

40 DAYS OF LENT HOLDING ON.

JOHN 14:1-3 We live in a time of increasing isolation and loneliness. People move frequently, work remotely and have shorter tenures at their jobs. Yet, the need for connection and community is universal. Everyone needs a place where they are welcomed and valued, a space where they can both contribute and be cared for when they are at their worst. Jesus assures his followers that despite the physical separation that is to come, he does not and will not abandon them. Yet, troubled hearts beat within and all around us. Anxiety pervades our pews and our culture. People feel weighed down and burdened. Isolation and loneliness silently creep into our lives. We hesitate to speak of our pain lest we appear ungrateful or incapable. Jesus knows our grief and our questions, our longings and our losses. Lent offers us a season of repentance, but also a time to reconnect with the God who loves us with abandon. Lent calls us to confession, but also to community. As you take stock of your life – your hopes and disappointments, your worries and the wonder – remember that you are not alone. Jesus not only prepares a place for us, he gifts us with others to pray for and with us, to walk with us on this journey. As you enter time of intentional prayer and practice this Lent, know you do not do so in isolation. The entire Body of Christ goes together to the cross. Notice who is lagging behind, lighten the load of those carrying heavy burdens, rest when necessary, prepare a place for others to find solace and cling to the promise that Jesus will not abandon us.

PRAYER: Lord, you promise to make a place ready just for us. When our hearts are troubled and we feel alone, surround us with others who journey with us, no matter where we go or what we face. Send your Spirit to remind us that your burden is light, you grant rest, you give us the gift of community and connection and call us to seek out those still far off and afraid. Amen.

WEEK 1

Holding Relationships & Releasing Division

Monday Bible Reading: DEUTERONOMY 31:6

MEDITATION: Today take courage, knowing that God does not abandon you. Consider where God may be calling you to speak up or step out in ways that witness to God's love. Are there people of faith you think of as courageous? What makes them so and how would you want to emulate them?

PRAYER: *Almighty God, you call us to be courageous in the faith, taking risks for the sake of the gospel. Forgive us when we shrink from bearing witness to your will and ways. Help us to take the next right and bold step on the Way until we are emboldened to run the race set before us. Amen.*

Tuesday Bible Reading: HEBREWS 13:5

MEDITATION: Today, practice being content. What gifts are in your life right now? Notice when you buy into the message that you need better or more of something. Recognize when you are being sold a consumerist vision of life. Maybe during this last year you have come to appreciate different things, people and places you never realised were so important to your life. Notice and contrast it with Jesus' vision of life, and give thanks for all that you see that is good.

PRAYER: *Lord, you came that we might have abundant life and that abundance consists of peace that passes understanding, a light burden, the promise of your never-failing presence and the gift of the Body of Christ. We praise you for the countless ways you daily chase us down with grace and mercy. Amen.*

Wednesday Bible Reading: PSALM 94:14-15

MEDITATION: What does judgment founded on righteousness mean? We often judge people based on their appearance, or their political views, or where they live, creating divisions where God desires connections. Pay attention to when and how you judge those you encounter today. What assumptions do you make? How can you let go of judgment and consider what God's judgment based on righteousness looks like?

PRAYER: *Loving God, your ways are not our ways, and yet we often assume you agree with us. We fail to see with the eyes of Christ and instead project onto others our biases and experiences. Open us to the leadings of the Holy Spirit, suspend*

our judgment in order that we might first see in others your divine image and treat them accordingly. Amen.

Thursday Bible Reading: MATTHEW 18:20

MEDITATION: We often say in church gatherings that when two or three are gathered, Jesus is in the midst of us — but do we pay attention to his presence among us? Today, when you find yourself with others, be that on the phone or online remember that Jesus is in that very group too. How does this truth impact your words, attitude and interactions?

PRAYER: *Lord Christ, you are always between us, among us, present with us. We can trust your promise to remain with us always. When we grow isolated or feel frustrated in our relationships, grant us an awareness that you are in the midst of us, bringing forgiveness, working toward reconciliation and holding us together. Amen.*

Friday Bible Reading JOHN 14:18-20

MEDITATION: There are promises in the Bible that require us to enter a mystery that we can never fully understand. Jesus tells us in these verses that we are united with God through him, that he abides in us and we in him. Read these verses several times and rest in the knowledge of your closeness with the holy.

