

2022

Journey to
Easter



A Disciples Seminary Foundation Devotional



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An Invitation: As we have done for the last few years, we invite you to journey with us through Lent.

Format: The devotions for this year mark Ash Wednesday, each Sunday of Lent, and every day of Holy Week. On the days in-between devotions, we invite you to participate in spiritual practices, reflect on the weekly devotion, and focus on the ways you see and experience God in the midst of this season.

About: Lent is the sometimes uncomfortable time where we sit with hopelessness, wrestle with doubt, try to let go of the things that no longer serve us, are challenged, make sacrifices, are called to forgiveness, and hopefully grow in our relationship with God. As we anticipate the promise of resurrection and new life, we invite you to use these devotions for personal reflection and/or a starting point for conversation. There are reflections from donors, students, graduates, friends, and board members, representing diverse theological, cultural, and social perspectives.

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¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment... ⁶You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. ⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. ¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. ¹⁷My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. (Ps. 51:1-4, 6, 9-13, 17)

A very kind friend sent me a note of encouragement. She was remarking how much she cared for me and said that I was: “brilliant, funny, kind, searching authentically, *fragile*, spiritual, loving, human, divine, and emerging.” In the generous list, I got stuck on the word *fragile*. I decided to look up the word *fragile* and one dictionary said: “an object easily broken or damaged.” I opined that she was saying that I was easily broken or damaged and took slight offense. Upon further reflection, I decided that she was very correct. I am fragile. Being fragile is not necessarily a bad thing. Life is fragile.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown most of us that we are fragile – easily broken or damaged by life. If not COVID-19, something else will almost certainly break you – grief, tragedy, pain, disappointment, and heartaches can crush the human spirit. The death of my father broke me. I had no idea that grief would virtually put me out of commission for six months as I tried to come to terms with the loss.

This Psalm 51 text is about being broken, though the cause of the break is sin. David’s sin with Bathsheba broke him. I often wonder, as with so many of us, what is the trauma that makes the sin so necessary? David repents, and in dust and ashes, proclaims in the 17th verse: “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; / a broken and contrite heart / you, God, will not despise.”

Regardless of our trauma and our sin, if we allow sorrow and affliction to do its work and break us, the arrogance of pride will be replaced by the humility of penitence.

Ash Wednesday comes directly from ancient Jewish traditions of penance and fasting, fragility and humility. The practice includes wearing of ashes on the forehead. These ashes are symbolic of the dust from which God made us. The priest reminds us of our fragility, applies the ashes and says, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return.” Fragility.

Prayer: *Dear Lord – not only on this Ash Wednesday, but every day, may we remember that we are dust and are very fragile. Allow fragility to do its work in us that we can recite with David: “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; / a broken and contrite heart / you, God, will not despise.” Amen.*



Frank A. Thomas, Ph.D., currently serves as Director of the Ph.D. program in African American Preaching and Sacred Rhetoric and the Nettie Sweeney and Hugh Th. Miller Professor of Homiletics at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN. His latest book is *The God of the Dangerous Sermon* (Fall, 2021), published by Abingdon Press.

¹ When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us." ⁴ When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, ⁵ you shall make this response before the Lord your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶ When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, ⁷ we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸ The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹ and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me." You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. ¹¹ Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

Moses sounds like a benevolent grandparent here. "You kids take that basket and go to the garden to pick some berries for lunch." Moses preaches his final sermon to the children of Israel, preparing them to cross the Jordan River and settle down in the long-promised land and build a life together. Those wandering desert people had endured severe hardships in their quest for freedom; hardships that tested the fragility of their soul but throughout their long and difficult journey, they had come to know for themselves God's faithfulness. Moses reminds the people from where they had come and who it is who walked with them. Then he dangles before them a vision for their future. Lives filled with blessings. Get a basket, fill it up with the first fruits of your harvest, make it a priority to honor God's faithfulness. Baskets are helpful tools. Gardeners use baskets to collect their harvest. At funerals, baskets are used to collect sympathy cards. At potluck dinners, baskets are put to work tending hot bread. At worship, baskets serve as offering plates. When you pick up your basket, what would you put in it as a gift to God? Moses reminds the people to use the basket to make an offering to the Holy One. For ancient Israel, that offering came from the garden, first fruits. For modern believers, the offering tends to be some form of financial expression. In this Lenten season, let your imagination explore other forms of offerings to God. In addition to money, what would you find meaningful to put in your offering basket? What would be an expression of devotion to God? A vow to do one act of service? A release of guilt? We are traveling through the hardship of a pandemic. Take a moment to name God's faithfulness. Put it in your basket and offer a gift of gratitude to the Holy One who walks with you.

