



LENT 2018

25

DEVOTIONAL



LENT 2018 – DEVOTIONAL

As we focus on this psalm during Lent, our prayer is that each of us carves out time and space to meditate longer and deeper on these words so that our lives are changed. This isn't done just by hearing the words of the preacher on Sunday, but by soaking in the scripture in solitude and community during the week. The devotional is an invitation to guide you during this Lenten season, so that we, both individually and as a community, are changed.

In addition to spending time going through the devotional, we encourage you to put a copy of Psalm 23 somewhere close to you so it is the first thing you see in the morning and the last thing you see at night. Take note of times during the day that the words come to mind.

Our hope is that you are drawn closer to our Good Shepherd during these days of Lent, and that as a result, you fall more deeply in love with the One who loves you enough to lay down His life for you.

Lenten Blessings,
Nancy Eckardt, Pastor of Christian Formation
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18

FEBRUARY SUNDAY

The Lord is my Shepherd. If we have grown up in the church, chances are we have repeated this with the complete Psalm 23 over and over again, and the routine of reciting these words have diluted the meaning and application for our adult lives. For those who have come to the faith as adults, these words may be unfamiliar and the metaphor of shepherd foreign. Most of us, regardless of background know the role of shepherd only what we have experienced vicariously through what we have been told.

The poet, David, who wrote this psalm, not only knew about shepherding, but was a shepherd. He lived the joy, the loneliness, solitude, fear, protectiveness—all the emotions that accompany being responsible for his flock. Imagine him wandering among his flock, letting his mind wander with the sheep, and encountering God in the very context of his work. He knew what it meant to be a shepherd; and he knew what it meant to be a sheep.

And so he wrote, beautifully, from a heart of worship -

The Lord is my shepherd,

I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside quiet waters.

3 He restores my soul;

He guides me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I fear no evil, for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You have anointed my head with oil;

My cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and loving-kindness will follow me all the days of my life,

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord [i]forever.

What do you know about shepherds? About sheep?

As you read through Psalm 23, what questions come to mind?

Is the metaphor of Shepherd to describe Christ relevant today? Why or why not?

Read John 10:1-6

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

When we think about the significance of Jesus being our Good Shepherd, sometimes it is important to understand it in the context of what He is not. What other people does Jesus reference in this passage?

How are they unlike the Shepherd?

When have you mistaken the voice of another for the voice of Jesus? What caused you to make this mistake?

Jesus, my Good Shepherd, you are the Presence that brings comfort and guidance. In a world that under-delivers both of these things, help me to listen for and recognize your voice. Amen.

Read John 10:1-6

Today, we focus on vs. 2 - 3 - *“the one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep hear his voice.”* There is a consistency in Jesus’ presence - he is recognized by the gatekeeper, and his voice is known to the sheep.

How do you recognize the voice of Jesus?

How have you experienced his consistency?

How do you cultivate a listening ear for Him personally? In your family? In your small group?

Jesus, there is a familiarity that comes with hearing your voice. Help me to cultivate space in my life to learn the sound of your voice over the voices of others so that I will know that it is You entering. Amen

Read John 10:1-6

The Shepherd brings the sheep out of the fold, and when he does, he “goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know His voice.” There is a forward movement to our relationship with the Shepherd. Life is not experienced fully in the safety of the fold, but in following Jesus out into the fields, and continuing to listen for his voice.

Can you think of a time when you have wanted to stay in the fold, but have instead been led into the unknown?

What emotions are stirred up in you as you remember that time, or as you consider a time before you now?

How will the way you listen for his voice be different outside the safety of the fold?

Jesus, you have led me out of my place of safety, and though I may be as excited as I am fearful, I need to hear your voice for guidance and comfort. Give me a heart to hear you and the courage to be obedient. Amen.

Read John 10:1-6

“He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” When we see a flock of sheep, we can’t imagine that each has a name. Yet with Jesus, he knows us, his sheep, each by name. He goes on ahead of us, but not so far that we cannot hear when he calls our name.

By what name does Jesus call you?

Where do you need to hear Jesus call your name right now?

Is there someone you can lift up in prayer today that needs to hear Jesus call their name? How can you pray for them today?

