

LENTEN DEVOTION – WEEK 1

MARCH 10-16, 2019

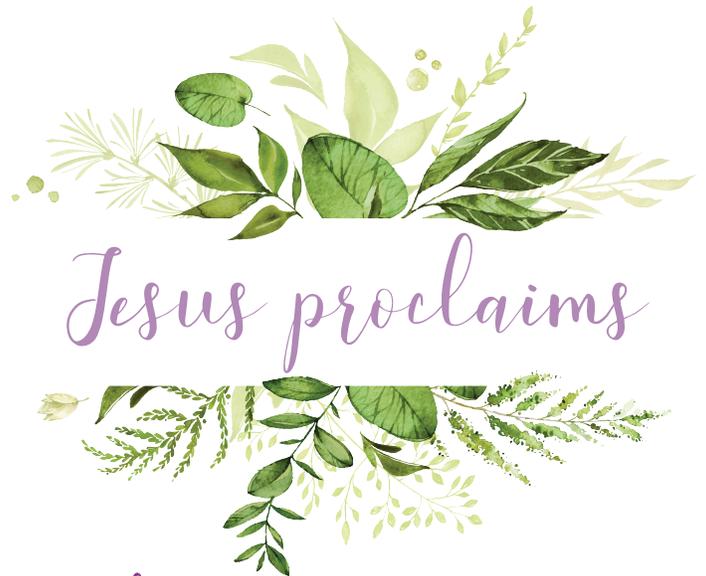
BY JILL DUFFIELD, PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK EDITOR

Sunday | LUKE 4:42-44

Early in Jesus' public ministry, he states his purpose: I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God. I envy Jesus' clarity of purpose, his ability to say no to the people eager for him to stay, even as they offer him praise and affirmation, in order to say yes to God's call that entails uncertainty, risk and sacrifice. Jesus' unwavering confidence that God sent him to proclaim good news – not just in familiar Galilee, but in the unknowns of Judea – propels him forward. Thwarting someone with a deep sense of divine purpose proves all but impossible. Even Jesus' death on a cross could not silence the good news of the kingdom of God he came to proclaim and fulfill.

During Lent, we are invited into a season of discernment about our call and purpose. Remembering that Jesus tells his followers that they too must share the good news and be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, whatever we do entails preaching the gospel. Even if we never step behind a pulpit or stand to speak in front of a crowd, no matter how we spend our days, whatever our circle of influence, as followers of Jesus our unambiguous purpose is to embody God's good news of great joy for all people. This season of self-examination calls forth the question: Are we? Are we, like Jesus, offering the wholeness of God through our words and acts? Are we showing mercy and extending grace? Are we calling out evil and working for justice? Are we saying no to what may feel good or familiar so that we can say yes to taking risks for the sake of the gospel?

Before Jesus ventures out to preach in the synagogues of Judea, he departs to a desolated place. Jesus retreats in order to advance his ministry. These 40 days offer us the opportunity to do likewise. As we seek to discern how and where God is calling us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, we are invited to find a place without distraction, where we can notice our thoughts, name our fears and listen for a holy word of guidance that is no doubt very near.



Jesus proclaims

Monday | LUKE 5:1-3

Jesus notices not only the crowd pressing in on him, but his surroundings. He uses whatever is available to proclaim God's word. Often, we are unable to see the resources God has given us because we are fixated on the clamoring crowd. Today, if you feel overwhelmed, look around and use the gifts at hand to proclaim good news.

God of abundance, when the crowd presses in on us, their needs urgent and many, we feel inadequate. Transform our fear into creativity so that we can notice the gifts you place all around us. Embolden us to ask for help and accept what is offered in order to better proclaim your word. Amen.

Tuesday | LUKE 7:21-23

Jesus proclaims the good news of God's reign not just in words, but through life-giving, transformative actions. When John the Baptist questions if Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus instructs those coming on behalf of John to report what they have seen. When others observe your words and actions what do they reveal about who you are?

Jesus, you say plainly that not all those who say "Lord, Lord" truly follow you. Our actions must not contradict our claim to be your followers. Keep us mindful this day that our lives demonstrate who and whose we are. Send your Spirit so that when others look at us, they see you. Amen.



