

# Lent 2023: A Daily Devotional

WESLEY FREEDOM UMC



# PALM SUNDAY

April 2nd, 8:00AM, 9:30AM, &  
11:00AM

Follow Jesus from the joy of the palm parade to the agony of the cross and be convinced that God's grace endures all things.

All children wishing to join in the palm parade are invited to gather 15 min before the start of the service in the Gathering Area (8am & 11am) or in their Sunday School classroom (9:30am).



## HOLY THURSDAY SERVICE

April 6th  
12:00PM

Remember Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples with a traditional mid-day worship service. Holy Communion will be celebrated.

## LAST SUPPER DINNER EXPERIENCE

April 6th  
5:00PM & 7:00PM

As Jesus gathered his disciples, so we will gather around tables to share a fellowship meal. Following the meal we will share Holy Communion. All ages are encouraged.

Register at [wesleyfreedom.org](http://wesleyfreedom.org)

## GOOD FRIDAY SERVICES

April 7th  
12:00PM & 7:00PM

We gather in prayer and scripture as the lights are extinguished. We grieve the darkness of the world and cling to the light which will break through on Resurrection morning. Nursery provided at 7:00pm.

Saturday  
April 8th  
Easter Vigil  
7:00PM

Easter  
2023  
April  
8 & 9

Sunday  
April 9th  
Sunrise Service  
\*Piney Run Park\* 6:30AM  
Sanctuary Services  
8:00am, 9:30am, 11:00am

Welcome to the 2023 Lent Devotional! The 40-day season of Lent is a time of intense spiritual devotion as we prepare ourselves to commemorate the crucifixion and death of Christ on Good Friday, and then celebrate his resurrection on Easter Sunday. Traditionally, Lent is a time of increased prayer & spiritual discipline, as well as a time of fasting – that is, abstaining from eating certain meals or kinds of food. If it is healthy for you to do this, I commend it to you as an ancient spiritual practice that has helped many saints grow closer to God. However, in the modern world, we are also more aware that there are some for whom fasting from food is not healthy, and in these days where we are constantly bombarded with bad news, I hesitate to ask anyone to give up anything that brings them a spark of joy. However, one fast we can all make is a fast of time. I challenge all of us to sacrifice at least 15 minutes each day – either as soon as we rise or just before going to sleep – to read scripture and pray.

This devotional guide is meant to be a practical aid to help focus your prayer and scripture reading during this season. Each weekday has a scripture passage or hymn text to read and a brief reflection & prayer written by the staff, members, and friends of Wesley Freedom. Saturdays will be days of rest with no readings. On Sundays, attend worship.

The first two devotions of this devotional (Feb 20 & 21), while technically not yet in the season of Lent, will focus on the goals of the Lenten season as preparation. On Wednesday, February 22, we will observe Ash Wednesday, the ritual beginning of the Lenten season. During these services we receive ashes on our foreheads and begin our fast.

It is my prayer that this resource will be a source of blessing for you as we journey towards the darkness of the cross, and the bright light of Easter Sunday!

May God's love be with you this Lent.

In Christ,

Ian+

Associate Pastor & Editor, Wesley Freedom Devotionals

Monday, February 20  
Isaiah 2:1-5

## REFLECTION

Lent can seem like an uphill climb. For these forty days we fast and pray and focus extra diligently on our spiritual disciplines. And while we understand intellectually why this is important – we practice saying no to small things that aren't sinful so that we build up the spiritual muscles to say no to big things which are sinful – giving up anything for forty days is not easy, especially if you are fasting from something you truly enjoy! Even a sacrifice of time takes serious discipline. For forty days it can feel like we are hiking up a steep hill, one foot after the other, one day after the next.

If you feel like this, you're right. Being a Christian in this world – giving something up in a culture that only preaches indulgence – can seem as non-sensical as claiming to see water flow uphill. But that's exactly the picture God gives us of the new world he is building. Because of what Christ accomplished through the cross and his resurrection, one day all the nations will flow to God like water running up a mountain. We will all ditch the behaviors which mire us in sin – even war will be no more, and war's weapons will become instruments of peaceful agriculture.

The good news of Lent is that we get to begin this upward movement towards God in this life. It truly is an uphill climb, but it is the climb towards the new world that we will all live in one day. We might as well start our journey now.

## PRAYER

*Almighty God, whose beloved Son willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross for our redemption: Give us courage to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

Rev. Ian Collier is the Associate Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Tuesday, February 21  
Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

## REFLECTION

Sometimes there's nothing else to do than repent. In human interpersonal relationships, we often fall into a pattern of behavior in which one person screws up, realizes it, sees the hurt (or destruction, or peril) their behavior is causing, and then does all in their power to reverse course. They try to make up for the damage that has resulted from their actions. On one level, this is commendable. We *should* try to address the harm we cause whenever we fall short. But this pattern of behavior itself also falls short if we don't repent of what we've done. To say, "I'm sorry," is to explicitly own the wrong that we have done. Forgiveness requires confession.