Prayer: *Gracious God, you have been with me all the way in this wonderful and confusing journey of life. Thank you. Amen.*



Rev. Doug Goodwin serves as pastor at First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Sheridan, WY.

³¹ At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” ³² He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³ Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem.’ ³⁴ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵ See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

I am both a pastor and a substitute teacher. The schools where I teach each have their own mascot. Most are animals: panthers, rams, dragons. These are animals that symbolize strength, power, and pride, which is probably why they were chosen.

However, not all mascots seem to have been chosen for this reason. The largest school I teach at has a jackrabbit for its mascot. (Don't animals like panthers eat jackrabbits?)

In the scripture passage above, Jesus compares Herod to a fox but compares himself to a hen.

A *hen*? What kind of animal is that to compare oneself to? What school would ever pick a hen for a mascot? (Actually, the University of Delaware would, but I digress...)

Episcopal priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor says this about Jesus: “Jesus won't be king of the jungle in this or any other story. What he will be is a mother hen, who stands between the chicks and those who mean to do them harm. She has no fangs, no claws, no rippling muscles. All she has is her willingness to shield her babies with her own body. If the fox wants them, he will have to kill her first.” ^[1]

It's hard to imagine Jesus as a hen. We'd rather picture Jesus as a strong warrior or a powerful king. If asked to pick an animal to represent Jesus, we'd probably choose a mighty eagle over a hen; but Jesus forces us to think differently about power and strength. How might picturing Jesus as a hen help us better understand the nature of power and strength in the kingdom of God?

Prayer: *God, you defy expectation. From the vulnerable first breath of a baby in a manger, to the crude, last gasp of a man on a cross, everything about you challenges our ideas of what “God” should be, and of what power should be. Open our eyes to new understandings: of you, of power, and of ourselves. Amen.*

^[1] Barbara Brown Taylor, “As a Hen Gathers Her Brood” *The Christian Century*, February 25, 1986.



Rev. Danny Bradfield (he/him/his) is pastor of Bixby Knolls Christian Church in Long Beach, CA, and a substitute teacher with the Long Beach Unified School District. He and his wife, Ginger, are graduates of Chapman University (mascot: Panthers); one of their sons is a UC Irvine Anteater, and one of their nieces is a UC Santa Cruz Banana Slug.

¹ At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?” ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴ Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.” ⁶ Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷ So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’” ⁸ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

For as long as I can remember, a row of trees has lined the far edge of the property at my parents’ house in hopes of creating a natural fence between their yard and the neighbor’s. First, there were black walnut trees that shed green-husked nuts perfect for pelting an unsuspecting sibling. Tired of cleaning up the mess these well-established hardwoods created, my parents eventually replaced them with Douglas firs, which quickly succumbed to disease. Next were Cypress trees; one hard freeze did them in. Finally, after years of digging out the considerable investment made on each row of trees, Green Giant Arborvitaes are flourishing.

Jesus tells what sounds like an off-handed story about Galileans who perished — some at the hands of a cruel ruler and others in a tragic accident. While there are no corroborating accounts of this story, it would’ve been familiar to those who were gathered to hear the Parable of the Fig Tree. The parable could be considered a cautionary tale: Just because you have not been cut down doesn’t mean you are bearing good fruit. What’s less clear is what a fruitless fig tree has to do with those devastating deaths.