Jesus, that you know me intimately enough to call me by name is beyond my comprehension at times. Help me to hear your name in the places of my life where I feel lost, and help those I love who are struggling, _____, to hear you call them by name as well.

Read John 10:1-6

The last two verses contrast the response of the sheep to the Shepherd's voice and to the stranger's voice, and then John inserts that the crowd around Jesus didn't understand the meaning of the parable.

From these verses, what is the meaning that Jesus is conveying in this parable?

What do you like about this parable?

What is hard to understand or accept about this parable?

Jesus, we can only begin to understand you through the parables you use to describe your relationship to us. Help us to press on to know you, and to know ourselves, as we listen for you.
Amen.

Read Psalm 23, slowly, perhaps from a different translation than you are accustomed to. As you read it, what is a word or phrase that stands out to you? Write it down and spend a few moments turning it over in your mind.

Read Psalm 23 through again. Of the different places described by the psalmist, where do you find yourself? Imagine yourself in this place? Where is the Shepherd?

Read Psalm 23 through again. As you read, what do you hear the Shepherd saying to you? Take a few moments to turn this over in your mind.

As you read Psalm 23 one more time, express gratitude to God for this time. Wrap up by journaling any thoughts, words, phrases, and/or invitations you have or heard.

Psalm 23:1

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

I confess that I have a great many “wants” in my life. I want to have clothes that make me feel good, food that I like (my weakness is breakfast food), toys and treats for my two pets that make them happy... I could continue naming many of the superficial wants of my life. These are the wants that are easy for me to acknowledge as being not important, and ultimately, these are the wants that I could imagine giving up to live into this verse.

But there are many more wants in my life that are closer to my heart. I want a career that will be fulfilling and pay all my bills, I want to be surrounded by people who love me and affirm my gifts and values, I want to have time for all the hobbies I have, I want to feel successful... and yet, “*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*” Ultimately Jesus calls for us to set aside some of our own wants, because when we follow the Good Shepherd, we come to a place where we realize we do not want anymore, because we have everything we need in the Triune God--and this leads to the sweetest of contentment.

Read Matthew 6:25-33

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,[a] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?[b] 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God[c] and his[d] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, calls us to contentment, because Jesus reminds us that God has provided for us, and will continue to do so.
In what ways do you feel God is providing for you in your life?

Where are the areas of your life that you do not feel God’s provision as strongly?

What do you think it looks like for you to “not worry about your life”?

Gracious God, you have called me to follow you, and each day you call me to trust in your provision for my life. Help me today to live my life in full belief of this reality. Amen.

27
FEBRUARY
TUESDAY

Read Matthew 6:25-33

Today we will focus in on vs. 25-26, where Jesus calls us to look at the lives of birds and see the way God provides for them. God faithfully cares for the creations God has made.

Jesus reminds us that life is about more than how we feed or clothe ourselves. Why do you think Christ wanted to remind people of this?

What are some of the worries you have?

How can you practice contentment today?

God, my Shepherd, you are the one who created and maintains everything. I ask that you go before me, walk with me, and follow after me in all I say and do today. Help me to feel your comforting presence in my life, now and always. Amen.

28
FEBRUARY
WEDNESDAY

Read Matthew 6:25-33

We will focus on v. 27 today, as Jesus pointedly asks, “*can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?*”

Reflect on why you think you worry.

What other emotions or feelings are tied to some of the worries you have?

What can you do today to live your life as a follower of Christ to the fullest?

Almighty God, you call me to set aside my worries and boldly follow you. Give me the courage to let go of the worries I have and live my life content in who you have made me. Amen.

1
MARCH
THURSDAY

Read Matthew 6:25-33

Today we will reflect on the ways that God provides for the lilies of the field as we take a closer look at vs. 28-30. Jesus uses the analogy of these beautiful flowers to explain that God's care and provision for us is not dependent on our toils and labors.

"Toil" is defined as "incessant" or "extremely hard" work. In what areas of your life do you toil?

Where do you most desire growth in your life?

What emotions do you notice in yourself as you read v. 30?

God of all the universe, thank you for your love and care for me. As I go about my day today, in all the work and toil it may bring, I ask that you help me to grow to reflect more of your likeness each day, just as you help the lilies of the field grow. Amen.

