

ABC Nebraska: 2026 Lenten Devotional Guide



"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death."

Philippians 3:10



Welcome to the ABC NE Lenten Devotional!

My name is Rev. Taylor Shippy, and I serve as the pastor of Gibbon Baptist Church, in Gibbon, Nebraska. We are honored that you have chosen to journey through the season of Lent with us.

This past year, I came across what may be my new favorite description of the ‘Church Calendar’—also known as the ‘Christian Year.’

In his book *How to Inhabit Time* (2022), scholar James K.A. Smith says that “[t]he liturgical calendar rehearses the way time curves and bends around the incarnate Christ like a temporal center of gravity...” And as the Church, Smith suggests, we have chosen “to synchronize our watches” with Jesus’ configuration of time. “Like operatives launching a mission in a spy thriller, coordinating their watches so they’re all on the same time, the people of God synchronize their soul clocks in relation to a story that cycles and repeats in the liturgical calendar. In the liturgical calendar, we are indexed to the solar time of the Son who is the light of the city of God (Rev. 21:23).”

This devotional was born from a desire to help us sense that *gravitational pull* of Jesus’ story—particularly during this season when it now bends toward Calvary as Jesus turns His face toward Jerusalem (cf. Luke 9:51). As Jesus intuitively knows that His “Hour” is drawing near (cf. John 13:1; 17:1), Lent invites us to feel that same movement with Him and to attend to the emotions, tensions, discomforts, and costs that accompany it.

Yet we are not merely invited to observe this journey from a distance. We are called to follow—to bravely walk with Him as He moves closer to His betrayal, suffering, and crucifixion. To retrace His steps, allowing the Holy Spirit to illuminate fresh dimensions of Jesus’ life, ministry, and self-giving love that can only come from this time of the year.

These Lenten devotionals are an invitation for all of us to slow down and, together, synchronize our watches with the rhythms of Jesus during this holy season. As the body of Christ and as members of the ABC of Nebraska, we walk this Lenten road side by side—praying for one another, listening together, and encouraging one another as we receive the lessons Jesus teaches us when we choose to journey with Him through Lent.

As always, I am deeply grateful to all those who have taken the time to contribute to this year’s collection of Lenten devotions:

Rev. Richard Crooks, *Pastor at First Baptist Church of Fremont*

Rev. Dr. Charles D. Gregory, *Chaplain at CHI St. Francis*

Susan Howell, *First Baptist Church of Lincoln*

Rev. Scott Jones, *Pastor at United Faith Community Church*

Rev. TN Praveen Kumar, *Pastor at Benson Baptist Church*

Rev. Andrew Mahoney, *Pastor at First Baptist Church of Omaha*

Rev. Dr. Greg Mamula, *Executive Minister of ABC NE*

Rev. Beverly Melchor-Young, *Retired ABC NE Minister*

Rev. Lauren Parliament, *Associate Region Minister ABC NE*

Mike Raasch, *ABMen Bible Study Leader at First Baptist Church of Fremont*

Rev. Aaron Srock, *Pastor at First Baptist Church of Chadron*

Rev. Rick Wheatley, *Pastor to Pastor at Sunset Hills Baptist Church*

Sasha White, *Worship Director at First Baptist Church of Fremont*

Rev. Blake Wilkes, Pastor at Arthur Baptist Church
Jason Workman, Pastor to Pastor at Sunset Hills Baptist Church

Additionally, I would also like to offer a special word of thanks to **Kay Johnson**, our church secretary here at Gibbon Baptist Church, whose invaluable work compiling, editing, and publishing this devotional make this possible each year. We *truly could not have done this without you.*

Thank you for deciding to journey with us through Lent. My hope and prayer is that these devotionals serve as a tangible means of God's grace for you in this season—drawing you more deeply into the story, the suffering, and ultimately the hope we find in Christ.

"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead"
(Philippians 3:10-11, NIV).

Grace and Peace,
Rev. Taylor Shippy
Gibbon Baptist Church, Gibbon, NE



FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

February 22, 2026

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19, Matthew 4:1-11

From Blessing to Embrace

God pours grace into our lives in ways both seen and unseen. These blessings stir happiness, not merely the fleeting kind tied to circumstances, but the deep, settled joy that comes from knowing we are held by grace. We receive this grace when our sins are covered with his great love. This is how David begins his Psalm: “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whole spirit is no deceit” (Psalm 32:1-2). God is not content to bless from afar; He moves toward His children. This grace, by its very nature, reaches out. It draws us close, turning into embrace.

David speaks of a heaviness. The kind that weighs heavy on the heart. Sometimes we feel the same and we may not even know why. In Scripture, heaviness is often the soul’s way of signaling a deeper need. David described it this way: *“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.”* (Psalm 32:3-4). Often the heaviness or weight we feel comes from what we’ve avoided—unconfessed sin, buried pain, stubbornness that keeps us from surrender. These create a weight, the kind that steals joy and distorts our view of God.

God never exposes the heaviness to shame us. He exposes it to heal us. Confession becomes the doorway to deliverance. David celebrated this with these words: *“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my inquiry. I said ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ and you forgave the guild of my sin”* (Psalm 32:5). This passage depicts the moment in David’s life where he stopped running! Similar to the moment in our lives when we stop hiding and step into the Light that has been waiting for us all along. When we confess, the barrier between us and God collapses, and our relationship is restored. *“Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from the trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance”* (Psalm 32:6-7). This is where the weight of sin transforms into the gift of love.

A restored relationship naturally turns into celebration. Like the father running to the prodigal, God delights in drawing us close again. *“Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded”* (James 4:8). He places a robe on our shoulders, joy in our hearts, and praise on our lips. His joy brings deep, restorative healing reaching those places we didn’t even realize were hurting. This pure joy and delight should lead us to a place of obedience. His instruction in our lives should be the guiding light for our lives.

David stated the Lord’s promise like this: *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him”* (Psalm 32:8-10). The

journey that began with blessing circles back again, fuller and deeper than before. When we confess to our Father deliverance and celebration often follows! David ends his Psalm with rejoicing: “Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing all who are upright in heart” (Psalm 32:11). The story God writes again and again in the lives of His people is weight leads to confession, confession leads to relationship (embrace), relationship leads to rejoicing, rejoicing leads to purpose, purpose leads to joy—does this sound familiar? Each of our stories can be a blessing leading to an embrace.

In this first week of Lent, think through this cycle of relationship seen in Psalm 32. Maybe take some time to reflect on where you are in the cycle. I have written a poem titled “Blessing to Embrace” in my own reflections. May this help you as you reflect on where you might be in your own relationship with the Lord.

Blessing to Embrace

Blessing rises like morning light,
bringing happiness in quiet streams.
Happiness flows from holy grace,
a gentle river shaping dreams.
Grace unfolds into embrace,
arms wide with heaven’s breath of peace.

But heaviness presses on the soul,
a shadow cast by what’s unseen.
Heaviness grows from hidden sin,
truth unspoken, left unclean.
Unconfessed, it knots the heart;
stubbornness becomes a stone—
a weight we carry far too long,
feeling we must bear it alone.