Jesus frequently receives the question, “Why?” in Luke’s gospel. And more often than not, the people asking it know the answer. As Debi Thomas says, “They don’t approach Jesus as a blank slate; they show up hoping to confirm what they already believe.” They want — no, they *expect* — Jesus to validate their deeply held assumption that people suffer because they’re sinful. *Bad* things happen to *bad* people. But what if Jesus isn’t trying to explain the *why* — *why* the Galileans died, *why* the fig tree hasn’t produced fruit? What if Jesus is less worried with the *why* of these calamities and more concerned about the conditions they’ve created? *That* we can do something about. Confront evil. Speak truth to power. Fight for justice. Cry with the broken-hearted. Repent and forgive in good measure. Plant until something beautiful takes root.

Prayer: *Holy One, hear our whys, which are so often offered in lament to you. Then cultivate the fruits of justice, forgiveness, repentance, and beauty within us. In the name of the parable-teller we pray. Amen*



Rev. Melissa St. Clair serves as Senior Minister at Heart of the Rockies Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Fort Collins, CO. She and her husband, Ben, live in the home of their 2 cats and 2 dogs and spend as much time as possible in the mountains in their hand-built camper.

¹ Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³ So he told them this parable: ¹¹ Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need... ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’” (Luke 15:1-3; 11-14, 17-19)

What are you worth?

It’s hard to imagine a question more salient to the anxieties of daily American life, where one’s literal net worth is calculated with algorithmic precision. An app on my phone in my pocket will show me (if I care to know) the exact value of my home, my car, and my accounts. This, apparently, is what I am worth. If I like (and I do not) it will produce an estimation of my worth at any given time between now and the statistically projected endpoint of my life. Knowing this is somehow reckoned to be a good thing.

But is that what I am *worth*?

The younger son in Jesus’ story seems to think so. Seeking to know his worth, and lacking an *app for that*, he withdraws and squanders every bit of financial, social, and moral capital bequeathed by his family. Whatever prodigality one might (rightly, I think) confer upon the father, the son is devastatingly reckless. But is he now worthless, as a result? Is one’s worth reckoned on the socially constructed ledgers of money, status, or religion?

The hypocrites trolling Jesus seem to think so. Disgusted by the company Jesus keeps, they sum up his bottom line: *This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them*. Empty accounts aren’t the only form of bankruptcy. Jesus responds with gifts: three parables about reckoning *true* worth — a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son, each beloved far more than any appraised value.

One’s worth, it seems, is reckoned on a ledger of love.

Our prodigal realizes this while eating with pigs. *But when he came to himself*, the story goes. *He came to himself*, having feasted on death. *He came to himself*, fasting for his life. *He came to himself*, remembering his father’s loving-kindness. *He came to himself*, to his identity as one beloved.

Prayer: Find a quiet space and a comfortable posture. Close your eyes. Breathe deeply. Let go of your desires. See them fall away, one by one. Pray: *Oh God, bring me to myself as one beloved.*



Rev. Jason Coker is Lead Pastor at The Oceanside Sanctuary. A graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary (MA, 2010), he serves on the board for The San Diego Organizing Project and the Pacific Southwest Region (PSWR) of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Co-Chairs the PSWR Church Transformation Committee.

¹ Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone. ⁸ She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

"Leave her alone." This is the first thing Jesus says in response to Judas's question regarding Mary's generous offering.

The fourth gospel names the woman anointing Jesus as Mary of Bethany. The critic is Judas Iscariot, one of the 12. Both are prominent figures in the Jesus movement, and there is an easily imaginable power dynamic between this male disciple and female worshipper.

As a female bodied person with a creative worship style and gifts for ministry leadership, I can testify to discouragement, insult, and spiritual injury I've experienced on the underside of this power dynamic while in unaffirming Christian spaces. I can also testify to the lifegiving power of words of acknowledgement and protection.

