7)

Look for the helpers, suggests Mr. Rogers. Look to the children, sings Whitney Houston. Hope, writes the psalmist. Look for hope. Hope in the Lord, the Lord who will “save [you] from a rebel life [and] the contempt of dunces” (Psalm 39:8, MSG).

Don't we all want to be saved from dunces? Or from being the dunce? Don't we all desire to live in hope rather than wallow in hopelessness?

Perhaps for some, hope is a stranger. Like the psalmist who admits to being a stranger and to being lost – “a migrant like my whole family” (Psalm 39:12, MSG). To what then do we look? My answer: We keep honest. We keep wandering. We keep looking. We stay on the journey.

Lord, hear our prayer.

God, in the midst of so much, hope can be hard to see. Give me eyes to see the grace upon grace that sustains my life. Amen.

Pastor Stacey Fischer Gehring, South Bend Grace UMC; North
District

NUMBERS 13:17–27

“And they told him, ‘We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.’”

Before traveling to an unfamiliar city, I like to ask someone who is familiar with the city for directions. I recall carefully following the directions someone gave me when I traveled to a new city. As I went along, I discovered that the directions that I had been given were not as specific as needed. The directions did not include the T-intersection.

Before entering Canaan, the land that God had promised to Israel, Moses sent spies to search out the land. Moses' instructions were very specific. Because Moses' instructions were followed, the spies were able to successfully complete their mission.

When we follow the Lord's specific instructions for our lives, we too, can expect to experience the outcome that the Lord has planned for us.

During this Lenten season, Lord God, give us the desire to seek Your specific instructions for our lives. Amen.

Pastor Michelle Cobb, South Bend Evangel Heights UMC; North
District

PSALM 32

“I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.”

The words of David in Psalm 32 are very contemplative. Verse after verse, we can see the depth of his emotions as he was pouring his heart to God. David is eager to please God and to seek to do what is right before God. This is like a child who has done something she knows is not proper or good who then seeks redemption by telling her parent how anguished she is by her actions and how earnest she is to get back on the right track.

David professes with his mouth that God is his hiding place and that God will preserve him from trouble and surround him with songs of deliverance (v. 7). What a beautiful picture of a loving, reverent son who does not hide his wrongdoing from the One who can offer him forgiveness.

No individual is perfect, and David certainly wasn't. Yet his words serve as a guide for us to humble ourselves before the One who can redeem us and turn any bad situation into a reason to rejoice.

Lord, be my hiding place today and always. Guide me with Your gentle instruction. Amen.

Luska Natali, Conference Assistant – Leadership Development;
Indiana Conference

JOSHUA 4:14–24

“In the days to come, when your children ask their fathers, ‘What are these stones doing here?’ tell your children this: ‘Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry ground.’”

Transitions – I am writing this in early November, when the trees are ablaze with the yellows, oranges, and reds of fall. You are reading this in late March, when spring blossoms have already filled the woods with signs of new life. Fall and Spring are both transition periods, moving from one season to another.

Today’s reading from Joshua describes a transition time for the people of Israel. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, they were finally realizing the promise as they crossed the Jordan to enter into Canaan.

We are often in transition as well, moving from loneliness to relationship, or relationship to loneliness, moving from dreams to reality, from searching to employment, or from security to uncertainty.

What transitions are facing you today? The people of Israel stopped to make a monument to God’s mighty act in parting the Jordan as a reminder that their hope lay in God alone, not in their efforts.

There may be a temptation in this Lenten season of repentance to try to make ourselves feel so sorrowful for Christ’s sufferings that in a way we deserve forgiveness. But the mighty act is God’s alone. We receive God’s grace, undeserved. Thanks be to God!

Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be—you get a fresh start (Psalm 32:1).

Steadfast God, call to mind Your mighty acts of grace that mark the transitions of my life. Grow my trust that You are even now at work! Amen.

Pastor Tan Mayhall, Grandview UMC; Southwest District

LUKE 15:1-10

“Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Not too long ago, I lost the remote to my television. I looked everywhere: under the couch, between the cushions, in every pocket, and even the refrigerator, but no luck. After about a week, I gave up on ever finding it. I ordered a replacement and a new one came the next day. In many ways it was better than the one I lost; there were no scratches or worn-out buttons. Yet I still missed the one I’d lost.

After a few weeks, I was going through my travel computer bag. There it was in the bottom of the side pocket, my remote control. I was so happy and excited. I may have done a little happy dance in the living room. I’m smiling now just recalling the memory.