Yet mercy waits with open hands;
deliverance blooms from confession’s cry.
Confession clears the clouded sky,
and brings us close to God again.
Relationship restored in love,
turns every breath into celebration—
a feast of joy, a dancing hope,
a song of holy restoration.
For joy itself brings healing winds,
lifting sorrows, mending seams.
Healing whispers into blessings,
turning pain to peace redeemed.
And in the circle of God’s kindness,
everything returns to grace—
blessing leading back to blessing,
and every blessing to embrace.



Rev. Lauren Parliament
Associate Region Minister, ABC NE

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

March 1, 2026

Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

Starting Life All Over Again

The season of Lent is a time of preparation for celebrating the resurrection of Christ. It is traditionally a time to let go of things that bind us to worldliness and to turn toward the newness of life in faith. This is a time, again, to be born again.

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 121

To be born again is to change and start life anew.

Life is a road trip. Like any adventure, there are things to be afraid of, if we don't know where we are going and what we might get into. Like any other journey, if we let fear make our decisions, we get nowhere. There is only one adequate answer to fear in our lives and that is what this Psalm is about. "Where does my help come from?" Who is my protector? Will money protect me? Will property? Will good planning and adequate insurance keep me safe in this life? Will staying at home and keeping to familiar places keep me safe?

My help comes from the Lord. He is my only protector. God is the only source of safety for me. This must be the beginning and foundation of our life of faith. This is where we begin life.

THE EPISTLE READING: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

Faith is the basis of the new life that God offers. If you are born again as a God's child, it begins with an act of faith as it did for Abraham. What did Abraham do? The first thing we hear about Abraham is that God called him to leave his native country and travel to a place he knew nothing about. God requires different acts of faith from each of us. Some of us are called to go to foreign places. Some are called to make various courageous commitments.

Faith is not belief. Faith is more than belief. Faith is risking your life on what you believe. Belief is what you think and feel but faith is what you do about it. We begin new life in Christ by taking reasonable risks in faith, acting on what we believe.

To be born again is to change and start life anew.

THE OLD TESTAMENT READING: Genesis 12:1-4a

To be born again is to change and start life anew.

Our ancestors went on dangerous journeys across oceans and prairies to the very strange land where we live. They could not know what would happen. At different times our different families traveled to Nebraska. Journeys have been important in the lives of our families.

Israel, God's people have been on journeys. The great events of the Old Testament involved the whole nation traveling or changing.

There are different kinds of journeys. They all require faith. There are journeys of the mind. Learning demands the courage of an open mind and a willingness to learn new and different things. There are journeys of the heart. Whenever you open your heart enough to begin to love someone you are acting on faith and taking a courageous risk. Telling the truth and raising difficult issues is a risky journey, but not as dangerous as evading truth. You cannot know where such journeys will take you. This is where our life of faith takes us. We need to be willing to start on a journey or proceed on the journey we have started because we are not at home here. We have not reached our home and this is a place of travel on the way home. If we are afraid to take the road then we don't have the faith to find our way home.

THE GOSPEL READING: John 3:1-17

To be born again is to change and start life anew.

What does it mean to be born again? I think it is clear that Jesus is telling us, if you want to obey God and be part of what he is doing, you must begin an entirely new life. The life of faith for a Christian is a complete break from the previous life in sin. It is such a complete change that Jesus calls it being born all over again.

How hard did you work the first time you were born? Your mother probably thought she did all the work. I imagine a newborn child is exhausted and feels that he has worked hard somehow. It is the same when we are born again of the Spirit. God does all the work and we feel exhausted thinking we have worked hard. When you are born it is no accomplishment on your part. It is your parent who does all the work. God your father gives you new birth if you will only confess faith in Jesus. It is not something you do; it is something you cooperate in.

New birth is a total break from the life of sin that went before. How completely are we willing to break off from the standards and values of sinful humanity and worldly society? It is a big change. How do you feel about change?

Are you willing to be changed?

Are you willing to live the life of one who is born of the Spirit, rejecting the love of money and things, rejecting self-centeredness. The new life in the Spirit must make love of God the first and central value. The next value is love of other people. These two must be the governing values of the life of faith. Those are the two commandments according to Jesus. They include all of God's commands.

Are you willing to be changed?



Rev. Dr. Charles D. Gregory, MDiv., Ph.D.
CHI Health Chaplin, St. Francis, Grand Island, NE

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

March 8, 2026

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

Living Water in a Dry Season

Lent is a season of honest reckoning. It draws us into the wilderness with Jesus, strips away our distractions, and confronts us with our thirst. In John 4:5–42, we encounter a woman who knows thirst well—not only for water, but for belonging, dignity, and hope. Her meeting with Jesus at the well offers a powerful lens through which to practice Lent.

Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at noon, the hottest part of the day. She comes alone, likely avoiding the judgmental stares of others. Lent often places us in similar spaces—uncomfortable, exposed, and quiet enough to hear truths we usually avoid. At the well, Jesus does not begin with accusation or instruction. He begins with a request: “Give me a drink.” In doing so, he crosses social, religious, and moral boundaries. Lent reminds us that God meets us where we are, not where we pretend to be.

When Jesus speaks of “living water,” the woman initially misunderstands. She thinks in practical terms, focused on avoiding future trips to the well. This echoes our own Lenten struggles. We often approach spiritual disciplines—fasting, prayer, self-denial—hoping they will make life easier or more manageable. Yet Jesus offers something deeper: water that satisfies the soul, not merely the surface needs.

The conversation turns when Jesus invites the woman to face her truth: “Go, call your husband.” Her past is exposed, yet Jesus does not shame her. Instead, he names her reality with compassion. Lent is a season of truth-telling. Through repentance and confession, we allow Christ to speak honestly about our lives—not to condemn us, but to heal us. True repentance is not humiliation; it is liberation. When we stop hiding, living water can finally flow.

The woman attempts a theological diversion, asking about the proper place of worship. How often do we do the same during Lent? We debate rules, methods, or appearances while avoiding the deeper work of surrender. Jesus gently redirects her: true worship is not about location or performance, but about spirit and truth. Lent calls us away from performative spirituality and toward genuine transformation.

In a striking moment, Jesus reveals himself plainly: “I am he.” This is one of the clearest declarations of his identity in the Gospel of John—and it is given not to a religious leader, but to a marginalized woman at a well. Lent reminds us that grace is not earned through piety. It is received through openness. The living water is offered freely, even to those who feel least deserving.

The woman responds not with perfect understanding, but with action. She leaves her water jar behind and runs to tell others about Jesus. This abandoned jar is significant. It represents the

old patterns, the false sources of satisfaction, the burdens she no longer needs to carry. Lent invites us to consider what jars we must leave behind—habits, attachments, sins, or comforts that keep us returning to empty wells.

