

Lenten Devotional 2021



Compiled by:
Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

A Word of Thanks and Advance Apology

Thank you to all our volunteer writers for this Lenten devotional. Without their assistance, this publication could not have been provided for the 2021 Lenten Season.

A special thanks also goes out to the Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist church for their assistance in producing this devotional.

Please accept our apologies in advance for any editing errors or omissions that were inadvertently added during this holiday rushed production. It was a challenge worth the effort. It has brought us all together as faithful Disciples of Christ living in the beloved community. Thank you for your willingness to experiment with us as we partner with the Holy Spirit and the body of Christ. We are excited to journey through Lent with you.

How to Use This Resource

Each day has scripture readings from year B of the revised common lectionary maintained on the Vanderbilt University website. There are 47 readings and reflections. You may read as many of the selections for the day as you choose but are encouraged to at least read the passages on which our contributors are reflecting each day.

Before beginning, pause to pray and unload your cares and requests to the Lord trusting Him with them so that you can invite the Holy Spirit to guide your understanding of the scripture and reflection. To end your devotion time, take a moment to praise the Lord for the insights and for all the blessings that His sustaining love provides each day.

Finally, be sure to write any questions or thoughts you would like to share with someone later. Our faith development is a community endeavor. Hopefully, this devotional will provide a jumping off point for growth and community.

Ash Wednesday
February 17th
Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12;
Psalm 51:1-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10;
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁵ “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^[a] consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

As many of you know already, my calling into ministry was a late calling. I spent over 30 years in the business world working for large, well-known corporations such as MCI WorldCom and Fannie Mae, and in the Federal government for the Federal Home Loan Bank Board and the Federal Home Loan Bank System. I eventually went into real estate and became a real estate broker managing two brokerages.

From my early impoverished childhood days, I believed that wealth was the path to happiness. As I grew older and accumulated all that I had ever dreamed of having, I found that happiness continued to elude me. It was during this time that God opened my eyes to the world around me and the poverty and brokenness that was everywhere that I found myself. From the slums of Rio de Janeiro to the inner-city of Baltimore. I could no longer live in such comfort while I knew that so many barely had enough to eat or lacked adequate housing. All this time I had been storing up earthly treasures at the expense of far greater heavenly treasures.

It has now been over 10 years that I have been on a new journey, which has led me to abundant life, living and serving in God’s beloved community. I pray each day to a merciful God for granting me an opportunity for eternal life and granting me a foretaste of His kingdom in the here and now.

Is it time for you to reconsider where your treasure is?

Pastor Bob Ruggieri, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

February 18th
Psalm 25:1-10; 1 John 1:3-10
Daniel 9:1-14

9 In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans—² in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. ³ Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. ⁴ I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, “Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, ⁵ we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. ⁶ We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. ⁷ “Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. ⁸ Open shame, O LORD, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. ⁹ To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, ¹⁰ and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. ¹¹ “All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. So the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against you. ¹² He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers, by bringing upon us a calamity so great that what has been done against Jerusalem has never before been done under the whole heaven. ¹³ Just as it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us. We did not entreat the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and reflecting on his fidelity. ¹⁴ So the LORD kept watch over this calamity until he brought it upon us. Indeed, the LORD our God is right in all that he has done; for we have disobeyed his voice.

Daniel was a prophet of God, in exile but faithful. Yet in this prayer he counts himself with his unfaithful leadership that led them into captivity. He fasts and prays in sackcloth and ashes, complete mourning according to the customs of the time. Why? Because he knows that no matter how faithful he tries and wants to be, he is a sinner saved by grace. Over and over in this prayer he points out the righteousness and faithfulness of God.

At no point in this prayer does Daniel offer an excuse. He simply proclaims God’s righteousness in allowing them to be punished. This act of justice was brought on them by their own disobedience and faithlessness. Yet Daniel is not depressed. He is praying this prayer because he has found a promise of God in the words of Jeremiah. In verse 2, Daniel *understood* that the time for captivity was coming to an end. He believed the prophecy and knew that God would fulfill it. So, he humbled himself before God on behalf of his people with the hopes that they would be ready to go home.

Today, we too can humble ourselves before God and pray for God’s people to be faithful and obedient so that they are ready for Jesus’ soon return to take us to the New Jerusalem.

February 19th
Psalm 25:1-10; Daniel 9:15-25a
2 Timothy 4:1-5

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ² proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

I feel this was written for today – this year 2021. Paul, and apostle of Jesus Christ, wrote this to Timothy, his “true son in the faith.” Apparently, times there in Ephesus were turbulent – just as ours are today. 1 Timothy 5 – said, “the goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

We have had the advantage of “sound doctrine” throughout the Bible. We have had some “preparation” for “times such as this.” We have heard “The Word” preached through our lives. We are fortunate and blessed with these teachings. We have been prepared, fortunately, for these turbulent times, to respond well and defensively to combat evil when it is surrounding us and imposing on our lives.

Do not let yourself be “turned away” from the TRUTH you have been fortified with. THE HOLY BIBLE. Be brave, fervent, and open with your knowledge of TRUTH. Let your values and Biblical Witness be “out there” in an attempt to combat the evil surrounding us.

Prayer – Father, protect us from the forces of evil which are so strong and prevalent in our world today. May you grant us courage and boldness, while keeping our hearts pure and devoted to you.

Betty Lou Breedon, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

February 20th
Psalm 25:1-10; Psalm 32
Matthew 9:2-13

⁹ As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. ¹⁰ And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

The Pharisees asked Jesus' disciples. "Why does your teacher eat and commune with tax collectors and other disreputable characters?" Jesus heard and answered, "People who are well do not need a doctor but only the sick do. Find out what is meant by the scripture: I desire mercy not sacrifice, I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." Other translations and paraphrase bibles provide added illumination. Good News Bible: "It is kindness I want not animal sacrifices, I have not come to call respectable church going people, but outcasts." The Message: "I'm after mercy not religion." Living Bible: "It isn't your sacrifices and gifts I want – I want you to be merciful. For I have come to urge sinners, not the self-righteous back to God."

It seems clear Jesus was intent of spending time with despised people like tax collectors and the Samaritan woman at the well, ministering to the spiritually ill. He seeks for us to be more than kind. i.e., to reach out in mercy to these spiritually lonesome who are separated from God.

How will you respond?

Prayer: Lord God, help me be aware and reach out in mercy to those who do not know your love and comfort. Amen

Bruce Smith, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

February 21st
Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:9-15

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." ¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. ¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

The Gospel of Mark records that as Jesus began his ministry, he came to John at the Jordan River to be baptized and the Holy Spirit descended on him to identify that he was God's Son. Then Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days and there considered what direction his life would take. Would he be a mighty warrior king? Would he provide food and shelter for those in need? Maybe he would impress people with amazing feats that would dazzle and amaze. He turned away from each of these choices. His choice was to show God's love by acts of compassion, healing, and mercy.

The 40 days of Lent are a reminder of Jesus' 40 days of temptation in the wilderness. From Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021, through Holy Saturday, April 3, 2021, we are called to a time of reflection and preparation to celebrate the Queen of all days in our Christian calendar, Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021. May these days allow us some moments to consider how we might allow God's Spirit to touch us in these days of uncertainty and lead us to a joyful celebration of Easter's special blessing.