While wrestling with the responsibility of embodying my Christian faith, I am often inspired by Womanist theologians. Dr. Edward Donalson III has said, "to be informed by a Womanist sensibility is to not have to take up space but to ensure that the space is safe and accessible for the people whose space it is." Jesus does exactly this in this passage: He provides safe space for Mary to be her full embodied self as she accesses and relates to the Divine.

As a white, cis het, able-bodied, American Protestant woman, this passage comforts *and* challenges me. Even as I experience life on the underside of the patriarchal power dynamic, many more of my identity markers align me with privilege and power.

Cognizant of this, I am challenged to consider how I might use my privilege, power, words, and actions to create safe spaces for people who need them. To embody the gospel by stepping in and creating boundaries to protect those who do not have safe space to offer their fully embodied selves to meet with the Divine. Where might you do the same?

Prayer: *Holy One – We confess we often fail to protect your beloveds. There are many in our communities who do not feel truly welcome or safe in Christian spaces. Give us courage to create safe and just spaces where your beloveds can be present as their fully embodied selves. Amen.*



Juli Prentice (she/her) is an M.Div. student at Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry. She is a member and elder of Lake Washington Christian Church in Kirkland, WA and a Candidate in Care for Ordination in the Northern Lights Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Juli lives in Snohomish, WA with her husband, two children, cat, dog, and robodwarf hamster.

- ¹ O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!
² Let Israel say, 'His steadfast love endures forever.'
¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.
²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.
²¹ I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.
²² The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.
²³ This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.
²⁴ This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.
²⁵ Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!
²⁶ Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD.
²⁷ The LORD is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.
²⁸ You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.
²⁹ O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

The Psalmist begins and ends this Psalm of thanksgiving with gratitude for God's steadfast love. When I began my reflection, those "bookends" seemed fine to me, yet when the Psalmist's words shifted to thanksgiving for salvation, something felt off to me, and I couldn't pinpoint why.

I found the clue that I was looking for when I re-read the Psalmist's words, "I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation," and "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." The Psalmist remembered what I had somehow forgotten. I was thinking of salvation as something that I had achieved or earned, but the Psalmist knew that salvation is a gift received from a gracious God whose love is steadfast and not a gift that is earned.

Biblical scholarship tells us that since the Psalm is one of the Psalms sung after the Passover meal, it may have been sung by Jesus and his disciples after their last meal together. It is hard for me to imagine how these words about God's steadfast love and the gift of salvation might have resonated with those same followers when they struggled to make meaning of their encounters with the resurrected Christ. The same Christ they had betrayed and denied stood ready to forgive, and he commissioned them to go and spread the Good News of salvation.

How easy it is for me to forget how often I have denied Christ and believed in my own self-sufficiency. The Psalmist knew better and reminds me, "The Lord is God, and he has given us light." The only proper response I can offer God is my praise and thanksgiving.

Prayer: *God of our salvation, we give thanks for your steadfast love. May we always remember that you love us not because we have earned it but simply because it is your divine nature to love. Teach us to love others as you have loved us and forgive us when we believe in our own self-sufficiency. For you alone are God and worthy of our praise. Amen.*



Ronald (Ron) Crawford is a seminary student in the M.Div. program at Claremont School of Theology. He is currently doing his CPE at Carle BroMenn Medical Center and the Carle Cancer Institute. He serves as an elder at Eureka Christian Church in Eureka, IL. Ron, his wife, Terri, and their dog Sydney live in Washington, IL.