Her testimony is simple and honest: “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did.” Evangelism here is not polished or rehearsed; it is rooted in encounter. Lent is not only about personal renewal but communal witness. When we are transformed by Christ’s mercy, our lives naturally point others toward him.

As the story ends, the Samaritan community begins to believe—not just because of the woman’s words, but because they encounter Jesus themselves. Lent prepares us for this movement from testimony to transformation, from thirst to abundance.

In this season, we are invited to sit at the well with Jesus. To let him name our thirst. To receive living water. To leave behind what no longer gives life. And to emerge renewed—ready to worship in spirit and truth, and to proclaim, in word and deed, that the Savior of the world still meets us in our dryness.

Jason Workman
Pastor to Pastor, Sunset Hills Baptist Church, Omaha, NE



THIRD WEEK OF LENT: MIDWEEK

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

Did You See the Sign?

Maybe some of you remember the song, The Sign, by Ace of Base in 1993. It's one of those catchy tunes that's hard to get out of your head. "I saw the sign, and it opened up my eyes, I saw the sign..."

In Genesis we can read how God created, and when He looked at all He had made, He saw that it was good. God was pleased that He had made us people and given us an amazing place in which to live. But He gave us a choice—follow and obey Him and accept His love and care, or do the one and only thing he asked us not to do: eat of that one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Some translations call it the tree of conscience. And God warned those first humans that if they ate from that tree, they would no longer know only goodness and be blissfully ignorant of all that was evil, but that once they knew evil, they would be doomed to die. Of course humans chose to eat from that tree!

People got to behaving so badly that God finally decided to destroy all of them, except for Noah and his family, because they still loved Him and wanted with all their hearts to obey Him. After God sent the destructive flood, He promised Noah He would never again destroy His people by a flood. And the sign of this promise is the rainbow, marked with the beautiful colors that make up light.

Alas, people kept on doing evil. So God decided to finally, once and for all time, enable humans to be forgiven for their sins. His own only Son, Jesus, willingly came to earth to take all of humanity's sins and remove them for all time. Thanks to Jesus' dying in our place, instead of letting each one of us die as we deserved to do, we can be restored to the way God made us when we were created. Through simply believing that Jesus is our Savior, we are forgiven, saved by grace, and will live eternally with God our Father, Jesus the Son our Savior, and their Holy Spirit.

As Jesus was entering Jerusalem to face crucifixion and complete His saving work for us, people were shouting praises to Jesus and calling Him their king. The enraged Pharisees told Jesus to make the people stop saying that, but Jesus told them that if the people stopped praising Him, even the stones would cry out.

Sometimes I wonder if people can be dumber than rocks. All of creation except us humans recognizes exactly who God is. But we can be so foolish! We think the universe is being good to us when things go our way, or that the "hockey gods" have favored our team with a win. (I actually heard a coach say this on national tv!) How blind can we possibly be!!!! And how can the real, one and only, true God put up with our attributing power to various random "gods" and a universe of gases, dust, and ice

crystals that supposedly show us good will when it pleases them to do so??? Talk about selling ourselves into slavery! Jesus died to give us freedom. We shouldn't dare to make a mockery of His death and resurrection by failing to acknowledge who He really is. I greatly fear for us humans.

God's amazing grace frees us from the penalty of sin and makes us guiltless, just as when we were first created, just as God intended us to be. We don't have to do anything to earn our salvation, yet the message of free forgiveness is too simple for many people to believe, who feel they must have to do something to deserve that grace. Nope, it's not like a scout badge with a list to check off each requirement as we complete it. It's free. Not like the catch phrase so commonly heard today, "there's no free lunch." This grace is totally free, no money nor deeds can influence how God sees us. Only faith in Jesus can enable God to see us as His spotless, clean creation, worthy of being His heirs and living with Him eternally.

Lest we forget how great is our God, He gives us many symbols to help us remember Him and His love for us and live accordingly. Here are a few of them:

Genesis 9:13 I have placed my rainbow in the clouds as a sign of my promise until the end of time, to you and to all the earth.

Mark 1:10-11 The moment Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens open and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descending on him, and a voice from heaven said, "You are my beloved Son; you are my Delight."

I Peter 3:21 That, by the way, is what baptism pictures for us: In baptism we show that we have been saved from death and doom by the resurrection of Christ; not because our bodies are washed clean by the water but because in being baptized we are turning to God and asking him to cleanse our hearts from sin.

Psalm 25:4-5 Show me the path where I should go, O Lord; point out the right road for me to walk. Lead me; teach me; for you are the God who gives me salvation. I have no hope except in you.

During this Lenten season, my prayer is that we humans might pay attention to the numerous signs that God gives us, if we would only notice them. Amen.

Beverly Melchor-Young
Retired ABC-NE Minister



FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 15, 2026

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

*“May the God of HOPE fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in HOPE.”*

- Romans 15:13 (ESV)

This, the fourth Sunday in Lent is generally considered the midpoint of our Lenten journey. So, today we take a break of Hope in our stoic and perhaps solemn Lenten adventure. An opportunity to reflect on where we started, recall where we have been, and to rejoice toward Easter that quickly lies ahead. We are called to take a brief pause; a respite, to fondly focus on all that is to come: the Conquest of Death, the Resurrection of Jesus, and the very Salvation of our Souls. 21 days to go! We've plenty to be thankful for, Amen?

Notice I did not use the word “halfway” in the opening sentence, mostly because that word can present a bit of a negative flair as connotations go. The words Halfway and Lent should not (cannot) exist in the same sentence. Our Lenten experience should be fully involved, in an all-consuming way.

Today we rejoice in progress! Look how far we have come. Pressing on toward the full Lenten experience. Reflecting on our reflections gives each of us a sense of accomplishment and a genuine pleasure of achievement. Yet, there is so much more to come.

A brief parable of the two “**Now**s.” Do not stop **Now**—and if you just started—**Now** is the right time for you.

As God Blesses this journey and our experience He will also Bless the changes that we make in our personal and private lives. These may happen in ways known only to us—and, perhaps to those who know us well.

Are you committed? - Completely invested? - Fine-tuned and focused?

If not quite, or neither of those, re-align and re-adjust. Get a refreshed and renewed start today. Adopt the mindset of... **From this day Forward**. Push the reset button, get going, and finish strong!

Hope is the *single most, ultimately important, have-to-have-it, foundational ingredient* in the Easter Story. Since we have found Hope in all of our humanity, just think of the Hope that awaits in all of eternity!

Hope! Loves! Us!
Hope Shows, Grows.
Hope Lives, Gives.

Hope Reveals, Heals.

Hope is forever beginning, in fact it has no ending.
Hope knows what to do and presents itself to me, to you.
Not just once, never measured.
Hope for All is ever treasured.

Tomorrow, as we recalculate and get a fresh start with a Lenten Monday mindset. It is necessary to focus on the intensity of that which will transpire in coming days. It is respectful and mindful; it is important and necessary; it must be done to bring the message of Easter to the forefront and ultimately reveal God's redemption of Joy and Hope on Easter morning. It is the purpose and the plan.