PRAYER; *Dear God, we rest in knowledge too wonderful for us, knowing that you are as close to us as our own breath, closer even. We will never understand the mystery of being united in Christ and, through Christ, made a part of the holy Trinity. Our only response is to rejoice in your grace and give thanks. Amen.*

Saturday Bible Reading: MATTHEW 28:19-20

MEDITATION: The assurance of Jesus' presence is not for our sake only. We are given a commission and sent to share the Good News we've heard. Today, how are you fulfilling the Great Commission even under these difficult circumstances? In what ways are you making disciples and teaching Jesus' commandments? Who are those who taught you about Jesus?

PRAYER: *Lord, we are reluctant to make disciples and teach your commandments. We feel uncertain about what to do. Yet, you promise to be with us and to send the Spirit to empower*

us. Help us to live what we've learned so completely that everything we do bears witness and points others to you. Amen

WEEK 2

Holding Wisdom and Releasing Empty Words

Bible Reading LUKE 12:11-12

We live in a world awash in words. Tweets, advertising boards, texts, blogs, podcasts, headlines, newsfeeds, talk shows. Silence rarely surrounds us, and we become uncomfortable with anything less than a full assault on our senses. Whenever we find ourselves waiting or with a moment to spare, we instinctively go to a screen, scroll, distract ourselves and disengage from much that is all around us. Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to give us the words we most need when we most need them. All that Jesus asks of his disciples, he equips us to do. Jesus grounds his admonition not to worry in the promise that he will give us what we need when we are called upon to do his work. Nonetheless, we find ourselves often anxious and afraid. Could that be related to our sensory overload, our constant distraction, our inability to tune out the noise and hone our hearing to the Spirit's signal? Words matter and yet we blithely speak without thought, post without prayer, text without considering the consequences. We quickly respond to whatever stimulus is in front of us instead of stopping to seek the Spirit's wisdom first. What if this Lent we sought to let go of all that distracts us and attempted to discern the words the Spirit is giving us to speak and enact? We will surely mishear and fall short, but grace abounds and God continues to teach us. This week could we challenge ourselves to pay close attention to the words we utter and type and disseminate and ask ourselves if they reflect the teachings of Jesus, the character of God and the wisdom of the Spirit?

PRAYER: Lord, Word made flesh, grace upon grace, we pause to listen for what you are saying to your church. We lean in to hear your wisdom so that our speech will reflect your character. Guide our thoughts, our words, our actions so that all we do, every sound we utter, builds up and contributes to your present and coming kingdom. Amen.

Monday Bible Reading EPHESIANS 4:29

MEDITATION: Today prayerfully attempt to use only words that give grace, that are useful for building up and encouraging. At the end of the day, mentally review what you said or wrote. How did you do? How hard was it? Ask for forgiveness for when your words were less than kind.

PRAYER: *Give thanks for when you were able to use upbuilding words. You are the Word, grace upon grace, and we want to reflect you in our own words. Forgive us when our words tear down or destroy that which you wish to build up and heal. Silence in us any voice but yours, that we might hear and imitate your performative, good, life-giving speech. Amen.*

Tuesday Bible Reading: ISAIAH 59:21

What does covenant mean to you? What does it mean that God has made a covenant with us, a covenant that confers God's words and Spirit upon us? Who are the people you know whose words and actions reflect God's words and Spirit? What is it about them that communicates God's words?

PRAYER: *God who communicates in a myriad of ways, we praise you for the people we know who speak your language fluently. We are grateful for their witness and words, the ways they point to you and inspire us to do likewise. We, too, hope to learn and live your divine lexicon in ways that call forth the good and beautiful. Amen.*

Wednesday Bible Reading JOEL 2:28-29

MEDITATION: God speaks through diverse voices. No one is off limits to God's power and Spirit. Often God chooses unexpected people to further divine plans. Are there people God may be speaking to and through whom you disregard? Pay attention today to who might be speaking God's word. Are they who you expected? What did they say?

PRAYER: *Lord of all, you pour out your Spirit where and when and to whom you will. We assume we know the likely candidates for your work, but a quick review of Bible stories reminds us of how wide and varied the protagonists you pick are. Attune us to your word, no matter who speaks it, so that we can hear and heed it. Amen.*

Thursday Bible Reading: ACTS 2:4

The Spirit gives the first disciples the ability to speak in a multitude of languages in order to tell of God's deeds of power. What are the languages, literally and metaphorically, we are called to speak in order to best communicate God's story in our context? How is God teaching those languages to us?

