



Payson Park Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

Lenten Home Devotions 2024

40 Reflections for the 40 Days of Lent



Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 • illustratedministry.com

It's All About Love

Written by the people of Payson Park Church Community

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Ways you may use our Lenten Home Devotions

On your own

At a special time of the day, light a candle, pour a hot mug of a delicious brew, curl up on your favorite spot and read it.

Or make it a family affair

At a special time of the day, perhaps after the evening meal, have family members take turns with

- Lighting a candle

- Reading a devotion

- Talking about your reactions or own reflections

- Say the prayer at the end of the reflection

Day 1 Ash

Wednesday, February 14

*The LORD passed before [Moses], and proclaimed,
'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
Exodus 34:6*

Devotion by Josh Lunde-Whitler, YCOM

The Israelites had just gotten BUSTED. While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Law from God, they grew impatient waiting, and decided to make a golden calf to worship instead! Yet after some deliberation (and a pleading Moses), God resolves to try again with the people, describing Godself with these words.

It isn't the first time in Scripture, and certainly not the last, where we see people missing the mark (badly). Yet the Bible repeatedly tells a story not only of human impatience, selfishness, or violence, but also about *God's essential character* in spite of what humans do. Perhaps this is why these words in Ex. 34 are repeated twenty times in the Bible.

But seriously, why turn to a homemade statue of a cow? Especially after being delivered from slavery? Right under the shadow of Moses and Mount Sinai? With the benefit of around 3,000 years of hindsight and a modern worldview, it's easy for us to see the folly of their actions.

It's important to recognize that the God of Israel was operating in a wholly unfamiliar way to the people. Gods in the ancient Near East were tangible, relatable beings that were familiar in some way. The God of Israel, however, was inscrutable, mysterious, and had no discernible form.

This God did things on God's own time, and in God's own way—not easily swayed by the whims of people's individual desires. Following this God was (is) not always easy, convenient, or even logical! When we consider how often we trust our own logic to a fault, or consider our own limited cultural framework as "Truth" with a capital T, perhaps the Israelites actions might be a bit more relatable.

But if we ever find ourselves lost or cynical about the intangibility of God, this passage reveals the essential divine characteristic—LOVE—that we can sink our teeth into, and which resonates through the centuries.

The ancient gods were fickle, changing their minds on a whim and prone to violent outbursts if not appeased properly. But here we learn the true nature of Divine Love, characterized by God’s unyielding commitment to people (“steadfast love” is *chesed*, covenantal love), and by God’s persistent willingness to forgive and show mercy (even when people miss the big picture, or try to put God/the world into the most comfortable box they can).

And so we begin our journey of understanding love this Lenten season, by looking at God. The foundation of our faithful practice as Christians is love, and that stems directly from the fact that love is the central feature of God’s character – a love that is characterized by mercy, graciousness, faithfulness, and steadfastness.

How can we reflect this kind of love in a new way in our lives? What can you do over the coming weeks to deepen your love for God, and to practice reflecting God’s love in your daily life?

Prayer: God, help us to love others as you love the world. Amen.

Day 2

Thursday, February 15

*¹⁸ “ Do not try to get even. Do not hold anything against any of your people.
Instead, love your neighbor as you love yourself.
I am the LORD. “Who is my neighbor?”
Leviticus 19:18*

Devotion by Rev Bill Ragan, Associate Minister

Remember the lawyer who asks Jesus this question? He studied, memorized, and drew upon the law that is encoded in the book of Leviticus. The law, even a holy law, only goes so far. Do's and don'ts help set appropriate boundaries around and within relationships, but the depth and heart of a relationship comes with trust, commitment, and love.

Do you love your neighbor as yourself? Wonderful!

Do you trust God enough to make a commitment to love your neighbor even when they are your mortal enemy? Now that, that, my dear ones, is love.

Peace,
Bill

Day 3

Friday, February 16

⁹ So I want you to realize that the LORD your God is God.
He is the faithful God. He keeps his covenant for all time to come.
He keeps it with those who love him and obey his commandments.
He shows them his love..
Deuteronomy 7:9

Devotion by Rev Bill Ragan, Associate Minister

What do we do to deserve God's love? Nothing.

What do we have to do to get God's love? According to the preacher of Deuteronomy, we must love God and keep their commandments to earn their love.

Do you agree with this preacher? Is transactional love befitting God or must God love unconditionally?