When it comes to our relationship with God, this pattern is not just suboptimal, but also absurd. When we sin, we have not hurt God – nothing can hurt God. There is nothing we can do to 'make up' for falling short of God's moral law. No amount of, "I may have messed up, but I'll be extra pious and generous this week," or, "I sinned just a little, I guess I'll say four more prayers to make up for it," makes any difference. How can we compensate God when God is infinite and possesses infinite happiness by nature?

Here is the Good News – we don't even have to approach this absurd behavior pattern. God just wants us to stop sinning (through God's grace) and to say we're sorry. God loves us – his goal is for us to join him in the world to come and live in perfection. He does not want to see anyone lost. Instead, when we do something sinful, he wants *our* hearts to break so that we will work to become the kind of people who don't hurt each other anymore. This is our Lenten work – to take inventory of our sins and to really, truly, repent. Then, we can accept the gift of God's forgiveness.

## PRAYER

*Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.*

Rev. Ian Collier is the Associate Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Ash Wednesday, February 22  
2 Samuel 11:1 – 12:14 & Psalm 51

## REFLECTION

Have you ever looked in the mirror and thought, “What the hell is wrong with me?” This seems to be King David’s thought after he was realized the atrociousness of his behavior towards Uriah the Hittite and Bathsheba. David is described earlier in scripture as a man after God’s own heart! But then he used his royal power to compel Bathsheba to sleep with him and sent her husband to the front lines of a battle in order to be killed. Once a man after God’s own heart, David showed himself to be utterly depraved. And with his shame heavy in his heart, David penned Psalm 51 as his own personal, “What the hell is wrong with me?”

David learned here what we all figure out eventually: from the time we are born, we are pre-disposed towards sin. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, called this, “Inbeing Sin.” Other theologians refer to this concept as “Original Sin,” pointing to the idea that we inherit the guilt & punishment of Adam & Eve’s disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Wesley doesn’t want to focus on some inherited curse or guilt, but rather on the way our human nature has been so twisted up that we can’t help but be selfish. Humans are in need of *healing* just as much as forgiveness. This is our cry to God during Lent: forgive us our sins and heal us of our Inbeing (Original) Sin. And we believe that God can do it! By cooperating with God’s grace, we can be made perfect in this life and no longer willingly choose to sin.

What’s wrong with us? A lot. But God is willing to forgive us, and heal us, and empower us to no longer sin.

## PRAYER

*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 sin. Amen.*

Rev. Ian Collier is the Associate Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Thursday, February 23

Luke 19:18-25

## REFLECTION

Jesus asks some tough questions, and he continues to ask them to us today when we read them in Scripture. In today's reading, he is curious, "What are people saying about me?" It becomes personal for the disciples when he then follows up, "But what about you, who do you say I am?" Peter answers, "The Messiah."

Lent is a time of reflection, a time to "rend your heart" and be challenged by this same question. Who do you say Jesus is? Do the actions and words of your daily life reflect who you believe Christ to be? *The Message* paraphrase of scripture reads, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead." If he is to be our Messiah, the one we follow, then we have to let him lead. To allow Christ to lead looks far different than allowing the world to lead. Christ uses words like 'deny yourself,' 'take up your cross daily,' 'to save your life you must lose it,' and 'don't be ashamed of me.' The world leads with words like, 'self-help,' 'win at all costs,' 'entitlement,' 'self-reliance,' and 'greed.' Christ's words force us to look beyond ourselves, to put others first, and to not be ashamed to declare that we do it because we are a Christ-follower. In doing so we live out who we say Christ is and find our true self.

I recall a line from the TV show *Blue Bloods* when I need to remind myself of who I am with Christ as my lead. "You know who you are, be that." You know who you are as a Christ follower, be that.

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for your son, Jesus Christ. We long to be his true disciples, denying self and self-sacrificing. However, the tugs of this world derail us. Forgive us. It is only through your grace, guidance, and unfailing love, we are able to lose our lives, our will, our ways and follow you daily. Amen.*

Sharon Feldman serves on the Adult Discipleship Team.

Friday, February 24

Luke 5:27-32

## REFLECTION

In Luke, we see that Jesus does not hang out with the people who are the spiritual leaders of his time but with the outcast, the sinners, the broken. As I read this passage, I began thinking of my life and how God has been there persistently asking me to follow him. There have been times in my life when I did not think that God could love someone like me – someone who struggled to fit in or belong anywhere. Yet, through all of that, God put people in my life in an attempt to get me to follow him. I eventually heard God and followed, but the world did not believe I belonged because of who I am. It has taken me almost 30 years to truly believe that I belong because I am following God, and not to believe what the world says.

I invited someone to church this week. She said that the people at church are “too good” since she has had a very colorful life. I assured her that everyone has their own baggage and struggles that we don’t always see. Come to church. She agreed. After the service she shared that she needed to hear the sermon and was glad she came.