PRAYER: Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. Mold us and shape us. Grant us the languages we need to best share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Silence us when necessary. Open us to learning new things so that we can participate in the new thing you are doing in our midst. Amen.

Friday Bible Reading: MATTHEW 12:36-37

MEDITATION: Are there words you have uttered that you do not want to give God an account for saying? If so, are there ways you can make amends and ask for forgiveness for them? Review recent conversations, emails and social media posts and consider if you want to be held accountable for them or not.

PRAYER: Merciful God, do you really call us to account for every careless word we utter? Knowing you are merciful and abounding in steadfast love, we confess the frequency of such carelessness and ask for forgiveness. We trust that you invite us to repent, to turn and attempt to do better. We count on the Spirit helping us in our weakness. Amen.

Saturday Bible Reading: COLOSSIANS 3:17

MEDITATION: Today do everything in the name and for the sake of Jesus. Try to give thanks for absolutely everything that comes your way this day. How does this gratitude change your perspective? How does doing everything in and for Jesus change the way you do things? Write down your answers to these questions so that you can go back and reflect on them later.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, we know that nothing can separate us from your love. You bless us richly and daily, how then, can we not be thankful and full of joy? Our gratitude cannot be contained or constrained. Thank you for seeking us out. Thank you for reconciling us to God and one another. Thank you for the gift of this day and every day. Amen.

WEEK 3

Holding God's Care and Releasing Perfection

Bible Reading: MATTHEW 18:12-14

MEDITATION: Lost. Confused. Disoriented. Afraid. Alone. Even with our smartphone giving us turn-by-turn directions, the parable of the lost sheep still resonates. All of us, at some point or another, know the anxiety of being vulnerable and directionless. My ability to get lost is legendary. I force myself to make a mental note of where I parked my car and have even taken photos when I am parked in some car parks. One of my great and real fears is getting lost because as my husband will tell you I have absolutely no sense of direction. I relate to the lost sheep, somehow separated from the flock. I wonder if that lamb's mobile phone went dead while on the way back to the pasture, rendering him helpless and wondering how long it would take before the others noticed his absence. We can be sure that Jesus notices when we've wandered or run away, when we've gotten turned around or been left behind. Jesus never fails to notice our vulnerability, our deepest fears, our lostness. Jesus notices and cares and comes to find us. When we wonder if the flock has simply moved on without us, we can be assured that the Shepherd never gives up on us. No matter how far away we are, no matter how long we've been gone, he keeps looking for us until he brings us safely home.

PRAYER: *Good Shepherd, you never fail to notice when we are missing from the flock. You value us so much that you will leave the ninety-nine in order to seek us out and bring us home. When we are afraid or anxious, unsure where we are or where to go, you come to us, care for us, assure us we are not alone. Amen.*

Monday Bible Reading: PSALM 23 Read this beloved psalm aloud.

MEDITATION: If you have different translations of the bible then note the differences. What feelings come to you as you read it? What places or people does this psalm bring to mind? As you go about your day, take one verse with you. Write it down, keep it close, pull it out when you need a reminder of God's abiding care.

PRAYER: *Lord, you are our Shepherd, our protector, guide and leader. When we are in shadowy places, fearful and uncertain what will happen next, bring us back with your rod and staff.*

Lead us to places of refuge, rest and renewal. Remind us that you chase us down with goodness and mercy. Amen. Letting go of perfectionism and holding on to God's care by Jill Duffield Presbyterian Outlook editor Devotions for Lent

Tuesday Bible Reading: LAMENTATIONS 3:25-26 MEDITATION: Patience is a virtue, or so we are told. However, there is more than patient waiting admonished here. The first verse gives us some agency as we wait. We are told to seek God, not only wait for God. How might you seek God today? Remember, we are promised that those who seek will find.

PRAYER: *Patience, Lord, is difficult to come by in our world of instant gratification and on demand everything. We do not like to wait. And yet, you tell us to wait — not passively, but eagerly and all the while seeking you. You promise that those who seek do indeed find and so today we anticipate seeing you everywhere. Amen.*

Wednesday Bible Reading: MICAH 7:7

MEDITATION: God hears us. Sit with that truth for a moment. As you pray today – for yourself, your loved ones, the world – remember that God hears you. God is right now listening to you. What difference does that reality make in the prayers you voice, the words you speak, the hopes you hold close?

