



STORIES OF HOPE

A Weekly Devotional for the Lenten Journey

A Note From Rev. Allison Gossett:

The 40 days of Lent, celebrated in the period before Easter Sunday, is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for Easter. These 40 days parallel the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness enduring the temptation of Satan, preparing for his ministry. It is a time of self-examination and reflection that ultimately culminates in the amazing celebration of the hope we have in the Resurrected Christ on Easter.

Included in this book is a devotional for each Sunday of Lent written by BUMC clergy as well as information on how you can access our daily Lenten devotionals online and a list of ways to get involved in our missional and worship opportunities during this time.

We invite you to not only take time each week to pray and engage in these weekly devotionals but to also read the online daily testimonies of God bringing hope to people in our congregation. We hope you will also join us in mission with Graceworks and different worship opportunities as you are able.

The past year has been filled with many lows, but I pray that you have seen glimpses of Jesus' hope breaking through the darkness. May this series of devotionals online and in this book be an invitation into the Lenten journey of self-reflection and a celebration of how the Living Christ is at work each and every day in our lives!

Peace and blessings,
Rev. Allison Gossett

Reminders:

Follow along with the rest of the 40 days by reading or subscribing to our Daily Field Guide Devotional at bumc.net/fieldguide.

Find out more about what's happening at BUMC during Lent at bumc.net/lent.

This Lent, we're partnering with GraceWorks in Franklin to Restock the Pantry! Will you help us provide our neighbors in Williamson County with food and necessary household supplies? The needs of our community continue to grow as COVID-19 continues to negatively impact not only health but family and individual incomes and the resources schools can provide to assist students. Learn how you can support this missional initiative at bumc.net/restock.

February 21, 2021

Beauty at Bethany

Rev. Shelby Slowey

Daily Reading: Matthew 26:6-13

We don't know much about the woman who anointed Jesus at Simon's house in Bethany. The gospel writer John identifies her as Mary, sister to Martha and Lazarus. But this is Matthew, and Matthew intentionally leaves her name and circumstance a mystery. Perhaps she was a long-time follower of Jesus. Perhaps a newcomer. We don't know if she was wealthy or poor. All we know is that she poured "very expensive perfume" on Jesus while he sat at the table, and Jesus called this act "a beautiful thing" (NIV). He tells all in attendance that she has done this in preparation for his burial.

Close your eyes and bring to your mind the picture of Jesus and his disciples at the table. See the woman lovingly sacrificing such costly oil on the body of her Lord. Take a deep inhale and smell the overpowering fragrance, now wafting throughout the house. It is the smell of wealth, royalty, and prosperity. It's beauty for the nose. With this smell rich in your nostrils, Jesus declares his coming death.

Can there be beauty in preparing for death? Those who have walked with loved ones at the end of life seem to think so. As a former hospice chaplain, I saw much beauty as families and loved ones prepared to depart from each other: estranged relationships reconciled, mutual forgiveness offered, and beautiful expressions of enduring love and respect. The walk toward the end of life is holy ground to be sure.

We thank you, Lord Christ, that even as we face death, we can find and experience the beauty of your magnificent Creation, and we can celebrate the perpetual love we swim in because of your unending grace and mercy. Amen.

February 28, 2021

The Last Meal

Rev. Casey Orr

Daily Reading: Matthew 26:17-30

I once found myself in a service of worship, feeling lost and detached. My soul was weary, and my heart was sad. I felt so far from God and so far from the others with whom I had gathered to worship.

But then, the pastor moved to a table where there was a simple loaf of bread and a cup of wine. She started speaking about the meal we were about to share. She spoke familiar words, familiar liturgy – words printed on my soul.

She raised up the bread and said the words Jesus spoke to his friends: “Take and eat. This is my body.” And when she broke the bread, it was the worst break I had ever seen. In one hand, she held basically the entire loaf. And in the other hand, she held a tiny sliver of bread.

After about three seconds of uncomfortable silence, she broke into beautiful laughter.