Jesus proclaims

Wednesday | LUKE 8:1-8

As Jesus travels with the twelve and a group of women who provide for them, he proclaims the word through parables. He uses metaphors well known to his hearers. Stories of seeds, birds, rocks and common things become instruments by which Jesus brings the kingdom of God near. Today, notice everyday objects that tell of the work of God in the world and in your life. Make a list of the common items you noticed that spoke to you of God's word.

God of stars and sand, sequoias and cells, as we go about our work and chores, our rest and routines, reveal to us your word, working for good in the world and in us. As we sow the seeds of the gospel, give us ears to hear the rocks shouting their praise, eyes to see the little children leading the way and the faith to trust that you will bring a plentiful harvest. Amen.

Thursday | LUKE 12:54-56

Jesus chides his hearers and tells them that while they understand the weather, they fail to see that God is as close to them as their own breath. He tells them they do not know how to interpret the present time. Today take time to pray the headlines. Consider the people and places impacted by current events and pray for them. As you pray, imagine Jesus in the midst of those circumstances and your own.

God of every time and place, often we fail to see you, even when you are right in front of us. We focus on that which we ought to ignore and ignore that which we ought to see. Give us the wisdom to know the difference and the strength of character to act accordingly. Amen.

Friday | LUKE 13:18-21

Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God and proceeds to help his hearers understand how to recognize that divine reign. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. The kingdom of God is like yeast. The kingdom of God appears small, sometimes undetectable to the eye, but exponentially able to grow, transform and nurture. Today take note of the little things that nurture you and bring growth and transformation.

Lord, we experience times that feel stagnant, your presence difficult to detect, impossible to see. When we doubt your ability to transform seeds into bushes and yeast into bread, forgive us. Thank you for the beauty of trees, the smell of food, all the little things that bring to mind the countless ways you sustain and nurture us. Amen.

Saturday | LUKE 14:25-33

Jesus came to proclaim good news, but good news does not mean easy or without cost. Jesus preaches the truth, not simply what people want to hear. As you read this passage, consider the cost of discipleship. Today, what do you need to do or not do in order to follow Jesus more closely?

Dear God, you instruct us to consider the cost of discipleship. Worshipping you alone requires that all else is secondary. We reverse the order of your priorities, making excuses for our upside-down lives. During this Lent we humbly repent and haltingly attempt to put you first. Amen.

LENTEN DEVOTION – WEEK 2

MARCH 17-23, 2019

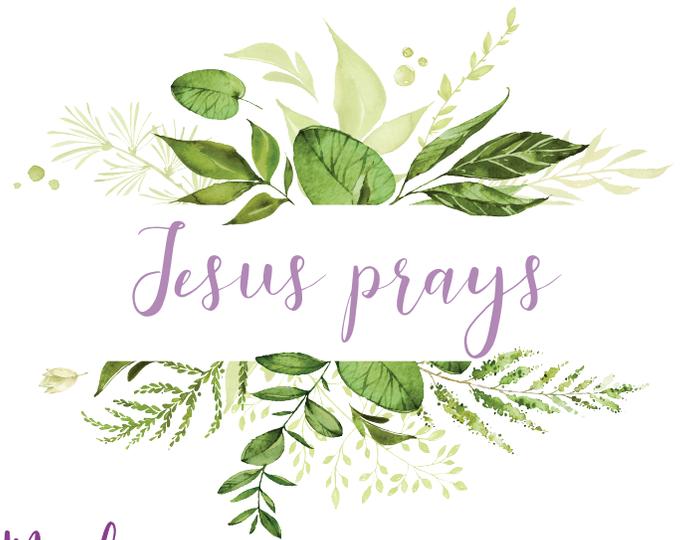
BY JILL DUFFIELD, PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK EDITOR

Sunday | LUKE 5:15-16

More than ever, word spread about Jesus. As Jesus' notoriety and the crowds following him grows, he withdraws to deserted places to pray. These two verses offer great wisdom to Jesus' contemporary followers. The more demanding, chaotic and full Jesus' life became, the more Jesus understood the need to set aside places and times to communicate and be with God.

