

# Lenten Devotions 2024





## Introduction

For our Lenten devotions this year, we want to pair the incredible stories of faith we find in scripture with the incredible stories of generosity found in Easter people. For this devotion, you'll need access to a Bible (let us know if you need one!) and a copy of the "Generosity Brings Joy Storybook" that was distributed on January 28 during Inspiration Team visits. If you need a new copy, please contact the church office or go to [easter.org/onesite](http://easter.org/onesite) for an online version.

The questions paired with devotion can be used in many ways. You may wish to use them as conversation starters with your life group, at the dinner table, or in a meeting. You may find them meaningful as Bible study tools or journaling prompts. You may use them to prepare your heart and mind for worship. They may serve as ways to enter a time of prayer and reflection. There is no one way to use them.

Even the schedule of the study can be whatever you need it to be. Included are devotions for every Wednesday and Sunday in Lent. Whether you use them daily or weekly, many times or once, or even need to skip a week and come back to it, it's meant to be a tool that supports **your** faith.

It is our prayer that God's word will continue to live in your words and actions, inspired by the faithful witness of other Christians and for the sake of the world God so loves.

## Ash Wednesday - February 14

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

*Key Verse: As servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way*

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten season. Many people think of Lent as a time of sacrifice and suffering. However, Lent intends to refocus us on our relationship with God. For some, this might mean giving things up and keeping life simple. For others, it might mean taking up new practices that help faith be more vibrant. For all of us, it's a time to increase our awareness of God's action in our lives. In this season of Lent, we especially commit to the work of gratitude. We want to be more aware of God's gifts in our lives, not only so we can be mindful of God's providence, but so we can share what God has given us.

As you read today's lesson:

- This lesson has a litany of suffering that people of faith have endured. How will you keep those who suffer for their faith close in your prayers today?
- This lesson also lists many ways that "the power of God" and "the weapons of righteousness" have served as protection. What are some of the ways you feel God's guidance and care in your life?
- Verses 8-10 point out some challenging dichotomies of faith, noting that for believers, it can sometimes feel like things are both beautiful and terrible at the same time. Can you think of a time in your life where something was both meaningful and painful? Where did you hear, see, or feel God at work in that time?

Read Royce's story, Offering Envelope #74, starting on page 3 of the booklet. As you hear Royce's story:

- He talks about love for community as part of why he loves Easter. How do these relationships help people through difficult times? Is there someone you could thank for how they cared for you in a challenging season?
- He discusses "tools in a big tool box" that we have to serve God and each other: time, talents, and treasures. How can you use these tools to serve others, especially those who might be enduring hardship?
- Royce reflects on stewardship and worship as instrumental parts of his faith. The reading insists "now is the day of salvation!" (v 6:2). What would you name as the ways your faith remains engaged, strong, and relevant? Where might you need a boost? How do you live into the truth that Christ's salvation is real for you today?

February 18

Reading: Mark 9:30-37

*Key Verse: Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.*

In this familiar story from Mark's gospel, we see Jesus using a child as an object lesson. His disciples are plagued with confusion, infighting, and pride. Jesus encourages his disciples to live and serve in great humility. He chooses a child as the example. In this time, children would have almost no rights or privileges and were treated primarily as property in a household. Jesus essentially asks his disciples to be so humble and lowly that they truly see, welcome, and love even those they might be inclined to ignore and devalue. To follow Jesus means to be willing to put love for others before even your own desires.

As you read today's lesson:

- Jesus says that welcoming a child is like welcoming Jesus. If a child would be one of the lowliest members of society in that time, who might be the equivalent today? How are you called to show compassion to such people?
- Jesus tells his disciples that he will suffer and die, but they don't understand and are afraid to ask for more information. What parts of your faith feel intimidating or inaccessible? How might you find answers for these things? How can you engage your doubts and fears to help better understand who Jesus is in your life?
- Jesus' disciples won't tell him what they were talking about. They were arguing about who was more important and seem to feel a little guilty about the selfish conversation. In what ways do believers try to make themselves more special or important today? How might Christians encourage a sense of compassion and equality, even when our beliefs differ?