Peace,
Bill

Day 4

Saturday, February 17

¹⁸ He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow,
and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.
Deuteronomy 10:18

Devotion by Rev Bill Ragan, Associate Minister

I want an answer and I want it straight; I want it consistent. Who, O God, do you love and why?

Earlier in this book, in yesterday's passage, we heard the preacher telling us that God only loves those who love her and keep her commandments. Now, in this passage, we hear that God loves the foreigner. The foreigner who, by definition, cannot love the one true God of Deuteronomy because they don't know him and may even worship other gods; the foreigner, who cannot keep God's commandments because they don't even know them – this is whom God loves?

Arrrrgggh!

Well, I guess I won't get a consistent, straightforward answer from Deuteronomy or probably from any other book of the Bible. After all, theology – talking about God – is the discipline of saying the least wrong thing about God. I will always misinterpret and read our Holy Scripture more wrongly by myself. I need you, the Holy Spirit, the reality of Jesus, and the creative love of God to guide me in the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Won't you join me?

Peace Bill

Day 5

Monday, February 19

³⁴ Give thanks to the LORD, because he is good.

His faithful love continues forever.

1 Chronicles 16:34

Devotion by Grace Yuen

In the hustle and bustle of life, it's easy to grow weary. We expend energy loving others, striving to do good, and seeking fulfillment in various pursuits. Yet, despite our best efforts, we often find ourselves feeling drained and depleted. The reality is, human love and goodness have their limits. We can't pour from an empty cup, and our own resources are finite.

But there's hope.

In God, we find a source of love and goodness that knows no bounds. When we feel tired and inadequate, we can take a step back, rest, meditate, and turn to him to find renewal.

Rather than relying solely on our own strength and resources, let us turn to God and draw from his abundant supply of love and goodness. As we lean into him, we can re-discover that his love empowers us to love others, and even ourselves, beyond our own capacity. His love is here to stay.

Dear God,

Thank you for the wonder of your enduring love.

In moments when loving others feels beyond our capacity, remind us of your steadfast love that never fails.

May we love others with the same unconditional love with which you have loved us, and help us to see each person through your eyes. Amen

Days 6 + 7

Tuesday, February 20
Wednesday, February 21

*⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will ^[a]dwell in the house of the LORD
^[b]Forever.
Psalm 23:6*

Devotion by Hilanda Rendon

Psalm 23 is one of the most well know passages of the Bible written by David. David reflects on how God cared and loved him. It is practical and powerful lesson for us today where hate and intolerance prevail. Can you imagine God walking with us everyday with us, protecting, providing and leading us. Just as a good shepherd tends to His folk with patience's and love.

Verse 6 is filled with HOPE and LOVE! It is hope that's found time and time again in the word of God's love. This verse also encourages us to continue trusting in Him.

Prayer

Dear Lord, my heart is full of love for you. Thank you for loving me. Bless those who have touched me in my journey of life. Please pour your blessings upon me and my love ones this day and always. I will rest in your presence when I pray, sing and share my faith with others in your name. Amen

Days 8 + 9

Thursday, February 22

Friday, February 23

*⁴ As soon as I had passed by them
I found the one my heart loves.
I threw my arms around him and didn't let him go
until I had brought him to my mother's house.
I took him to my mother's room.
⁵ Women of Jerusalem, make me a promise.
Let the antelopes and the does serve as witnesses.
Don't stir up love.
Don't wake it up until it's ready.
⁶ "Who is this man coming up from the desert
like a column of smoke?
He smells like myrrh and incense
made from all the spices of the trader.
Song of Songs 3:4-6*

Devotion by Leah Kosch, Adult Music Director

I don't think there could be a more perfect scripture for fixing the world's ills. If we are focusing on the love that is needed in this world, I think the idea of making love the antidote for hate is very powerful, and sorely needed.

Prayer:

Dear God, we are grateful for this powerful scripture from Song of Songs, the perfect word to repair the rips in our world. Amen.

Day 10

Saturday, February 24

*10 For the mountains shall depart
And the hills be removed,
But My kindness shall not depart from you,
Nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,"
Says the Lord, who has mercy on you.
Isaiah 54 :10*

Devotion by Lorraine Clifford

Though the mountains be shaken, and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love, for you, will not be shaken, nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord who has compassion on you.

From the time I was a little girl, my parents taught me to always do what is right and later in life, my thought was to think long think wrong.

Our faith teaches us Jesus loves us and wants us to make good decisions. The choice is ours and maybe it will be a difficult choice to make but our inner thoughts can help direct us.