The joy I felt when I found a simple remote control must be a pale glimpse of the joy there is in the Kingdom of Heaven when a lost soul claims Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

During this Lenten season, many Christians focus on personal sacrifice to deepen their faith and reconnect with God. This time of year, I am accustomed to hearing people talking about how hard it is to give-up caffeine or sugar for 40 days. What if we gave-up on giving-up and instead chose to spend this Lenten season celebrating 40 people who once struggled with their faith, but now proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord? Hallelujah!

Jesus, let me rejoice with heaven over these, Your beloved, who once were lost, but now are found...including me. Amen.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:16–21



From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way.

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

PSALM 53

“God looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are
any who are wise, who seek after God.”

The first time I read this Psalm, my initial reaction was a feeling of disappointment. “Fools say in their hearts, there’s no God. They are corrupt and do horrible deeds...” That does not sound like the many non-Christians in my life who are incredibly kind and Christlike in ways that I don’t know if I could ever be. This Psalm seemed really mean-spirited and unkind until I was able to put it in the context to which it came and read the last few lines.

“When God changes his people’s circumstances for the better, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will celebrate.” In David’s time the most marginalized and oppressed were likely to have no way out of their oppression. While Christ had not yet come, David knew that the oppressed would eventually be freed from captivity, meaning freedom from suffering and marginalization.

In this Lenten season, when we pause to pray for forgiveness and grace for the wrongdoing we have caused or the oppression we may have put on others, this Psalm is a reminder that we as Christians can be fools. Our best intentions may cause the worst circumstances for others.

Thankfully, God will change our hearts like God changes circumstances, through Jesus and the love of Christ that we have been given to share with others. In this season, I often reflect on how I can be foolish, completely missing easy opportunities to show love, kindness, and grace to those who need it most. If we remember that we too can be fools, perhaps we can also remember to be kind to people in the same way.

In this Lenten season, let us remember to ask for forgiveness, to forgive as we have been forgiven. May we remember that we are living in God’s abundance of love so that we may give that love as often as we receive.

Holy Spirit, as I pause in prayer, call to mind areas in need of forgiveness and love. Let the forgiveness and love I give to others reflect the extravagant grace You give to all people. Amen.

Greg O’Connor, Conference Assistant – Central and West Districts;
Indiana Conference

PSALM 53

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

While prayer-walking, we asked a gentleman if there was anything we could pray for. The gentleman responded, “I do not believe in God.” I was shocked!

This scenario reminded me of Asa, King of Judah. Asa relied on God to win a battle against King Zerah of Ethiopia. When Asa developed a severe disease, he sought physicians, not the Lord. Eventually, Asa died, and the scripture specifies that he did not die because the disease was incurable but because he did not seek the Lord (2 Chronicles 16:12). How deplorable!

That is the problem with many people today. When they become rich and comfortable, they turn their backs on God. Someone says, “I am educated, I earn money and can provide for my family.” All this is good, but we should never lose sight of who we are in Christ Jesus and whose we are. As we wake up, let’s appreciate the air we breathe freely, the strength to work, and the daily bread God provides. As we visit the hospital, let’s involve God in our healing process and restoration. God is the source and sustainer of all lives. In all circumstances, God is made our wisdom, strength, guide, light, and peace.

Dear God, I trust You in all things. You alone matter. I am fully convinced that You have a good plan for my life. Amen.

Pastor Ezechiel Habwawihe, Shishewana UMC and Topeka UMC;
Northeast District

LUKE 9:10-17

'Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.' But Jesus said to them, "You give them something to eat."

The disciples are fresh off of a mission trip, going from "village to village, proclaiming the Good News and healing people everywhere" (Luke 9:6). Their faith might be on a high when shortly thereafter the disciples and Jesus find themselves surrounded by thousands with the practical challenge of a hungry crowd. Imagine the collective rumblings of hungry bellies!

Yet in spite of their faith being at a high, the disciples seem to regard this perhaps as either beyond Jesus' ability or not worthy of Jesus' attention. When they tell Jesus to send the people away so they can find food and lodging, Jesus says, "You give them something to eat." They respond saying how little they have—five loaves and two fish, and certainly not enough money to purchase enough food for the masses. Jesus proceeds to bless the food and break it, instructing the disciples to distribute the food. There ended up being more than enough.

Jesus invites the disciples to participate in the miracle, to be a part of His ministry to feed the hungry. The disciples' faith was formed through this, in a different way than their mission trip. How is Jesus forming your faith right now? Who is Christ calling you to feed, whether it be with faith or food?