My main take away from Luke 5:27-32 is that everyone is struggling with their own hurts, hang-ups, and habits. God sees it all. We are not fooling God into thinking that our lives are perfect. But still, God is calling, asking us to come follow him, to come to church, to invite people back to church. The challenge for us as the church is: Do we truly believe that all belong? Do we challenge those who ask why we are letting “those” people in our church? God is chasing all of us with a simple request, “follow me.”

## PRAYER

*Lord, thank you for all you give us daily. Thank you for calling and reaching out to sinners like me. Forgive me for the times when I am swayed by prejudice, when I judge, despise, or exclude others because of my own insecurities. Grant me the grace to respond to your call – to follow you wherever you lead. Amen.*

Kathy Kaufman serves on the Confirmation & High School Ministry Teams.

Saturday, February 25  
The First Sabbath of Lent

Pray for the Church: Members, Bishops, Pastors, Deacons, and all who serve God. Conclude your prayer by saying:

*Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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Sunday, February 26

Worship with us at 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(8:00am & 11:00am Livestream at [www.WesleyFreedom.org](http://www.WesleyFreedom.org))

Before bed, conclude your prayers by saying:

*Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

Monday, February 27

John 3:1-21

### REFLECTION

“Are you born again?” Depending on the religious traditions you grew up in, you may or may not have an easy answer to this question.

To free us from the baggage surrounding these words, we turn to the source and read John 3:1-21 carefully. The setting is not a fancy church or a coliseum with a trendy evangelist; rather, we are listening in on a late-night conversation shared between Jesus and a Synagogue teacher. After the crowds have gone home, Nicodemus can be vulnerable and curious. He comes seeking to understand who Jesus is. Jesus explains that in order for Nicodemus to “see the kingdom of God,” he must be born again. Nicodemus has already been born into this human life through the waters of a birth canal. Now he is invited to experience a spiritual birth.

As you read the passage, consider the transformation that occurs when one is born again. It seems that being born of the Spirit awakens new senses. Once born again, we can “see” that Jesus is ushering in the Kingdom of God. Once born of the Spirit, we can have faith to believe that Jesus comes to save us, and we can claim the eternal life he offers. Living in the Spirit, we can move through the darkness of sin and ignorance into a life illuminated by the way of Jesus.

So, I ask again, “Have you been born again?”

### PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, I come seeking you. Deliver me from the darkness of a life void of you. By your Spirit give me new birth into an eternal relationship with you. Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith is the Senior Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Tuesday, February 28

*Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters* (UMH #605)

Wash, O God, our sons and daughters,  
Where your cleansing waters flow.  
Number them among your people;  
Bless as Christ blessed long ago.  
Weave them garments bright and sparkling;  
Compass them with love and light.  
Fill, anoint them, send your Spirit,  
Holy dove and heart's delight.

We who bring them long for nurture;  
By your milk may we be fed.  
Let us join your feast, partaking  
Cup of blessing, living bread.  
God, renew us, guide our footsteps;  
Free from sin and all its snares,  
One with Christ in living, dying,  
By your Spirit, children, heirs.

Oh, how deep your holy wisdom!  
Unimagined, all your ways.  
To your name be glory, honor!  
With our lives we worship, praise!  
We your people stand before you,  
Water-washed and Spirit born.  
By your grace, our lives we offer.  
Recreate us; God, transform!

## REFLECTION

This hymn is a three-stanza baptismal prayer. The first verse is a prayer for our children who are being baptized, for them to be cleansed, initiated into God's family, and filled with the Holy Spirit. The second verse is a prayer for ourselves, that God would continue the work of baptism throughout our lives. It ends with a prayer for all of us, the newly and long-ago baptized, to be recreated and transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit. Throughout, the

hymn draws on imagery from Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in the third chapter of John's gospel, which we read earlier this week. "How can anyone be born after having grown old?" Nicodemus asked. "By water and the Spirit," was Jesus' cryptic reply.

As you sing or read these words now, ponder who are the "sons and daughters" God is calling you to bring into God's family. It may be your biological children or grandchildren. It may be a neighbor, a friend, or a coworker. It may even be your own parent. What a privilege, that in all of God's unmatched power, we are given a role to play in sharing God's grace. And also consider where you are feeling the Spirit calling you to transform. What are your "rough edges" that need to be eroded smooth by the waters of baptism? Invite God's sanctifying grace to make those rough places plain.

#### PRAYER

*God, thank you for your grace that reaches out to us through the Holy Spirit and through the people who love us. Send your Holy Spirit through the waters of baptism to make us the people you have called us to be, and send us out to share your grace with the world. Amen.*

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship.

Wednesday, March 1  
John 3:22-36

## REFLECTION

“He must increase, but I must decrease.”