PRAYER: *Gracious God, we know your word does not return to you empty. You promise, too, to hear our words, to listen to us, our hopes and desires and our doubts. Today we speak boldly to you, holding nothing back, because you know each utterance before it is even on our lips and you not only hear, but respond. Amen.*

Thursday Bible Reading: MATTHEW 5:3-8

MEDITATION: Blessed. What does that word mean to you? We may hear “God, bless you” after we sneeze or, in certain regions of the country, “Bless your heart.” Sayings like “too blessed to be stressed”, but in light of this text, what does it really mean to be blessed?

PRAYER: *You, God, bless us, with your power to not only be present but to transform our most painful circumstances. Being blessed does not render us immune from suffering. Being*

blessed offers us a sliver of light through the cracks, a lifeline in tumultuous waters, the assurance that we are more than our circumstances and immeasurably valued by none other than the Most High God. Amen.

Friday Bible Reading: LUKE 12:7

MEDITATION: This is one of those verses that feels like overstatement — every hair on our heads counted by God, really? What if, for today, you carried this possibility with you? What if you imagined today that God knows and values everything about you and about everyone you encounter? Notice how this impacts your perception of yourself and others.

PRAYER: *Lord of all, aren't you too busy to pay attention to every detail of our lives? It is all but impossible for us to believe that we, and every creature, are that important to you. And yet, you hold nothing back from us, not even your Son. So we abide in the promise that we are more precious to you than we could ever hope or imagine. Amen.*

Saturday Bible Reading: 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4 MEDITATION:

Consolation is not a word we use much anymore, short of describing a runner up prize. In this verse we are told that God consoles us, enabling us to console others. Think about who and what brings you comfort. How does your faith bring consolation? How can you console someone today?

PRAYER: *God, when we are afflicted, disappointed and reeling from loss, you console, comfort and care for us. That consolation comes in the form of people, prayer and moments of the peace that passes understanding. May the relief of your grace prompt us to extend that grace to others who right now need to know you care. Amen.*

WEEK 4

Holding God's Peace and Releasing Fear

Bible Reading: JOHN 3:16-18

MEDITATION: God does not condemn us. Despite our mistakes and missteps, what we have done and what we have left undone, God does not call us out publicly, judge us harshly or sentence us to lifelong punishment. In fact, God so loves us that Jesus is sent to save the world. During this season of Lent,

we follow the Son to the cross and grave, to the tomb and back to Galilee, learning all the way about repentance and forgiveness, grace and transformation. Imagine if those of us reconciled to God through Christ practiced even a modicum of the mercy extended to us? What would it look like for us to let go of judgment and focus instead on extending grace? Consider the impact disciples would make if we sought to be just and not vindictive. What divine inbreaking might happen if we yearned for restoration rather than retribution or revenge? Forgiveness always costs someone something. It cost God the Son. As we seek to follow Jesus more closely this Lent, we too are called to extend forgiveness, even though it will inevitably cost us something — our pride, perhaps. Or our need to be right or our desire to see someone get what we think they deserve rather than what our faith calls us to hope for them. If God does not condemn us, how do we emulate the One we worship, and stop condemning others and instead point them to the saving love of Jesus Christ? We yearn not so much for universal mercy, but for punishment for others. Instead of celebrating radical transformation, we hold grudges and refuse to believe change is possible.

PRAYER: *Gracious Lord despite our pettiness and our sin, you refuse to condemn us. You come to save us. May the joyous recognition of such divine mercy shape us into a merciful people. Amen.*

Monday Bible Reading: LUKE 6:37-38

Bible Reading: What are you struggling to forgive today — in yourself or in others? Why are you holding on to regret or grievances rather than accepting God's forgiveness and opening yourself, your relationships, your communities, to the loving transformation that accompanies grace and mercy? Is there someone you need to contact to either extend or ask for forgiveness? Do it.

PRAYER: *Forgiving God, we struggle with patterning our lives after your character. You forgive the most egregious of actions done even to your Son. We refuse to let go of minor affronts and picayune mistakes. We thank you for showing us mercy. We accept your forgiveness, we commit to repentance, we will extend your grace to the world you so love. Amen.*

Tuesday Bible Reading: MATTHEW 9:13

MEDITATION: Jesus tells us to go and learn what it means that he desires mercy and not sacrifice. What does this mean? In one sentence write down what you think Jesus wants us to learn from this phrase. Now, how do you practice our Savior's rebuke? How can you extend mercy, rather than requiring sacrifices?