Deserted places seem nonexistent in our culture. Even when we are alone, most of us remain digitally connected to work, friends, family and all manner of internet distractions. Waiting in line, stopped at a traffic light or sitting in a coffee shop, everyone peers intently at their screens. Space void of the intrusion of rings, dings and buzzes must be sought out. Time to listen for God's voice, share with our Maker our deep feelings and simply be still and know that God is God must be prioritized and created. No less than Jesus withdrew to deserted places even as the needy crowds clamored for his attention.

In a culture that values efficiency, multitasking, consuming and capital, taking time to pray appears useless, indulgent and downright odd. Those of us who follow Jesus, however, take our instructions from the One who came to fulfill the greatest, most urgent calling possible: salvation of the world. And if Jesus, who is on a mission to save sinners, took time to withdraw and pray, how much more should we acknowledge our dependence on and need for God? This week, no matter who or what presses for your attention, no matter how important the call or text, no matter how long the to-do list, no matter how overwhelming the circumstances, put everything aside, turn off the phone, look away from the screen, find a deserted place, withdraw and pray. Jesus did, therefore so should we.



Monday | LUKE 6:12-16

Jesus prays before calling the twelve disciples. He shows us that spending time with God is critical if we are going to do God's work faithfully. Today, pray the simple, but challenging question: Lord, how can I serve you? Make note of any insights you receive.

God, we do not often have the ability to go to the mountaintop and spend hours in prayer. Nonetheless, we yearn to spend time with you, to listen and speak freely, to give thanks and ask questions. Throughout this day, we seek an awareness of your unfailing love and guidance. We ask with utter sincerity: How can we best serve you? Amen.

Tuesday | LUKE 9:18-20

Jesus, after praying alone, asks the disciples who people say that he is, and then, "Who do you say that I am?" Prayer brings to our consciousness deep questions and grants us the courage to voice them that we might grow in our sense of call and purpose. Read this passage and contemplate how you would answer Jesus' question, and then ponder who you are in light of who you say Jesus is.

Lord, I confess, often days go by when I do not think about who you are and therefore who I am called to be. I worry about how others perceive me and if I am measuring up, when all that truly matters is remembering that you are the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the one who forgives, grants mercy and gives grace, and as your follower I am to go and do likewise. Amen.



Jesus prays

Wednesday | LUKE 9:28-36

Today's reading describes a quintessential mountaintop experience. Jesus is transfigured before the eyes of his closest disciples. Moses and Elijah make an appearance. Have you ever had an unmistakable experience of the holy? What did that experience teach you about God? Yourself? Take time in prayer to give thanks to God for the gift of knowing God's presence.

Almighty God, your voice booming from heavens rarely resounds unmistakably in our lives, and yet, you gift us with unmistakable glimpses of the holy. During this time of prayer and fasting, we seek to hone our sensitivity to you in order to listen to the prophets, the Law and, mostly, your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thursday | LUKE 10:21-22

Jesus rejoices. Jesus' prayers, like ours, include an expression of every emotion: joy, fear, lament, anger. No feeling need be suppressed. Throughout the day, pay attention to your emotions and offer them to God. Make sure you find ways to rejoice.

Rejoice in the Lord always, you instruct. You give us countless reasons to rejoice, first among them the gift of Jesus Christ. We rejoice that we need hold nothing back from you. We rejoice in the freedom to voice our praise and our doubt, our joy and our anger. We rejoice in the gift of community. We rejoice knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Friday | LUKE 11:1-4

Jesus responds to the disciples' request and teaches them to pray. Jesus gives them this simple, expansive, beautiful prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. Consider how many times you have said these words. Consider how many times these words have been prayed since Jesus taught his first disciples. Rest in the knowledge that you are surrounded by that entire Communion of the Saints.

Gracious God, we cannot fathom the vast network of prayer happening throughout time and space. Considering the truth that the Spirit intercedes for us and that Christ prays for us is too wonderful for us. Knowing that when we pray we do not pray alone, and when we cannot pray the entire Communion of the Saints prays for us both humbles and heartens us. Amen.

Saturday | LUKE 22:39-46

The disciples fell asleep when Jesus needed them most to stay awake. Their failure pains us because we realize that we, too, fall asleep when Jesus tells us to keep awake. We understand that we fail Jesus, but we take heart knowing that God never fails. Today, offer to God the deepest longings of your heart, your most profound hurts, failings and regrets. Know that God readily hears and responds.