How can I prepare my life to share God's love by what I do for the sake of another of God's children?

Darrell L. Laymen, Retired Lutheran Pastor

February 22nd
Psalm 77; Job 4:1-21
Ephesians 2:1-10

You were dead through the trespasses and sins ² in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³ All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ^[a]—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

I love recognition. When I was growing up, I enjoyed when people would point out how gifted I was. As an adult, I enjoyed my reputation as someone who had multiple talents and I would do good works to prove it. I would make a big show out of what I could do because I knew it would bring me the attention I desired, and it would speak well to my reputation. It got to the point where my behavior was feeding my ego and I secretly felt superior to others. Yikes!

That is when God got my attention. I participated in my first Bible study and realized I completely separated myself from God. My activity was all about ME. ME. ME. My works were completely done in vain. My titles, associations, and my so-called talents meant nothing. In fact, nothing I have is my own—not even my faith! The author of Ephesians notes that faith is a gift from God through unearned grace, not by any merit of mine.

Over time, I began to develop a degree of humility. Now, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for what God has given me. It is this gratitude that now directs my “good works.” Rather than any promise of reward, I know that I have a new life in Christ, and all I do and say comes from knowing that the reward has already been given. Thanks be to God!

Do I do good things out of gratitude to God or to receive recognition? Can it be both?

Pastor Suzanne Jones, Benevola/Salem United Methodist Churches

February 23rd
Psalm 77; Job 5:8-27
1 Peter 3:8-18a

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For “Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” ¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.

How often in recent days have we heard the word “unity” spoken? There can be no unity amidst anger and mistrust. To achieve unity, Peter reminds us that we must follow the commandment to love one another. We must endeavor to see others’ points of view and respect their opinions. The only way we will obtain any sense of unity is to refrain from arguing and tearing each other down and, instead, look for ways to resolve our differences and find common ground. Only then will we begin to sense a spirit of unity as we become the blessings God meant us to be.

How are we able to do this? Certainly not on our own. We cannot set things right without the guidance and support of God. We must turn our concerns over to God, the One who is always ready to hear the prayer of the righteous (those who seek a right relationship with God).

What better time than now, during this Lenten season, to spend a little extra time getting closer to God? Prayer does not have to be offered at any particular time. We can pray while we’re waking up, walking, waiting in lines, watching commercials, before meals, at bedtime or at any other moment of the day. Be creative! God is always listening and wants us to reach out to him.

Judy Long, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

February 24th
Proverbs 30:1-9; Matthew 4:1-11
Psalm 77

¹ I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me. ² In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted. ³ I think of God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints. Selah

⁴ You keep my eyelids from closing; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. ⁵ I consider the days of old and remember the years of long ago. ⁶ I commune with my heart in the night; I meditate and search my spirit: ⁷ “Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? ⁸ Has his steadfast love ceased forever? Are his promises at an end for all time? ⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” Selah

¹⁰ And I say, “It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed.” ¹¹ I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD; I will remember your wonders of old. ¹² I will meditate on all your work, and muse on your mighty deeds. ¹³ Your way, O God, is holy. What god is so great as our God? ¹⁴ You are the God who works wonders; you have displayed your might among the peoples. ¹⁵ With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

¹⁶ When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; the very deep trembled. ¹⁷ The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; your arrows flashed on every side. ¹⁸ The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. ¹⁹ Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters; yet your footprints were unseen. ²⁰ You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

The feeling of being alone is unlike any other. When you can't fall asleep at night, tossing and turning, or when you feel like your life is an open wound that won't heal, it's important to remember you are not alone. During a global pandemic, isolation is the biggest disease spreading through humanity. It claws its way into our minds. It creates anxiety and fear in a world already so broken.

In some ways, the pandemic almost feels like suffocation, but with his hidden, guiding hands, God is here to remind us that when we shout from the highest mountain, God is there with us. Even when we push his outstretched hand away, and realize our mistakes, God will welcome you with open arms.

Recently, I've been struggling with making friends and feeling like I am stuck in my apartment, but one thing I do know is through all my fears and anxieties, I can sleep well knowing I have someone looking over me, taking care of me, and leading me on the path I was meant to be on.

Do you turn to God when you feel alone?

Jade Ruggieri, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

February 25th
Psalm 22:23-31; Romans 3:21-31
Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”² But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”³ And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.”⁴ But the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.”⁵ He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”⁶ And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.¹³ Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years;¹⁴ but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.¹⁵ As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.¹⁶ And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

There are times in our lives when we feel hopeless for our future, uncertain of how we are to get through. This is a common problem for those who cannot see into the future, and that means that just about all of us will face these feelings at some point in our lives. And this is just where we pick up the patriarch, Abraham, that titan of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11. We find him in Genesis 15 where his faith is waning.

Abram had just won a great victory over the combined armies of four kings with just his 318 trained servants. In spite of this sign of God’s presence with him, which he acknowledged by paying a tithe to the king of Salem, Abram still felt hopeless. He had no heir to whom he would pass on his wealth, his name, his stories, his God. This is the point at which his faith was put to the test. Would he believe the promises of God that his descendants would be as vast and numerous as the stars or as vast as the sand of the sea? In spite of his advanced age, Abram believed, and scripture tells us “and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”

There are many promises from God in scripture for the Christian to claim. Which promise do you hold onto by faith in spite of your experience telling you there is no way it will come to pass?

Pastor Shawn Paris, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

February 26th
Genesis 16:1-6; Romans 4:1-12
Psalm 22:23-31

²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! ²⁴ For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me but heard when I cried to him. ²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. ²⁶ The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! ²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. ²⁸ For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. ²⁹ To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. ³⁰ Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, ³¹ and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

Worship. Worship comes in many different varieties, perspectives, interpretation and implementations. One element or style of worship may truly get a child of God moving and working for HIS glory! While that same style of worship may keep another person complacent and in their comfortable cardboard box. That is the true raw beauty of worship to me! God uses very purposefully, different styles of worship to get his children's attention. Not only to get our attention but to get us excited and fired up for our purpose-driven life he has set out for us. He sees the good in it way before we ever do. Yet on the flip side of things, we tend to only worship when things are good and in our cardboard box. We have a difficult time as imperfect children of God to find reasons and ways to praise him in the storms of life. Some of us tend to view and utilize worship as a convenient-time only thing. We sometimes make excuses as to why we are not engaged in worship or let alone going to worship. Relationships, sporting events, more "exciting" things, tend to make us put our worship with God and to God on the back burner for later. Sometimes something as challenging and stressful and full of unknowns as COVID comes our way and it really rocks our cores. We tend to steer away from God because it's easy. It is easy to say, "well churches are closed because of COVID" "We can't go to church because it's closed, so we can't worship with our family." I know I had fallen into that thought process at one point. However, brothers and sisters, I have also used the last year or so to really focus on my IDENTITY. Yes, I am a diehard baseball fan, yes I am outdoorsy, yes I am an uncle, brother, son. But that is NOT my IDENTITY IN HIM. I used to hide in my comfortable cardboard box of life, with my cardboard walls of comfort under those surface minded answers. All I was doing was avoiding the hard work of discovering, developing and growing so much more. All I had to do was accept it, own it and WORSHIP and THANK GOD for it. See, God wants us to worship him when things are great, God wants us to praise and Worship in RELATIONSHIP with him during the average everyday times, and God most certainly wants us to Worship him during and through the storms of our life. The world may try and tell us at times that we cannot worship if a particular building with four walls is not accessible for one reason or another. Brothers and sisters of all ages, the CHURCH is NOT closed and never has been. The CHURCH is the people, the CHURCH is the WORD, the CHURCH is the WORD through music, the Church is community of support through Facebook live services or Zoom Bible studies and committee groups. We may not always be able to gather and Worship in a physical location. But we will ALWAYS be able to WORSHIP in SPIRIT and COMMUNITY and as a FAMILY of GOD! No one will ever be able to take that power and control away from our ALMIGHTY FATHER. Psalm 22:24 says, "The Lord doesn't hate or despise the helpless in all of their troubles. When I cried out, he listened and did not turn away." I will leave you with this. God says in his Word, that if we cry out to him, he will listen and not abandon us. Are you willing to accept the same for him and your IDENTITY in him for your life?