2
MARCH
FRIDAY

Read Matthew 6:25-33

We now bring our attention to the last three verses of the passage, as Jesus calls us to strive first for the Kingdom of God. When we follow our Good Shepherd, we seek first for what will bring God glory, and the rest falls into place through God's faithfulness to us.

What makes it hard for you to simply "not worry," as this passage calls for?

What needs do you have that you want God to know about?

How can you strive first for the Kingdom of God? What does that mean to you?

God, my comfort and Shepherd, you know all that I am; my deepest desires, my greatest doubts and worries, and my heart to follow you. Show me how I can strive for your Kingdom today. Help me to be attuned to your presence in my life, this day and always. Amen.

3
MARCH
SATURDAY

Read Psalm 23, slowly, perhaps from a different translation than you are accustomed to. As you read it, what is a word or phrase that stands out to you? Write it down and spend a few moments turning it over in your mind.

Read Psalm 23 through again. Pay attention to the emotions you feel as you read the passage. Take a moment to reflect on each of them, and where they came from.

Read Psalm 23 through again. As you read, listen for an invitation from the Shepherd. Take a few moments to turn this over in your mind.

As you read Psalm 23 one more time, express gratitude to God for this time. Wrap up by journaling any thoughts, words, phrases, and/or invitations you have or heard.

4
MARCH
SUNDAY

Psalm 23:2

“He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters.”

Rest. Can any of us say that we get enough of it? To rest is to “cease work or movement in order to relax, refresh oneself, or recover strength.” It’s not the same as sleep. That’s why we can ask if we had a restful night of sleep. There is a ceasing, or stopping of work – physical, mental, emotional – that happens when we truly rest. We are no longer striving, but put everything aside for the day, the night, the moment. David describes this state in Psalm 131 as a weaned child in a mother’s arms, not looking for milk, but at rest in her presence.

The Good Shepherd invites us to rest in green pastures. In green pastures, sheep can rest, because they are surrounded by all they need – food, water, and their shepherd to guide them. They entrust their care to the shepherd, who knows that they need to rest in order to prepare for the next day of travel or whatever it may bring. Our Good Shepherd knows what is ahead of us, and knows how to guide us and prepare us for what’s next. That’s why *“he makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters.”*

What keeps you from rest?

How would your life benefit from more rest?

5
MARCH
MONDAY

Read Isaiah 40:10-11

*See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.*

*See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.*

11 He tends his flock like a shepherd:

*He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.*

In this passage, the prophet Isaiah contrasts the strength of the Lord with his gentleness, carrying the lambs in his arms as gently leads those who bore them.

In what ways do you see the strength of the Lord?

In what ways do you see his gentleness?

Are you more comfortable with his strength or his gentleness? Why?

Jesus, my Shepherd, in your gentleness, never let me forget that you are strong.
And in your strength, never let me forget that you are gentle. Amen

6
MARCH
TUESDAY

Read Isaiah 40:10,11

It is because of the protective strength of the shepherd that the sheep can be at rest and trust his voice.

Who are you strong for? Who is strong for you?

In what ways do you rely on the Lord for protection? What makes this hard?

How does your capacity to trust in the Lord's protection allow you to truly rest?

Jesus, my strong Shepherd, grant me rest that comes from knowing that you are able and willing to protect me in the places where I am most vulnerable.
Amen

7
MARCH
WEDNESDAY

Read Isaiah 40:10,11

Imagine a big, tough protector of the sheep, strong enough to overcome predators and thieves, gentle enough to gather lambs into his arms in love. What a picture of meekness - strength under control. His strength for the sake of our safety and well-being.

Where do you need to feel the Shepherd's gentle closeness?

What would it look like to rest in his arms?

As you imagine Him taking you into His arms, what do you need to let go of so that there is nothing between you and his chest?

Jesus, I need the safety of your strong arms around me, but I find that my arms are filled with things that provide a false security. Please help me to let go of those things so I can find my rest in you. Amen.

8
MARCH
THURSDAY

Read Isaiah 40:10,11

This strong Shepherd who gathers the lambs in his arms also gently leads those who have young. It is so easy to think that harried rushing is the only way to operate when we are responsible for much. What a relief to imagine being gently led!