⁵ *Tu amor inagotable, oh Señor, es tan inmenso como los cielos;
tu fidelidad sobrepasa las nubes.*

⁶ *Tu rectitud es como las poderosas montañas,
tu justicia, como la profundidad de los océanos.
Tú cuidas de la gente y de los animales por igual, oh Señor.*

⁷ *¡Que precioso es tu amor inagotable, oh Dios!
Todos los seres humanos encuentran refugio a la sombra de tus alas.*

⁸ *Los alimentas con la Abundancia de tu propia casa
y les permites beber del río de tus delicias.*

⁹ *Pues tú eres la fuente de vida, la luz con la que vemos.*

¹⁰ *Derrama tu amor inagotable sobre los que te aman;
haz justicia a los de corazón sincero.*

¹¹ *No permitas que los Orgullosos me pisoteen
ni que los Malvados me intimiden.*

David escribió estas palabras reconociendo quien era Dios. Exalto la benignidad de Dios y reconoció su fidelidad. No existen límites para la fidelidad y el amor de Dios. David expresa la grandeza de nuestro Dios y su justicia, justicia que no viene del hombre o de pensamientos humanos. La justicia de Dios es mejor, El recompensa las obras y acciones de cada persona, sean buenas o malas, tal como a David nosotros debemos vivir en la Justicia de Dios. Dios pelea nuestras batallas y él nos dará la victoria.

Que mayor refugio podemos encontrar, no hay lugar más seguro que bajo las alas de nuestro creador, tal como lo describe David. para David era la forma de expresar la protección de Dios, como lo dice el salmo 91. Dios es nuestro defensor, Dios es el lugar más seguro en el que podemos estar, ante toda circunstancia, adversidad, temor, ansiedad, él es nuestro protector, es el Dios todo poderoso. Pensemos por un momento quien es Dios para nosotros, y nos daremos cuenta que él lo es TODO.

Gracias a su grande amor podemos confiar y estar seguros que nuestras vidas están en sus manos, que nada nos puede alejar de su amor, él es la fuente de Vida y en El vemos la Luz, alérgrense todos aquellos a los que luz de Jesús les ha alumbrado. No importa si se levantan los orgullosos o malvados, no debemos de temer o angustiarnos, pues Nuestro Dios va delante de Nosotros y el paga justamente, su justicia es mejor, él nos defiende. Veremos que la luz alumbrara sobre las tinieblas. La luz de Jesús.

Oración: *Padre en el nombre de Jesús seas tú siempre sobre nuestras vidas, tu amor ha sido derramado en nuestros corazones y nos has mostrado que tú eres suficiente, no necesitamos nada más, más que tú presencia en nuestras vidas, que tu Espíritu Santo sea sobre nosotros. Quitá todo temor o ansiedad, defiéndenos y lucha por aquellas batallas que esta fuera de nuestro control. Gracias señor por tu amor, por tu fidelidad y protección.*



Marco A. Santiago Soy miembro de la iglesia Cristiana, Casa de Refugio, Discípulos de Cristo, en la ciudad de Covina, CA. Mis Pastores el Reverendo Francisco Ramos y la Reverenda Soriliz Rodríguez. Vivo en Vista CA, junto a mi Esposa Norma. He sido miembro de los discípulos de cristo desde hace 14 años, y ahora estoy por terminar mi M.Div (Maestría en Divinidades) en Azusa Pacific University. Bajo cuidado de la PSWR (Región Suroeste del Pacifico) desde hace 7 años. Y soy candidato a la ordenación por la iglesia Cristiana Discípulos de Cristo.

- ⁵ *Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.*
- ⁶ *Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgments are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.*
- ⁷ *How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.*
- ⁸ *They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.*
- ⁹ *For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.*
- ¹⁰ *O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your salvation to the upright of heart!*
- ¹¹ *Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on me,
or the hand of the wicked drive me away.*

David wrote these words to describe who God was. He exalted the goodness of God and acknowledged his faithfulness. There are no limits to the faithfulness and the love of God. David described the greatness of our God and his justice, justice that does not come from man or human thoughts. God's justice is better than human justice. God is just, and he repays the works and actions of human beings, whether good or bad. Just like David, we must live in the Justice of God. God fights our battles, and he gives us victory.

What better refuge can we find? David explains that there is no safer place than below the wings of our creator. For David, this was the way to express God's protection, as described in Psalm 91. God is our defender, God is the most safe place that we can be, and in all the circumstances, adversities, fears, and anxieties, he is our protector. He is God almighty. If we think for a moment about who God is for us, we will realize that he is EVERYTHING.