When we Hope in Christ, we Hope in Love. When we Hope in Love. . .

We throw doubt out. . .
We toss dismay away. . .
We give concern an about turn. . .

May the God of Easter continue to sustain you with Blessings of Hope!

*"Be strong and let your heart take courage,
All you who HOPE in the Lord."*
-Psalm 31:24 (NASB)

Carry on People.

Your Brother in Christ,
Michael D. Raasch
AB Men Bible Study Leader, First Baptist Church, Fremont, NE



FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 22, 2026

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

A New Perspective, A Second Chance

In “A Christmas Carol,” a novel written in six weeks by famed 19th century novelist Charles Dickens, Ebeneezer Scrooge has lived a life devoted to selfish ambition and bottomless greed. His deeds are so abhorring, he is visited by three spirits who work in tandem to rekindle dignity, humanity, and love by observing Christmases of the past, present, and future. By the following morning, Scrooge has a new perspective on life and how preciously short it is, celebrating by forgiving debts, connecting with family, and pouring out his wealth. In effect, Scrooge receives not only a new perspective on life, but a second chance to live it.

Often in life, we are met with a yearning for a second chance; as children, we hope for a second chance to retake a test and improve our grade. Perhaps when we've not followed through with a promise, we ask for a second chance to reestablish trust and prove we are dependable. Maybe the circumstances we face bring us to the point of wanting a second chance at life altogether.

Although this latter option proves to be impossible for most, for Lazarus, this became his reality. After fighting severe illness, Lazarus succumbed to his fate and died before his dear friend Jesus arrived. A well-loved and righteous man, Lazarus's death was mourned heavily by his sisters, who buried him in a tomb and continued to pour out their grief. After three days, Jesus and his disciples arrive, learning of their friend's fate and weeping along with the mourners.

But suddenly, Jesus makes a most unusual request; he wishes for the tomb to be opened. Although they are taken aback by this command, those present remove the stone and watch in disbelief as Lazarus comes sauntering out, still draped in his funeral clothes.

As we embrace the contemplation of the Lenten season, meditate on the Lord's sacrifice, and examine this story and its profound demonstration of Jesus's power, we see many powerful connections that tie these stories together. Foremost, we see Lazarus experience the opportunity for a new life; he who was once dead was raised after three days and is now made living. He has seen the wonders of heaven and now, returning to Earth, carries a new perspective on God's plan, power, and incredible mercy. Jesus too, who would later go to the cross and be buried for three days would also be raised to life and made new, returning to Earth in his resurrected form to reaffirm God's plan, power, and mercy.

When we consider these truths, we find a deeper message for us; that as we profess our faith as believers, we too journey from death to life. Though we were once dead in our transgressions, we are made living through the sacrifice of Christ. We gain a new perspective for our lives; our priorities and actions change. We see the power of God and his mercy

illuminated in a personal way, as we understand that we too are now made a new creation and therefore, have a second chance at life.

What will you do with this new perspective and second chance this Lenten season? Will knowing God's power and ability to work within your life foster trust in your circumstances? Will your generosity and joy of life be increased like Ebenezer Scrooge's? Will difficult times and the fear you feel be outweighed by knowing God has a plan for you, as he did for Lazarus? No matter how we use this second chance, ultimately, let us use it to demonstrate the power of a life that is Christ-led, that is fixed upon God's plan, and reflects his love through the sacrifice.

Sasha White
Worship Director at First Baptist Church, Fremont, NE



FIFTH WEEK OF LENT: MIDWEEK

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

“I Give Up”

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting....But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Matthew 6:16-18

It is an honored tradition to give something up for the 40 days of Lent. The sacrifice for 40 days remembers Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness where he gave up food and all creature comforts and was tempted by Satan before he began his ministry. It also recognizes Christ’s sacrifice of His life for us when he suffered and died on the cross.

You can give up a food or an activity or just about anything as long as it is a true sacrifice. In the past, when I have chosen to fast in this way, I have often given up something that would not inconvenience me a whole lot. I could give up going to the gym. I could give up eating rice cakes. I could give up working overtime. None of those would have been a great sacrifice. Actually, all of those things would have been a pleasure.

The understanding of “fasting” from something during Lent is that it requires self-sacrifice and self-discipline. You are “fasting” from something that requires resisting temptation. Like Christ in the wilderness. Plus, your sacrifice is, hopefully, done in a spirit of humility as our passage suggests. If you brag or make sure everyone knows what you are giving up and how hard it is, Jesus says you are like the hypocrites. The sacrifice is between you and God.

When Jesus was in the wilderness, it says he gave up food for 40 days and at the end of the 40 days, he was hungry. That was when Satan tempted him. When he was at his most vulnerable. He had been without food for a long time and Satan says, in Luke 4:3, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” Jesus not only resists the temptation, but he quotes the scriptures to say that man does not live on bread alone. The full passage from Deuteronomy says “...man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” Now Satan was a fallen angel and would have known the context of that passage as would those reading Luke. The passage explains the purpose of the 40 days the Israelites wandered in the desert. It was to humble them. To test them. To find out what was in their hearts.

If you choose to abstain from something that is a true cost to you, it will be difficult. Each time you are tempted to give up, each time the temptation is too much, each time you say to yourself, “I can’t do this,” try praying. The idea of giving something up is to grow closer to Jesus. To humble us. To show God, and sometimes ourselves, what is in our hearts.

This Lenten season, think of something that even the thought of giving it up makes your stomach hurt, makes you sweat a little, makes you come up with a thousand excuses why you can't and that is probably the exact thing God wants you to give up.

This year I am giving up ... oh, wait. I'm not going to tell you. I don't want to seem like I am bragging. At the end of 40 days, I pray I will be changed and I pray that you will be, too.

Susan Howell
First Baptist Church, Lincoln, NE



SIXTH SUNDAY OF LENT – PALM SUNDAY

March 29, 2026

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11

“And the multitudes going before Him, and those who followed after were crying out, saying:

*Hosanna to the Son of David;
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;
Hosanna in the highest! (Mt. 21:9)*

And when He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying who is this?” (Mt. 21:10)

Did you catch the question, “Who is this?”

Outside the city walls of Jerusalem, the multitudes cried; “Hosanna in the highest,” but once on the inside of the walls it was a different story. The crowds there were asking who is this guy on the donkey? Why all the fuss? And someone said; “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.” (Mt. 21:11).

It was time for the celebration of Passover in the city. A very important celebration for the Jewish culture. In fact, a required feast to attend. Many in the city did not live there and made the pilgrimage from surrounding towns and villages to celebrate this feast. A lot of people in the city were preparing for the special occasion toward the end of the week. Needless to say there was a lot of commotion and Jesus and the disciples just added to it. They just became part of the commotion. Thus the question, “who is this?” some asked.

Jesus, however, had other priorities then what those gathered were there for. Yes, He was there to celebrate the Passover, but the real reason was His death, burial and resurrection at the end of week. Others will address this aspect of the Holy Week events, and I will let them do so.