Sometimes it's just a feeling and most times that feeling will lead us in the right direction. Always remember that we are loved by God unconditionally.

Dear Lord, help us to try to always make good choices, and to remember you are always with us no matter what happens in life. Amen.

Day 11

Monday, February 26

*The LORD says, “I love those who do what is right.
I hate it when people steal and do other sinful things.
So I will be faithful to my people.
And I will bless them.
I will make a covenant with them
that will last forever.
Isaiah 61:8*

Devotion by Josh Lunde-Whitler, YCOM

The Israelite people have had their backs broken by the conquering armies of foreign nations, and are now returning home attempting to rebuild. “What happened to us being the chosen people?” they must be wondering. These words of God through this prophecy are meant to bring them solace and encouragement.

“Loving Justice” is kind of a strange idea on the surface! Short of having a law degree, not many of us would identify with “loving” what we typically think about the word “justice” – courts, laws, lawyers, etc... Yikes.

Maybe some of you immediately realized that this “justice” refers in part to what we call “social justice” today. Yes, the prophet is depicting an Israelite people who are now feeling financially, socially, and culturally frail. And yes, part of this passage’s meaning is to remind us that God loves the oppressed and marginalized in society, and dreams of a world where all share out of their abundance.

But part of this “being brought low” Israel is experiencing is the “double shame” (v.7), of claiming to be God’s chosen, special people, only to now have their nation conquered twice over, and to have become refugees in their own homeland. If this is what it meant to be God’s people, who would sign up for this?

Again and again in the Bible, God reminds the people of God’s love and the promises God made to the people. Now, to the naked eye, it sure looks like God broke those promises! But God (through the prophet) here is trying to assure the people that this is not the case, instead “bring[ing] good news” to the “oppressed” and “captive” peoples of Israel (61:1; using words that would later be echoed by Jesus in Luke 4).

Sadly the question of “Why me” or “Why us, God?” has never been a rare one. Faith has never been a guarantee that everything was going to work out in our favor (just ask Job). But the constant refrain in scripture, that is still echoed today, is the enduring hope that somehow, some day, God’s justice will find a way. That God’s love for all people somehow means that no one will be forgotten or excluded forever. We can’t say exactly what this “justice” will look like, but we do know that it was the mission of Jesus’ lifetime to create a community of followers who also loved justice, and who would keep the flame of hope burning, even when things seemed dire and doing so seemed foolish.

How does faith help keep the embers of hope alive, even in difficult times? When has it been hard? How might you help keep that hope alive for someone on the margins of life, in a new way this week?

Prayer: God, help us become lovers and doers of your justice, your sacred community, in the world. Amen.

Day 12

Tuesday, February 27

¹² *"My people, you will go out of Babylon with joy.
You will be led out of it in peace.
The mountains and hills
will burst into song as you go.
And all the trees in the fields
will clap their hands.
Isaiah 61:8*

Devotion by Rachel Steely

It's been a difficult winter, and I checked in with my sister to see how she was doing. She sent me a picture of her cat, and said, "A year ago I wasn't sure if he would still be with us, and now I've had a year more with him than I thought I would. Right now I'm looking at the positive things in life." We often measure God's kindness in terms of things we have, or opportunities we're given, instead of simply holding it close to us, and holding other close as well.

Lord, we thank you for the kindness you show to us, before we know it's there and when we don't appreciate it. And in the moments when we are closest to you, thank you for sharing your generous spirit. Amen.

Day 13

Wednesday, February 28

¹² *“My people, you will go out of Babylon with joy.
You will be led out of it in peace.
The mountains and hills
will burst into song as you go.
And all the trees in the fields
will clap their hands. Isaiah 55:12*

Devotion by Leah Kosch, Adult Music Director

This particular scripture elicits for me of a joyous surrounding that can be difficult to picture with all that is going on today: to be led by peace, to proceed with joy, to hear the singing in the hills and mountains. When I read of the trees of the field clapping, I cannot help but think of something Ent-like, and the famous phrase of protest from the Lord of the Rings “...but you’re part of this world!”. We are all part of this world. Let us go forward in peace and joy.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for this invitation to join with the trees of the field clapping in joy, to burst into your song of peace in all the lands. Amen.

Day 14

Thursday, February 29

*"I have loved you with a love that lasts forever.
I have kept on loving you with a kindness that never fails.
Jeremiah 31:3*

Devotion by Florence Kwok

The LORD appeared to us in the past saying:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving kindness."