Lord Jesus, we lament our failings, we beg forgiveness for the times we have let you down, fallen asleep, turned our back, neglected our responsibility to you. Trusting your grace we boldly pray to the one who neither sleeps nor slumbers, putting down our burdens of regret and guilt and asking for the transformation only you can give. Amen.

LENTEN DEVOTION – WEEK 3

MARCH 24–30, 2019

BY JILL DUFFIELD, PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK EDITOR

Sunday | LUKE 4:38-40

“They asked him about her.” This simple sentence represents compassion, connection, communal care. Consider how often we ask about others. “How’s your mom doing?” we might say. If someone fails to show up to worship a few weeks in a row, we may ask one of their friends if they have any news: “Are they out of town? Sick?” We may give them a call just to let them know they were missed. When we run into a friend we’ve not seen in a while and we ask how they’ve been, we get updates and maybe worries or challenges. We may even say, “I’ll be praying for you.” Or that much maligned phrase, “We will keep you in our thoughts and prayers.” Hopefully, we really will — like the disciples in this story, we will ask Jesus about them. Healing and wholeness includes our asking to Jesus about others.

In a number of congregations with which I’ve been affiliated, we had a time during worship to share our “joys and concerns.” Just before the pastoral prayer or the prayers of the people, the congregation is invited to ask Jesus about those people and circumstances about which we are concerned. We ask Jesus to bring healing, even when a cure seems impossible. I confess, when I was younger, at times I found this part of the service frustrating. Didn’t we pray for that concern last week and the week before that, too? I wondered if God didn’t have bigger issues to address than some of what his flock voiced. Occasionally, I wished that certain members would practice the art of brevity.

However, now I look forward to hearing whatever is shared. The joys and concerns feel as sacred as the words spoken at the Communion Table or font. Each request for comfort, healing, thanksgiving, wisdom and relief remind me that Jesus is in the room and we are asking him about one another. And I picture him responding: getting up, standing beside each person, rebuking the suffering, embracing the hurting, calling for healing, listening as we ask him about one another.

Jesus, we ask you about those for whom we are concerned. We tell you about friends and family in need of healing. We ask about tragic situations in our world. We lift up circumstances beyond our control and yet ever present on our minds. We know you hear us and will respond. Amen.



Monday | LUKE 5:12-13

The pain of this person comes through the page all these thousands of years later. His disease caused physical pain and it also separated him from community. Pain upon pain. Jesus chooses to make him clean, restoring him and reconciling him. Today, remember that Jesus still chooses to restore and reconcile. What do you need Jesus to cleanse you from this day?

Lord Jesus, you see our suffering, our physical and spiritual pain, the ways we are cut off from community and compassion. You see us and you choose to act. You bring restoration and reconciliation not just to us, but to those we too often dismiss as irredeemable and to those we have shunned for nothing and no one is God forsaken. For choosing to make us clean, we give you thanks. Amen.

Tuesday | LUKE 5:17-20

One of the powerful messages of this text is the reminder that when we have no agency, no ability to help ourselves, the community of faith brings us to the feet of Jesus in prayer and through acts of love. When have faithful friends helped you find healing? Who do you need to lift up to Jesus in prayer today?

God of all space and time, there are seasons when we are spent, worn out, too sick or tired in mind and body to even pray. We find comfort in the knowledge that we do not always need to seek you out because you come to us and you send others to bring us to you. We give thanks because we are part of the Body of Christ, the household of God, never alone or abandoned. Amen.



Jesus heals

Wednesday | LUKE 6:17-19

Jesus stands on a level place with a multitude from a vast region surrounding him. He teaches and heals, brings relief to those troubled with unclean spirits. Healing entails word and deed, proximity and a willingness to be surrounded by those in deep need. Today, think about those troubled and in need. How might you be called to bring a word or deed that would bring them relief?

Lord, when we hear the news and suffering of the multitudes around your world, we feel overwhelmed. The needs are so great, the problems seemingly so intractable. We want to turn away rather than stand with those who suffer. Grant us the courage to remain with those who are troubled and give us a word to say and the wisdom to know what we are to do to bring relief. Amen.