How does "gently led" describe or not describe how you feel as you go about the work of your day?

Who or what do you look to you for leadership, and how would you describe how you feel led?

What would need to change in order for you to feel like you are being gently led by Jesus?

Savior, like a Shepherd, lead us; much we need Thy tender care. In thy pastures feed us and give us rest. Amen.

9
MARCH
FRIDAY

Read Isaiah 40:10-11

There are probably people who rely on us to be strong and gentle. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is the perfect example of what that looks like.

From what you know of the gospels, where have you seen the strength of Jesus and the gentleness of Jesus?

Where do you need to experience strength and gentleness?

Who in your life needs to experience strength and gentleness? How can you reflect the Shepherd's love to them?

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, thank you for your gentle strength that guides us and leads us to rest. Help us to do what we can to create space for others to find rest in you. Amen.

10
MARCH
SATURDAY

Read Psalm 23, slowly, perhaps from a different translation than you are accustomed to. As you read it, what is a word or phrase that stands out to you? Write it down and spend a few moments turning it over in your mind.

Read Psalm 23:2. Pay attention to the emotions you feel as you read the passage. Take a moment to reflect on each of them, and where they came from.

Read Psalm 23:2 As you read, listen for an invitation from the Shepherd. Take a few moments to turn this over in your mind. What is your green pasture? What is your still waters?

As you read Psalm 23 one more time, express gratitude to God for this time. Wrap up by journaling any thoughts, words, phrases, and/or invitations you have or heard.

Psalm 23:3

*He restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.*

David writes beautifully of the Good Shepherd's guiding presence in our lives, and because of the Shepherd we have the honor of walking "paths of righteousness." I first imagined this path as a utopia; a trail well worn and easy going on a beautiful sunny day, birds chirping, green grass, and God, leading me through it all.

My mind turned then, and I thought more about the word "righteousness," and I couldn't help but wonder if my first imaginings of a path of righteousness were what it might actually look like. Is the path of the righteous an easy one, where the trail is clear and the trek is easy? Is it a confusing pathway, one where sometimes it is hard to know which way to go? Does it look as beautiful as I first imagined, or does it sometimes feel difficult and scary as you go along?

The verse immediately following this one says "Even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death," and I wonder if this is coincidence. Regardless of my imaginings of whether the path of righteousness is a sunny utopia or a confusing summit we hike along, one thing we can be confident in is that God is with us, leading us along in the direction we are called to go.

Read Mark 8:34-38

34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel,[a] will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words[b] in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

The direction Jesus ultimately calls us to is to be with him in all things, including his death. Yet, the beautiful and sometimes confusing reality is that when we lose our lives for the sake of Christ we actually save our lives and we participate in Christ's resurrection.

What emotions are stirred in you as you read this passage? Take a moment to write and process about each one.

How do you live your life now in ways that "lose it," as Jesus talks about?

How do you live your life in ways that "save it"?

Merciful God, you call us to a life of taking up our cross and following you, through thick and thin. Help me to listen and follow in the direction you desire my life to go. Amen.

Read Mark 8:34-38

Today we will keep our focus on v. 34. Jesus asks us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow, should we desire to be his followers.

Imagine yourself as both a member of crowd, and then as a disciple, hearing Jesus give this direction. What do you imagine the crowd's reaction to Jesus' call to them was? What do you imagine the disciples' reaction was?

Reflect on what it means to "deny yourself."

Finally, what are some "crosses" you think are in your life?

Abba God, you invite me to follow you. Yet the path is not always easy, and I need your help. Grant me the strength and courage to take up my cross and walk alongside you as you lead me to paths of righteousness. Amen.

Read Mark 8:34-38

The focus for today will be on the paradoxical v. 35 of the passage.

Reflect on what it might mean for you to lose your life for the sake of the Gospel.

Jesus uses the word "want" in v. 35. Reflect on the motivations and desires of your heart in your life. How do these interplay with how you follow Jesus?

The call to follow Jesus is not always easy. Who is someone you can reach out to in order to find support as you strive to follow Jesus?

15
MARCH
THURSDAY

Read Mark 8:34-38

Jesus asks us to think about the ultimate direction of our lives and the ways we choose to live them under the care of the Good Shepherd.