“Isn’t that perfect?” she asked. “We’re all broken. And we all break just like this. When we break, we don’t break pretty.” It was so comforting, so nourishing, so real. I wept as I remembered that starting with Jesus’ last meal with his disciples, the people invited to receive the blessing of the bread and cup have never been perfect. We are so blessed to inherit the invitation to the table that welcomes us as we are.

Over the last year, many of us have felt lost and detached. Our souls have been weary, and our hearts have been sad. But I hope each time you prepare Communion in your home, at your coffee table or kitchen table, with your everyday dishes, you take a few seconds of silence and maybe even welcome joyful laughter at the wonder of Christ’s invitation to receive love and grace and mercy. May Christ’s words of invitation be printed on your soul.

March 7, 2021

Being A Judas

Rev. Toi King

Daily Reading: Matthew 26:47-56

Every time I read the store of Judas betraying Jesus, it grieves my heart. I remember asking the question, “Why would and how could he do this to Jesus?” He knew Jesus was the Messiah. He had seen all of Jesus’ miracles, but then I am reminded that I too know Jesus is the Messiah. I have read the Bible. I have heard the Jesus story all of my life, and unlike Judas, I know how Jesus’ story ends. However, even with all of the knowledge, wisdom, tradition, reasoning, Scripture reading and studying, and experience I possess, I betray Jesus.

Much like Judas, there are times in my life when I say Jesus is my Lord and Savior, yet my actions say otherwise. When I am behaving in ways that are not pleasing to God, I am betraying Jesus. We betray Jesus when we do not love our neighbors. We betray Jesus with our words, actions, and deeds, especially when they cause harm to self and others.

On the bookshelf in my office, I have a small piece of art of the Last Supper. It has Jesus and the disciples sitting at the table, yet one of the disciples is missing its head. I purchased this piece several years ago. I remember how reluctant the woman in the store was in selling it to me. She asked me why I would want to buy a piece of damaged art. I told her, “First it will remind me that I need Jesus because without Him I am damaged just like this art. Secondly, this will remind me daily to be careful I do not become a Judas.”

What do you do when you notice your actions, words, or deeds are causing you to be a Judas?

I am strongly convinced Jesus knew that the world would betray Him, yet he still followed through with His mission. Jesus willingly surrendered to fulfill Scripture. Jesus loves us so much that Jesus is willing to die for us.

March 14, 2021

The Denial

Rev. Allison Gossett

Daily Reading: Matthew 26:69-75

How and how often do I deny Jesus in my words and deeds?

Rev. Toi King and I were recently recording a video on addressing racism as Christians for a Sunday School series that focused on the Good Samaritan story. Rev. Toi pointed out that in the Scripture, the men that passed up the wounded man on the side of the street could have been good people. I imagine a priest and a Levite (an assistant to the priests) were probably what we would call “good people.” They probably did not intend to openly thwart God as they walked passed the naked, half dead man. But for some reason they didn’t stop to help. I wonder. Were they just too busy? Were they too consumed with their own to-do lists, their own agendas, that they just didn’t slow down enough to see the suffering? Were they not spiritually intentional enough to focus on how they could share God’s compassion and care with the beaten man?

In the Book of Matthew, Jesus says, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” Whenever you love the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the person needing clothes, the sick or the imprisoned, you love Christ.

How often am I too busy or too narrowly focused on what I want to do that I do not intentionally see those that are suffering around me? Turning to the Scripture for today, how often do I in this self-focused way, deny Jesus like Peter with my words and deeds or my lack of words and deeds?

We surely can’t do everything as individuals, but in the Sunday School video with Rev. Toi, she challenged us to wake up each morning and pray “God, who needs me today? Who needs to see You through me today? Who needs to know that You are real through me today?” How is Jesus calling us to claim his name in caring for others, in resisting evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever ways they present themselves? How are we repenting of our sin that Christ might do a good work in and through us that we might not deny Him, but boldly claim that His love and mercy reign supreme?