Kevin Welker, Trinity United Methodist Church

February 27th
Genesis 16:7-15; Mark 8:27-30
Psalm 22:23-31

²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! ²⁴ For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me but heard when I cried to him. ²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. ²⁶ The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! ²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. ²⁸ For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. ²⁹ To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. ³⁰ Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, ³¹ and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

Have you ever felt broken? Abandoned? Powerless? Well, then according to our Bible texts, you are in good company with King David, servant Hagar, and even Jesus Himself. You and I cannot escape the hardships of life. Yet even when our stories seem so dark and devastating, they can have a happy ending.

Maybe you have a testimony like this from your own life. When feeling down and depressed, you have experienced God's healing and hope like you could never imagine. I like the fact that God's love for us is unending to the point that he endured the cross to show us that no matter what, we are His beloved. Even when you feel lonely, tired, overwhelmed, misunderstood, and hopeless – God's love for you is at its maximum.

No matter what and where, please don't forget that God is with you. He has always loved you. He wants you to be with Him for the whole of eternity. And He is going to find a way, even though it might not be an easy one, to see you through these trying times.

My friend, Jesus is inviting you to stick with Him for the rest of your life and a life to come. What do you say?

Volodymyr Grinchenko, Clinical Chaplain Hospice of Washington County

February 28th
Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38 or Mark 9:2-9
Psalm 22:23-31

²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! ²⁴ For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me but heard when I cried to him. ²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. ²⁶ The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! ²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. ²⁸ For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. ²⁹ To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. ³⁰ Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, ³¹ and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

In this passage, it talks about how we need to spread the word of God. We need to tell others about God and what he does and can do. We can do this by worshiping God with others and telling people about how God is working in our lives.

You can also spread the word of God by helping others, spreading kindness and uplifting others. We need to tell our children and generations to come. This is important because if we don't tell our children then they may not tell their children and then people won't know about God and what good things he can do for you and others.

How will you spread the word of God today?

Lilly Berg, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

March 1st
Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45; Genesis 21:1-7; Hebrews 1:8-12

Genesis 21:6 Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me: everyone who hears will laugh with me."

Psalm 105:1-5 O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually. Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgements he has uttered.

When I read the Genesis verses, they made me laugh and then wonder...I'm old and beyond childbearing age, could I laugh if I was told I was to have a child at this time in my life? Then I read the verses in Psalm 105 and began to understand that God is faithful. His strength is with us, no matter what the situation is, but it is up to us to seek his strength, to share his good works, to praise him with all our being.

This reminded me of when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. At first, I was completely overwhelmed. Then I felt that I could see that God was working with me, to support me and to give support to others. I found strength in prayers and help from family, friends, and medical personnel, and I was able to go through two surgeries, and many weeks of radiation as well as 5 years of taking anticancer drugs. The support I got from my husband, Bruce, was overwhelming. I have been cancer free for 13 years now and I praise God.

I know that my faith wants me to be intentional with my prayers, to bear witness to our God with acts of love, compassion, decency, and kindness each day and to share these acts with everyone that I meet whether family, friend or stranger. This is following Christ's example.

Have you been following Christ's example and living a life that shows love, compassion, decency, and kindness to all whom you meet each day?

Katie Smith, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

March 2nd
Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45; Genesis 22:1-19
Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-19

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. ¹³ All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, ¹⁴ for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them. ¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom he had been told, "It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you." ¹⁹ He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Faith is the basic ingredient to begin a relationship with God. Faith is the flour in a cake or cookies; faith is the bread in the stuffing; faith is the milk in the ice cream.

How strong is your faith? Is faith the main ingredient in your daily walk?

If you want to give a boost to that main ingredient, spend some time today with God in prayer. Read all of Hebrews 11 to learn of people who had faith in God as the basic ingredient in their lives.

Dear God, increase our faith in you this day, we pray, Amen.

Becky Hein, Benevola United Methodist Church

March 3rd
Jeremiah 30:12-22; John 12:36-43
Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45

¹ O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. ² Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. ³ Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. ⁴ Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually. ⁵ Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered, ⁶ O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones. ⁷ He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. ⁸ He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, ⁹ the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, ¹⁰ which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, ¹¹ saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.” ³⁷ Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold, and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled. ³⁸ Egypt was glad when they departed, for dread of them had fallen upon it. ³⁹ He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light by night. ⁴⁰ They asked, and he brought quails, and gave them food from heaven in abundance. ⁴¹ He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river. ⁴² For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant. ⁴³ So he brought his people out with joy, his chosen ones with singing. ⁴⁴ He gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples, ⁴⁵ that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws. Praise the LORD!

Have you ever noticed that “call to worship” and “call to action” sound very similar?

Psalm 105 is a “call to worship” that teaches us what worship really looks like. In the opening verses, worship looks a lot like action: Give thanks! Call on! Make known! Sing to! Praise! Tell about! Glory in! Let your hearts rejoice! Look to! Seek! Remember...

As I think about my own worship experience, perhaps it has become a bit too passive and sedate (especially in the time of COVID): sit, listen, kneel, watch.

The call to worship is not just for show or something to do out of habit. Psalm 105’s call to worship is a direct **response** to a God who judges (v. 7), remembers (v. 8), confirms (v. 10), rebukes enemies (v. 14), rescues (v. 37), protects (v. 39), feeds, satisfies (v. 40), and gives (v. 44).

This is truly a God to “tell others about” and “sing to” and “glory in” and “seek” and “remember.” This God is worth more than just an hour of our attention on a weekend. This is a God worthy of our most active, demonstrative, and sacrificial love.

What have you specifically seen God do for you? How can you actively worship him today?

Jay Perry, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

March 4th
Psalm 19; 1 Peter 2:4-10
Exodus 19:1-9a

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ² They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. ³ Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: ⁴ You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶ but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites." ⁷ So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸ The people all answered as one: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do." Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after."

The Israelites were God's chosen people. In the Desert of Sinai, God chose them to be a holy nation and a nation of priests. In their covenant with God, if they would obey Him fully, they would be God's treasured nation.

If we all believe in Him, and follow his ways, we too can be His treasured nation.

Have you been living a life for God?