John’s disciples came to him asking about Jesus. “Look,” they say, “he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” John responds by reminding them that he himself is not the Christ, and that he had been sent before Jesus. He compares his relationship to Jesus with the relationship of a friend to the groom at a wedding. John reminds them that the bridegroom has the bride, and the friend of the bridegroom rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. He then speaks of his own joy in these things.

Verse 30 is only one sentence long, but so powerful to me. John says, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” As we celebrate and remember the work that Jesus did on the cross – the blood that was shed for our sins – may we consider the words of John as he proclaimed his desire that he would be less, and Jesus would be more.

As we go about his work – reaching into the dark places, caring for the hurting and the tired – he must increase, we must decrease. As we humble ourselves and chase recovery from our pain and mess-ups – he must increase, we must decrease. As we grow and love each other well in this body of Christ – he must increase, we must decrease.

## PRAYER

*Jesus, thank you for your sacrifice. Thank you for giving your life so that I could live. Thank you that it wasn’t the end of the story – that you rose from that death and reign in our lives! Today, as I busy myself with daily activities, meet the needs of my family, go to work – may there be less of me, Lord, more of you!*

Shannon Reinhardt is the Director of Wesley Freedom’s Hope Rising Resource Center.

Thursday, March 2  
John 12:1-11

## REFLECTION

In this passage, as Jesus comes to dinner at Lazarus' home, we are given the account of three different followers of Jesus who knew of the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

Lazarus welcomes Jesus with fellowship. We are told he was at the table with Jesus; his heart is fully present in the moment. All other cares and worries ceased as his heart welcomed Jesus with a meal. Martha's heart is also strangely warmed. She knows her Lord, and desires nothing more than to serve him. We can imagine her like a matriarch running around at Thanksgiving, making sure everyone had plenty of food & love. Her actions, very different from Lazarus', show another way we might welcome Jesus. Her service is not done out of obligation; rather, it is done with joy and devotion to her Lord. Mary, who often is the central figure in the telling of this story, also longs to open her heart to Jesus. She knows the miracles and power of her God. She doesn't listen in fellowship, or work in service, but instead confidently trusts in the gifts God provided her to honor her Lord. We see the depth of her devotion as she uses her hair & oil to anoint Jesus. For Mary, these acts of honor are how she welcomed Jesus. She is unafraid of what others may think. Welcoming Jesus into her heart is a leap of faith with no looking back.

All three of these followers of Christ welcomed Jesus in different ways; but all three did so fully. They are not afraid of what others will say or think. In opening their hearts to Jesus and using the gifts God had given them, they are powerful in their faith and actions. In this season of our lives how can we open our hearts and homes to Jesus? How can we fellowship? Or serve?

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, we welcome you into our homes and hearts. We trust in your grace and power to transform our lives for your glorious purposes. Guide us in this season to be unashamed in our trust of you.*

Jon Smith serves on the Sunday School Team.

Friday, March 3  
Numbers 21:1-9

## REFLECTION

At first, this reading from Numbers might seem out of place during Lent. Why read about Israel on its way to the Promised Land when Lent is about a time of prayer, fasting, and preparation for Jesus' resurrection at Easter? What do the two have in common?

Israel, just following a victory (vv. 1-3), quickly became discouraged as they were bypassing the land of Edom, and they even spoke against God and Moses, complaining about being brought out of Egypt to a place where "there is no food and no water," (vv.4-5) despite the fact that God had provided them manna and quail. At this point, Israel is in a state of waiting, waiting to come into the Promised Land, but they lose hold of their belief, and they lose their trust in God.

During Lent, we also are in a state of waiting. It is very similar to our wait during Advent for Jesus' birth. Advent comes at the end of the year, when vegetation is dormant (seemingly dead or dying); yet we wait for a birth, the birth of Jesus. Lent comes in the dead of winter when we wait for vegetation to come out of dormancy (a rebirth) and Jesus' resurrection.

Much of the Christian life is waiting. In the lead-up to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, he goes to a place called Gethsemane with Peter, James, and John. He asks them to wait and stay awake, while he goes aside to pray, but three times he comes back to find them asleep. We cannot be like the people of Israel, complaining about the wait, nor yet like Peter, James, and John, who could not stay awake waiting for Jesus. We must not lose hold of our belief and trust in God.

## PRAYER

*Dear Lord, please help us to remain faithful in our own time of waiting, help us to stay awake, trusting in you, who brings all good things to fruition in their own time. Amen.*

Kevin Silberzahn serves as the Lay Leader of Wesley Freedom.