PRAYER: *Lord Christ, we live in the hope that you came not for the righteous but to save sinners. We know that we are not righteous and are desperately in need of your grace. There is nothing we could do that would be enough to earn your favor or forgiveness. Thanks be to God, you desire mercy and not sacrifice. Amen.*

Wednesday Bible Reading JAMES 4:12

MEDITATION: The Book of James refuses to be theoretical about our faith, always calling us back to how our faith should shape our actions and interactions. Notice today how and who and what you judge. Make note of your assumptions and attempt to suspend them. Be open to meeting each person as the beloved child of God they are.

PRAYER: *God, you alone are the judge of people and places, circumstances and behaviors. Yet, we constantly assess and render judgment. Help us to pay attention to how we rate, evaluate and respond to what we encounter. Send your Spirit to give us the eyes to see the world through the lens of faith. Amen.*

Thursday Bible Reading ROMANS 8:1-2

MEDITATION: Jesus sets us free from sin and death. Truly, nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing. Sit with this astonishing truth for a few minutes. We are not destined to languish in the consequences of sin. In this very moment, in every moment, you are united to God. Remember this truth today.

PRAYER: *Liberating God, you set us free to live without fear and in bold faith. Let nothing keep us from lavish generosity, obvious praise, over-the-top joy. May our gregarious living garner the attention of those around us so that we can offer our testimony and tell of your wondrous deeds of power. May*

our audacious hope be contagious and draw others to you. Amen.

Friday Bible Reading ROMANS 3:21-25a

MEDITATION: There is no distinction among us because all of us are sinners. Think about all the categories we put people in, all the distinctions we think so important. Now, imagine all those distinctions erased and everyone utterly equal before God. How does this change your perception of yourself and others? We put people in categories,

PRAYER: *Lord of All, and then we rank them, treat them differently, act as if some are better or more valuable than others. We forget we all fall short of your glory and need your grace. When we remember, we are humbled and chastened. Thankfully, you give us countless opportunities to repent and do better. Amen.*

Saturday Bible Reading 2 TIMOTHY 1:8-10

MEDITATION: More than even your vocation, your holy calling entails the core value or values you want to live in faithfulness and glory to God. It bears witness to Jesus Christ and reflects your God-created uniqueness. Write down your moral framework, that which shapes your decisions and remains evident and consistent in your life. Does it reflect and reveal Jesus?

PRAYER: *Lord, you enlist us to do your work in the world, to reveal your will and reflect your character. You set us apart for divine purposes, not because we are worthy, but because you are good. Shape us in ways that show the world who you are, whose we are and how you want us to live together. Amen.*

WEEK 5

Holding God's Grace and Releasing Judgement

Bible Reading: Matthew 6. 15-34

Like many, music can make me tap my feet and lift my spirits. I was thinking of a song entitled 'Don't worry, be Happy'. It is a lovely little song with some whistling in it and makes you want to sway. Or I was thinking of a song from a Disney film named Hakuma Matata from the Lion King. Apparently, it means no worries for the rest of your days. I'm sure you can

think of songs that have the same sentiments. Songs can be great fun and to sing can lift you up for a while but they can't bring you peace.

Jesus is not dismissive of our worries or anxiety after all Jesus stood with friends and cried. Far from being dismissive Jesus understands the kind of things we struggle with and spent most of his own life with real people with real issues and gave all his energy to lifting up the poor, the hungry, the widow; welcoming children and the list goes on. He taught about money and forgiveness Jesus was always addressing people's real worries, real anxieties, and real issues. If we want to see God's heart then look to Jesus, look what he taught and look who he reached out to. Maybe he was teaching the importance of letting go of fear and holding on to God's peace. We could all begin by making a list about the things that we are anxious about or things we can't stop worrying about. The challenge is not letting the fear, worry and anxiety define who we are or letting it choose the direction of our path. Maybe we need to acknowledge our fear and our faith alongside each other. During this week let us remember the words of the Lord's pray, 'Give us today our daily bread'. Worry and anxiety can cause us to lose focus on the things we need to pay attention to and put our energies in and most of all fear may rob us of knowing God's presence. So this week let us do some letting go and letting God help us with our fears.