Loving God, where we see lack, You see miracles. Thank You for bringing us into Your ministry. Show us who You have called us to feed. Amen.

ISAIAH 43:1-7

“I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you... everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

It's almost impossible to make it through a day without hearing bad news. News of injustice, disaster, war, and hatred reveals how some people struggle throughout life to survive in a world of turmoil and uncertainty.

As followers of Jesus—disciples—we are asked to love and to serve those who struggle with the woes of earthly life. Doing so, in obedience to Christ's commandment to love others as Christ loves us, answers God's call for us to bring hope and light into the world so that God's Kingdom will come on earth, as it is in heaven.

Lent reminds us to be hopeful and to remember that God promised to be with us through sweeping waters and blazing fires simply because we are precious and honored in God's sight and because God loves us. And because of that love, God gave God's only Son that we may have eternal life (John 3:16). God calls us to be people of hope—people who can hope and trust in God's promise that calls us to a greater faith and a greater love.

God calls for justice where there is injustice, peace where there is war, and love where there is hatred. We are spiritually gifted with joy in a world that challenges us to hope beyond the injustices, hatred, and fears of this earthly life. Christ brings redemption and eternal life to everyone who is called by God's name, created for God's glory, formed and made by God (vs.7).

God, there is nothing in this life that is a match for You. In the face of bad news, let all Your disciples embody the Good News of Your everlasting love, and the promise of redemption. Amen.

Dr. Betty Hart, Mt Vernon First UMC; Southwest District Lay Leader

PSALM 126

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

What do you call someone that celebrates New Year’s Day on the wrong day? A “fool!” Some say the origins of April Fools’ Day dates to 1582 when France started following the Gregorian calendar and shifted the beginning of the New Year from April 1st to January 1st. People who were still following the old rhythm of the non-dominant calendar of the day were labeled as fools and were the focus of pranks and jokes.

Let’s be clear, following the way of the Suffering Servant looks like foolishness to the dominant culture of our day. The way of sacrificial service and self-emptying love looks like nonsense in the face of so many demanding on getting their own way, no matter the cost. Lent is a stark reminder that if we are not being labeled a “fool” by the culture, we are doing faith wrong. If all we are doing is blending in, then we have missed the memo on the purpose of living the way of suffering.

Fools we are, but not fools in despair. Psalm 126 reminds us that “those who went off with heavy hearts will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing” (The Message). Let us hold fast to the promise that when our hearts are heavy from standing firm in the foolishness of Christ, we will receive blessings beyond measure.

Jesus, the wisdom of the world would have me believe that following Your sacrificial service and self-emptying love is foolishness. Today I commit myself to walking in Your way, even as that way leads to a cross. Amen.

EXODUS 12:21-27

“And when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this observance?’ you shall say, ‘It is the passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.’ And the people bowed down and worshipped.”

Exodus 12:21-27 shows us the events of Passover. It tells of Moses’ instructions to the Israelites on the placement of the blood on the door frame, so the angel of death would Passover their house. In it he tells the Israelites to not only observe the Passover, but to also tell their children about the meaning of Passover.

It reminds me of the way my mom told my children, her grandchildren, about her faith and what it means to her. Years ago, when I first had my children, I found a journal called “A Journal of Faith and Love, Grandmother’s Memories To Her Grandchild.” I purchased the book and gave it to my mom, so she could fill it out. In it she would respond to questions that asked for her memories growing up. Some of the questions revolved around her favorite things as a child, like her favorite pet growing up, and what the most wonderful things she remembered her mother or father cooking for a holiday meal. The most meaningful questions to me are the ones where she can tell about her faith journey growing up: what her mother taught her about God, what she thinks faith is, and what it means to be a real Christian. I am working on creating a journal like this for my own grandchildren.

As we continue in this season of Lent, we should focus on what the Passover means to us now as we think of Jesus on the night before he was betrayed remembering the Passover with the disciples (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22). Just as the Israelites were delivered from the angel of death, through the lamb’s blood on the door posts, we too are now delivered from death through the blood of the Lamb, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Holy One, as the cross looms ever nearer this Lent, put someone in our path so that we might share of Your mighty acts. Give us words to speak and the boldness to pass on our faith. Amen.