Saturday, March 4  
The Second Sabbath of Lent

Pray for the Oppressed: The immigrant, the poor, the sick, the hungry, the imprisoned. Conclude your prayer by saying:

*Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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Sunday, March 5

Worship with us at 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(8:00am & 11:00am Livestream at [www.WesleyFreedom.org](http://www.WesleyFreedom.org))

Before bed, conclude your prayers by saying:

*O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Monday, March 6  
John 9:1-12

### REFLECTION

What did I do? Why is God punishing me? There are isolated times in the scriptures when tragedy is a consequence for human sin. This has led many faithful scripture readers to conclude that illness or loss is a punishment from God. This could cause us to wonder what we have done wrong if something about us is unique or challenging, or question what sin our neighbor committed if they experience hardship. In today's reading the teachers and the crowd are asking, "Rabbi, who sinned? This man or his parents that he was born blind." Before we jump to being appalled at the question, let's be honest, we too, have asked "why?" Let us also acknowledge that while lack of eyesight was a cause for social isolation and poverty in A.D. 30, in our day, persons who cannot see can live full, thriving, gifted lives.

Jesus has an important word for us to write into our memory for easy recall, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." His inability to see is not a punishment, but his uniqueness can have a purpose. By giving him sight, Jesus will have opportunity to show the healing power of God.

Do you have anything that makes life more challenging for you? What purpose could this challenge have for your spiritual life or your contribution to community?

### PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, prevent me from speaking half-truths about how you work that can harm others. Slow me down so that I can perceive how you can transform every aspect of life, even the struggles, into something purposeful. Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith is the Senior Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Tuesday, March 7  
Ephesians 5:6-20

## REFLECTION

We are now at a special time of year when the darkness of Winter gives way to the light and life of Spring. In today's scripture, the Apostle Paul vividly uses these dark and light images to instruct us on how to live more fully in God's will. Some of these teachings seem easy for us to grasp, such as his warning to not be deceived by empty words, but instead, walk as children of the light, and try to understand what is pleasing to the Lord. We can do this, right?

Other parts of this scripture seem more overwhelming for us to act upon, such as staying away from works of darkness, but instead, exposing them to the light. Each day as we watch the news, we get more than just a glimpse at the darkness that surrounds not only us, but our community as well. What can we, as individuals, possibly do to spread Christ's light into this deep darkness? Perhaps it could start with something as small as inviting a friend to join us at a worship service or spending just a minute or two with a family new to Wesley Freedom to help them feel welcome. Maybe these may feel like simple, small steps, but we are reminded that it only takes a tiny bit of light to begin to break through even the deepest darkness. God's grace is at work in each of us to provide that light!

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, please help us to live as you have asked us to, being filled with the Spirit, singing and making melody to the Lord in our hearts, and giving thanks always and for everything to God. Please teach us how to be a light to our neighbors each day.*

Peter Jacobus serves on Wesley Freedom's Finance Committee.

Wednesday, March 8

Jeremiah 8:18-22 & *There Is A Balm In Gilead* (UMH #375)

Refrain:

There is a balm in Gilead  
to make the wounded whole;  
there is a balm in Gilead  
to heal the sin-sick soul.

Some times I feel discouraged,  
and think my work's in vain.

But then the Holy Spirit  
revives my soul again.

(Refrain)

Don't ever feel discouraged,  
for Jesus is your friend,  
and if you look for knowledge  
he'll ne'er refuse to lend.

(Refrain)

If you can't preach like Peter,  
if you can't pray like Paul,  
just tell the love of Jesus,  
and say he died for all.

(Refrain)

#### REFLECTION

This African-American spiritual, adapted and arranged by William Farley Smith, calls back to the words of the prophet Jeremiah, “Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?” (Jeremiah 8:22). The writers of this song would have heard these words as they were introduced to Christianity while held in slavery. William Farley Smith writes, “Slave poets, with the assurance of knowing, acquired from Christian learning and experience, responded to Jeremiah’s despairing [and negative] queries with profound conviction. Indeed, ‘Doctor’ Jesus is alive and well and does heal the sin-sick soul.”

It is important to recognize that while we often think of God's liberation as being from the spiritual chains caused by our sins, the writers of this song were praying for God's deliverance from quite physical chains, caused by the sins of their oppressors. The "sin-sick souls" in need of healing were the souls of their captors, who needed to be freed from the sin that blinded them to the humanity of their slaves. As you read and sing these words, consider what sin you need God to heal you from. What harm have you caused to others in your sin-sickness? And pray for your enemies as well – not for God's vengeance, but for God's healing of their souls.

*Lord Jesus, the great physician, you are the healer of bodies and of souls. Free us from our sins and from the sins of others, so that all the world may live in freedom and peace. Amen.*

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship.

Thursday, March 9  
Psalm 23

## REFLECTION

*My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought / My sin, not in part, but the whole / Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more / Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.*

When I read or sing these lyrics from “It Is Well With My Soul,” I am filled with a profound sense of relief. Relief that, though I sin on a regular basis, Jesus is here to forgive me, to love me, and to accept me. That forgiveness, love, and acceptance is an ever-present force that encourages me to pause before I think, act, or speak. My hope is that I can forgive, love, and accept others as Jesus has done for me.