What does it look like for you to forfeit your life for Christ and follow the direction of the Good Shepherd today?

What encouragement do you need from God to follow Christ today?

How can you encourage others in your life that are following Christ too?

16
MARCH
FRIDAY

Read Mark 8:34-38

The passage ends on an uncomfortable note: Christ reminds the crowd that those who are ashamed of him will be ashamed of in the end times.

What emotions do you experience when you think about the end days?

Are there certain situations or patterns you fall into that might make Jesus feel sad?

Reflect on a situation in your life presently in which you need Jesus' help to discern what to do.

God, I confess that I stumble often as I try to follow you. Forgive me for the times when I sadden you, and help me to know your grace abounds and is all sufficient. Fill me with your Spirit so that I may have all that I need to continue to follow your call. Amen.

17
MARCH
SATURDAY

Read Psalm 23, slowly, perhaps from a different translation than you are accustomed to. As you read it, what is a word or phrase that stands out to you? Write it down and spend a few moments turning it over in your mind.

Read Psalm 23 through again. Pay attention to how you imagine this journey with the Shepherd looks and feels. Take a moment to reflect on this.

Read Psalm 23 through again. As you read, listen for a word from the Shepherd. Take a few moments to turn this over in your mind.

As you read Psalm 23 one more time, express gratitude to God for this time. Wrap up by journaling any thoughts, words, phrases, and/or invitations you have or heard.

18
MARCH
SUNDAY

Psalm 23:4

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,[d]
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.*

Fear can be such a driving force in our lives. Think about how fear informs your decisions about what you do and don't do for fun; how long you stay in a job; who you live with or don't live with. We experience fear of the unknown. Fear of failure. Fear of talking to people we don't know. Fear of being shamed. The list goes on and on.

No doubt the shepherd, David, knew fear as he led his sheep through the dark valleys. He knew that the sheep relied on him to guide them through the dangerous valleys and beside cliffs to get to the next pasture. And he had the awareness to see the life of the sheep reflect his own need for guidance and the assurance of the Good Shepherd's presence. The rod and staff together complete the shepherd's toolbox as they lead their sheep. To comfort and guide. That is what we need to overcome fear. Comfort, yes, and guidance. One of these qualities is not enough, but the Good Shepherd uses both to walk us through the dark valleys of fear and infuse us with courage.

Where do you need courage this week? This month? This season in life?

What does the Good Shepherd's comfort look like? What does His guidance look like?

Read John 10:11-15

11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.”

Jesus continues to reveal Himself to the religious leaders and the crowds as the Good Shepherd. A bold yet true statement.

As you read through this passage, what does Jesus say about Himself as the Good Shepherd?

How do you see these claims from Christ made real in your own life?

In what area of your life do you need to hear Jesus calling your name, helping you know where you are going?

Jesus, there are times when I feel alone, lost, and vulnerable. Thank you for knowing me by name, and for laying down your life for me, not just in the ultimate act of dying for my eternal salvation, but the daily acts for protection that you perform on my behalf. Amen.

Read John 10:11-15

In contrast to the good shepherd, the hired hand is ultimately concerned for their own safety. They care and guide as long as things are good. But when trouble comes, they disappear, leaving the sheep without a protector. When have you felt abandoned and realized that someone you relied on was ultimately a “hired hand?” How has that impacted you?

Are there “hired hands” in your life now that you are relying on? How is that affecting your well-being and sense of safety?

What step can you take to shift your dependence away from the hired hand and onto the Good Shepherd, who is willing to lay down His life for you?

Jesus, this world is full of hired hands who have great plans for me, but no commitment to walk with me through the darkest valleys, Help me to listen for your voice, knowing it is the voice of One who would give His own life for me. Amen.

21
MARCH
WEDNESDAY

Trouble is expressed as a wolf, who snatches and scatters the sheep. What a poignant picture of evil that can invade our lives and affect us, both directly as the one snatch, or indirectly as the one scattered.

When have you felt like the one snatched from safety?

When have you felt like one scattered by the loss of another?

Where are you in the process of healing and recovering from this?

Jesus, my Good Shepherd, as the psalmist said, we walk through darkest valleys, and as you say, the wolf will come to snatch and scatter. Please assure me in those times that you do not run off, but you run to the evil to overcome it and protect us, even at the cost of your own life. Amen.