The same words which the LORD spoke to the Israelites through Jeremiah in the past also apply to us today. God is always faithful, His love for us is everlasting since the beginning of time and will continue for all eternity. Because of His great love for us, He had given us His only Son to redeem us from our sins. No matter who we are and what we have done, God will continue to love us. Even though we have wandered astray, God will constantly seek us and draw us back and close to Him. This is the blessed assurance that we have in Him. He is always with us and for us because of His steadfast and everlasting love.

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, thank you for your everlasting love for us. Draw us closer to you. Remind us of your grace, and you are always near us. Align our hearts with Yours and be the center of our life. In Jesus name. Amen.

Days 15 + 16

**Friday, March 1
Saturday, March 2**

*⁸ The LORD has shown you what is good.
He has told you what he requires of you.
You must act with justice.
You must love to show mercy.
And you must be humble as you
live in the sight of your God.
Micah 6:8*

Devotion by Ned Gulley

Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly.

The bible is a big book. Intimidating. Have you read the whole thing? I haven't. Can I call myself a Christian if I haven't even read the Christian Instruction Manual? But there are some passages that seem to concentrate everything essential into a single gemstone. You come across a passage and you think, "Well that's it." As if you can forget all the rest of it, so long as you just remember this. I think of the "Greatest Commandment" passage in Mark ("Love the Lord your God with all your heart..."), and then this passage from Micah.

Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly.

That kind of sums it up, eh? You might never remember another verse, but remember this: Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly.

Thanks, Micah! Like all the best things, it's hard, but it's not complicated.

Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly. Do that. Live that.

Day 17

Monday, March 4

³⁶ “Teacher,” he asked, “which is the most important commandment in the Law?”
³⁷ Jesus replied, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your mind.’ (Deuteronomy 6:5) ³⁸ This is the first and most important commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it. ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ (Leviticus 19:18) ⁴⁰ Everything that is written in the Law and the Prophets is based on these two commandments
Matthew 22:36-40

Devotion by Madeline Cronin

I believe this commandment would solve our problems in this world. By loving God fully, we in turn would express this by loving our neighbors as ourselves. We would remember to walk in someone’s shoes. This would extend not only to people we know but those we encounter for the first time. We would be quick to try and understand rather than judge and take the time to learn where someone is coming from as we wish others to do the same for us. Lord, please help me to remember and abide by these words to love God and love thy neighbor with all my heart. Love never fails!

Dear God, renew me with your strength everyday to remember and live by your promise, that Love Never Fails. Amen

Day 18

Tuesday, March 5

”[F]or I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Matthew 25:35-40

Devotion by Josh Lunde-Whitler, YCOM

In our world of rampant income inequality, this passage (esp. when read as a whole, vs. 31-46) has to be considered one of Jesus’ most challenging parables.

As I reflect on these words again, I find myself focusing on the repeated word, “*When?*” You can almost hear the gasp in the voice of the “righteous” ones. They’re genuinely shocked at the prospect that they could have done anything that directly benefited the Lord. More than their excitement about being welcomed into the Lord’s presence, or pride at being noticed, the overwhelming feeling is one of incredulity!

It might be a strange connection, but the words of Dumbledore to Harry Potter in the final HP book come to mind for me here: “*It is a curious thing, Harry, but perhaps those who are best suited to power are those who have never sought it. Those who, like you, have leadership thrust upon them, and take up the mantle because they must, and find to their surprise that they wear it well.*”

Jesus isn’t talking about leadership, per se. But the attitude of the “righteous” in the passage bears a resemblance to that of a reluctant power-wielder such as Harry. To clamor for the gift, or to dwell on the belief that we deserve it, can make us unworthy of the gift itself. It is like holding sand in our hands: The more tightly we squeeze, the more that escapes our grasp. The pursuit of “heaven” itself, for its own sake, misses the whole point (and the true “reward”) of faith.

Showing compassion, being patient, living generously and sharing our time, energy, and resources with those who are hurting, living in mutuality and friendship with others, petitioning for just laws and practices and to invest in a more equitable and green future – We are called to reflect God’s love by doing these things, *not* in order to earn a reward or to receive credit, but because our lives are richer and more joy-filled as a result. We are not seeking a future heaven, but a present reality, marked with struggle and pain, but joy nevertheless. Here, as the passage dramatizes, we are surprised to encounter the living God.