Today we begin focusing upon what we traditionally call Holy Week. A time of reflection of for what Christ Jesus did for us. What will be our focus? Many who are reading this devotional have been a follower of Jesus for awhile. Perhaps for years, and have celebrated this week for all the years of following Him. Here we are another Palm Sunday. So is the celebration “old hat?” Or will our reflection of this day inspire something new?

Let us reflect upon this day and what it means for us as we begin the week. I want us to consider as to which side of the wall are we in our faith journey as we celebrate this annual remembrance of the Easter celebration? Are we on the outside of the wall, crying, “Hosanna” (save us)? Or are we on the inside of the wall asking the question, “who Is this?” And I ask the question again, what is our focus?

Jesus came to save us. On the outside of the wall as He was entering the city, He knew the purpose of His coming there. In fact, Jesus knew for a long time the mission set before Him. “Who is this?” As followers we should know and have great reason to be celebrating. Jesus is our Savior! So let’s cry out with the multitudes, “Hosanna in the highest!” We have every reason to do so. On the inside of wall there was a lot of commotion, maybe even to the point of chaos. Jesus comes in on a donkey in the midst of all the chaos, people were questioning “who is this?” Coming into this city for the annual feast on a beast of burden was nothing unusual, because some others probably arrived the same way. People had other things on their mind, like getting ready for the feast. There was buying and selling. People were visiting and catching up from others they had not seen in a while. Other priorities were at hand. The feast.

For us it is Easter. And sometimes the celebration of Easter becomes the main focus of making preparations for Easter Sunday. Running around purchasing the food for the family meal after church. Preparing eggs for the Easter egg hunt. Getting the candy ready for Easter baskets from the Easter Bunny. Get the picture? Should this be our priority, church? I think not. For us, celebrating the Resurrection is the highlight at the end of Holy Week. But let us not forget the trials, the cross, the death, and the tomb that were very much part of the week.

“Who is this?” It is Jesus.

So on this day, let our focus be on Him and what He accomplished for us. And may the focus remain throughout the week. “Who is this?” We know, don’t we?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to truly focus on what is most important this week. You! Amen.

Rev. Rick Wheatley
Pastor to Pastor, Sunset Hills Baptist Church, Omaha, NE



HOLY WEEK: MONDAY

March 30, 2026

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

Yesterday was Palm Sunday, the day we recall Jesus riding a donkey as the crowd cried, “Hosanna!” We remember leaders asking him to quiet the crowd, and his reply that even if he did, the stones would cry out. But how often do we notice that he then dedicated time to just looking around, observing what was happening, seeing things he would directly address on Monday?

Having departed Bethany Monday, Jesus saw a verdant fig tree covered with foliage, but without any figs; it was not fig season. Regardless, Jesus cursed it for not providing him fruit. And why shouldn’t he have expected figs? After all, other parts of Creation responded to its Master: the sea and winds calmed, an unridden donkey submitted to his direction, even a fish brought Peter a coin, and Jesus said the stones themselves would cry out for him... but not so the fig tree.

Later Monday Jesus walked into the temple and saw crowds of worshipers amidst lots of noisy and colorful activity. Sadly, he did not see the fruit he was looking for there, either: the fruit of a house dedicated to prayer. Instead, he saw what Isaiah described as Jesus had quoted (Mark 7:6): “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.” Still later as Jesus and disciples returned towards Bethany, they saw the fig tree withered from the curse; they saw the fig tree for what it really was: a tree wasting space and not fulfilling its purpose--a graphic illustration of what they saw in the temple—a people called of God but not fulfilling God’s purpose, in spite of all the activity and outward appearances. Jesus uses the moment to teach Peter about the potency of faith and its centrality for a vital relationship with God.

As Creator of all things, the God who breathed life into human existence, our Lord has expectations for his people to bear the fruit that he desires. During Jesus’s time, people gathered annually in Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover bringing a sacrificial lamb. And yet true worship, a meaningful encounter with God, had been replaced with a circus atmosphere, lucrative business enterprises, visiting with friends and all the other trappings of going through the motions which Isaiah called “hearts far from God.”

After Palm Sunday rejoicing, the next day beckons us not only to examine our hearts to recognize how desperately we need God’s mercy, his forgiveness, his transformation for our lives, but also to examine the evidence of God’s fruitfulness in our lives. Have we allowed our connection with God, our worship, our service for God to be contaminated with the trappings of nothing more than surface appearances and just going through the motions? In our “worship,” have we possibly become dulled by the routine of our church activities and forgotten how incredible God’s call upon our lives truly is? Tony Campolo called it “inoculated against the Gospel with just enough to keep us from experiencing the real thing.” Charles Swindoll’s words were, “\$3.00 worth of God”... not enough to make demands of us or change us, just enough to feel good, but nothing transformative.

Later that week, Jesus's words recorded in John 15 may well have reminded the disciples of Monday as he told them he had chosen and appointed them (and us) to bear fruit, fruit that lasts. He said that the only way to bear fruit was to abide in him, the true vine, which is the only way any branch can bear fruit, and God calls us to be fruit-bearing branches. With our Baptist emphasis on personal salvation, it becomes all too easy to think of our relationship with God as being just about God and ourselves when, in fact, it is much bigger. As God's called, saved and redeemed people, we are to be used of God to bear fruit. In his John 15 analogy Jesus warns that only the fruit-bearing branches survive. Whatever else you might derive from it, that statement clearly brings us back to that Monday when Jesus evaluated the fruit he observed among his people, and illustrated his expectations as his curse of the fig tree withered its branches. I wonder if abandonment of the call to bear fruit is at the root of the withering and dying we see of so many churches in our time. I think of the vast cathedrals in Europe that sit nearly empty week after week, which seem to have abandoned God's imperative to bear fruit, an example of Jesus's warnings to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3.

The fruit God produces through our lives may vary, just as the way God has gifted us varies, but fruit is the expectation. The parable of the soils in Mark 4 indicates that the quantity of fruit might vary from person to person, as seed in the good soil produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold; but fruit is always the expectation. Not the kind of fruit we can somehow manufacture by our own efforts, rather the kind of fruit that only God can create. You might use today to reflect on your life in relation to the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23. You might review God's spiritual gifts listed in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 or 1 Peter 4 and whether you are allowing God to use your gifts to fulfill your assigned calling to serve as the body of Christ. Perhaps instead you need to reflect on your growth progress as described in Romans 5, 2 Peter 1 or Ephesians 4:15.

Today, as Jesus observes the temple that you are for him (1 Cor. 3:16) and measures the fruit of the word that was planted in you, what would be his reaction? Beyond that, as you look within and around at your life, what will your reaction be?

Rev. Richard Crooks
First Baptist Church, Fremont, NE



HOLY WEEK: TUESDAY

March 31, 2026

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

The Message of the Cross

The message of the cross which is God's rescue of us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the fundamental foundation of our faith. Paul's letter to the Corinthian church where they are faced with divisions and the influence of secular philosophies of divisions, diversity, and moral challenges. Within this context Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, highlights that the message of the cross, despite being seen as foolishness to the world, is the source of salvation and power for believers. As we prepare to hear the story of the cross this year, think of these two perspectives. One, the transformative nature of the cross. Two, cross a remembrance of reconciliation.