22
MARCH
THURSDAY

Read John 10:11-15

The Good Shepherd knows his sheep, because he is present among them. He speaks to them in the day-to-day, so that when trouble comes, they know his voice.

How do you train yourself to recognize the voice of the Shepherd during the day-to-day?

When have you been able to hear His voice in the midst of trouble?

Where in your life right now do you need to hear the reassuring voice of the Shepherd?

Jesus, you are with me every day, all day. There are many other voices, but none who promise to be with me in the day of trouble. So train my ear to hear you and find comfort and courage. Amen.

23
MARCH
FRIDAY

Read John 10:11-15

As Jesus spoke to the crowds and to the religious leaders, I wonder if the religious leaders felt called out as hired hands. And I wonder if in our places of influence, we are hired hands, the first to speak up for our benefit and the first to run away when trouble comes.

Who has Jesus given you to care for?

In what ways does your commitment to them reflect a hired hand?

How might you reflect the character of the Good Shepherd more fully to them?

Jesus, it is so easy to be wrapped up in our own well-being and safety and forget our call to care for the flock you have entrusted to us, whether it be family, friends, employees, neighbors. Give me the heart of a shepherd, willing to put myself on the line for the benefit of another, in your name. Amen.

24
MARCH
SATURDAY

Read Psalm 23, slowly, perhaps from a different translation than you are accustomed to. As you read it, in light of the previous week's reflection, what word or phrase stands out to you? Write it down and spend a few moments turning it over in your mind.

Read Psalm 23 through again. Pay attention to how you imagine this journey through the dark valley with the Shepherd looks and feels. Take a moment to reflect on this.

Read Psalm 23 through again. As you read, listen for a word from the Shepherd. What do you need to hear from Him today? Take a few moments to turn this over in your mind.

As you read Psalm 23 one more time, express gratitude to God for this time. Wrap up by journaling any thoughts, words, phrases, and/or invitations you have or heard.

25
MARCH
PALM SUNDAY

Psalm 23:6a

Surely goodness and loving-kindness will follow me all the days of my life.

So often position is seen in terms of power. Yet our position and relation with Christ is not about our own power. Rather, in relation to the Good Shepherd, we are weak. Our position in our relationship with God is that we humbly receive. The Good Shepherd showers us loving-kindness and all other manner of things we need to exist, and we in turn acknowledge that we depend on God.

This requires humility and awareness of our dependence upon God. This certainly can be challenging, especially when our culture values independence so highly. However, sometimes the best revelations of who we are and what God is calling us to do come when we are on our knees, praying and asking for God's help and guidance. And mercifully, the Good Shepherd is always there to provide.

26
MARCH
MONDAY

Read Matthew 20:29-34

29 As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. 30 There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, "Lord,[a] have mercy on us, Son of David!" 31 The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" 32 Jesus stood still and called them, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" 33 They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." 34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.

Today we will examine this story through the eyes of the crowd. Reflect on the crowd's role in this story.

How would you have felt if you had been part of the crowd, trying to hear from Jesus, and someone was interrupting Jesus' teachings?

Are there places in your life where you feel silenced, or as if someone is speaking over you? Take a minute to reflect and pray on these situations. How can you work to be present today so you can be aware of those around you who need to be heard?

God, thank you for all you do to teach me. Help me to see people in the crowds that could be easily missed. I pray that you use me to be a conduit of your grace and love to those around me. Amen.

27
MARCH
TUESDAY

Read Matthew 20:29-34

Today, we will imagine ourselves as the two blind men. Reflect for a moment on the two men's role in this story.

What parts of your life do you most need God's mercy?

Reflect on some people you know who may need God's mercy, and pray for them.

How do you think it would have felt to have Jesus be moved by compassion for you to heal you?

God, often in my life I need help. Have mercy on me and help sustain me through all of the storms of life. Help me remember to have humility and reach out to you and others around me when I need it. Amen.

28
MARCH
WEDNESDAY

Read Matthew 20:29-34

Today, we will look at the story through the eyes of Jesus. Reflect on how Jesus acts in this passage for a moment.

How often do you stop when you are in the middle of something to give someone who needs attention or care help?