JJ Berg, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

March 5th
Psalm 19; Exodus 19:9b-15; Acts 7:30-40
Romans 4:1-12

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. ⁵ But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. ⁶ So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: ⁷ "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸ blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin." ⁹ Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, "Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness." ¹⁰ How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. ¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, ¹² and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.

I once attended a painting event where a leader helped us paint a beautiful nature scene on a blank canvas. She had an example of the painting off to the side for reference and I was eager to produce a painting like hers. The instructor told us to pick up our brush and place the colors where she pointed. I thought she was crazy. She was using colors that were not on her original painting. I tried my best to follow her instructions, but my strokes and swirls were not looking like the finished product she promised. I was not the only one in our group frustrated. She addressed our concerns saying, "Trust the process. Just place the color on the canvas where I tell you and you will see what emerges." I continued to layer on the colors thinking she was crazy. When we were nearing the end, she told us to take the canvas and flip it upside-down. To my surprise, I discovered the nature scene! We painted it in a way that didn't make sense, but it looked exactly like the example painting.

We are called to trust in God's promises even when they make no sense, even when we don't see them happening on our timeline. Abraham had faith in God's promise to him, knowing full well it was a ridiculous promise: a 100-year-old man and his 90-year-old barren wife would have descendants so numerous they couldn't be counted. Yet Abraham had faith not because it made sense or because he thought he deserved it. He had faith because God said it and he trusted God.

What circumstances are you trying to manage by using human strategies? Is God calling you to put your faith in God's promises?

Pastor Suzanne Jones, Benevola/Salem United Methodist Churches

March 6th
Exodus 19:16-25; Mark 9:2-8
Psalm 19

¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; ⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat. ⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. ¹³ Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Most mornings I sit out back reading several devotionals. My view is farm fields, woods and South Mountain. Sometimes it's bright and sunny. Sometimes damp or rainy. Sometimes it's draped in snow that has fallen from the heavenly storehouses. The peace and sense of God's presence this vista brings never fails to strengthen me for the day ahead. He truly speaks to me.

God also never fails to speak to me through the devotionals. My favorite part of the devotionals is the scripture reading. The Word of God is true and unfailing. Each morning that I spend time with God, His Word speaks directly to what is going on in my life that day. I receive guidance, encouragement and wisdom from the scripture. If I'm struggling with something, He encourages me. If I'm joyful, He rejoices with me. Again, He truly speaks to me.

How important I must be for the Creator of everything to spend this time alone with me. And he has such varied ways to communicate His love for me and His desires for my life. What a great and glorious God we have!

How does God speak with you in your time alone with Him?

Rick Bishop, Salem UMC of Keedysville

March 7th
Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22
Psalm 19

¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; ⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat. ⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. ¹³ Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Our daughter lives just outside of Smithsburg, and they have some of the most beautiful sunsets. How often I have looked at a sunset and thought of the beauty that God has created. When I look at the cumulus clouds and find creatures in them, I think of God's great creative mind. The fact that day after day, the sun and the moon come up; the world is wonderfully made.

Take time today to enjoy God's creation. Share your enjoyment of God's creativeness with a friend.

When was the last time you looked at God's creation and saw its beauty as a gift to you?

Prayer: We thank you God of Creation for the beauty that is all around us. Open our eyes that we may see the beauty. Amen.

Becky Hein, Benevola United Methodist Church

March 8th
Psalm 84; 1 Kings 6:1-4, 21-22
1 Corinthians 3:10-23

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—¹³ the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. ¹⁴ If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. ¹⁸ Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written,

"He catches the wise in their craftiness," ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

²¹ So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, ²³ and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

When I was younger, I started going to two church services every Sunday; one was really early in the morning and a regular church, or at least too early for my six-year-old self, and then Sunday school after the first service ended. I always stared in amazement at the church, as its ceiling seemed to go on forever and the lights made it feel look like everyone had an angelic glow around them.

As I grew up in the church, one thing I understood very quickly is that I was made in God's eye. Much like Corinthians, he laid out the blueprints and I am his builder in the world. Everything I do is through God as God is in me much like he is in every single person. He's the one who watered me and put me in the right amount of sunlight to help me grow into the person I am today.

How has God helped you grow?

Jade Ruggieri, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

March 9th
2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19; Hebrews 9:23-28
Psalm 84

¹ How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! ² My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. ³ Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, LORD of hosts, my King and my God. ⁴ Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise. Selah

⁵ Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. ⁶ As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. ⁷ They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion. ⁸ O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah

⁹ Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed. ¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness. ¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the LORD withhold from those who walk uprightly. ¹² O LORD of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

In the first part of psalms, it means that everyone that goes into his temple are blessed and praise him. Also, it is a really good thing to be there, because it is like where people think God lives and you can get eternal life.

Overall, I think it is a really worthy chapter like it belongs there. Because it is talking about his temple and I think it means that everyone wants to be there, and it is a nice place to be. Plus, it is talking about how someone really wants to go there, and they are praying so it must be a good place.

Do you want to be there too?

Owen Parish, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

March 10th
Psalm 84; Ezra 6:1-16
Mark 11:15-19

¹⁵ Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; ¹⁶ and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷ He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

¹⁸ And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. ¹⁹ And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

In this scripture, Jesus, cleanses His Father's house which was meant as a place of prayer, a sacred place. Besides his anger at the money changer's greed, Jesus detested the noise and uproar which interfered with worship.

Jesus took great offense at the buying and selling of goods in the temple courts which were intended for God's required offerings. In this sinful practice, foreigners who were seeking God, and even locals had to exchange their currency through money exchangers who charged an unfair rate for the temple currency, which was required of all worshippers. The sellers also exploited those who sought to sacrifice offerings for their yearly tithes. Since some couldn't bring their sacrifices with them on the journey, sellers of these things were allowed to set up a market in the temple court where items could be purchased at a profit for the sellers. The peddling of these goods in God's House inevitably led to a setting where thieves would find a sanctuary for themselves. These activities caused quite a commotion. Jesus cleansed the temple to rid it of sinful activities that were interfering with worship.

Do we need to cleanse ourselves of things that are coming between us and God?

Kathy Witman, Benevola United Methodist Church

March 11th
Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 1:3-6
Genesis 9:8-17

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.^[a] ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹² God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷ God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

I have always loved rainbows. As a young girl, I put rainbow stickers on all my notebooks for school and one time I bought a rainbow sticker with the name Julie on it and carefully trimmed off the “e” so that it was my name spelled my way. It was on my mirror for years as it was always hard to find things with my name spelled without the “e”.

But my favorite about rainbows is that they always remind me that God keeps His promises. Yes, the world has had many devastating floods in lots of different places all over the planet. Only this one time though did “all flesh be cut off by the water of the flood...” because God has kept His promise. That promise was not just to Noah, but to all flesh.

Yes, I believe that God will purify the earth again as it says in Revelation chapter 20 but then He will use fire. Until that day, and possibly forevermore, no matter what others may use the rainbow to be a sign of, for me it is only ever going to be a sign that God keeps His promises.

Have you taught yourself to trust in God’s promises? Which ones give you the most hope and peace?