Thanks to God's great love, we can trust and be sure that our lives are in his hands, that nothing can separate us from his love, that he is the fount of life, and that in him we see the light. Everyone rejoices who has been enlightened by the light of Jesus. It doesn't matter if the proud or wicked rise up, we shall not fear or be worried because our God goes before us, and he repays justly. His justice is the best, and he defends us. We will see that the light will shine in the darkness.

Prayer: *Father, in the name of Jesus, may you always be sovereign over our lives. Your love has been poured into our hearts, and you have shown us that you are enough. We do not need anything more than your presence in our lives, and your Holy Spirit will be over us. Take away all our fear and anxiety, defend us, and fight the battles that are beyond our control. Thank you God for your love, your faithfulness, and your protection.*



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¹⁸For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.... ²⁵For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength. ²⁶Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no one might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 1:18-21, 25-31)

What is wisdom? What is foolishness? I’ll admit, this passage had me stumped. I grappled alone until I realized that I should discuss with wiser people than myself. Those conversations led me to this: living my faith has required me to reject conventional wisdom time and time again. My faith has taught me to welcome strangers when conventional wisdom would encourage me to stay with those whom I know to be safe. My faith is what guides me to forgiveness, while conventional wisdom pushes me to hold a grudge in order to avoid being hurt again. My faith is the reason I give away my time, talent, and treasure to help others, while conventional wisdom reminds me that I should keep my assets to myself for my own emotional and financial security. My faith compels me to share my beliefs with others, while conventional wisdom insists that being Christian is private, something to keep to myself. Those are only a few of the examples that come to mind when I think of the ways in which my faith and conventional wisdom are at odds. This Lent, I recommit myself to faith-based wisdom. I choose to trust the teachings that have guided me along my faith journey, regardless of whether they are conventional. I choose foolish vulnerability, love, compassion, justice, generosity, welcome, forgiveness, mercy. I choose to trust in God’s wisdom.

Prayer: *Creator God, we are foolish. We believe in your compassion yet struggle to provide it to others. We have faith in your forgiveness but refuse to open ourselves to forgiving. We yearn for welcome yet veer away from hospitality. Your wisdom calls us to justice as we struggle to move beyond our need for security to the place where we put ourselves on the line for others. We seek to live faithful lives as we hope to avoid confrontation. We speak words of love while we hesitate to stand against hate. The fear of appearing foolishly vulnerable prevents us from living your wisdom. May we open ourselves to your grace, sharing faith-based wisdom with the world. Amen.*



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⁴ The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. ⁵ The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. ⁶ I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. ⁷ The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; ⁸ he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. ⁹ It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

God gives

God wakens

God opens

God aids

God equips us to remain steadfast in the darkest of times. In other words, God is our salvation. Every day, I am called by the Spirit to listen and rest in this timeless truth. Through this passage, I can relate to the Judeans living in exile. Their immediate concerns were different from mine, but the anxiety is all the same.

As a twenty-something, worrying is easy. Often, I worry about inflation and the cost of necessities like food and shelter. And from this worry, I feel beat down, bullied, and corrupted by a system that was not built for me. This is a collective moment of anguish and yet, the prophet Isaiah remains confident, not in his own ability to weather the storms of this world. Rather his confidence is in his relationship with God.

This passage and the past two years have taught me that when we attune to the truth that God is both with and for us, we can begin to navigate this life, which preys on our deepest insecurities and ever-present worries. By responding to and accepting God's support, we develop the spiritual maturity to face what is to come.

As you go about your day: pause and reflect on the following questions:

How is God equipping me to face the world today?

In what areas of my life can I rely on God more?

By asking these questions of ourselves and being silent enough to hear the answer, we can lay down our fear and worry for just a moment and come into confidence that God is always for us.