Read Angie's story "Belonging" starting on page 13 of the booklet.  
As you hear Angie's story:

- She describes joy in Easter being a place where children – hers and others – find belonging and encouragement. What can we do to make sure everyone, from infants to elders, know that they are loved and valued? How can you be a part of that work?
- Angie talks about being part of a faith community that is active on Sunday but also every day of the week. What are some of the ways a church can live into Jesus' expectation that we might each be a "servant of all"?
- Angie describes the simple gifts she received from her grandmothers. These abundant, loving acts showed great care in meaningful ways. How might you do the same this week? Who can you show compassion to in a small, caring way? What's one step you can take towards being a servant of all?

## February 21

Reading: 1 Peter 4:7-11

*Key Verse: Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.*

It can be easy to be distracted by the opening verse of this reading: “the end of all things is near”! That sounds like a threat! In Christ’s time his followers were sure that he would return **soon**, not just eventually. But regardless of the timeline, the urgency remains. Believers are called at all times to discipleship concerning love, care, faithfulness, and generosity in all things.

As you read today’s lesson:

- We are encouraged to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God”. We often think about being generous with things like money or time, but what would it look like to be generous with God’s grace? How would it look and feel to live that out?
- Maybe you’ve heard someone use the phrase “love covers a multitude of sins”, which is taken from this Bible passage. What do you think this means? Are there relationships that could use more attention to love for the sake of healing and wholeness?
- God’s abundance is made clear in this passage. God grants us so many things! Can you list five things that God has entrusted to you? Can you also think of how you might use each of those gifts in service of God and in love for your neighbor? What might that mean for your life?



Read Sue and Jerry's story "Growing In Faith And Giving" starting on page 40 of the booklet. As you hear their story:

- Sue and Jerry talk about tithing, which is the practice of giving 10% of your income to God's mission in the world through the church. It lives out the Biblical concept of giving from the first fruits of all God's gifts to us. How do you discern how to share from what God has given you? What does growth in giving look like for you?
- Sue and Jerry experienced that there has always been enough at every point of their giving. Where do you experience God's providence in your life? What does trusting that there is enough look like for you this week?
- Giving takes many forms like financial giving, volunteering, or sharing your talents. In what ways do you live out the instruction to "serve one another with whatever gift" you have received?

## February 25

Reading: Mark 10:13-16

*Key Verse: Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.*

Again, children figure heavily into Jesus' teachings. Here, it seems that others start to realize the value of all people as they bring children to be blessed by Jesus (remember on Feb 18 that we discussed how children were seen as having no status or worth). It seems the disciples didn't get the message. They want to chase children away, nevertheless Jesus welcomes them. Jesus encourages us to receive the kingdom as one who has nothing, who deserves nothing, and who wants to be in relationship with Jesus.

As you read today's lesson:

- Many hear the instruction to "receive the kingdom of God as a little child" as lifting up the innocence and wisdom of children. However, we all know that children are little people, who can be just as stubborn, silly, and snippy as a grownup. What do you think it means to receive the kingdom as a little child? How might that change the way you approach your faith?
- The disciples try to chase the children away from Jesus, thinking they're doing the right thing. Who do we chase out of church, thinking we're doing what we should? What affect might that have on our own faith community and our ability to see Jesus in our midst?
- Jesus refers again to the "kingdom of God", here describing it belonging to children. If children were without worth in this society, what does that say about the kingdom of God in our midst today? To whom might Jesus say the kingdom belongs now?

Read Sam's story "Growing for Giving" starting on page 18 of the booklet. As you hear Sam's story:

- Sam describes being part of the faith community early, including in his giving. What's your earliest memory of being part of a church community? Can you think of times you felt excluded? How does that affect the way you welcome others?
- Sam says the gift of a community, especially for young people, is "life-changing and even life-saving". The Surgeon General recently described an epidemic of loneliness among Americans with serious health implications. What role might you play in creating community and health for others, especially at Easter?
- Being an active part of a church means making a commitment to community, not just for yourself, but for others. How are you an active, compassionate part of building community at church? At work or school? In your community? What do you need to stay connected and make sure others can be, too?

## February 28

Reading: Romans 12:3-8

*Key Verse: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another*

This popular passage from Romans reminds us that we all have a role to play, we all have gifts to share, and we all belong to each other. Paul, the author of this letter to the church in Rome, compares the church community to a body where every part and organ is essential to the function of the entire self. While we are all different and diverse in our abilities, our unity comes in Jesus Christ himself. In Christ, we find the love that binds us and calls us to love each other.