When in your own life have you been surprised to find joy in a difficult situation, or peace when life was spinning? Have you ever been emboldened to act on behalf of others in ways you weren’t sure were possible for you? How has God’s love flowed through you in your life, perhaps in ways you haven’t considered before?

Prayer: God, help us find joy in the journey towards compassion. Amen.

Day 19

Wednesday, March 6

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle
and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."
Matthew 11:28-30*

Devotion by Linda Knight

As our Lenten journey takes us from the shorter days of winter to the lengthening days of spring, we admit that we are weary and heavy-laden. We find it difficult to move forward, yoked, like oxen, to burdens of war, climate disasters, pandemics, political hatred, and children grieving for their parents killed in war. Jesus' words invite us to REST, yoking with him, a compassionate, down-to-earth, non-violent man, who reflects the ONE who created all of us, who spun the Creation into being, and whose entire message is LOVE.

Prayer

Loving God, during these 40 days of Lent 2024, may we cast off the twin yokes of fear and hatred and instead join with YOU in carrying yokes of LOVE and PEACE. In the name of the One God, Amen

Day 20

Thursday, March 7

²⁸ *One of the teachers of the law came and heard the Sadducees arguing. He noticed that Jesus had given the Sadducees a good answer. So he asked him,*

“Which is the most important of all the commandments?”

²⁹ *Jesus answered, “Here is the most important one. Moses said, ‘Israel, listen to me. The Lord is our God. The Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your mind and with all your strength.’ (Deuteronomy 6:4,5) ³¹ And here is the second one. ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ (Leviticus 19:18)*

There is no commandment more important than these.”

³² *“You have spoken well, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one. There is no other God but him.*

Mark 12:28-32

Devotion by Leah Kosch, Adult Music Director

Although the biggest focus of this reading is establishing the first commandment as the most important: that there is only one God, I want to focus more on the 2nd most important, which is “Love your neighbor as yourself”. I don’t want to contradict Jesus here, but in today’s world, I do wonder if the second should become the first. With so many conflicting religious beliefs causing strife, if we were to truly love our neighbors as ourselves, even if *their* true God is not *ours*, where might we be today? Perhaps we can make this exception for today?

Prayer:

Dear God, give us the courage and hope to truly reach out and love our neighbors today. Amen.

Days 21 + 22

Friday, March 8
Saturday, March 9

²⁷ “But here is what I tell you who are listening. Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸ Bless those who call down curses on you. And pray for those who treat you badly. ²⁹ Suppose someone slaps you on one cheek. Let them slap you on the other cheek as well. Suppose someone takes your coat. Don’t stop them from taking your shirt as well. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you. And if anyone takes what belongs to you, don’t ask to get it back. ³¹ Do to others as you want them to do to you.
Luke 6:27-31

Devotion by Pastor Eric Wefald

This is such a simple statement, such a clear commandment; Love your enemies.

Yet for me, this is also the most difficult word of Jesus to follow.

From childhood, we are all taught to avoid the people who are hating on us. Fight them if we have to. Protect ourselves as best we can. But no, Jesus says, If someone is hating on you, then do good to them.

When I am stuck in brokenness, when I struggle with the people who hate me so much and who want to hurt me so much, I remember Mrs. Lester.

My best friend, Albert Lester, was competing in a bicycle race in upper state New York, when a drunk driver veered over and killed him. I was at Albert’s funeral in my hometown in Westwood. The Lesters were devastated. Mrs. Lester was full of grief and anger. She was full of hatred towards the 18 year old high school dropout, a drunk driver who took away her son forever.

She poured out her grief and anger to her Pastor. She couldn’t contain it anymore. She drove to the prison in upper state NY. In that prison, Mrs. Lester sat across from the young man who killed her son. She said, “You killed my son. I hate you.” Then Mrs. Lester drove home.

A month later Mrs. Lester drove out again. Across the table in that prison, she said, “You killed my son. I hate you.”

Mrs. Lester was consumed with grief. She drove out a third time to that prison. Across the table in that prison, she said, "You killed my son. I will help you get an education and a job when you are soon released." And she did.

Mrs. Lester also joined MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving. She visited local high schools. When she spoke in the auditoriums, holding up the front tire of Albert's broken bicycle, she had everyone's attention. Then the room would be filled with the sound of hundreds of teenagers quietly crying.

Later, I myself would join in bicycle races by MADD, to honor Albert's memory.

Mrs. Lester, thank you for showing me how to follow Jesus, how to love my enemies.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for people like Jesus and Mrs. Lester, witnessing to us the way of life, of loving our enemies. Amen.