Transformative nature of the cross: I always hear this phrase "back in the day the churches was filled with people, children...." The reality is we are not in 'back in the day.' What happened to 'back in the day'? I sense that in many churches, the message of the cross has become increasingly muted during Lent, fading into the background year after year. If you notice Christmas has become culturally "safe" and familiar. Even people with little connection to faith still celebrate it. But Lent and Holy Week asks something of us, repentance, self-examination, fasting, confronting sin, remembering suffering. Those are spiritually rich but emotionally demanding. Many people avoid seasons that require inward honesty. Easter is theologically central but emotionally complex. Think about this, can you get to resurrection without going through the cross? No. People often want the joy of resurrection without the weight of crucifixion. People like the gift of Jesus during Christmas, but not the purpose of the gift. It's like, you get a gift box for Christmas and not open it at all. Wouldn't that be foolish? Paul says that the message of the cross has the power and wisdom of God. Paul says God chose foolish people rather than wise. The question to think is, who is wise? Who is foolish? Everyone who has clinged to the world and seeks worldly wisdom and counsel are wise and perishing. The worldly-wise people sought to think the message of the cross is ridiculous. Even Christians get carried away, often take it for granted. The cross carries a transforming power that the world may see as foolish, but for believers it becomes the unmistakable power of God at work. Try this, mark your spiritual countdown to Easter—a season that draws us to remember why Jesus came, what He accomplished, and how deeply we depend on Him. Just as children eagerly countdown to Christmas, Lent invites us into a season of waiting and preparation—not for presents, but of the purpose of the greatest gift of all: the resurrection of Jesus. Share what cross and Christ mean to you to a friend and let the Spirit of God transform them and bring them to experience it. Let the transformation happen back again like "back in the day."

Cross a remembrance of reconciliation: The presence of God is in the midst of us, but the power of the cross has not penetrated in us. Whether we like it or not we all are living in a postmodern world. What we are facing as reality is not what we all want. The world is not exactly Christian friendly. Sin has created a chasm between God and mankind, a separation that

could only be bridged by the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Postmodernism made us pursue good things. You may ask, what's wrong with good things? Sin isn't just bad things, it's making any good thing and then we try to turn that into an ultimate thing. When we build a good thing more than God it's called Idolatry. Sin is simply making worship of substitute. The good news is that the message of the cross reconciles us to God. Paul says that God in his wisdom prepared the salvation plan for you and me at that cross. God chose the foolish, weak, lowly and redeemed them through Jesus Christ and poured his righteousness, holiness and redemption. It is through the cross, we can boast only in Christ. Therefore, our reconciled lives should reflect His grace and power, building bridges of love and unity just as He did through His sacrifice. When you go to church the next time. Look around, look at people who are worshipping with you. It's probably your closest friends, mentors, family, co-pewters, maybe some new visitors. You might see some of them wear a cross pendant. Maybe you are wearing it, or you have one in your jewelry box, or you may have a cross hung in your house. Ask your neighbor wearing a cross, what does it mean to you? If you are wearing it, boast about the cross. Recall I Cor 1:18-20 and share Romans 5:10-11 (NIV) "For if, when we were enemies of God, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! Not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." Share that the Cross is your way of remembering God's reconciliation.

My dear friend in Christ, whatever problem that you are facing today, whatever emotional, physical, or spiritual distress you are facing today, may the Good News about Jesus Christ bring you peace and redemption. Paul was addressing the Corinthian church and our church today. A city filled with pagan gods and problems of its time not much different today. Problems can draw you close to God or derail you away from God. Please await, remember, share, and boast about the Cross and its story.

Rev. Praveen Kumar TN
Benson Baptist Church, Omaha, NE



HOLY WEEK: WEDNESDAY

April 1, 2026

John 12:1-11

I will have to admit that grammar has never been one of my strong suits. However it is important when you look at this passage and you see the way in which John uses his words to describe each of the people that are in this passage. First we see Lazarus. He is described as the one that Jesus has raised from the dead. In this time of Lent we are reminded of the fact that Jesus Christ has the power to bring each of us out of that grave. Every time we read this story we should be amazed by the fact that a dead man that was trapped in a tomb is now reclining at a table very much alive.

We also see that there are many ways in which we are called to serve. Once again Martha is the one that is busy at work making sure that needs of this gathering are met. Yet we are also reminded of the humble way in which Mary serves Christ as well by taking this expensive perfume and offering it as an anointing of Jesus, casting herself at the feet of Jesus and using her hair to wipe His feet down. Mary deserves to be the focus of this passage. Her act of humility points us to an understanding of not only who Christ is but who we are in comparison. Jesus is the anointed one, the one that has come to offer forgiveness and salvation to a world in desperate need of it. We, as Christians, should all be like Mary. Overwhelmed by the grace and mercy that has been extended to us and realizing that the only thing that we really can offer is our humble acts of worship.

This passage says that the perfume filled the room. Not one person in that room would have been able to escape the powerful act of worship and not been moved by it. The question then is how were they moved. We see Judas, the one who was to betray Jesus, moved to greed and care only for himself. My prayer for each one of us during this Lenten season is that we would be moved to the opposite reaction. That we would join with Mary in throwing ourselves at the feet of Jesus and being overwhelmed by the love that is extended to us. We just like Mary our sinners deserving death. And yet we are reminded of Jesus' offer of redemption to Mary and we remember and praise God for the fact that that same redemption is offered to us. Let us take time during this season of reflection to see where Jesus has saved us from and the places where He has called us to.

This passage concludes by calling us to remember Lazarus one more time. Not only were people drawn to Christ but they were also drawn to Lazarus because of the work that Christ had done through him as well. I know I would have loved to have been in the presence of a man that experienced the power of coming back from the grave. It is a reminder that as we use Lent to prepare ourselves to be amazed by what Christ has done for us we have another mission as well. During the Easter season the world's mind is directed to Jesus and the world can see the works of Christ in us as well. Pray that during this time of Lent there would be people placed on your mind and your heart, and through your work and through your words, can point them to the fact that they are loved by Christ and can receive the gift of salvation and can move from life to death.

Rev. Aaron Srock
First Baptist Church of Chadron, Chadron, NE
Associate Minister ABC NE



HOLY WEEK: MAUNDY THURSDAY

April 2, 2026

John 13:1-17

Birds Eye View

Perched on a window is a tiny bird; you are watching a bittersweet scene unfold before you. In the room sits a man, the Son of God, surrounded by his disciples. He appears resolute and peaceful. His disciples seem confused and bewildered at the words their leader spoke earlier in the day. What does he mean when he says he must be lifted up? Or that to gain your life you must lose it?