As you read today's lesson:

- Paul lists prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and compassion as some of the gifts people might have. Where do you feel like you fit? Recognizing that we're not all meant to do all the things, is there one you feel like you want to be better at? What would that look like in your life?
- The analogy of the faith community to a body implies that we all play a role in supporting the life and health of all people. What's one ministry at Easter that you think does that well? What's one way you think Easter could be challenged to grow? How could you make that happen?
- Paul warns us "not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think". Can you think of any values, practices, or habits in our culture that make us more likely to think of ourselves before we think of others? What effect might those have the community around us?

Read Dave's story "Popsicles" starting on page 32 of the booklet. As you hear Dave's story:

- He recounts many challenging ways that he was called on to serve the good of others. He also notes, "But together, we felt like we made a difference." How can challenge and adversity call us together? Can you think of a situation where personal sacrifice brought you closer to others?
- Dave names the joy that comes when realizing you have gifts that can serve and support others. What might some of your gifts be? How can you be in tune with the gifts you're being called on to share – and when you're called to share them?
- He talks about all those parts of the body of faith (like his parents and pastor) who helped him learn how to be generous and caring. Who are those people in your life? How can you thank them for what they taught you?

## March 3

Reading: Mark 12:28-34

Key Verse: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

This story featuring the greatest commandment is frequently quoted and referenced. It is the filter through which we should read all of scripture and consider all our own actions. In fact, when the scribe (effectively, an expert in religious law with a high level of education) confirms that Jesus is right in his estimation, Jesus declares that he is “not far from the kingdom of God”.

As you read today's lesson:

- These instructions – to love God with all you have and love your neighbor as yourself – are deceptively difficult. Where are the greatest challenges for you right now as you consider your love for God, your neighbor, and yourself?
- Jesus affirms that loving God is the greatest commandment, and loving your neighbor as yourself is like it. Think of other instructions, stories, and proclamations in scripture. Which ones most challenge you? How do they change when considered through the greatest commandment? Do you find them to be harder or easier?
- The scribe declares that these commandments are “more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices”- in other words, more important than any formality or ritual. How might Easter live out that truth more fully? How can you be a part of that work?

Read Barbara's story "Coffee Time" starting on page 7 of the booklet. As you hear Barbara's story:

- She describes appreciating that her family "never received that dirty look when my child made some noise during worship". This is a profound statement of welcome and hospitality. How are welcome and hospitality a part of our love for others? Our love for God?
- She tells a story about a friend who regularly bought breakfast for someone who needed it, but also stuck around to talk while they ate. Which act do you think showed more love? Why?
- Barbara ends by hoping that future generations at Easter "reflect God's love both to the congregation and to the world, and they do this with joy and thanksgiving". How are you a part of that work? How does your compassion and generosity build that future today?

## March 6

Reading: Isaiah 40:27-31

Key Verse: *[God] gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless*

This powerful passage from Isaiah comes to God's people in a difficult time. The people are in exile, their homes destroyed, their future uncertain. Into that painful and exhausting place, God promises renewed strength. God promises that there is nowhere we can go that won't be full of God's love and care.

As you read today's lesson:

- The first verse wonders why we might say our way is hidden from God. How would you answer that? Can you think of a time when it felt like God wasn't with you or you felt hidden from God's care? What does it take to trust God's promise in those times?
- Isaiah declares that God's "understanding is unsearchable". Scripture often reminds us that God's ways are different from our ways. How do you give yourself space and time to reflect on God's action in your life? How might this change in perspective help you trust God more?
- Ultimately, this is a passage encouraging hope in a hard time. How do you define hope? Where do you place your hope?



Read Coryn's story "Just Like Mom" starting on page 17 of the booklet. As you hear Coryn's story:

- Coryn describes her mom's many acts of care and compassion to people who struggle. In many ways, she sees her mom as one through whom God's promises for care are fulfilled. How might you be one who brings hope to others? How might this witness to your faith?
- The desire to help others plays a large role in Coryn's commitment to Easter. Why do you think caring for others is such a vital act of faith? Thinking back to other scripture passages we've read so far, how might you describe loving others as a central act of Christian belief?
- We all have faith models who help us understand how we should live out God's call in our lives. Think past your own circle of family and friends. Who would you say inspires you to service and generosity?

## March 10

Reading: Mark 13:1-8

Key Verse: *Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray."*

This passage can feel especially troubling. Jesus seems to point to a time when everything falls apart and all kinds of suffering will be unleashed. Throughout history, people have declared that **now** is that time. The fact that their dire prophecies seem plausible every time reminds us that life truly is hard and always has been. The point isn't trying to predict the moment. The point is recognizing that suffering is part of life – and recognizing that Jesus has the promise of life that will always endure.