PRAYER: Loving God help me

Gracious God give me peace.

pause

Holy Spirit comfort me

Christ hear me. Amen

Monday Bible Study. Isaiah 41.10

This one verse says so much about God's knowledge of us. So do not fear [knowing that we do] and at the end we read, 'I will strengthen you and help you'. As we begin to prepare for Holy Week we need to face Jesus with all our fears and worries because when we do we can feel the companionship of the Holy Spirit with us, helping us sometimes to see the wood for the trees. Is there something you feel worried about? today I ask you to name it out loud, that worry that you have carried for a long time today say it out loud and then wait to feel the Holy Spirit.

*PRAYER. All knowing and all seeing God, you know our deepest fears and worries today I name them I am anxious about.....
I can't stop worrying about
Give me peace this day. Amen*

Tuesday Bible Study John 14. 27

Peace is a wonderful word which conjures up all kinds of images, images of doves and rainbows and love and togetherness. But in reality, we strive for it all the time, don't we all want peace and unity? For many of us we may, if we are lucky get glimpses of peace and during this pandemic I think that people have found peace surprisingly difficult, didn't many of us think that given more time and a slower pace of life it would all feel better? Some find peace in different ways, through reading or painting or gardening or having a special place to be. I want you to take time today to think about how today you can enjoy peace and then do it, treat yourself to a time of peace.

PRAYER: Prince of peace, sit with me today and allow me to feel your peace flowing within me. Help me to practice peace in my life each day enough to share with others. Amen.

Wednesday Bible Study. Hebrews 11.1

It is hard to rely upon something that we cannot see and yet we do it all the time. We breath in oxygen without a second thought that by breathing in one day there will be no oxygen to breath. Belief in God comes about in many cases because of what we can see all around us. Breathtaking beauty, generosity, love, forgiveness, and a light that shines in someone's life of faith. There is a parable about a woman who has a disability that means she is unable to stand up straight [Like 13. 10-13] she is permanently bent over until Jesus heals her. We may go through times in our lives when we are downcast unable to stand tall and see the wonder of God all around us. In the parable Jesus speaks these words, "Woman you are set free". Today hear those words for yourself especially if you are struggling to see God at work in your life or the life of the world around you. *N [your name] you are set free.* Now start looking up and outward for God's presence.

PRAYER: Holy Spirit you were promised to us as our advocate and comforter. Hear our prayer and bring us to a closer walk with God and give to us comfort when we feel alone. Amen

Thursday Bible Study: Psalm 27

There is an old saying that goes something like this, 'If you want to hear God laugh tell him your plans'. How true it is that we spend sleepless nights and fretful days trying to work something or someone out. Trying to change something so that it can all work out in the end. Only to find that something else happens from out of nowhere and our plans become ashes and we wonder why? why did I get myself in such a state only for things to work themselves out without my interference. When these things happen, we can see in reflection how God had everything under control anyway. Things we could not possibly have known or imagined. For many of us it is hard not to be in control to let go and let God. However, as we draw closer to Holy Week we may just get a glimpse of God in all his majesty, all his limitless love and forgiveness and see that God shines a light guiding us to safety, protecting us. God is not to be feared. What do you think you have discovered about your relationship with God? Do you trust God or is there your plan and then God's. Try to remember a situation when there was a surprising outcome one that only God could have provided.

PRAYER: God, we accept your plan for our lives. We may not understand everything, but we know your path is the best for each of us. We surrender ourselves to you. Lord, we trust in you completely. Please reveal your path for us. We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen

Bible Reading Friday. 2 Corinthians 12. 9

Every Lent I realise that I have failed miserably at all the things I thought I would achieve by this time next year. I'd read more of my Bible, pray more, be bolder in faith be a better person and the list goes on. We try but fail to be the person we would want God to know because we are human beings who have frailties. Who make mistakes and let fear and worry direct our lives instead of worship and faith. Today the task is to place ourselves into God's hands as we journey through Holy Week. Jesus encountered people just like you and me and he loved and cherished them. God does not ask us to be perfect but to

be people who depend upon the one who says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness". As we draw closer to Holy Week let us take time to reflect upon our faith, on our weaknesses and ask God to help us. Amen.