Prayer: *Loving God, thank you for always being with me. Give me ears to hear your voice and give me the strength to heed your call. It has been a troubling time, and I am weary. I need the freshness of your Holy Spirit to invigorate every part of my being. This Lenten season, I ask for renewed vision, renewed speech, and a renewed mind, not for my own gain Lord, but for the flourishing of your kin-dom.*



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⁴ [Jesus] got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn. 13:4-14, 34-35)

John always does things a little bit differently than the other gospels, and this story of the Last Supper is no different. Here, the scene is just familiar enough to make the differences with the Synoptic gospels stand out. There is a meal but no words of institution; it is the week of Passover, but it is Friday rather than the other gospels' Thursday; and the story contains both anxiety and community, though in John's account they take a different form. Here Jesus does something that he does not do in the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke: he washes the disciples' feet. Where the other gospels' account of the Last Supper are horizontal, focusing on the communal meal, John's account is vertical, with subjection and servitude at the center of the story. But while we might have expected John's Jesus to sit at the top of this hierarchy, the opposite is true: Jesus, in John 13, becomes a servant. He washes the disciples' feet in a striking — even shocking — act of self-diminishment and service. For 12 chapters, John had been describing Jesus in powerful, grand, and important ways, emphasizing Jesus' status as the incarnated Logos. But here, John flips the order of things, and the one who "was with God, and... was God" serves others in all humility. Jesus reiterates the point in verses 31-35, pointing to love as the fabric of community. Love, not power or status or authority, is what should define Jesus' followers. Exemplified in the act of washing others' feet, love takes the form of service and care. This is not a self-abasement that allows one's self to be abused or taken advantage of, but it is a gift of one's generous care to another human being. Christianity has not always been good at following this model, but it stands as a reminder to us to give our care and our service in the way that Jesus did. Here, we are called forward into a kind of selflessness that has never been fully lived out, but that should draw us onward anyway.

Prayer: *God, invert our hierarchies. Where we feel proud, teach us love. Where we have power, give us love to learn. Where we disdain each other, show us love. Where we lack trust, lead us in love. Let love guide our actions, our thoughts, and our prayers. Amen.*



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³ So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. ⁴ Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” ⁵ “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) ⁶ When Jesus said, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ Again he asked them, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they said. ⁸ Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” ⁹ This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.” (Jn 18:3-9)

This passage gives us a very vivid description of what is happening at that moment. Jesus had just finish praying when he is confronted with a situation he knew was coming. He asked, “Who is it you want?” and they replied, “Jesus of Nazareth.” As a follower and servant of God, we need to understand that there is a price to pay because we choose to live our lives with purpose for Christ. Jesus was chosen by God to serve on this earth, and he paid a very heavy price and because of that price on the cross, we are now saved.

As I read and reflect on this passage, allowing God to speak into my life and share His word among the readers, I could only hear Him whisper to me a beautiful reminder, “I got you, keep going.” I encourage you to believe in Him in the midst of your current situation; it could be something positive or negative happening at this moment but simply keep moving forward one day at time for Jesus will be with you at all times. We are persecuted because we are a precious tool used by our Savior. Having a life of prayer, fasting, and a relationship with Jesus doesn’t guarantee our daily lives to be easy; it just means we are preparing for those times when the enemy brings situations we have no control over. What we have control over is how we react to those situations and who we have faith in, which is Jesus our Savior. Jesus prayed, fasted, and had a relationship with God and that did not guarantee a life without struggles and trials during his time on this planet, so why do we think our lives should be any different?

I was not born or raised as a Christian, so I didn’t know what it means to be chosen or live by a purpose until my mid twenties. This journey of discovering who I was called to be in Christ has not been easy but definitely very rewarding because I found my purpose. I had to understand that my life is not going to be ever easy, it’s just going to be worth it because I serve our father Jesus Christ. There have been many occasions I forget that I am in the midst of a war between the flesh and the spirit, and discouragement comes into my life and my mind wonders on the what if I choose not to continue paying the price of living for Christ? Well God has wonderful ways to remind me how much He loves me, takes care of me, and is always by my side. After all Jesus is our Pastor, the one who knows what’s coming our way. He takes care of us for we are his flock.