Juli Blood, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

March 12th
Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 1:7-14
Daniel 12:5-13

⁵ Then I, Daniel, looked, and two others appeared, one standing on this bank of the stream and one on the other. ⁶ One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was upstream, "How long shall it be until the end of these wonders?" ⁷ The man clothed in linen, who was upstream, raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven. And I heard him swear by the one who lives forever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things would be accomplished. ⁸ I heard but could not understand; so I said, "My lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?" ⁹ He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the end. ¹⁰ Many shall be purified, cleansed, and refined, but the wicked shall continue to act wickedly. None of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. ¹¹ From the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that desolates is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred ninety days. ¹² Happy are those who persevere and attain the thousand three hundred thirty-five days. ¹³ But you, go your way and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days."

"I heard but could not understand;" When I read these words of Daniel, they resonate with me. There are times when I read God's word and I just don't understand it. Yet, I don't give up. Like Daniel, I ask questions. I ask them of God, Pastors, and friends. I pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show me the truth, but mostly I cling to the promise that was given here to Daniel also in verse 10 and 12 "*those who are wise shall understand,*" and "*Happy are those who persevere...*"

I can't tell you exactly how many times God has answered my prayers for understanding, but it's a lot. Sometimes, it's a lightbulb moment, sometimes the sermon that week at church will have the answer in it, or a friend will make a seemingly random comment about what they learned in their Bible study and boom, that's what I needed.

Although Daniel didn't understand, God promised that those at the "*time of the end*" would. I believe we are nearing the time of the end and so I believe I can understand, if I am sincere and faithfully looking. However, regardless of how long the time until Jesus returns in the clouds, my time might end way sooner than expected, so I seek while I can and I pray you will do the same.

Do you claim God's promise to help you understand as you study His word? How often has He answered those prayers in unexpected ways?

Juli Blood, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

March 13th
Numbers 20:22-29; John 3:1-13
Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

¹ O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. ² Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those he redeemed from trouble ³ and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

¹⁷ Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction; ¹⁸ they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. ¹⁹ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; ²⁰ he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction. ²¹ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. ²² And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

David begins this Psalm with praise. Calling on the people to praise the Lord for all that he has done for all his children all around the world.

The second part of this Psalm is interesting to me for two reasons. First, David points out the fact that though the people were sick and enduring affliction, it was their own fault. They were literally at death's door before they called out to the Lord. The Second point of interest for me is that, even though all their suffering was self-inflicted because of their sin and iniquity, when they called out, God answered. God's steadfast love brought healing and deliverance. Steadfast is an interesting word in and of itself. The idea of a love that doesn't change regardless of how it is used and abused is not a concept that we as fallen humans have much experience with. Yet, it is the only kind of love God offers. Complete, true, never changing, selfless love.

With that kind of love in mind, we too should join with David in praising God for his steadfast love, and wonderful works with sacrifices of thanksgiving songs of joy.

Just like this Psalm begins and ends with praising God, do you think you could commit to beginning and ending each day by praising God?

Juli Blood, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

March 14th
Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21
Numbers 21:4-9

⁴ From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵ The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." ⁶ Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷ The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." ⁹ So Moses made a serpent of bronze and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where all your needs are met but you're grumbling anyway? We are so easily caught in the web of lies that stir up discontent. The "keeping up with the Joneses" or even just wanting constant entertainment and excitement. Marketing companies know we can be influenced to do what they want us to, it's how they make their living.

The Israelites in the desert didn't have a marketing company or anything trying to influence them, but they did have the "mixed multitude" and the unpleasantly hot boring landscape. They had everything they needed. They had the visible presence of God providing them shade during the day and light at night. They had the daily miracle of manna and had seen the water come gushing from the rock. Miracles had filled their days for months as God protected them from not only the natural dangers of the desert, but also the enemies round about them. Yet, they murmured.

Gratitude is a mindset and process that has lost its prominence in our society today. Yet the act of choosing to be grateful and remembering to thank God for the myriad of blessings that fill our days in many ways protects us. It protects us from being discontent. It protects us from being selfish. It keeps us focused on the good and not the bad. Let us be actively grateful to God on a daily basis, not just for the extras in our lives, but for the basics too.

Will you make the commitment to being more grateful today and every day?

Juli Blood, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

March 15th
Psalm 107:1-16; Hebrews 3:1-6
Exodus 15:22-27

22 Then Moses ordered Israel to set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. That is why it was called Marah. 24 And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" 25 He cried out to the LORD; and the LORD showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he put them to the test. 26 He said, "If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the LORD who heals you." 27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they camped there by the water.

This story has always made me wonder why they doubted. It had only been THREE days since the Lord had parted the Red Sea and then drowned the army of Egypt to save them. Yet here they are complaining. Now I get that they were thirsty and scared. I just don't understand how they get to this point in only THREE days.

Moses doesn't even hesitate though; he goes straight to the Lord. Every time there is a problem for the next 40 years this is his response. Yes, he lost his temper and messed up the message that one time. I'm sure there were other areas in his life where he wasn't perfect, but he was consistent in going to God.

God answered. Not only to the problem of the water, but God answered in so many ways over and over in Moses' life just like he does in ours. Yet in verse 26, God tells us that he has expectations of us. IF we listen carefully to his voice and obey, then he will be free to be the "Lord who heals you." I want to be like Moses and always turn to the Lord when I am in need. I want to be careful to listen to the Lord's teaching in his word and to obey, not just so I will be healed of a disease or injury, but so that God can heal my broken sinful nature and I can be like Christ.

What is your reaction to trouble, do you run to God for help or just complain?

Juli Blood, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

March 16th
Psalm 107:1-16; Numbers 20:1-13
1 Corinthians 10:6-13

⁶ Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷ Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.” ⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. ¹⁰ And do not complain as some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹² So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³ No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

Have you ever been thankful to not be a Bible character? What I mean is are you thankful that your mistakes and struggles are not being written down for future generations to learn about in detail. One Bible study technique that is taught is to picture yourself as one of the characters in the story. Maybe pretend you are David or one of his mighty men as you read through his story. Or Noah, or his wife as you read of the flood. It's a good technique in that it helps you realize that they were real people with real emotions and struggles just like you.

Be that as it may, I've been very thankful that my life is not being documented and included in scripture just the same. I know it's all written in the books of heaven and I'm very thankful that Jesus' blood covers every page making it mostly illegible except for the times I get it right.

Although our struggles might not be published as scripture, the fact is many people in our lives are learning from our example. But we don't have to do this alone. Our struggles with temptation are something that God is fully prepared to handle, and he stands ready to help us every moment of every day. This leaves the responsibility on us to call out to him and look for the way of escape so we can “endure”. It isn't always easy, or the Bible wouldn't use the word “endure”, but it is possible, not by ourselves, but with GOD. This is just another promise that he is with us and for us, so we need to be with him.

Will you stay close and call out to God today?

Juli Blood, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

March 17th
Psalm 107:1-16; John 8:12-20
Isaiah 60:15-22

¹⁵ Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you majestic forever, a joy from age to age. ¹⁶ You shall suck the milk of nations, you shall suck the breasts of kings; and you shall know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. ¹⁷ Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron. I will appoint Peace as your overseer and Righteousness as your taskmaster. ¹⁸ Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. ¹⁹ The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. ²⁰ Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. ²¹ Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever. They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified. ²² The least of them shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the LORD; in its time I will accomplish it quickly.