*PRAYER; Christ the light of the world has come to dispel the darkness of our hearts. In his light let us examine ourselves and confess our sins.
pause for personal reflection*

*Our good news is this-The steadfast love of God never ceases. God's mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is God's faithfulness. (Lamentations 3: 22-23).
Amen*

HOLY WEEK

Holding onto Abundance of Life and Releasing Death

John 10.7-10

Jesus brings life abundantly. God never skimps or withholds. Over and over again, we see Jesus offering more than enough for everyone. His first sign at Cana affords us a glimpse of the lavishness yet to come. Lots of really good wine is emblematic of how Jesus operates. He will feed the crowds, all will be satisfied, there will be baskets of food left over. Living water overflows. Forgiveness will be granted to tax collectors and adulterous women. Those blind from birth will see. Lazarus, dead and buried, will walk out of the grave. Heavenly banquets will host those formerly living on the streets and lost sheep will be sought, found and reunited with the flock.

Abundance, not scarcity, defines the Kingdom of God. Lavishness, not stinginess, reflects the character of Christ. Generosity, not meanness, marks the community of Jesus. As we move closer to Jerusalem, the gratuitous love of God comes into clear focus. Truly, there is nothing God will not do to put us in right relationship and bring reconciliation. God is trustworthy. Jesus leads us to green pastures. We do not need to hoard our resources or hold back our feelings. We like the Shepherd who leads us, can be generous with all we have, all we are, sharing widely, loving wildly, loving, living abundantly. On Palm Sunday, Passion Sunday, wave your palm unabashedly even if you are in your living room, shout "Hosanna!" loudly, follow, Jesus closely, knowing that God

holds nothing back from the world, so we can joyously give our all in return.

PRAYER: Hosanna in the highest, we praise you without reserve and with all we have. Accept our shouts, our palms, our cloaks and our worship even knowing our propensity to turn away from suffering. You forgive our fickle following from the cross and we marvel at the abundance of your grace, your mercy, your sacrifice that gives us life abundantly. Amen.

PRAYERS FOR HOLY WEEK.

PRAYER FOR MONDAY

Gracious God, as we begin this Holy Week, we stop to reflect on our Lenten journey. We remember the times we felt your close presence and the moments when we could not sense you near. Help us to abide in you, even as you abide in us, assuring us that you are here, even when we cannot feel your presence. Amen.

PRAYER FOR TUESDAY

Lord Christ, how did you feel after your triumphant entry into Jerusalem, as you readied for the last meal with your friends and contemplated the betrayal and cross? Were your thoughts fraught with doubt and pain? Knowing you took on all our humanity, we thank you that none of our feelings or prayers, our questions or suffering, is unknown, off limits or unredeemed. Amen.

PRAYER FOR WEDNESDAY.

In the middle of this holiest of weeks, distraction creeps close and we are tempted to act as if nothing exceptional is afoot. Lord, we forget that you are on the cusp of crucifixion and that we are to be intent on following you. Nudge us from obliviousness and heighten our awareness of the divine in the midst of the ordinary, in the center of this exceptional week. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THURSDAY

Servant Lord, your willingness to kneel at our feet astounds and confounds us. Rarely do we choose the lesser, lower place. Often, we succumb to whatever inflates our egos. You tell us that people will know we are your followers by our love.

May our tangible acts of service witness to our love for you and your love for creation. Amen.

PRAYER FOR GOOD FRIDAY.

God whose giving knows no end, today your Son goes to the cross in our stead and for the sake of the world. He utters forgiveness with his last breath, unwilling to succumb to vengeance or hate. As we contemplate his sacrifice, we pray for the faith to imitate his endless compassion and unfathomable mercy. Amen.

PRAYER FOR HOLY SATURDAY.

When all hope is lost and we see no way for goodness to overcome evil, God come to our aid. When darkness overwhelms us and paralyzing uncertainty fells us, God, come to our side. When the liminal space between cross and resurrection feels eternal, God, come abide with us. Amen.

PRAYER FOR EASTER SUNDAY

Alleluia, a new day dawns, all we thought God forsaken and dead pulses with divine life and light. Risen Lord, we went to the graveyard expecting to mourn and attend to the rituals of death, but instead discovered the tomb empty and your living presence. God's power to reverse and upend our greatest fears and assumed intractable realities shock us and all we can do is shout for joy. Amen.