A truly remarkable thing begins to happen. This leader, who had been celebrated by a great crowd in Jerusalem, proclaiming, "Hosanna!" Got up, removed his outer garments. He then poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciple's feet.

As a bird, you perch yourself closer to get a crumb of bread left at the table. You hear one of the disciples get frustrated, "You shall never wash my feet!" The one they called Jesus, replied, "If I don't wash you, you have no share with me!" As they continued talking back and forth, the reality and intensity of the room increased as the true meaning of what was happening was being absorbed by the disciples.

As he was washing his disciple's feet he said a truly cryptic thing, "Not all you are clean!" The disciples still confused looked around at each other with bewilderment. But with a keen bird's eye, you notice someone in the corner, sweating a little to profusely, seemingly burdened by a choice or decision he was about to make.

Without missing a beat, the man they called Jesus, stood up amongst them and explained why he did what he did. "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you and example..."

You stopped eating the crumbs at the table and flew back to the window to perch as the disciples resumed their places around the table. There was exceptional energy in the room, almost electric. You flew off into the Jerusalem sky and noticed that same energy was reverberating throughout the city. Something big was about to happen, soon the Son will rise!

Key thoughts:

1.) Jesus is setting an example of what it means to serve. He debased himself cleaning the feet of his disciples, who had been wearing sandals all day in the Jerusalem streets. The water was dirty and he cleansed them all.

2.) He gave a commission for them, “You ought to wash each other’s feet!” His disciples had an obligation to take on the sacred calling of servant leadership that was demonstrated by Jesus.

3.) How I wish I could have had a bird's eye view of what was happening on Maundy Thursday. The tension, the excitement, the despair. It would make for a good movie. However, this was more than a movie. This was God's plan for salvation. Jesus knew this, his disciples were beginning to understand. My hope and prayer for you as you continue reflecting on the cross, is that you truly understand what Jesus was saying here. To follow him, you must lead on your knees in service to others!

Rev. Andrew Mahoney
First Baptist Church, Omaha, NE



HOLY WEEK: GOOD FRIDAY

April 3, 2026

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25; John 18:1-19:42

Good Friday is not a day for pretending. That's one of the gifts and one of the burdens of Lent. This season invites us to stop performing, stop rushing, and stop trying to fix what we cannot fix. Lent trains us to tell the truth: we are dust, we are limited, we are not in control. And on Good Friday, we stand at the cross and face the deepest truth of all that the world's brokenness is not "out there" somewhere, but also "in here". The cross is where we finally admit what our sin costs, and we finally see what God's love is willing to bear.

The Gospels don't let us look at the crucifixion from a distance. John 18-19 places us close enough to hear the blows, close enough to watch the silence, close enough to feel the ache of abandonment. And what we discover there is as unsettling as it is holy: Jesus does not save himself because he is saving us.

Isaiah foretold it: "He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). Psalm 22 gives language to the pain: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1). John shows the Lamb of God enduring the full weight of violence, mockery, rejection, and death. And Lent asks us not to hurry past any of it.

On Good Friday, we listen to the voices around the cross, and if we're honest, we hear ourselves. We hear betrayal. Judas trades Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, temporary power, quick satisfaction, the kind of thing that glitters in the dark. And Jesus knows. He knows who will do it, how much it will cost, and what it will set in motion. Yet he does not push Judas away, because he has come to carry the sins of betrayers, too. Lent teaches us to name the places where we have chased lesser lights, where we've chosen comfort over obedience, applause over faithfulness, self-protection over love. And still Jesus remains steady, moving toward the cross for people like us.

We hear denial. Peter swore he would never fall away. But before the sun rose, fear spoke louder than devotion. Maybe that is one of the most painfully human moments in the passion story: a disciple who loves Jesus and yet denies him to save himself. Lent pulls us into that mirror. How often has fear made us quiet when love required courage? How often have we chosen the approval of people over the call of Christ? And still, Jesus goes on. He does not die only for the strong disciples. He dies for the weak, the fearful, the compromised, the ashamed.

We hear false accusations and silence. Jesus is mocked, beaten, spit on, and charged with lies. He could answer every accusation. He could call down legions of angels. He could end it. But he remains silent like the Suffering Servant: "He opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). His silence is not weakness; it is submission. It is the holy resolve of a Savior who refuses to step off the altar. This Season of Lent trains us to stop insisting on being right, stop defending our ego, and stop clawing for control. Good Friday shows us the Son of God choosing humility, even humiliation, so mercy can reach the guilty.

We hear the agony of abandonment. Jesus cries the words of Psalm 22 not as a loss of faith, but as faithful prayer from within the dark. There are moments in life when suffering feels like absence, when grief makes God feel far away, when the world's cruelty makes prayer feel thin. Good Friday does not shame that experience. It sanctifies it. Jesus has entered even that place. He has made room in the presence of God for the cries we can barely speak.

We hear forgiveness. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Even as nails are driven, even as cruelty continues, Jesus speaks mercy. Lent calls us to repentance, but it also calls us to receive grace we didn't earn. At the cross, forgiveness is not sentimental; it is purchased. It is costly. It is drenched in blood. And yet it is offered freely.

We hear hope in despair. A thief dying beside Jesus says, "Remember me." That is the prayer of someone who has nothing left to bring, no résumé, no performance, no religious achievement, only need. And Jesus answers with love and mercy: "Today you will be with me in paradise." Lent teaches us that salvation is not for those who manage to pull themselves together. It is for those who call on the name of the Lord.

And then we hear the words that change everything: "It is finished." Not "I am finished," but "it is finished." The debt is paid. The sacrifice is complete. Hebrews says God's promise is written not merely on tablets but on hearts, and because of Jesus' blood we can "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:22). Good Friday is the day we see what our forgiveness cost and why we can stop pretending we can save ourselves.

So what do we do with this day?

We do what Lent has been teaching us to do all along: we come to the cross honestly. We confess. We grieve. We repent. We worship. We do not rush to Easter as a way of avoiding the pain. We let the weight of the cross press us into humility and gratitude. We remember that Jesus entered our darkness to bring us light, and he was willing to be pierced so that our hardened hearts could be healed.

If you need a simple practice today, here is one: take a moment of silence, real silence. Picture yourself standing at the foot of the cross. Name, out loud or in your heart, one specific way you have tried to hide, fix, or control your life apart from Jesus. Then pray: "Lord Jesus, I bring this to your cross. By your wounds, heal me. By your blood, forgive me. Teach me to trust you in the dark."

And when you're done, don't rush away.

Because Good Friday invites us to leave in silence, not because there is no hope, but because love this deep leaves us speechless.



Rev. Blake Wilkes
Arthur Baptist Church, Arthur, NE
Associate Minister ABC NE

HOLY WEEK: HOLY SATURDAY

April 4, 2026

*Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24; Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16;
1 Peter 4:1-8, Matthew 27:57-66*

For centuries, the church has marked Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday as a slow, intentional journey toward Easter. These days were never meant to be rushed, but to be entered into through prayer, fasting, and deep attention to the story of Jesus' suffering, death, and burial.