A lot of times when I go to the beach or somewhere beautiful, I love to watch the sunset or a sunrise. They are so beautiful, but only last a certain amount of time before they rise into the sky or set and the moon then comes.

When I read the scripture from Isaiah 60:20 it reads, “You won’t need the light of the sun or the moon I, the Lord your God, will be your eternal light and bring you honor. Your sun will never set or your moon go down. I, the Lord, will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will come to an end.”

This reminds me that, like the sunset we watch, its light will always come but will also leave. But God's light is what is eternal and will stay with us forever. If we follow in the footsteps of him and live out his will, he will shine his eternal light on us forever. We are so blessed to have received God's gift of eternal light, and we should spread it to others. For they too should experience God’s light!

How are you going to light up your world with God’s light today?

Anna Jackson, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

March 18th
Psalm 51:1-12; Isaiah 30:15-18
Hebrews 4:1-13

4 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ² For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. ³ Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

“So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. ⁴ For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “On the seventh day God rested from all his works.” ⁵ And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.” ⁶ Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, ⁷ God again set a certain day, calling it “Today.” This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted:

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

¹² For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Like everyone else, there’s not a day goes by without mentioning or thinking about the Pandemic, or the restrictions that are mandated by our state’s governor. However, through this temporary trial of time, I have taught myself to slow down and reflect spiritually on the wonders of what God has created for us. The past year has reminded me how beautiful the sunsets are that God has created. Hearing the birds sing and seeing the deer crossing through my yard is one of God’s amazements that I’ve discovered that I no longer take lightly. Many of the mornings simply sitting in the chair in the dark with a cup a coffee and watching the sunrise always reminds me of the scripture Psalm 46.10 “Be Still and Know that I am God.” It’s enough to bring me comfort, and it’s even more than enough for me to find peace.

In years past, life has been a rat race, always on the go and for what? Why be in a hurry; who am I’m pleasing? Nothing can be more rewarding than the simple things of life, like walking alone on the C&O Canal seeing all of God’s great creations. Resting and slowing down is a sample of my renewal and more important, the growing of my faith that is desperately needed. We must always stay connected in our relationship to our Father who art in Heaven.

How many minutes, how many hours in a day, or how many days in a week does it take for one to experience renewal, or to restore and grow one’s faith?

Jeff Jones, Salem United Methodist Church

March 19th
Exodus 30:1-10; Hebrews 4:14-5:4
Psalm 51:1-12

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against 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. ⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.⁶ You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

This psalm is a prayer for cleansing and pardon. It is traditionally said to have been composed by David as a confession to God after he sinned with Bathsheba. David has been called the greatest King of Israel. However, David had so much blood on his hands that God would not allow David to build a temple for him – that work would have to wait for David’s son Solomon to undertake.

Although David had many faults, he was faithful to God. In this psalm, we see that he humbled himself, asking for forgiveness as he pled, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sins.” David begs for forgiveness, accepting responsibility for all of his sinful actions – asking for God to have mercy on him. Even with his brokenness, David always returned to submit to the holy will of God – he knew that without God in his life that he would be a rudderless ship on a tossing sea. Unfortunately, many of us fail to understand where we would be without the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives.

Have you recently had an opportunity to share a conversation with God absent of all pride and defensiveness – to hear His word and to look at yourself honestly? Re-read Psalm 51 and reflect on how it may speak to you and remember that we have a forgiving, merciful God. There is no sin too great to be forgiven by our Lord. Amen.

Pastor Bob Ruggieri, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

March 20th
John 12:1-11; Habakkuk 3:2-13
Psalm 51:1-12

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against 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. ⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. ⁶ You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

God loves us so much... Some days I wish we could stop right there. But it is never that easy. During this season of Lent, we turn our spiritual attention inward and do some self-examination. It is not easy to look inward. Many of us stop when it becomes uncomfortable. Sometimes I don't look forward to these days when I have to come clean with wrongs that I have committed, but when I work out my own faith with fear and trembling, I find value in the journey.

Psalm 51 is a personal passage for the psalmist. The writer pours out their pain because of their sin. It is almost as if we are reading an entry of a personal journal. Speaking our wrong-doings, our secret truths, is never easy to share—especially with God. But beloved, sharing our truth can help us find release, peace in our souls, and move us toward true happiness.

Confessing sin isn't a magic button—one click and our problems go away. But it does open ourselves up to God. The God who knows us and loves us and offers us grace. When we do that, we can begin the work of healing and bring relief from long-held guilt or sadness.

I love how today's passage beacons hearers that God wants the truth. In a world filled with falsehoods and conspiracy theories, this idea that God wants us to tell the truth is relevant. God expects the truth. And sometimes, that means we have to own up to our truth.

What truth do I need to confess to God? Today, consider your truth. Speak it to God in prayer.

Pastor Suzanne Jones, Benevola/Salem United Methodist Churches

March 21st

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-12 or Psalm 119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. ²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

This scripture reading speaks to the humanity of Jesus. Although, Jesus knew his time had come and needed strength from his heavenly Father who was always there for Jesus. Like Jesus, we need to know that our Heavenly Father is always there for us. Too many times, we try to go it alone. It is usually not until our situation is so dire with all our options exhausted that we turn to God. As you walk the journey of life – take the advantage of having a Heavenly Father that is on that walk with you. Don't wait until the situation is hopeless to turn to God for guidance and support.

Do you look to God daily for guidance and support? Maybe you should start today.

Pastor Bob Ruggieri, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

March 22nd
Psalm 119:9-16; Isaiah 43:8-13
2 Corinthians 3:4-11

⁴ Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, ⁶ who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ⁷ Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, ⁸ how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? ⁹ For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! ¹⁰ Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; ¹¹ for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

Our confidence and competence come from God through Jesus Christ. Paul gave God the credit for all of his accomplishments. While false teachers boasted of their own power and prestige, Paul expressed his humility before God. None of us can claim to be adequate without God's help. None of us can carry out the responsibilities of God's calling in his or her own strength. Without the Holy Spirit's enabling, our natural talent can carry us only so far. As Christ's witnesses, we need the character and strength that only God can provide.

Paul talks that the keeping of the engraved letters of the Old Testament laws will only result in death without believing in the Lord Jesus Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, will give the person eternal life. There has only been one person who fulfilled the law perfectly, Jesus Christ. So by keeping the law alone, all others will be condemned to death. The law makes people realize their sin, but it cannot give life. Eternal life comes from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives life to all who believe in Christ. The Ten Commandments still point out sin and show us how to obey God, but forgiveness comes only through the grace and mercy of Christ.

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.”
Romans 8:2 RSV

The Holy Spirit was present at the creation of the world as one of the agents in the origin of life itself. (Genesis 1:2) He is the power behind the rebirth of every Christian and the one who helps us live the Christian life. By his power, we will be transformed into Christ's perfect likeness when he returns. Thank God for the fact that the best is yet to come!

Are you ready for the return of Jesus Christ?