Days 23 + 24

Monday, March 11
Tuesday, March 12

*¹⁶ God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.
Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.
John 3:16*

Devotion by Kate Rodriguez-Clark

This famous passage about God's love for the world makes me want to sing. In my years at Payson Park, I have sung at least three different tunes with these words set to them. Actions such as singing together are just one way we can remind ourselves of the universal love out there, waiting for us.

May we all, in this lent season, find ways to join voices with our fellow travelers and remember the love that is there to bind us together, if we're willing to look for it.

Days 25 + 26

Wednesday, March 13

Thursday, March 14

*³⁴ "I give you a new command. Love one another.
You must love one another, just as I have loved you.
John 13:34*

Devotion by Priscilla Elliott

We are a family at Payson Park, & yes, we love each other. How do we show it? We make comforting, understanding comments. Family members disagree (yes, we do, sometimes!). Then, we are non-judgmental, caring and kind. Loving, actually.

The *shape* of our love is that of a mailed card or phone, keeping in touch with members and friends. It is a smile or a hand offered in greeting or condolence. It is a tear.

A glance at our Mission and Outreach list reveals how we show our Christian love for strangers. Rev. Carrington Moore's common cathedral is *local*., while Sandra Gannon's Kisaboka, Inc. in Lexington is a *local* concern for *Ugandans*. Also, some of us support love of strangers via donations to the United Nations International Childrens' Fund.

We love at the "ground" level, at the "balloon" level, and at the Jesus level.

Prayer: Dear God, what a powerful shape you give our lives, shaping all we do locally and afar in the shape of your Love for us. Amen

Days 27 + 28

Friday, March 15
Saturday March 16

*¹⁶ God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.
Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.
John 3:16*

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Days 29 + 30

Monday, March 18

Tuesday, March 19

⁹ “Just as the Father has loved me, I have loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. In the same way, I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.

John 15:9-10

Devotion by Tom Best

We experience love in many forms – love for parents, for a child, a friend, a cause, romantic love. But John’s Gospel is talking about a different kind of love, a love we “abide in”. It’s a love we live inside of, like we live in the air we breathe: a love that sustains us and makes everything else possible.

“Abiding in Jesus’ love” means being as close to Jesus, as Jesus is to God. Can you imagine that? And if that isn’t enough, we have to “keep Jesus’ commandments” – to actually do things to show God’s love for our neighbors, and for our world.

Prayer

Loving God, teach us to abide in your love as you abide in God’s love. And help us to put your love into practice for our neighbors, and for our world.

Days 31 + 32

Wednesday, March 20

Thursday, March 21

*¹² Here is my command. Love one another, just as I have loved you.
¹³ No one has greater love than the one who gives their life for their friends.
John 15: 12-13*

Devotion by Pam Curtis

Jesus sets the bar very high. His love for the disciples is as perfectly realized as God, the father's love is for him. As humans, we often set terms and conditions on our love, expecting even demanding something in return. When my son was killed in Afghanistan, I received many condolence letters that referred to John 15:13. I came to realize that an act of self-sacrifice is the greatest love, because it is unconditional, complete and final. The person that lays down his or her life for another has nothing left to give and gets absolutely nothing in return.

Prayer: Help us to remember those from all walks of life who have made the ultimate sacrifice, just as we remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. Amen

Days 33 + 34

Friday, March 22
Saturday, March 23

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Devotion by Josh Lunde-Whitler, YCOM

This list of attributes—speaking in tongues of mortals (I.e., other languages) and of angels, prophecy, faith, generosity, martyrdom—are all things that many of the early churches of Paul’s day would understand as *defining features* of their communities, what they believed to be concrete signs of God’s presence and favor. But the writer Paul reminds them that these things, in themselves, are not what ultimately create Christian community.

For Paul, divine love (compassion, solidarity, interconnectedness) is so fundamental to Christian identity, that without it, all else is for nought. It’s not about our regular religious participation, or the skills or gifts we display, in and of themselves. These things only matter insofar as they become vessels for sharing love and restoring *shalom* (wholeness) in the world.

Churches can have the best facilities, the most robust music, the most engaging liturgy, and the most faithful, progressive theology. They can be diverse, give generously, and have great track records of volunteerism and activism. They can pack people in every Sunday, balance their budgets, and be lauded as present-day church success stories.