We need a place to take our pain. Healthy families and communities cultivate space for the darkest emotions of life to be expressed, heard, and soothed appropriately. The Bible and church traditions provide us with the grounding we need to learn to lament well. We are all shaken when the grief-stricken, sorrow-soaked, disorienting moments common to our fully human condition leave us disoriented. When we have a place to take our pain, our faith is given an environment in which it can be embraced and healed. We need to practice lament before we can fully dwell in a renewed, often surprising equilibrium in a forever-changed life.

Our texts from Lamentations 3 and Psalm 31 are such examples. A hurting people speak directly to God, honestly proclaiming their deepest anger and sorrows, holding nothing back.

“I cry out, ‘My splendor is gone! Everything I had hoped for from the Lord is lost!’... I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss.”
-Lamentation 3:18, 20

“Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am in distress. Tears blur my eyes. My body and soul are withering away. I am dying from grief; my years are shortened by sadness. Sin has drained my strength; I am wasting away from within. I am scorned by all my enemies and despised by my neighbors—even my friends are afraid to come near me. When they see me on the street, they run the other way.”
-Psalm 31:9-11

These honest confessions of pain, sin, and isolation are brought before God within a worshiping community. When the burden of pain is shared, it becomes more navigable.

Within the reality of our lived experiences, lament does not wallow in self-pity. It is shared with God because of God's character and ability to do something about it. God's people confidently bring misery to God because we have high expectations based on God's character and promises.

“I am trusting you, O Lord, saying, ‘You are my God!’...Praise the Lord, for he has shown me the wonders of his unfailing love.”
-Psalm 31:14, 21

“The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him.’”
-Lamentations 3:22-24

From a posture of Lament rooted in God's identity, we can now invite and trust God to change the situation by acting within God's love and faithfulness.

“Don’t let me be disgraced, O Lord, for I call out to you for help...Pull me from the trap my enemies set before me, for I find protection in you alone.”
-Psalm 31:4, 17

“You heard me when I cried, ‘Listen to my pleading! Hear my cry for help!’ Yes, you came when I called; you told me, ‘Do not fear.’ ... Pay them back, Lord, for all the evil they have done.”
-Lamentations 3:56, 64

Even Jesus, on the cross of Good Friday, drew on such a lament, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.” Psalm 22 continues, “Yet You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel... Do not stay far from me, for trouble is near, and no one else can help me... I will praise you among your assembled people. Praise the Lord, all you who fear him.” Jesus, in his most vulnerable moment, lamented by naming his sorrow, trusting in God's character, and inviting God to change the situation.

Holy Saturday is a moment of significant disorientation. Before we can begin to reorient our lives around resurrection, we must first lament well. The disciples who had scattered at Jesus' arrest gathered as a community on Holy Saturday to lament. They grieved, prayed, and waited for God to do something to change the situation.

Good Friday may be resolved by Easter Sunday, but not before it makes its way through the valley of the shadow of death and the lament of Holy Saturday.

Holy Saturday does not ask us to solve anything. It asks us to stay. To remain with the stone still sealed, the body still buried, and the future still unclear. This is the day when the church learns again how to wait with God rather than rush past God.

We are invited into lament, not as a sign of failed faith, but as a demonstration of trust. Lament grants us permission to acknowledge what is unfinished, what still causes pain, and what feels lost or unresolved in our lives and in the world. It allows us to speak honestly before God without trying to make our prayers more acceptable or hopeful.

On this day, we can pray the words we have been holding back. We can bring before God the grief we have not processed, the questions we cannot answer, the anger we have tried to suppress, and the hope we are afraid to voice. We can confess our fear, our anger, our exhaustion, and our longing for God to act.

Holy Saturday reminds us that God is not afraid of our sorrow. The God who lay in the tomb has already entered it. The silence of this day does not mean God is absent—it means God is closer than we realize, working in ways we cannot yet see.

So we wait. We lament. We entrust our lives once more to the faithful love of the Lord, whose mercies do not cease, even when we cannot yet feel them. We do not rush ahead to resurrection, but we hold fast to the promise that God is still at work in the dark.

And in this waiting, this honest prayer, this holy grief, we prepare our hearts, not with certainty, but with trust, for the dawn of Sunday is coming.

Rev. Dr. Greg Mamula
Executive Minister, ABC NE



EASTER SUNDAY

April 5, 2026

Jeremiah 31:1-6, Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18

A Beautiful Morning

It's a beautiful morning! I don't know about you all, but I love mornings. I love getting out of bed and seeing the light shine through the windows. I love looking out and seeing birds, squirrels, and even rabbits fill my backyard. It's a new day!! Every single day, I thank God for giving me another day. It's another day to be in his creation, to take a breath and give him the glory and praise. You see, yesterday has passed, and this morning begins a new start, a new day. I can put on a smile and tell myself that today is going to be the best, wonderful, and the most amazing day ever.

Today is Easter morning. It's a morning to celebrate. Jesus is alive and living! He has rose from the grave – and is living among us. He has defeated death, and has given us new life. It's a great day; it's a happy day! Let us dance, sing, clap, and lift our voices on what our savior has done for us. **HE IS RISEN!! HE IS RISEN INDEED!!**

Yet – was it truly a great and happy morning for Mary when she went to the tomb? For her, she was expecting to find a tomb with her deceased loved one (Jesus). Three days earlier, she just witnessed Jesus go through a crucifixion to the point of death on a cross. Now on this morning, she was coming to give proper burial preparations. It was the opposite of a great and happy morning. To her, it was a sorrowful morning. A morning that she would never forget.

Then the unexpected happened. As she was approaching the tomb, she notices something. The tomb stone had been rolled away. What in the world was going on? Who would do this? Who would want to take a deceased body? Already full of emotion, she began to panic. Is this true? Am I seeing this correctly? Rubbing her eyes again and again, she couldn't believe what she was seeing. Preoccupied with grief, shock, and fear, she barely sees a person standing before her on the path. Who could this be? What are you doing here? Out of nowhere she hears a soft whisper say, 'MARY'. Wait, she knows that voice. It's the voice she has been following all this time. This can't be true. But, could it be? No, impossible. But maybe it is. Yes, it is. It's JESUS!

This was the moment, when Jesus whispered 'MARY', that Easter broke like the sunrise into Mary's heart. Immediately, her heart was changed. Hope and excitement became visible. It was a new day. It was new life for her. From a sorrow and gloomy day, to a day of celebration and excitement. Easter (Resurrection Sunday) had finally arrived for her.

This morning as we celebrate our risen savior, let's remember what Easter is all about. It's an invitation to new life. Because of Jesus, we all can experience the fullness in Christ. We can experience the grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love that Christ brings to us. When we least expect it, we can hear Jesus whisper out our names. He will turn our sorrow into joy. We can run to him because it's a new day. A glorious day.

Happy Resurrection Day!!! May God continue to bless you each and every day.

Rev. Scott Jones
United Faith Community Church, Valley, NE