Wendy Malone, Anderson New Hope UMC; North Central Lay
Leader

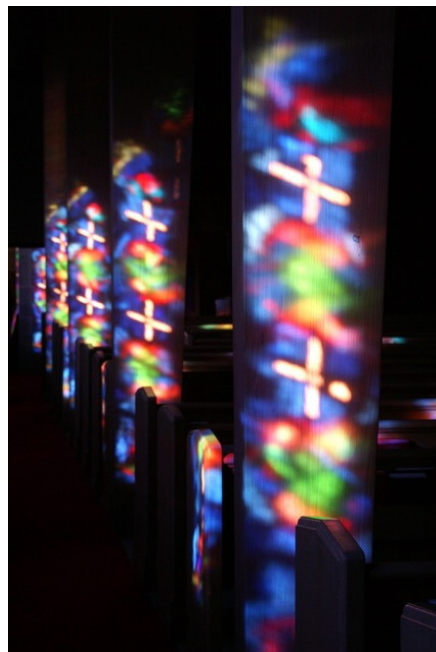
PHILIPPIANS 3:4B-14

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.



EXODUS 40:1–15

“The Lord spoke to Moses: On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting.”

Exodus is a fascinating read, isn't it? Sandwiched between truly interesting narratives, we find long, tedious sections. There are instructions on building the tabernacle and all it contains, descriptions of said things being built, and more instructions on what to do with said items.

Today's passage from Exodus 40 might seem long and tedious. It seems like the kind of stuff that you gloss over when you are trying to read through the Bible in a year. But, it's here for a reason, right? They received the instructions. They did the work. And now, they are getting it all in order. In some sense, that's what the season of Lent is all about. It's about getting our house in order. But why?

It's a little outside the scope of our reading for today, but we get that answer at the end of the chapter: the glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle. This chapter seems a little monotonous at first or not really all that important. In actuality, it's all prep work for the glory that is to come.

There are times in our spiritual lives when the practices we engage in may seem tedious. They may seem boring at times. Yet we have to remember why we are doing them in the first place. It's not to pass the time or to give us something else to do. We do spiritual practices to prepare us for the coming glory of the Lord.

God, prepare me to witness the glory of Your resurrection! Amen.

Pastor Matt Swisher, Vincennes First UMC; Southwest District

PSALM 20

“Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God.”

King David's prayer for victory as he led his army into battle expressed confidence in the Lord being more powerful than the chariots and horses used in battle. In contrast, the misplaced confidence we have in ourselves and our plans is revealed when plans go wrong.

Recently, our pastor and church agreed to host a Lay Servant Academy which had been postponed for over a year due to COVID concerns. The Lay Servant Team agreed to coordinate planning, painting, repairing and “deep-cleaning” the church, to be completed in less than five days.

It started on time, but then everything went awry with key volunteers unable to do the repairs as planned, and others uneasy about gathering. We only had three days before the event. With our confidence reduced, we realized we were amid a battle similar to King David's.

That's when our eyes were opened; scales were removed. Volunteers worked overtime. The space passed inspection the night before the event. At the opening of the event, we had a full team of volunteers and sixty registrants in attendance. One of our volunteers gave a testimony of knowing and following the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. The Lay Servant Academy was truly a success. Isn't God awesome?

The confidence we had in ourselves, and our plans changed due to uncertainty as our plans went amiss, but our eyes were opened to an “unseen pride that is eternal.” Our pride is not in ourselves or in what we do or have. It is in trusting and celebrating the name of the Lord. Amen.

Gracious God, help us place our pride, confidence, and hope where it belongs—in You. Amen.

LUKE 18:31–34

“But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what Jesus said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.”

The disciples couldn't wrap their brains around what Jesus was saying. What could Jesus possibly mean by these words? If what he said was true, then it sounded as though Jerusalem was the last place they should be headed. Who in their right mind heads straight toward a place where they expect to be mocked, flogged, and killed? Wouldn't it make more sense to travel in the opposite direction, return to Galilee, perhaps? Yet, Jesus was determined and headed toward Jerusalem. If the disciples wanted to stay with him, they'd have to set their faces toward Jerusalem as well.

Heading straight toward Jerusalem (or any unpleasant situation) isn't easy, especially when we know or suspect that it's going to hurt. The temptation to turn back, to avoid pain, is great; but if we go out of our way to avoid any unpleasantness in our life we may never experience the fulfillment of God's promise. Jesus knew he would suffer and die; he also knew he would rise again. The path to resurrection led straight through the cross, not over, under or around the cross.

The disciples didn't comprehend any of this, not yet, but they stuck with Jesus anyway. As you face painful situations in your own life, stick with Jesus and follow Jesus' lead, even when you don't quite understand where you are going or what you are facing. The pain is real, but so is the hope of resurrection on the other side!