But if the presence of the Divine is neither seen nor felt, then none of that stuff matters. And God is love, after all. What makes a church is its spirit of welcome, its willingness to learn, to walk with others and hear their stories, its sincerity and

capacity to trust each other, its compassion and solidarity with those who need it—and its awareness that all the community does is in communion with the Spirit of the living God.

When have you been most “moved” as a part of Christian community? What moments have made you feel more connected, spiritually aware, loved as you are, convicted, and/or generous? How can we as a church embody God’s loving presence to each other?

Prayer: God, help me embody your hospitality, warmth, and friendship, to friends and strangers alike. Amen.

Days 35 + 36

Monday, March 25
Tuesday, March 26

*²⁸ We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.
He appointed them to be saved in keeping with his purpose.
Romans 8:28*

Devotion by Emily Dallman

I am reminded of this bible verse when life throws you a curve ball, when your best laid plans are upended. Sometimes you don't see right away that God was there all along the way. It doesn't appear that way at first but looking back you see God's hand.

Prayer

May we remember that God is with us at all times especially when we are caught by surprise.

Day 37

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Day 38

Wednesday, March 27

Maundy Thursday, March 28

³⁵ Who can separate us from Christ's love? Can trouble or hard times or harm or hunger? Can nakedness or danger or war? ³⁶ It is written, "Because of you, we face death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be killed." (Psalm 44:22)
Romans 8:35-39

Devotion by Josh Lunde-Whitler, YCOM

This passage is an overflow of the apostle Paul's surging emotions – you can almost hear the fervent scratching of his quill, and imagine the tears in his eyes, as he writes!

This section is a culmination of a lengthy philosophical argument that Paul was trying to work out about what it meant to be God's people. Paul is basically saying that Jesus continued the work God had already started in the people of Israel. At the same time, he also transformed the game forever, by making it possible for Gentiles to be included in the promises (the covenant) of God.

For so long people have looked to circumstances to figure out where God stood with them. We're thriving; God must love us. We're in turmoil or exile; God must have forgotten us. People still tend to see God this way in their own lives.

Paul's excitement here stems from the breaking-free of this way of thinking.

Think about the love that you might have for your children, your parents, your partner, your closest confidantes. How those relationships all have their ups and downs. How couples, families, and single people alike all have to face various hardships throughout life, often putting those relationships to the test.

And yet, these relationships are usually built upon a deep sense of connectedness that you felt at least once, that coalesces into a core memory. For me, I will never forget the moment when my child was born, or the first time he smiled at me. There might be times now as a nine-year-old when his emotions get the better of him – or when my emotions get the better of me. But (on those very rare occasions!) when it does, I can practice relocating that feeling of connectedness within myself, that fierce protective spirit of parents residing in my core, allowing my feelings boiling over at

the surface to subside. And so I can truthfully say that nothing, absolutely nothing in all creation, could separate me from the love for my child!

The early Christians were learning, as the people of God had been wrestling with for centuries, that they could face horrible circumstances, and yet that didn't mean God had left them; God's love wasn't going anywhere. So long as they continued to seek that love together, and remember God's faithfulness in the past, that was enough to keep them going. Today millions of people around the world keep this tradition going, every Sunday, making God's love tangible to each other regardless of their circumstances, through worship and fellowship. (It could be said that Paul's words here are almost "hymn-like"!)

When we're in tune with the Spirit of God, we realize that nothing, not even death itself, can separate us from the enduring love of God that inspires, heals, transforms, and seeks to make all things new.

And if we are struggling to get "in tune" (or if it's been a while since we've been in tune!) that's normal. But we can use this final week of Lent here to spend some time in reflection and prayer, time in community with others, time in worship, time reading or listening to scripture, time serving others—wherever God's presence feels most tangible for you.

As we approach the cross together during Holy Week, what can you do to connect with God, the enduring Spirit of Love, in the way that works best for you? How might doing so help you to experience the cross itself, and the resurrection, with new eyes?

Prayer: God, help me to seek your enduring love, that I might know in my heart more deeply that nothing can separate me from your love. Amen.

Day 39

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Day 40

Good Friday, March 29

Holy Saturday, March 31

⁴ I am a prisoner because of the Lord. So I am asking you to live a life worthy of what God chose you for. ² Don't be proud at all. Be completely gentle. Be patient. Put up with one another in love. ³ The Holy Spirit makes you one in every way. So try your best to remain as one. Let peace keep you together. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit. You were appointed to one hope when you were chosen.