We are tethered to God and Christ through baptism and the Church. Sometimes the tie that binds us to Christ can stretch long and thin, and he becomes a small blip on our radar as we think about all the things we have to do/accomplish/take care of. Jesus is constantly and gently tugging on that cord to bring us back to him, to look to him, to seek him. He reminds us to praise God for all the good things in our lives. He encourages us to look to Him for guidance in times of need. He brings us peace when our minds and hearts are racing. Psalm 23 reminds us that God is acutely aware of all our spiritual needs, and is ready to help us when we are ready to hear his wisdom. Pause. Breathe. Listen. Jesus’s love and sacrifice for us is a beautiful gift!

## PRAYER

*Christ Jesus, thank you for your constant love, forgiveness and acceptance. Thank you for always bringing me back to you and reminding me that I am yours. Help me extend that grace to others and be the Christian example you want me to be. Amen.*

Nikki Spurgeon serves on the Music Ministry Team.

Friday, March 10  
John 9:35-41

## REFLECTION

Reflecting on this scripture, I am thinking about my father who used to say, “Hindsight is 20/20,” meaning, if we knew the results of our choices ahead of time, we would always have positive outcomes. We, as humans, want to be in control of our outcomes, but at what cost? And are we really in control? Seeing through our own lens of control and self-sufficiency does not leave a lot of room for guidance and faith. Without faith, depending on our own vision alone keeps sin in our lives. The blind man could not literally see, but regarding faith, he had 20/20 vision.

Another quote I recall is “a problem is an opportunity in work clothes.” If we always had the answers and were never challenged, why would we be motivated to learn and depend on the greater power of the Lord? The scriptures describe “seeing” through the lens of faith as having little to do with actually seeing. The Pharisees lacked the spiritual insight to have this faith, therefore they remained in sin. The more we think we are in control of our lives, the further we are from our relationship with Jesus. Obsession with self-sufficiency and control creates its own spiritual blindness and keeps us in sin. Freedom from sin is not dependent on our own sight and control. It is only God's grace that is our path to that freedom and that is the 20/20 vision we should strive for.

## PRAYER

*Dear Lord, give me the courage to have faith like the formerly blind man, and the insight to depend on you for guidance and grace. Give me the knowledge and understanding that I am broken and flawed, and my salvation is in God's grace. Amen.*

Cindy Shruell is the Front Office Assistant.

Saturday, March 11  
The Third Sabbath of Lent

Pray for those in Authority: For Wisdom and Justice in their rule.  
Conclude your prayer by saying:

*Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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Sunday, March 12

Worship with us at 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(8:00am & 11:00am Livestream at [www.WesleyFreedom.org](http://www.WesleyFreedom.org))

Before bed, conclude your prayers by saying:

*Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.*

Monday, March 13

John 4:1-30

### REFLECTION

Scandal! At the Samaritan Well. I can only imagine the headlines that would have been put online if the internet was around during Jesus' ministry. You see, meeting a woman at a well is a featured plot point in the stories of Isaac, Jacob, and Moses finding their wives. So, approaching a woman at a well and asking for a drink was a little cheeky on Christ's part! Further, this woman was a Samaritan – someone descended from the northern tribes of Israel, but who the Jews saw as corrupted by intermarriage with Assyrians. While they still worshiped the God of Abraham, they did so with different scriptures and their own temple. They were an enemy.

But Jesus approaches her anyway. Jesus walks a fine line in his conversation – he affirms the Jewish orthodoxy that Samaritan worship practices & beliefs were incorrect, and he names actions in which she is not following the Law. But Jesus also unconditionally shares his Good News with her and offers her eternal life. What's amazing about this story is that while Jesus was not looking for an earthly wife, this scene does end with a betrothal; the Samaritan woman becomes part of the Bride of Christ – the Church. Because Christ just comes right out and shares the Good News with her, the one who was seen as an enemy of God trusts him and shares her experiences with her community. Tradition records this woman's name as Photini. She is said to have gone on to convert so many Samaritans that she earned the honorific, "Equal to the Apostles."

Jesus also scandalously comes to us today, shows us the truth, and invites us to become part of his bride, the Church. What is stopping us from having Photini's faith, and sharing it with those we know?

### PRAYER

*Lord, we, too, thirst for the water of eternal life. Wherever we come from, and whatever our misconceptions of you or our neighbors, let your truth cut through. Make us into those who can share your good news like St. Photini. Amen.*

Rev. Ian Collier is the Associate Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Tuesday, March 14  
Romans 5:1-11

## REFLECTION

Many years ago, there was a popular song with a refrain: “I beg your pardon, I never promised you a rose garden. Along with the sunshine, there’s gotta be a little rain sometime.” Although roses are beautiful and fragrant, they also need the proper balance of sunshine and rain to flourish. We, like roses, flourish with a balance of sunshine and rain, laughter and tears. Some seasons of life produce more tears than laughter, and more pain, heartache, and struggle than smiles. Life can be hard. It’s hard for me right now, trying to regain my independence after knee replacement surgery. But I take comfort in the knowledge that no matter how bleak my current situation might be, I am not alone. Despite whatever physical and emotional pain that I’m undergoing, or may have endured in the past, I have hope, the kind that is grounded in the knowledge of God’s love. The Apostle Paul tells us that “suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character; and character hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”

What proof do I have of God’s love – for you, for me, for everyone? Paul tells us that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Think about it – Christ died for us, before we were even born, before we had even heard of Jesus, and yes, even for someone like Paul, who had persecuted the followers of Jesus. Even the most kindhearted humans would be baffled by this extreme outpouring of love. What an awesome God we serve!