God, I trust You to lead me through suffering and death to resurrection. Help me follow You today. Amen.

Pastor Shalimar Holderly, Avila Calvary UMC, Garrett UMC;
Northwest District

PSALM 31:9-16

“My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.”

As someone who has experienced depression throughout my life, this psalm sounds familiar. Your struggles may be different, but we all have times when the darkness is bottomless. Our "vision fails." Our "bones dry up." We cry out for help. The words echo, seemingly unheard.

Injustice, violence, racism, poverty, and war take away abundant life for many. The songs of the suffering resound with the psalmist's lament: "Our years are consumed with groaning... I am like a piece of pottery, destroyed."

Lent invites us to walk with Jesus into the dark. We see Jesus refuse violence. We notice the anger at those who keep people from God. We hear Jesus' stories about offering water to strangers and rescuing lost sheep. With a word, Christ could save himself and leave us to our own consequences: he calls that "temptation" and turns toward the cross. Jesus will go with us down into the darkness, even when it is of our own making.

In deep trouble, the psalmist proclaims that our future is in the hands of God. Jesus shows us that our God is one who stays right here with us, even at our very worst.

God, thank You for the assurance that there is no place of darkness we can be where You will not be with us. Amen.

Pastor Lore Blinn Gibson, Conference Superintendent; Northwest District

PSALM 31:9-16

“Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also... But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’”

I hear the cries of the psalmist, and I swear it is like the voice of my toddler. She moves throughout her day in this seemingly constant back and forth struggle between trusting her environment and us, her parents, and reacting against it when she is hurt or scared. She can be a bit dramatic, but she is three. She invites me to wonder if I could be so vulnerable and aware.

This Psalm is a teaching about trust. It is an invitation to explore in our souls who and what we really trust.

Most of us manage pretty well to keep ourselves happy and moving. We say we trust in God and are blessed. But until the wheels really fall off and we have no control, do we really know that to be true?

The endurance of this pandemic has pushed many to the limit. We can no longer rely on so many of the things that were just normal to us. It is devastating in one sense, but the invitation is clear: Living or dying, knowing or unknowing, will you trust in the God who is faithful and steadfast? Will you trust in the God who loves purely and truly without any effort of your own? While imperfect as we are as parents, my daughter still cries out to us because she knows we love her. May we cry out in our joy and our pain to the God who loves us.

Loving God, we say with the old hymn, “’Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus.” Hear my cries of hurt and hope today... Amen.

PSALM 31:9-16

“Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.”

“Life isn’t always peaches and cream.” As much as life would be so pleasant if all things went well, that, quite frankly, is not the case. There will be days and seasons in our life where we struggle with relationships, occupation, loss, and health. In times like these, our relationship and walk with Christ can be strained. In our toughest moments, will you fight your battles alone, or let an all-powerful God fight alongside you?

In times like this, we must stay grounded, not only in ourselves, but also in God. Submit yourself to God, who is unseen, and trust in God to deliver you from your troubles. God has promised comfort to those who are in mourning. God is unchanging and unwavering, so the promise of comfort heard in this Psalm still holds true today. In our weakest of times, the God of the Universe is waiting to comfort us with open arms.

God, today we ask You to make what is broken whole again. When we suffer, bring us comfort, and let us earnestly trust in Your holy name. Amen.

LUKE 19:28-40

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'"

So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it."

Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."



ISAIAH 42:1-9

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.”

As Holy Week begins, we already know how it will end. Those who understand God’s light and love will kill the Messenger and use their sense of justice to do so.

In today’s reading, Isaiah prophesies a servant who “will bring forth justice to the nations” (v. 2) and declares, the people to be “a light to the nations” (v. 6). While many understood God’s servant to be Israel, I read these words as a messianic prophecy, believing the servant to be Jesus.

Isaiah describes the servant as having God’s Spirit upon him and his purpose to bring justice. This justice is not like today’s justice system where violence and oppression are abundant and legal loopholes are celebrated. Instead, God’s servant of justice “won’t call attention to what he does with loud speeches or gaudy parades. He won’t brush aside the bruised and the hurt and he won’t disregard the small and insignificant, but he’ll steadily and firmly set things right. He won’t tire out and quit. He won’t be stopped until he’s finished his work – to set things right on earth” (v. 2-4, The Message).

These are the instructions of God. These are the actions of Jesus. This is the job description of Christians: to bring justice to a troubled world without stomping on the bad guys or making life difficult for others. By doing so we ensure that nothing—not even death—can destroy God’s light and God’s love.