Thursday | LUKE 7:11-17

When the Lord saw the widow grieving the death of her son, he had compassion on her. Acts of healing begin with the feeling of compassion. Often, we suppress the urge to act with compassion and look for excuses not to or we second guess ourselves. Today, give in to any compassionate impulses. Pay attention to what happens when you act.

Compassionate Lord, over and over in Scripture we hear of how you are moved with pity. Your tender-hearted responses to the grief of human beings gives us hope. You comfort those who mourn and promise to wipe the tears of every eye. Help us to carry those losses and griefs we can no longer bear. Hear our weeping and give us a word of grace. Amen.

Friday | LUKE 8:26-37

What is your name? This simple question asked to the man so dehumanized that he'd been relegated to the graveyard reveals to the man and all who have ostracized him that he is a beloved child of God, known and remembered. As you go about your day today, take time to ask those you encounter the simple but profound question: What is your name?

You tell us, God, that you know us so well that before we speak a word, you hear it. You know us so well that even the hairs on our heads are numbered. You know our failings and goodness, our gifts and greatest insecurities and you claim us and call us beloved. You know us all by name and call us to see each other as you see each of us. Amen.

Saturday | LUKE 9:37-43

This story highlights Jesus' power, but it contains a rebuke that is difficult for disciples then and now to hear. The disciples could not heal the boy and Jesus calls them out for their lack of faith. Do we, too, lack faith in ways that prevent us from participating in the healing of the world? What might we do if we truly believed that through Christ all things are possible?

Lord God, you promise us that if we ask we will receive. You tell your disciples that you give them power to do the very ministry you did: preaching, teaching, healing. Move us this day to be just a little bolder, braver and courageous for the sake of the gospel. Amen.

LENTEN DEVOTION – WEEK 4

MARCH 31 – APRIL 6, 2019

BY JILL DUFFIELD, PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK EDITOR

Sunday | LUKE 4:14-15

Jesus teaches throughout Luke's Gospel. He teaches in formal settings like synagogues. He teaches outdoors to crowds gathered eager to hear his words. He teaches with stories, telling parables that invite listeners to reach their own – often surprising, yet inevitable – conclusion. He teaches by asking questions. He most certainly teaches by example, modeling for his followers how they are to be in the world. He reminds his followers that even after he no longer walks the earth, the Spirit will remind them of all that he taught them. Friends and foe alike refer to him as teacher, rabbi.

This week we focus on Jesus, the teacher, our teacher. We remember, like those first disciples, that Jesus continues to teach and that the Spirit tutors us. We are not self-taught, but mentored, guided, instructed and given tools to help us hone our discipleship. While a YouTube video might teach us how to change a tire or Khan Academy might help us master calculus, learning the will and ways of God, growing in Christian maturity and deepening our discipleship requires face-to-face time with Jesus, his Word and members of his Body.

Who were (or are) your favorite teachers? What made them so? I suspect their passion for their subject engaged you. I imagine their patience allowed you to persist when the material got challenging. I trust that they valued you, thought you had something worth sharing or invited you to risk trying a new thing. Good teachers push us just enough, praise us honestly, critique us with care and call forth the best of us. They never let us stop learning. Jesus, the master teacher, never stops teaching and calls us to never stop learning how to follow him a little more closely each day.

Master teacher, your patience astounds us. We are humbled and shocked by your willingness to meet us where we are, challenge us with care, honor our slightest progress and believe in our ability to serve you in ways that make a difference. Make of us eager students, unafraid to ask questions, try new things, make mistakes and always, always keep learning. Amen.



Jesus teaches



Monday | LUKE 4:31-32

Jesus teaches in synagogues wherever he goes, meeting with those gathered for worship on the sabbath. The folks of Capernaum are astounded at this teaching, as he teaches with authority. What, do you imagine, did he teach? What is Jesus teaching you when you gather week to week? Are you astounded at what he has to say and the way he says it?

Teacher, you meet us when we gather, coming to us with the authority of God, ready to teach us all we need to know in order to have life abundant. Quiet in us any voice but yours. Grant us the ears to hear and the hearts to heed your life-giving teachings. Channel our astonishment into attitudes and actions that reflect our knowledge of you. Amen.