March 21, 2021

The Choice

Rev. Laura Brantley

Daily Reading: Matthew 27:15-26

I have always found this passage disturbing because it highlights how a group of people can be coerced to choose evil. It also demonstrates the power of the crowd, a power that can be used for harm or for good depending upon the personal inclinations and ambitions of the leader.

As the text explains, it was customary during the festival for the governor to pardon one prisoner “for the crowd.” This means that it was not the leader who decided who to pardon, it was the crowd – the people. We might assume – or at least hope – that the crowd would choose to pardon someone who had been unjustly judged. However, what we see instead is how a group of religious leaders, out of anger and jealousy, convinced the crowd to shout for the release of a notorious criminal and for the death of a spiritual guide.

Pilate could not believe what he was hearing. He saw evil in their request and asked multiple times for the crowd to reconsider. Pilate tried to appeal to reason when he asked them why they wanted Jesus crucified. Notice that this question went unanswered. They simply shouted more loudly, “Crucify him!” Seeing no other way, Pilate relented and did what seemed expeditious in the moment. He washed his hands and told the crowd they were responsible for what was about to happen. In a blind frenzy, they agreed to assume the guilt of murdering an innocent man. And, thus, Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified.

As we journey toward the cross this week, I invite us to consider the ways we may be choosing – intentionally or unintentionally – to go along with the crowd. I invite us to consider how we will use our life and our voice for good rather than harm. I pray that we will become more aware of harm that can come from being passive bystanders in the face of wrongdoing. Let us pray together that the work Jesus Christ began in us will be brought to completion and that we will grow ever more deeply in love of God and love of neighbor. May it be so. Thanks be to God. Amen.

March 28, 2021

The Cross

Rev. Adam Jones

Daily Reading: Matthew 27:32-44

It has always been hard for me to read this story; needed but hard. I read it sometimes with anger, sometimes with a tear, and always with an overwhelming sense of grace. It is hard to read because we view it through the lens of knowing they are treating our Savior in a way no man or woman should be treated. As Jesus is dying on a cross, He is mocked for being exactly what He was called to be. "Save yourself! If you are God's son come down from that cross." I imagine the people throwing insults are filled with rage or maybe even laugh to one another. As the mocking continues, it reaches the point in which they mock Jesus by quoting Him: "He said, 'I'm God's Son.'" Jesus does not deny this, of course, because He is the Son of God and living into exactly the call placed on His life. Jesus listened to His call being mocked as He extended grace to the very people who mocked Him. I don't know about you, but to me that makes grace even more amazing. My call to follow Jesus has led me lots of places and gifted me with many blessings, but one of the greatest is being reminded that the grace I receive uniquely through Jesus on the cross is also extended to those that might insult me or think different than me. Jesus, the Son of God, on the cross, means grace abounds for all.

April 4, 2021

Easter Sunday

Daily Reading: Matthew 28:1-10

Easter is a time of joy and renewal. Followers of Jesus saw their darkest days replaced with the miracle of hope and eternal life. Christians today take time for self-examination and reflection during Lent. “Going dark” for a few weeks prepares us to fully experience those first rays of resurrection light on Easter.

This prayer was composed by the Rev. Michaela Youngson, the Methodist Church of Britain.

*When everything was dark
and it seemed that the sun would never shine again,
your love broke through.*

*Your love was too strong,
too wide,
too deep
for death to hold.*

*The sparks cast by your love
dance and spread
and burst forth
with resurrection light.*

*Gracious God,
We praise you for the light of new life
made possible through Jesus.
We praise you for the light of new life
that shone on the first witnesses of resurrection.
We praise you for the light of new life
that continues to shine in our hearts today.*

*We pray that the Easter light of life, hope and joy,
will live in us each day;
and that we will be bearers of that light
into the lives of others.
Amen.*

We hope you will join us for our Easter offerings and read Dr. Davis Chappell’s Easter reflection online. You can find more details at bumc.net/easter.

Dates To Remember:

March 28 Palm Sunday
April 1 Maundy Thursday
April 2 Good Friday
April 4 Easter

Visit bumc.net/lent to learn more!