Bring forth Your justice, God! Transform me, my community, state, and world. In Your sovereign wisdom and order, set things right. Let me be more like Jesus. Amen.

Chris Mahon, Community of Hope; East District Lay Leader

ISAIAH 49:1-7

“I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

In this “Servant’s Song” we who are the servants of God are speaking out. It is not God speaking to the divine council of the world, nor those from afar but, “I” the servant of God, will speak from my soul, life and experience, the “prophetic” voice.

In my prior ministry in Alabama, our ministries began serving, feeding, baptizing, and welcoming our new brothers and sisters who found themselves in our city. From packing lunches for those working in fields to teaching English as a Second Language we were running on all cylinders. Offering services in English and Spanish, traditional and “Whatever the Holy Spirit rolled out” was our culture. Things could not get better. It was the feeling of Pentecost Sunday every week...

...until the Alabama State Law changed on immigration, and persons who were said to be undocumented began moving from the state in fear. In one day, our entire ministry was changed. Christians began taking sides with political parties, and the feeling of fear was rising from everywhere.

Then came a leaders’ meeting on how to deal with this matter in various congregations. I remember a person saying, “We had better not say anything or the fallout will be on us.” My Superintendent stood and said, “Unless you have been using a prophetic voice, you should hold off.”

God has given all of us a prophetic voice in our lives to profess God’s power and love. From your beginning, God has placed a calling inside of you. “Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

God, give us a prophetic voice to declare Your love and power. Amen.

JOHN 13:21–32

“After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, ‘Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.’”

Our cultural use of the word “endurance” often expresses passivity. For example, “I had to endure a long flight with a screaming baby.” A blog called “Stoic Coffee Break” titled one episode paraphrasing Marcus Aurelius, “If It’s Endurable, Then Endure It.” The message is this: if you can fix it, fix it; if you can’t, shut up about it.

But the biblical meaning of endurance isn’t about passivity or stoicism. In today’s Gospel reading, the words of Jesus reveal what it means to endure. Jesus is no stoic with regards to His impending suffering. Jesus’ spirit is troubled with intense emotion about what lies ahead. But, Jesus is not passive. Jesus tells Judas, “Do quickly what you are going to do.”

Jesus endures actively and purposefully. From early in the Gospel narrative, Jesus knows about being lifted up on a cross (John 3:15) so that we may be drawn into God’s fold (10:15–18).

Hebrews 12 also reminds us that we are called “to endure the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus...” who “endured the cross.”

Endurance, scripture reveals, can be redemptive for us and for others. Endurance involves faithfulness to God’s purposes and a willingness to suffer so that others might be drawn to God.

Many of us feel we’ve suffered a great deal over the past couple years, yet the most important question is: “Have we endured?”

Jesus, help us faithfully endure so that others may be drawn to You. Amen.

Pastor Tracey Leslie, Lafayette Trinity UMC; Northwest District

JOHN 13:1-17, 31B-35

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

When I became a mother, my aunts told me that “my children will not do what I say, but they will do what I do.” I can hear their voices as I watch my children mimicking my bad behavior while they walk past my homemade “no eating upstairs,” sign to eat in their rooms.

On this Maundy Thursday, we turn our attention to John 13 where Jesus shares an intimate moment with the disciples, knowing the time is near to give the ultimate sacrifice on the cross called Calvary. Jesus gives the disciples a mandatum, a new commandment. The new commandment is to “love one another, just as I have loved you.”

Jesus’ command isn’t wishful thinking or empty words. Rather, Jesus demonstrates love toward the disciples by actively modeling what it looks like to be loved so that they can mimic that love towards one another. In an act of radical love, Jesus grabs a bowl of water and a towel, and takes a knee washing the feet of the disciples.

The menial task of washing feet was reserved servants, slaves, women, and children. And yet, Jesus demonstrates great love towards the disciples while taking a knee in solidarity with the marginalized of that day. It is in the washing of feet that Jesus anoints His disciples for a life of love and servant leadership.

How are we being called to demonstrate our love by taking a knee with the marginalized among us? How can we demonstrate radical hospitality and Christ-like humility in polarizing and challenging times? We are disciples and Easter people who look towards the light and glory of Jesus to guide us.

God, the world will know that we are Your followers by our love. Help us, Your children, follow You. Remind us that our children are watching us, too. Amen.

Pastor Annettra Jones Stephens, Associate Director of Diversity,
Mission, and Justice; Indiana Conference

JOHN 18:1–19:42

“So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.”