As you read today's lesson:

- In Jesus' time, the temple would have been a building in which people took pride. His insistence that one day it would be thrown down would have been seen as deeply offensive. (Still, he was ultimately right.) Why do you think he told people this? What would be the point of letting people know that nothing lasts forever?
- Many people get stuck on Jesus' caution in verses 5-6 that someone will come, pretend to be Jesus, and lead others astray. This accusation has been leveled at many leaders throughout time. Why do you think that is? How seriously do you think we should take Jesus' warning?
- Jesus indicates that all the suffering is "but the beginning of the birth pangs". In other words, through struggle, a new life is being born. How do you think we are a part of bringing that new world to light? How can you help someone suffering today in a way that helps build the kingdom of God?

Read Mindy's story "Home!" starting on page 42 of the booklet. As you hear Mindy's story:

- She describes a time of devastating suffering in her life and how kindness from others gave her comfort. How often do you reach out to people when they are hurting? Easter has a ministry of people who commit to praying for others and will send cards to Easter people going through hard times. Could you be a part of that work? Or, what outreach might be authentic to you?
- Mindy talks about home as a place you retreat to and find peace. What are those places in your life? How do you help build those networks for others, especially when they experience hardship?
- She ends her story by encouraging people to keep giving "perhaps in ways that you never knew you were giving at all". Can you think of a time when someone appreciated something you didn't even realize you were doing? How did that feel? How can you lift that up in others?

## March 13

Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

Key Verse: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*

For those in the Lutheran tradition, this is a key passage. Verse 8 gets quoted and memorized often. It calls us to a faith built not on our own successes but solely on God's grace. In opposition to systems of belief that tell us we need to earn our place in God's love, Ephesians tells us we couldn't do it no matter how hard we try. We will keep messing things up, even when we try our best. Fortunately, it doesn't depend on us. Thanks to Jesus, we can know that we are forgiven and free.

As you read today's lesson:

- This passage contrasts being “dead through [our] trespasses and sins” with being “alive together with Christ”. What does that look like in your life? How would you describe the contrast between that which brings life and that which doesn't?
- Some might argue that we need to tell others that they have to earn their forgiveness or they won't be motivated to seek it. Ephesians implies that none of us can earn our forgiveness. What then is the motivation for seeking forgiveness? How should we think of righting our own wrongs when we are saved by God's grace and not our actions?
- Ephesians insists that we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works”. In other words, we're meant for doing good even though God's grace is “not the result of works”. How could you describe the need to do good if doing good doesn't earn us favor with God?

Read Jim & Liane's story "A Place To Be Fed" starting on page 22 of the booklet. As you hear Jim & Liane's story:

- They discuss some of the good that has come of opportunities beyond helping others – things like building relationships, strengthening our faith, and inspiring wider generosity. How do those things sound when read alongside Ephesians? What are other ways our service to others can have an even wider impact than we realize?
- They talk about wanting to pass on the ways they got to grow in faith by being generous with their time and money. Look back at verse 7 of the Ephesians reading. God wants to show us grace and kindness through Jesus "in the ages to come". How can you be part of a legacy of faith? What would be one way you could be generous this week so God's action in the lives of others can be known?
- Jim and Liane also describe how they found Easter as their church home, which is a common theme in many of these stories. What role do you play in helping people find Easter and feel welcome here? What's one thing you might change to extend hospitality? Can you name someone who needs to hear about Easter – and share with them why you hope they'll join you?

## March 17

Reading: Mark 13:28-37

Key Verse: *And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.*

This is another one of Jesus' apocalyptic teachings. These lessons point people to the end of all things and warns them to be alert and cautious. For many of us, these teachings feel troubling, even scary. It can make us lose track of Jesus' wider message. We get so focused on watching for the **end** that we stop paying attention to what God is up to **now**. Ultimately, this is what Jesus wants people to hear: nothing lasts forever except God's word among us. No matter what may or may not happen in the future, we can trust that God will be at work in our midst. That's why we keep awake.

As you read today's lesson:

- In verse 30, Jesus seems to indicate that those who hear him speak won't die before the end of time. Two thousand years later, the end we think Jesus is pointing to still hasn't arrived. What kind of end do you think Jesus describes? How might you hear his prophecy now, millennia after he shared it?
- Jesus warns that the master shouldn't find you sleeping. In this example, who is the master? What would it mean for you to be sleeping?
- Jesus insists that we all "keep awake". For many, a faith life is about awareness. We watch for and expect God's action among us in every moment. What would it take for you to be more aware of God's work and presence in your life today?