## PRAYER

*Gracious and generous God, we thank you for giving us hope when life seems dark and painful. Thank you for the gift of your Son to show us the meaning of love.*

Susan Silberzahn serves on the Adult Discipleship Team.

Wednesday, March 15

*How Shall They Hear The Word of God* (UMH #649)

How shall they hear the word of God  
unless his truth is told?  
How shall the sinful be set free,  
the sorrowful consoled?  
To all who speak the truth today,  
impart your Spirit, Lord, we pray.

How shall they call to God for help  
unless they have believed?  
How shall the poor be given hope,  
the prisoner reprieved?  
To those who help the blind to see,  
give light and love and clarity.

How shall the gospel be proclaimed  
that sinners may repent?  
How shall the world find peace at last  
if heralds are not sent?  
So send us, Lord, for we rejoice  
to speak of Christ with life and voice.

## REFLECTION

Yesterday, we read Paul's proclamation of God's justifying grace brought to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Our hymn this week asks the next logical question, based on the words of Paul: "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14-15)

This evangelistic message used to be the hallmark of Methodism, and was the fuel that helped it spread throughout the new world. But in recent years, we have become wary of sharing our faith too loudly, or with too much enthusiasm. Telling someone about our faith in Jesus feels uncomfortably like telling them that what they currently

believe is wrong. Certainly, we Methodists are too polite to do something like that.

But I suggest we look at this from another angle. We are not in the business of telling the world a philosophy to believe, or an opinion to hold. Our mission is to introduce them to a person – Jesus Christ, the son of God and savior of humanity. This is not about a debate of ideas. We're just one thirsty soul telling another where the good water can be found.

#### PRAYER

*Loving God, you have saved me through your great grace. Forgive me for my reluctance to share your love with others, and give me the boldness to bring all the thirsty souls to drink from your well. Amen.*

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship.

Thursday, March 16  
Revelation 21:10; 21:22-22:5

## REFLECTION

In this passage, the author writes of the establishment of the New Jerusalem. There is no need for a temple as God and the Lamb themselves are in its place, bringing light to the world. The tree of life provides fruit and leaves that heal the nations. Here, there is only peace. God will be the everlasting light for the world.

When I first read this passage, I immediately thought of the hymn “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light” (UMH 206). The refrain begins, “In him there is no darkness at all, the night and the day are both alike.” As a child, this hymn troubled me. I thought Heaven would be so boring. I couldn’t imagine never getting to see a sunset, chasing fireflies, or the beauty of a starry night sky.

As an adult, my understanding of this hymn has changed. I no longer think of darkness as just night. I know darkness is the violence, prejudice, abuse, disease, and loneliness that the world suffers. Darkness of the soul cripples us. Yet there is hope. We are blessed to be members of the family of faith. We can reach out and know that the Lord is always there for us. God sent Jesus to be our Light, even in our darkest moments.

## PRAYER

*Lord, let me walk in your light. Help me to see past the hurt of the world, and remember that through the blood of Jesus, we will one day find eternal peace in your presence.*

Luanne Rusk serves on the Confirmation Leadership Team.

Friday, March 17  
John 5:1-18

## REFLECTION

The entirety of this passage is centered around God's creation. His almighty power created us, knowing our imperfections and capabilities.

Throughout their lives, the people called “invalids” in this passage were deemed incapable by the world because of their debilitating conditions. The world's judgement had determined their worth until God showed his determination through Jesus' work of healing. The world then raised doubt about one man's healing. They questioned him and restated his restrictions based on their understanding of the Law. The world may work to interfere with our healing journey, but it is in those times we must remain hopeful, defining our self-worth only as God's creation.

We all have pieces of ourselves by which the world judges us to determine our worth, and we internalize the world's judgment in our self-worth. However, God knows our imperfections, he knew these in our creation. Jesus immediately recognized the man's “imperfection” and destroyed the constraint the world created by healing the man. For God determines our worth, not the world.

As neighbors, we must drive out worldly definitions of worth to see ourselves and others only by the worth given by the God who created us. God is larger than any “imperfection,” God is larger than all “imperfections.”

## PRAYER

*Dear Lord, thank you for giving me worth beyond the what the world may define me as. For giving me all capabilities beyond the restrictions the world has worked to limit me with. May I serve as a good neighbor, showing light for hope and trust in you to be healed. May I be your servant being a hand to help bring others to healing and seeing their worth. Amen.*

Emilie Tedeschi is a Youth Member of Wesley Freedom.