Prayer: *Grant me the strength needed, O God, to keep going, to keep following, to keep serving, and to keep trusting that you are still the One that raises up new life...even out of death. May it be so. May it be so.*



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³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Today's text portrays an episode that occurs well into the center of this pilgrimage of Lent – the followers have arrived in Jerusalem and witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, and now they are in hiding. All that Jesus' followers had expected to happen had fallen apart before their eyes, and the text's first words give a glimpse into the emotional tone of this part of the story, "after all of these things.... (NRSV) or "after all this...(Message)."

The text clues us into a sense that "after I survived all I can imagine surviving, there is more? Really??" A secret plan is hatched to receive Jesus body and place him in a tomb that belonged to a person that would not openly admit a relationship with Jesus earlier in the story. This time, in light of day, Nicodemus claims Jesus body to place it in a tomb with Jesus' other followers absent. Nicodemus took this risk without knowing the next part of the story.

This season of COVID pandemic has taken people in our time to a place of grief as they have watched their expected future stall or dissipate. Sadness and conspiracy theories, distress about the limits and advances of science, and wondering who is telling the truth and who can be trusted, have pulled us to extreme emotional space. Many of us have had to rearrange the future to which we thought we were headed as an individual, family, congregation, or country.

We have the "what now?" moment in common with people in John's story. They placed Jesus body in a convenient and available tomb and then left to go about their usual duties and rituals. In other words, life moved on for them. At the moment of loss, Nicodemus showed up to offer compassion, even when it could have been dangerous to claim Jesus in any way. In our moment of deeply altered future, will we choose kindness publicly even at some risk? Will we hide and break relationships for personal safety? Will we put our resources into kindness in the midst of brokenness? Lent asks us to consider these questions.

Prayer: *Gracious Spirit, in the "what now?" moments of our life, we humbly ask that you would guide us to kindness and hope. We confess to the pull of fear and despair that a deeply altered or unexpected future can have on us. Lead us through our individual traumas and grief, and center us in a community of your compassionate care that prompts us to sharing our resources and strength with others. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the one that invites us each year to this Lenten journey. Amen.*



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¹But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰**Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.** ¹¹**But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.** ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women who were with them. These women ran to spread the good news! They ran to tell “the eleven and all the rest” what they knew in their bodies to be true. They arrived at the tomb with spices in hand. They honored the tradition of showing up on such an occasion to do what they knew to be done. Met with the unexpected and filled with trembling fear, they did not turn and run away. And the voice reminded them, “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again?” These women who arrived at the tomb, bore witness to the event of the day, and ran to spread the good news! Their bodies could not hold the divine fire that touched them deep in their bones.

Jesus Christ is risen, so we must act like he is alive! As we rise to witness yet another Easter morning, do we hold that divine fire in our bones? Are our feet running to tell the good news to everyone we encounter? Are our hands filled with the tools, the spices we need, to bless our today? Jesus Christ is risen and so we must act like he is alive! We must do what our bodies demand of us, what we cannot hold inside. Address mass incarceration; show up for a national moral revival; denounce white supremacy; rebuild communities destroyed by hurricane winds and bitter cold and erupting underwater volcanos; speak out and stand against injustice in all its many forms.

Even when someone accuses us of delivering an idle tale and does not believe the good news message that says because he lives, we must put our bodies to work for justice. Run and tell it any how! Just as our sisters in Luke would not be deterred. And maybe Peter or your next-door neighbor or your yoga classmate or someone in the grocery store line will go and see for themselves, walking away with a new conviction to embody the good news with actions.

Hallelujah! Jesus Christ is risen! Thanks be to God!

Prayer: *O God, may we embody the passion of the Risen One as we face this day and the days ahead. Amen.*



Rev. Belva Brown Jordan serves as the Interim President of Disciples Seminary Foundation and the Moderator of the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.