Steve Hanson, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

March 23rd
Isaiah 44:1-8; Acts 2:14-24
Psalm 119:9-16

⁹ How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word. ¹⁰ With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. ¹¹ I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you. ¹² Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes. ¹³ With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth. ¹⁴ I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches. ¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. ¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

As a 20-year-old college student, I often have fears about if I am doing the right things, if I am doing what I need to in order to reach my goals, and if I am becoming the person I envision myself as. Sometimes I stumble or take a wrong turn. Sometimes I need a reminder of my goals and who I want to be to set me back on course, but I know when I turn to God, he always sets me on the path I am searching for.

God clears the easiest path for me, and if I am listening to him enough, then I find my way out of the wilderness, as God trains me to become the person who listens to the word, the road signs he has posted for me, and avoid the damage I can inflict on others or myself. I want to follow the road map of life he planned for me.

Will you follow his map, or will you follow your own?

Jade Ruggieri, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

March 24th
Psalm 119:9-16; John 12:34-50
Haggai 2:1-9, 20-23

2 In the second year of King Darius, ¹ in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai, saying: ² Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say, ³ Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? ⁴ Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, ⁵ according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. ⁶ For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; ⁷ and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts. ⁸ The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. ⁹ The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the LORD of hosts. ²⁰ The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month: ²¹ Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, ²² and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders shall fall, every one by the sword of a comrade. ²³ On that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, son of Shealtiel, says the LORD, and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the LORD of hosts.

I have come to appreciate the Old Testament writings as I get older. The Book of Haggai gives me more insight into the way people worshiped God and how easily they fall away, become discouraged, and need encouragement to stay dedicated. Haggai spoke the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, Joshua and the people to encourage them to rebuild the temple. And even if the temple did not have the former beauty of Solomon's temple, God's glory would be there, and this temple would be even more beautiful.

Today, even though God does not reside in a man-made temple I see his promise to bless us if we serve him. Even as the whole earth seems to be shaken with a pandemic and many fear for their lives, his promise to be with us and provide for us has not changed from the days of Haggai. His promise to destroy our enemies and that we will ultimately be triumphant, should give us all hope for the future and a peace that God is in control.

Bryan Smith, Benevola/ Salem United Methodist Church

March 25th
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Deuteronomy 16:1-8
Philippians 2:1-11

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

While reading the verses of Philippians for today's reading, I am amazed at how they speak to me of how we behave. We look at our lives and want what we want. We are not following Christ's example. Just think, he knew that he was equal to God, his father, yet he stopped and talked to tax collectors, who were some of the lowest level of life. These tax collectors would collect the taxes for the Roman government and then take some more for themselves. He talked to Gentiles and treated them as persons who had lives that mattered, even though Jews were not supposed to associate with Gentiles. Jesus Christ showed us the way of being a servant. He tries to teach us that we are not the number one person in our lives, but that putting others ahead of ourselves, with our words and actions, is the path to oneness with God. He teaches us that God loves everyone and wants us to regard everyone we meet, with humility and caring.

As we look toward Easter and the days before Easter, we know that Christ did not claim any of the privileges of being the Son of God, but died the worst death, on a cross, so that our sins can be forgiven. In closing, I will quote the first verse of Psalm 118, "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!" I challenge each of us to give thanks by living a life of joyful servanthood, forgetting ourselves, and putting others first.

Is there one thing that you can do each day to show that you thank God for sending us Jesus Christ who is our Lord and Savior?

Katie Smith, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

March 26th
Jeremiah 33:1-9; Philippians 2:12-18
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

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.

We all know a mother's strong love for her child. We may misbehave, but we can always count on our mother's love. That is how God loves us. Even when we do things that are wrong, God still loves us. He answers our prayers; he's there with us when we are afraid; he never leaves our side.

How often do we forget to thank God for his love for us?

Take time today to say a Thank You Prayer to God for his love and patience. You may even want to reach out to your mother and say thank you to her too.

Prayer: Dear Loving God, today we thank you for your love that endures forever. Amen

Becky Hein, Benevola United Methodist Church

March 27th
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Jeremiah 33:10-16
Mark 10:32-34, 46-52

¹⁰ Thus says the LORD: In this place of which you say, "It is a waste without human beings or animals," in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without inhabitants, human or animal, there shall once more be heard ¹¹ the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD:

"Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!" For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the LORD.

¹² Thus says the LORD of hosts: In this place that is waste, without human beings or animals, and in all its towns there shall again be pasture for shepherds resting their flocks. ¹³ In the towns of the hill country, of the Shephelah, and of the Negeb, in the land of Benjamin, the places around Jerusalem, and in the towns of Judah, flocks shall again pass under the hands of the one who counts them, says the LORD. ¹⁴ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Today's reading from Jeremiah reminds me of a YouTube video that I watched about permaculture gardening in the Jordan valley. "Greening the Desert" is a ten-year project from Geoff Lawton to turn lifeless, salty desert sand into self-sustaining, fertile, life-giving forests and crops. Through careful design and planning, it transforms death into life.

God promises the same through Jeremiah. Where before there was only "desolate waste, without people or animals," God promises "joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom." And this promise is to be fulfilled through Jesus, the Branch sprouting from David's lineage.

Jesus is in the restoration business.

In Mark 10, Jesus encounters blind Bartimaeus and restores his sight. I know we sing about it, "I once was lost, but now I'm found; Was blind, but now I see..." But I want you to imagine the reality of being fully blind and then having Jesus restore you to perfect 20/20 vision.

This is what Jesus wants to do for us. Your heart may feel like a desert, like nothing could ever grow there again. Maybe you feel broken or blind or spiritually or emotionally dull.

Jesus is in the restoration business.

What do you need Jesus to restore in you today?

Jay Perry, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

March 28th

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; or Mark 15:1-39, (40-47)

Mark 14:1-15:47

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; ² for they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.” ³ While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴ But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.” ¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹ When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him. ¹² On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, “Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” ¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, ¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ ¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”

From this scripture reading, we see that Jesus had planned every small detail of his entry into Jerusalem on his journey to the cross including where he and his Disciples would partake in his last Passover meal. Even though he would suffer a painful, agonizing death, his thoughts were on his disciples – even up to the end he watched over and cared for them. Based on a prearranged plan, he sent them into the city where a man carrying a jar of water was to meet them – the disciples would have no trouble finding him since no man in the 1st century Palestine would be performing the work of a woman. Once they met him, they followed him to a large house where they said to the owner, ‘The Teacher asks, “Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my Disciples?”’ After he led them to a large upper room – they began the preparations for the Passover meal.

From this account, we see that Jesus knew what lay ahead of him and knew it was the will of the Father. In our journey in life there are times we know the path that we are called down – however, we don’t always follow it due to our own willfulness. We see that the will of Jesus was the will of God. He never failed the Father in his obedience. He has set the example for us to follow. Unfortunately, too few have taken this path of full submission to the will of God.

Are you willing to accept the holy will of God and follow Jesus?

Pastor Bob Ruggieri, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

March 29th
Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 36:5-11; Hebrews 9:11-15
John 12:1-11

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. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." ⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

The Anointing at Bethany is one of the most telling stories. In Mark's version of the story, the author shares how a woman anoints Jesus with a valuable ointment and someone tries to scold her for her actions. The reason for the rebuke is that the ointment could have been sold and the money could have been given to the poor. Jesus doesn't see this being the case. In fact, he does not scold the woman at all. He commends her loving gesture. You see, she is using her precious ointment to help Jesus prepare for the cross.