Tuesday | LUKE 6:46-49

Jesus uses every method to teach those he encounters, giving us every opportunity to understand. He makes sure we know that his lessons require a real-life response, not only intellectual assent. What teachings of Jesus do you find the most difficult to put into practice? Today, make a tangible effort to enact one of Jesus' instructions.

You teach us, Lord, to dig deep and make your teachings the unshakable foundation of our lives. Often, we fail to do the work needed to make for a strong structure of faith. We sincerely desire to not just listen, but to put into practice your commandments. Each day, we seek to make you the cornerstone of all we do and say and, indeed, who we are. Amen.



Jesus teaches

Wednesday | LUKE 9:1-6

Jesus teaches us in order that we might go out and share with others the Good News of God. He tells us to do as he does, sending us out with explicit instructions: Pack light and rely on the hospitality of others. Today, take stock of all that you carry around, literally and metaphorically. What baggage do you need to leave behind in order to better share the Good News with others?

Lord Jesus, our culture tells us relentlessly that we need more. Our closets overflow with unneeded things even as our spirits bend under the weight of grudges, guilt and worry. We are too heavy laden to travel far or well. Today we let go of some of what holds us back from proclaiming your Good News to the world. Amen.

Thursday | LUKE 9:21-26

Jesus does not tell us only that which we want to hear. He plainly teaches the most difficult lesson of all: that he will suffer and die. He also says clearly that he will rise again on the third day. The joy of resurrection comes only after the pain of crucifixion. Pray today for all of those in the midst of pain and suffering. Be willing to hear and speak hard truth that leads to new life.

Jesus, you do not spare us the painful truth that suffering and death inevitably come to all, even the Son of Man. You also clearly teach that God works through horrendous events, even your crucifixion. May our knowledge of this gospel truth grant us hope and the courage to lose our lives for your sake in the confidence that in so doing we will be saved. Amen.

Friday | LUKE 10:25-37

Luke's Gospel is awash in questions. Jesus knows that asking the right question elicits the right answer, surprising as that answer may be to us. Notice the questions in this parable. Write down questions you have for Jesus. Imagine what questions Jesus has for you. How do you respond?

Lord Jesus, you do not force us to do your will. You invite us to come to the right answers through the right questions, through patience, by meeting us where we are and believing we are teachable, transformable, worth your time and care. Thank you for taking the time to hear our questions, tell us stories, call forth holy answers that will change the course of our lives for good. Amen.

Saturday | LUKE 12:1-11

Good teachers call us out and keep us accountable, not to shame or embarrass, but to coax and encourage us to be better than we imagine we are capable of being. Jesus speaks a hard word in these verses, one that we, too, must hear. Where are we practicing hypocrisy, saying one thing and doing another?

Jesus, we do not want to admit the many ways we say one thing on Sunday and do another on Monday through Friday. We praise your name in worship, confess your lordship in our lives publicly, but fail to practice love for one another or care for the least of those among us. We recognize our hypocrisy and seek to live with integrity, with your help. Amen.

LENTEN DEVOTION – WEEK 5

APRIL 7-13, 2019

BY JILL DUFFIELD, PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK EDITOR



Jesus feeds



Sunday | LUKE 5:27-32

I love Levi's reaction to Jesus. Levi, that sinful tax collector, leaves everything and then throws a party in Jesus' honor. He invites all his tax collector friends and colleagues. He cannot contain his joy at being found and called by Jesus. He wants to let others in on this great happening. Jesus doesn't hesitate to attend the banquet, eat with the disreputable and join with those others seek to avoid. The religious righteous want nothing to do with this scene. They grumble, question Jesus' judgment and ask why he would sink so low as to eat with the likes of Levi and his kind. Jesus who feeds thousands and eats with multitudes, replies unequivocally, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Jesus is exactly where he needs and wants to be: feeding the hungry in body and spirit, eating with those in need of transformation, healing the sick, bringing home the lost, calling sinners to repentance as he mingles among the guests at Levi's dinner party.

Where do we see ourselves in this scene? As the righteous unwilling to be associated with Levi and his ilk or as a sinner in need of Jesus' salvation? Are we hungry for the bread of life, eager to be fed by and eat with Jesus or self-satisfied and certain of our own ability to take care of ourselves without need of Jesus' intervention?