The Scripture passage for today is long but powerful. It confronts us with the story of our Lord's arrest, trial, and bloody crucifixion. In this story we are confronted by the betrayal of Jesus' disciples. Of course, we want to look to Judas for that, but Peter and all of the disciples turned away too when the going got rough.

And too quickly for my comfort, the story comes to us; because in some ways the cross on this day becomes a mirror in which we see the reflection of the truth. If we dare, we see an honest vision of who we really are.

So maybe on this Good Friday, at least for a moment, we can be honest in our hearts about who and what we really are ... because Christ didn't sacrifice Himself to excruciating agony on a cross because we are basically good people. Christ didn't endure a long, exhaustive, humiliating death because we just needed a little help to be just a little bit better.

As we remember the scene of Jesus hanging lifeless on the cross, the truth is that we are in the picture too. Our lives were there as the nails were driven. We drove the nails even as we have attempted to proclaim ourselves as basically good.

Easter has no meaning unless we know about the complete sacrifice that Christ made and that that truly horrific sacrifice was for the specific purpose of taking on the reality of our human sin and failure.

This is about the day humanity conspired to silence the voice of God. Yet the blood so cruelly shed that day is the blood that cleanses us. Even as our sin drove the nails... Jesus was praying, “Father, forgive.”

Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner. Amen.

Pastor Larry Whitehead, Executive Assistant to the Bishop and
Director of Connectional Ministries; Indiana Conference



PSALM 46

“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

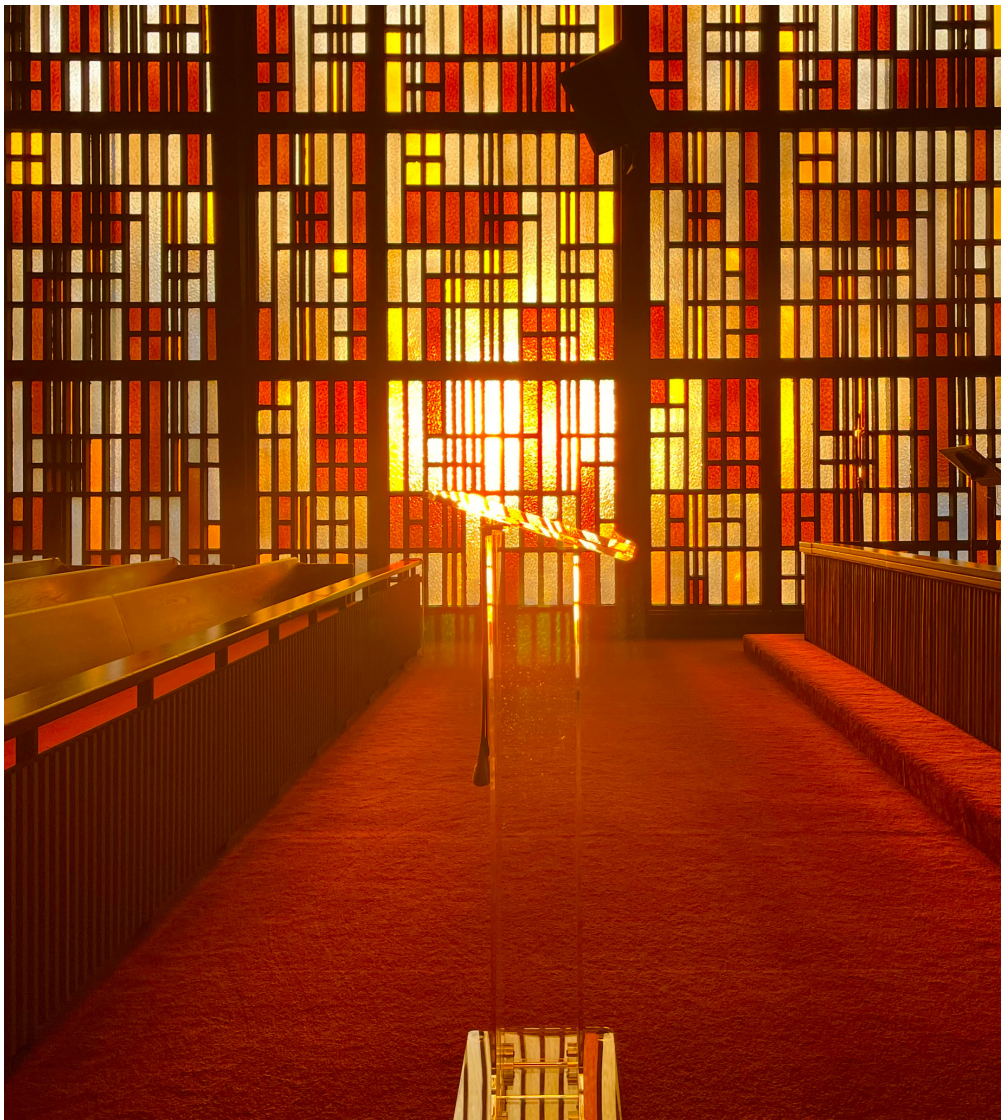
While Good Friday is dark and dramatic, Easter is bathed in light and celebration. In contrast, Holy Saturday is a quiet day, gray and lifeless. Holy Saturday was so much easier to explain in 2021. There was a pandemic surge and the grayness was imposed on us like the ashes that began our Lenten journey. We recognized the liminal nature of disruption, illness, and death.