Read Chad's story "A Story Shared" starting on page 2 of the booklet. As you hear Chad's story:

- He tells a powerful story of his dad stopping to truly engage with someone who would have been easy to pass by. Who might you be likely to ignore or pass by? If Jesus calls us to "keep awake", how can you be more aware of the humanity of others?
- Chad talks about once being a student with lots of questions – and then answering those same questions as a mentor later. Questioning can be a powerful way to stay engaged and aware in faith. What questions do you have? Do you feel comfortable expressing doubts? Why do you feel that way?
- This story ends with the reminder that we are all "recklessly loved". How can you be alert to that truth in your life this week? What would help you be more aware of God's love in your life?

March 20

Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

*Key Verse: at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth*

In Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, he gives them passionate, loving encouragement to live faithfully in hard times. This reading is certainly the most well-known portion of the book and possibly one of the more familiar of any of the epistles. It's known as the Christ Hymn and may have been derived from a commonly known prayer or liturgy of that time. It reminds believers that following Jesus means taking on the care, humility, and obedience that Christ demonstrated in his life. This way of living makes our worship into a part of our daily life.

As you read today's lesson:

- It can feel intimidating to “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus”, knowing that it is a high standard. What parts of Christ's life and service do you feel most connected to? What parts are most challenging for you? What does faithfulness look like for you this week?
- Verse seven tells us that Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave”. This instruction can be misused today, encouraging some to be incredibly sacrificial while exempting others. How can we reframe this verse for today? What can a faith community do to hold everyone to the same humble, gracious standard?
- Paul points us to a time when “every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”. Where and when do you see glimpses of that future today? How are you a part of building that vision?



Read Sandy's story "Our Family Church" starting on page 37 of the booklet. As you hear Sandy's story:

- Sandy gives many reasons for her continued involvement at Easter. One is because the church looks outward and wants to share the gospel. This isn't only the work of the church but of all believers. What's one way you can be part of outreach and evangelism at Easter? In your daily life?
- One way Sandy saw God at work in the world was through young people she chaperoned on mission trips. Sometimes, we think we're teaching – but really, we're being taught. Can you think of such an instance in your life? How did it help you learn more about the God we worship?
- Her ongoing generosity and service comes from a desire for "future generations to feel the love of God" – much like Paul's vision that every knee would someday bow at the name of Jesus. We build that future together. How can you live as the gift of faith is at work in you today? (Because it is!)

## March 24

Reading: Mark 14:1-11

*Key Verse: "Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."*

Palm Sunday is a day of joyful hymns, waving palm branches, and festive processions. However, it's also the transition to Holy Week, a time of penitence, pain, and humility. This reading stands on both sides of the equation. On the one hand, we hear of a woman's lavish, generous praise of Jesus in an act of abundant anointing. On the other hand, Jesus rightly recognizes that she has effectively prepared his body for burial. We hold both truths today: that we praise and rejoice in the good news of Jesus while also grieving and aching over his death.

As you read today's lesson:

- We hear details in this story that include the upcoming Passover and Judas' betrayal. This story is part of a wider story. Can you make the commitment to hear the whole story by coming to worship on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday, either onsite or online? How can you fully engage in this powerful narrative?
- Jesus says that this woman will be remembered "wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world", yet she isn't named. Why do you think that is? What legacy does she leave, even without her name? How can you follow her example?
- This woman's act praises Jesus but also functions as a sacrificial gift. What can you give to God's glory and for the good of the gospel today?

Read Brenda's story "Sing To The Lord A New Song" starting on page 21 of the booklet. As you hear Brenda's story:

- For Brenda, music is an important gift to share and way to praise. What are your favorite ways to praise God? Think about inside and outside of worship. What other acts are praise for you?
- Brenda discusses how many styles of worship meet her family's needs. From Palm Sunday through Easter, our congregation will have over a dozen different worship services. How can you support those important offerings? Can you volunteer, attend, or offer support in some way?
- Jesus praises the woman in the reading because "she has done what she could". Brenda also mentions that not everyone can do everything – but everyone can do something. What's one action you'll take this week to serve your community? To bear witness to your faith? To take time to listen for God's work in your life?