This week we will sit at table with Jesus. We will join the crowds on the grass and be fed by bread blessed and broken. We will be invited to help feed others, passing the baskets and collecting the leftovers when all have eaten and are full. We will invite Jesus into our homes, just as they are, and listen to his words, ask him to supply our every need and be fed by the one who is the bread of life that never fails to nourish and sustain us.

Lord, you eat with all those who invite you to dinner. You do not hesitate to rub elbows with those society deems unworthy. You call sinners to repentance and never fail to feed us on the bread of life that offers forgiveness, mercy and redemption. We relish your presence, your goodness, your grace. Amen.

Monday | LUKE 6:1-5

Jesus makes sure his disciples are fed, even if it means doing what some see as unlawful on the Sabbath: picking grain. Jesus insists that people come before rules, even important religious rules. Today, consciously try to put people first. Make note of how this impacts your words, choices and actions.

Jesus, you promise to care for your followers, making sure they are fed as they go about your work. You put people before rules, mercy before sacrifice. Show us how our religious rules impede your will. Do not let our righteousness become a stumbling block for your goodness. Amen.

Tuesday | LUKE 7:36-39

Giving and receiving radical hospitality entails more than food. Just because we invite Jesus to dinner does not mean we welcome him into our hearts. The Pharisee gives Jesus food, the sinful woman tends to Jesus with her whole self. What are you are holding back from Jesus. Why?

Lord God, you hold nothing back from us, offering your body and blood, the bread and the cup, your life in exchange for us. Yet, we resist giving you more than just the bare minimum. We invite you to dinner, but fail to welcome you fully into our homes. We offer you a meal, when you ask us to give our lives. Take whatever we offer, bless and use it until our faith compels us to hold nothing back from you. Amen.



Jesus feeds

Wednesday | LUKE 9:10-17

The disciples want to send the crowd away. Jesus says instead, “You give them something to eat.” What do we have to offer Jesus that he can bless, break and distribute to feed the needy crowd? Make a list of what you can offer to Jesus so that he can feed others.

Too often, God, we forget that everything we have comes from you. We hoard that which you tell us to share. We send away those whom you tell us to tend. We fail to understand the extent of your power to provide. Thank you for enlisting us in your service of compassion, even if at first we resist. Thank you for allowing us to participate in your miracles of abundance, despite our doubts. Amen.

Thursday | LUKE 11:37-44

What truly matters? That’s the question at the heart of this dinnertime exchange with the Pharisees. Is it more important to look good or be good? Critical to appear righteous or live with integrity? When you examine your life, what does it tell you about what matters most to you? Do your priorities match those of Jesus?

Gracious God, we rejoice in your goodness, your never-failing kindness, your consistent character of mercy and grace. We pray that our values and priorities match not just our words but your Word. We seek not so much to appear righteous to others, but to act in ways that reveal a purity of heart that desires only your will. Amen.

Friday | LUKE 14:15-24

Jesus feeds whoever is willing to come to his banquet. His guest list includes those who respond to his expansive invitation. Do we respond to Jesus’ invitation to come and be fed, or do we make excuses and neglect his call? Consider the excuses you make that prevent you from being with Jesus.

We are so full, Lord. Our calendars are full. Our days are full. Our heads are full. Our homes are full. We are stuffed to overflowing with that which does not really satisfy. Hence, we keep trying to find more and more and more. We make excuses to avoid answering your invitation to empty ourselves in order to be filled by you. Today, we simply say “yes” and sit at table with you. Amen.

Saturday | LUKE 15:1-7

We end the week where we began: with the Pharisees complaining about Jesus’ propensity to eat with sinners. As you have considered being fed by Jesus and eating with him, has your sense of who is around the table with you expanded? Who is still missing and needs to be invited? Who is still lost and needs to be sought out and found?

Lord Jesus, you notice when we are missing from around your table. You miss us. You leave the other 99 in order to come find us. We are awed by your love for us. We rest in your care, rejoice in your attention and abide in your kindness. We give thanks that you have found us and will never abandon us. Amen.