Ephesians 4:1-4

Devotion by Melissa Mitchell

As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

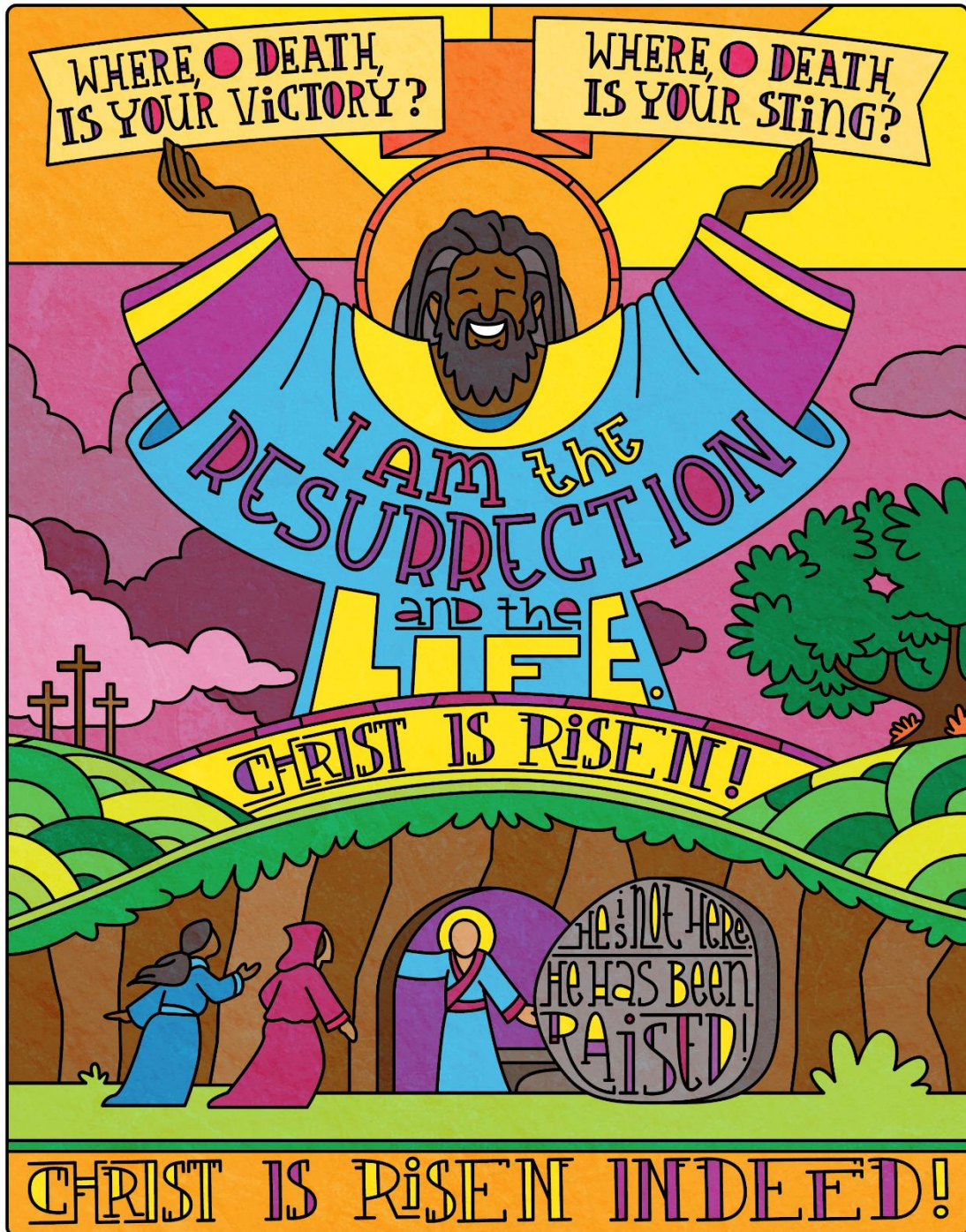
Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; The church at Ephesus is surrounded by the polytheistic Roman Empire. Paul is encouraging the people to remain unified in Christ despite this challenge. We may not be in occupied territory, but we too have many forces pulling us from our faith journeys.

Work, family, health issues, politics are all nibbling away at our devotion to Jesus. We can withstand this pull through our loving bond with our church family at PPC!

Prayer

*Dear God, be with us in our endeavor to follow you. Lead us not into temptation!
Amen.*

March 31, Easter Sunday



John 20: 1-18 • illustratedministry.com

Happy Easter, Alleluia!