Yes, helping the poor is incredibly important, but not as important as walking with Jesus toward the cross. In other words, joining Jesus on his walk to the cross is one of the most valuable things we can do. It is more important than even the most valuable things we have around us.

Today is the first day of Holy Week. What might you do to show how important it is to join Jesus on his walk toward the cross this week?

How could you put others first? What does extravagant self-sacrifice look like for you?

Pastor Suzanne Jones, Benevola/Salem United Methodist Churches

March 30th
Isaiah 49:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36
Psalm 71:1-14

¹ In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame.² In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me.³ Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.⁴ Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.⁵ For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth.⁶ Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.⁷ I have been like a portent to many, but you are my strong refuge.⁸ My mouth is filled with your praise, and with your glory all day long.⁹ Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent.¹⁰ For my enemies speak concerning me, and those who watch for my life consult together.¹¹ They say, "Pursue and seize that person whom God has forsaken, for there is no one to deliver."¹² O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!¹³ Let my accusers be put to shame and consumed; let those who seek to hurt me be covered with scorn and disgrace.¹⁴ But I will hope continually, and will praise you yet more and more.

While reading this Psalm, I felt comforted in the power and the greatness of our Lord. He is my fortress where I may take refuge – a place of rest and comfort in a time of calamity. His grace has brought me through many trials in my life and has brought me through them stronger. I am thankful for all that He has done for me by his grace.

The challenges that I face daily do not seem as not as big because there is someone that I can confide in and look to in my times of need. He has never been far from me on this great journey. Over the years, I have come to trust in him and to accept His holy will. I know that my journey in this earthly realm will ultimately end. However, I am comforted by the Christian hope of eternal life and the words of comfort in this psalm of prayer for lifelong protection and help.

Who brings you comfort? Is that comfort enduring and eternal?

Pastor Bob Ruggieri, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

March 31st
Isaiah 50:4-9a; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:21-32
Psalm 70

¹ Be pleased, O God, to deliver me. O LORD, make haste to help me!

² Let those be put to shame and confusion who seek my life. Let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire to hurt me.

³ Let those who say, "Aha, Aha!" turn back because of their shame.

⁴ Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. Let those who love your salvation say evermore, "God is great!"

⁵ But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay!

So often in life we call out to the Lord in our distress. Why do we do this? Because we know that we are poor and needy, helpless in the face of so many different things. Yet while we often delay in our calling out to the Lord until our situation is desperate, He is with us all the time. In the good times, all the way to our desperate times.

Even as David is pleading for God to help save his life, he adds verse 4. It's almost like he is saying, Lord, even if you let me die, I will rejoice and be glad in you and love your salvation and say that you are Great! But, I still need help, NOW.

David didn't stop asking for help or believing that God could and would provide it. Yet he took a moment to praise God and profess his love for God even in that desperate moment. What an example that is to us today. In our trials and struggles, we need to remember to take time to praise God for his blessings and reaffirm our faith, regardless of the outcome of our situations. We know this is what we should do, yet I'll never say it is easy or natural. David, however, proved it is indeed possible. Even in the moment of desperation.

Can we look at our trials and praise God regardless of the outcome he allows? Maybe we can take steps in the moments when we aren't desperate to prepare so that we can.

Juli Blood, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

April 1st

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26;
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ 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. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. ³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 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."

It is the night before the crucifixion. Jesus has gathered with His disciples in the upper room to celebrate the Passover together, an experience in which He will reveal to them that He is the fulfillment of all the rights and rituals of their religious services. But in the midst of this important night, there is a quarrel amongst the disciples as to who would be the greatest in the new kingdom.

This is the backdrop from which Jesus notices that none would stoop to the level of serving another by washing their feet lest they concede to the others that they are greater. But Jesus knew who He was, where He came from, and for what purpose He came, and it all centered on the life of a condescending servant. That is the heart of God, to love His created beings to the point of serving them. Total selflessness is the character that Jesus portrays of the Father.

But here is the bombshell of this story, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." Jesus calls us to serve others as He did, selflessly and with great humility.

How are you allowing the Holy Spirit to work through you so that your life resembles Christ's life of service to others?

Pastor Shawn Paris, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

April 2nd
Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9;
John 18:1-19:42; Psalm 22

On the cross, Jesus quotes Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Here is a reflection on those words, from author Rev. Sarah Agnew, posted on her blog "Pray the Story" <http://praythestory.blogspot.com/>

**his prayer, from a cross
of wood**

God?
God?
forsaken
alone
groaning
the psalmist cried out
all day long and all
through his restless night.
where have you gone?
where is your throne?
God?

You are holy
ancestors trusted
they trusted
you were there.
despised
scorned
no more than a dirt-bound
worm.
mocked

taunted
God?
God?
are you there?

you were there
at my birth
you have been with me
ever since
do not leave me
now
there is no one else
to help me

bulls
circling
lions
roaring
thirsty
broken
melting
empty
dogs
circling

scavenging
tearing my clothes
gnawing at my bones
do not leave me now
for the dog's teeth
the lion's mouth
God?

God?
rescue me, please,
my Holy, Sacred, Home
bring me home
you are God
you alone
I live for you
I die for you
I live
you live

Amen

Rev. Sarah Agnew

April 3rd
Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24; 1 Peter 4:1-8;
Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42;
Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16

¹ In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. ² Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me. ³ You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me, ⁴ take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge. ¹⁵ My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. ¹⁶ Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

I love the word pictures that scripture uses to reveal the character of God. In Psalm 31, David portrays God as a rock; strong, immovable, unbreakable, everlasting. He calls out to this Rock to be a “fortress of defense to save me” (vs. 2). In the gospels, we find that Jesus pulled from the Psalms frequently as His own source of strength and encouragement, as the means to support His steadfast Faith.

Then we come to the point where Jesus, by faith, has laid down His own life for you and me. But let us not lose sight of the powerful imagery that linking the word pictures can bring us of just how intense the spiritual battle of the grave was as Jesus lay in the tomb. There is Jesus, the Rock that David said was His fortress and defense laying in a tomb hewn from rock, now the fortress and defense that the Devil hoped to use to hold the Son of God from completing His mission. The contest was set, and time would tell which Rock would prevail.

Jesus has gained the victory over sin and death, He is our sure defense, but what have you not fully surrendered to Him and allowed His victory to conquer?

Pastor Shawn Paris, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

Easter, April 4th
Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24;
1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or
Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

In the early hours of the morning, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, and Salome arrived at the tomb of Jesus to anoint his body. What they found was an open tomb with a messenger who told them the amazing news of the resurrection of Jesus – the most important event in all of Christianity.

Because of the resurrection, we understand Jesus not just as a memory, but a presence. Our Christian life is about knowing Jesus in the present tense. Because Jesus is a living Lord – there are new wonders and truths to be discovered all the time. The greatest proof of the Resurrection is Christianity itself, with over two billion Christians worldwide. And the good news is that we are all called to be a part of this life through our faith in Christ Jesus. Just as Jesus brought hope and healing in the 1st century – he can also bring hope and healing in the 21st century and beyond! Allow yourself to be passionate about your Christian faith. Make a difference in this broken world.

Are you ready to start today?

Pastor Bob Ruggieri, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church