LENTEN DEVOTION – HOLY WEEK

APRIL 14-20, 2019

BY JILL DUFFIELD, PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK EDITOR

Sunday | LUKE 22:14-23

Jesus serves. Jesus serves us. Jesus came not to be served but to serve. The sheer magnitude of this reversal – that the Son of God becomes the servant, offering us not just bread and wine, but his body and blood, his very self – should stun and shock us no matter how often we celebrate the Lord's Supper. As we remember the events of this week – recalling Jesus' last supper with his friends, his sacrifice for our sin, his unending love for the world, even those closest to him who deny and betray him – we examine our own inability to stay away, remain loyal and go all the way to the cross with him.

In a culture where those who serve are often invisible, undervalued or ignored, how does the last week of Jesus' life on earth call us to regard the least in our society? If Jesus, our Lord, takes on the role of table server, foot washer and crucified criminal, what tasks and roles are we called to perform for his sake? When have you served another? How did it feel? Did you do so willingly or were you pressed into service?

I have a favorite picture of my children. The photo shows my son, around 6-years-old, bent over washing his younger sister's feet with the garden hose. She is 3, covered in mud, looking down as he cleans her feet. Behind her, my youngest, also filthy, stands waiting her turn. The entire scene spontaneous, enacted because my son saw the need and the means to meet it. A simple act of service, lovingly performed, a witness to me of what a life in Christ might look like.

During this Holy Week, notice both how you serve and are served. Imagine Jesus as you give and receive acts of service.

Almighty God, as we begin this holiest of weeks we ask that you would quiet in us any voice but yours. Still our minds, open our hearts, grant us the faith to stay awake in order to be with Jesus. As we remember how he came to serve, not be served, we yearn to do likewise, in thanksgiving and with joy. Amen.



Monday PRAYER

Living God, we acknowledge our tendency to worship you on Sunday only to forget your claim on our lives come Monday. Yesterday we praised you, shouted with joy and got caught up in the excitement of the crowds. Today we question if your entry into Jerusalem matters. Nudge us from complacency. Do not let us neglect your call. Keep us aware of your presence among us and show us how to stay close to you all week, especially this week. Amen.

Tuesday PRAYER

God of all times and places, the business of daily life consumes us. Work must get done. Meals must be cooked. Bills must be paid. We go easily from one day to the next, oblivious to your work of salvation happening here and now, in and all around us. Help us to pay attention, to be mindful of your purposes, attuned to your will, grateful for each moment on this abundant life we have in and through Jesus Christ. Amen.



Jesus serves

Wednesday PRAYER

The days are surely coming, Lord, when you will no longer walk the earth. The atmosphere feels sinister as we prepare to gather at table together. Hold us close as we worry our faith will falter and our fear will overwhelm our promise to follow you wherever you lead. Bless our sincere desire to be loyal to you and forgive us when we falter and flee. Amen.

Maundy Thursday PRAYER

Lord, you are our Master, our Teacher, our Friend. The thought of your suffering pains us. We desperately want a different outcome, an escape from what you tell us must come. As you serve us, wash our feet, offer the bread and cup and give us the commandment to love one another, we relish our time with you. We will remember your words, your actions, your loving care and honor you when we emulate them. Amen.

Good Friday PRAYER

My God, my God, why have you forsaken your Son? How can you tolerate the suffering of the One who came to save? How can it be that He who brought abundant life has been sentenced to a cruel death? Hear our lament. Stand with us in our sorrow. Sit with us in the dark. Remind us of our Savior's promise that we will see him again. Grant us the strength to get through the night in the hope of a new day. Amen.

Holy Saturday PRAYER

Jesus, the light that no darkness can overcome, even as the sun rises, the night refuses to relent. We huddle together, afraid, bereft and unsure what to do next. All we can do is cling to each other, assure one another that we heard you correctly, that you did say on the third day you would be raised, that you said plainly that you would not abandon us. Help us to hold fast to your words even when we see no evidence of their truth. Help us to put our hope in you despite our despair and doubt. Amen.

Easter Sunday PRAYER

It is the third day, Lord of all, the third day, the eighth day of creation, the day of resurrection. The stone is miraculously rolled away, the tomb is unquestionably empty and the glorious news of you alive, scarred but breathing, ripples through the world. Reconciliation accomplished. Redemption certain. Death defeated. Sins forgiven. Salvation won. No longer can anything separate us from the love of God, the hope of Christ, the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Alleluia! Christ is risen! Amen.