Richard Lischer wrote, “In a time of pandemic...Holy Saturday invites us to reexamine our spiritual bearings when, as Psalm 46 says, the kingdoms are tottering, the earth is melting, and desolations threaten the earth. ‘Be still and know that I am God.’ The command sounds harsh, but it isn’t a rebuke, as in ‘Be quiet.’ It’s an invitation to enter the supernatural stillness of God. It means ‘Don’t be afraid of what comes next.’”

Last year, many were willing to give that kind of quietness a try if it meant that the pandemic would end. But this year, many of us have no time for supernatural stillness. We’ve had enough of limitations and boundaries. We’re neither resting like the disciples were required to do on the Sabbath, nor secretly making burial preparations like the women at the tomb. No one can tell us what to do. The compulsory stillness has been irritating. We’ll skip the quiet and head straight to the Easter celebration.

It will take unusual courage to pause, to be still, and to consider what our fears and fierce individualism have created within us and among us.

We need deliverance: from the pandemic our self-deceptions have prolonged; from societal injustices and personal intolerances that have separated us; from fatigue, anxiety, and social isolation.



That deliverance begins as we sit quietly with a God who has been subjected to suffering and who does not ask whether this is a beginning or an end but assures us, “I am with you always.” In Hebrew, the words “wait” and “hope” can substitute for one another. This year, hold those words close. Hold that promise even closer.

Holy God, You hold us in the silence of this day between death and life, loss and promise, fear and hope. You are with us always, even to the end of all things. Amen.

Pastor Kevin Armstrong, Extension Ministry – IU Health, Chief
Mission & Values Officer; Central District

JOHN 20:1-18

“Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away.”

The women leave the tomb and rush to tell the disciples that the stone has been rolled away and the tomb is empty. Thankfully, the dark tomb is not the final chapter of the story. God works amidst darkness. It is a prelude to the risen Jesus who appears to the disciples as confirmation that God is faithful. Easter is life over death, forgiveness over sin, freedom over bondage. Because of Jesus’ resurrection, we are free to go and serve with gladness!

Some of my most meaningful reflections of the resurrection have been overseas. Oh, how I wish you could go with me and First Lady Racelder to the Holy Land where you would experience the “Fifth Gospel,” the land of the Bible. To walk where Jesus walked and stick your feet in—or even get immersed in—the baptismal waters of the Jordan River. To pray at the Garden of Gethsemane and weep at the birthplace of Jesus. The Bible comes alive!

There have been times I have experienced the holiness of God and heard Jesus say that He loves me. I cannot fully explain the spiritual and emotional experience of visiting the Garden Tomb and stepping into an empty cave knowing that Jesus died for me and you.

Every time we return from the Holy Land, my first call is to my mother, who is now 99-years-old and has traveled many places though never to the Holy Land. “Mama, I checked the tomb. He is risen just as He said!” I can tell she is smiling upon my report because we are all free to serve with gladness as Easter people. Praise be to God!

The Good News is we serve a risen Savior. The tomb is empty! We have something to declare to the world!

Gracious God, You have set us free from the bondage of sin and defeated death on a cross. Thank You, Jesus! Help us to share Your love as light that shines even in the darkness. Amen.

Bishop Julius C. Trimble, Resident Bishop; Indiana Conference



NOTES

We are grateful for the following churches that submitted the
included stained glass images:

Bradley UMC of Greenfield, IN- page 20
Central UMC of Richmond, IN- page 34
Evangelical UMC of Huntington, IN- cover
Green Center UMC of Albion, IN- page 41
Memorial UMC of Terre Haute, IN- page 49
North UMC of Indianapolis, IN- pages 13, 27, 47, 51
Stidham UMC of Lafayette, IN- page 6