What moves you to compassion?

Take a moment to reflect and pray about ways you can show compassion today.

Gracious and loving God, help me to be moved to compassion today. Give me the strength, patience, love, and empathy needed to live the life you have called me to. Amen.

29
MARCH
THURSDAY

Read Matthew 20:29-34

Today we will imagine ourselves as Jesus' disciples in this story. Though they are not specifically named, imagine what they might have felt or done in this story.

What do you imagine the disciples felt as Jesus stopped for these two men?

What do you imagine Jesus might have told the disciples after they left the two men healed?

How can you, as a disciple of Christ, try to learn something from Jesus each day?

Loving God, thank you for making me your disciple and teaching me how to live faithfully for you. Help me remember who you have made me to be and love others today. Amen.

30
MARCH
GOOD FRIDAY

Today we are stopped in our tracks, because this is the day that the Good Shepherd puts His money where His mouth is and lays down His life for His sheep. This is the day that God-made-flesh submitted himself to the hands of men, not as a sign of weakness, but of strength and purpose. He went alone to the cross and to death, because only He could overcome the power of evil.

We are undone by this ultimate act of sacrificial love, as we acknowledge that He gave Himself up to die, not as consequence for His own sin, but for our sin. This Good Shepherd, our strong protector, provider, healer, leader, is also the One who reconciles us eternally to God.

And so today, we stand at the foot of the cross, weeping with his disciples, bewildered, seeking to understand how all the hope He gave us will be realized, wondering if our commitment to Him was for naught. We know the end of the story, but imagine for a moment that we don't. What if this is the end of Jesus' life. What if He was a brief moment in history, 3 years of idealist teaching and miraculous healings, followed by a return to the false peace of Roman rule and religious law.

Read John 14:30-31. 30

I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; 31 but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way."

Imagine the feeling of dread and bewilderment in the disciples' hearts. Of course they do not want to leave the safety of the upper room, but they can't imagine being left behind. We, too, can stay in the safety of the upper room, but Jesus invites us to come with Him, even to the foot of the cross.

What emotions do you feel right now on this day, as you ponder Jesus? Where are you? In the upper room, enjoying the warmth of food and rest, but missing Jesus? On your way with Jesus, but fearful?

What can you do to mark this day, and remain mindful of Jesus' sacrificial act for you, until Sunday morning?

Jesus, with the disciples I am undone, wanting to be safe, wanting you to be tamed by my own fears. But you walked to the cross and bid me come. And so, trembling, I follow you. Amen.

31

MARCH

SATURDAY

Today, we sit in the dark of the in-between. Jesus is absent from the earth. His followers are numb, in shock as they celebrate Sabbath. Did the ritual of Sabbath Day begin that day to take on new meaning? Did it dawn on them that Jesus was the be-all, end-all sacrificial lamb that was conquering sin and death and taking away the sins of the world?

How aware are you today of the profound act of love that God-made-flesh performed that Holy weekend. In the dark time between his crucifixion and his resurrection, Jesus Christ faced ultimate evil and eternal death, and overcame it. In the darkness of this day, where we cannot see, God's work of reconciliation is taking root. The veil between God and humanity is ripped in half. We no longer fear death because our Lord has overcome. Jesus Christ is ushering in a kingdom bent on making all things new. It is dark today, but there is much work being done.

Today, sit in silence for as long as you can. If possible sit in the complete dark. As you do, what is happening in your mind? What emotions are you feeling? Where is Jesus and what is He doing in you right now?

When you finish, journal your thoughts and emotions?

What do you want to take with you from Lent?

How can you follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep by name and lays down His life for them, into the life before you?

Today, write your own prayer, summarizing your heart right now.

1
APRIL
EASTER SUNDAY

Read John 20:1-23, the Easter Story, in whichever translation you prefer.

Where do you find hope in this story?

How can you guide others and help to shepherd the people God has placed under your care?

Mighty, matchless, and marvelous God, I thank you for the work you have done through your son Jesus. I thank you for the Easter story that gives me hope for today and the future. As I continue in my journey with you, help me to follow your good shepherding for my life, and help me to shepherd those you have placed under my care. I love you and am thankful to have you in my life. Amen.