Saturday, March 18  
The Fourth Sabbath of Lent

Pray for the Nations: For goodwill among peoples, wisdom for leaders, and the well-being of all people. Conclude your prayer by saying:

*Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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Sunday, March 19

Worship with us at 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(8:00am & 11:00am Livestream at [www.WesleyFreedom.org](http://www.WesleyFreedom.org))

Before bed, conclude your prayers by saying:  
*Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

Monday, March 20  
March 14:22-36

## REFLECTION

The disciples were shocked to see Jesus walking on top of the water; we're not. Water walking is awesome, but it's not the headline for an incarnate God who restores sight to the blind, causes a paralyzed man to walk, and is resurrected from the dead on the third day. If we believe that Jesus is who he says he is in the Gospels, we expect him to be able to calm a storm and call Lazarus from the grave. So, what is surprising and faith-inspiring about this chapter?

How about Peter? He sees Jesus walking toward him on the water and he says, "Jesus if that's you, call to me, and I will walk with you on the water." So, Jesus invites him to come walk on the sea. Peter steps out and he now can walk on top of the waves. When he realizes he's stepping out where no mortal man should stand, he begins to sink. When he calls out to Jesus for help, the Lord takes his hand and empowers him to continue taking impossible steps.

Jesus' ability to walk on top of the water demonstrates that he is more than mortal – he is God! Peter's steps on the surface of the deep remind us that in relationship with Jesus we can step beyond our natural limits.

Consider where and when the Lord called you to something new or impossible. How did you experience God's power or presence in that space? Consider inviting God to reveal a next step for you to take in faith and service.

## PRAYER

*Jesus, all things are possible according to your will and your power. Reveal to me the next steps of faith you would call me to take and give me faith to go beyond what I can do on my own power so that I can grow in your power. Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith is the Senior Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Tuesday, March 21  
Jeremiah 17:5-13

## REFLECTION

In this prophetic passage found in the Old Testament, Jeremiah warns the people of Judah that continuing to live in their present lifestyle – trusting in themselves and other humans, rather than trusting wholeheartedly in God – would result in being cursed by God. Turning away from God was like withering in a desert land with no water for sustenance, being foolish and ashamed, and missing opportunities for an abundant life with no hope for life eternal.

In contrast, Jeremiah describes a far different lifestyle for those who put their trust in God. Instead of residing as in a parched land, they will be blessed by God like a tree that has no fear of drought and continues to bear fruit, having its roots in everlasting water that brings them hope in an eternal sanctuary, a place of safety in the Lord.

In whom do you put your trust? Your financial advisor? Your doctor? Your insurance broker? Your boss? Your colleagues? Your friends? If asked, most of us, if not all, would say without hesitation that we put our trust in God. After all, we sing hymns avowing that trust; we recite creeds affirming that trust; and we pray, believing in that trust.

God wants that trust to permeate every aspect of our lives. God wants to bless us, not curse us! God wants the Living Water to flow through us, flooding our entire being with the everlasting spring of God's love and care, a fountain of Grace that never runs dry. All God asks of us is to trust him wholeheartedly!

## PRAYER

*Gracious God, help us not to put our trust in mere humans or ourselves. No matter what life brings our way, help us to trust you with our whole hearts. Amen.*

Lorena Stone serves on the Adult Discipleship Team.

Wednesday, March 22

*Standing On The Promises* (UMH #374)

Standing on the promises of Christ my King,  
through eternal ages let his praises ring;  
glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,  
standing on the promises of God.

Refrain:

Standing, standing, standing on the promises of God my Savior;  
standing, standing, I'm standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises that cannot fail,  
when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,  
by the living Word of God I shall prevail,  
standing on the promises of God. [Refrain]

Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord,  
bound to him eternally by love's strong cord,  
overcoming daily with the Spirit's sword,  
standing on the promises of God. [Refrain]

Standing on the promises I cannot fall,  
listening every moment to the Spirit's call,  
resting in my Savior as my all in all,  
standing on the promises of God. [Refrain]

#### REFLECTION

This hymn is one of my favorites. I have a happy memory of singing this song when I was in middle school, when our youth choir joined with the adult choir for a service. I was blown away sitting in with the tenors, and not just because at that time in my life I'd never stood so close to anyone who could sing that loud. "Standing on the promises, standing on the promises..." they belted out. I wasn't sure what promises we were standing on, exactly – the hymn never goes into detail on that – but whatever they were, those men's enthusiasm was infectious. I wanted in.

I had the gift of spending time with one of those men in the last week of his life. It was in that space that I learned the great gift that came with this trust. He had no fear for himself, because he knew with absolute certainty that he was headed to God's house with many rooms, just as Jesus had promised. In his last moments, his prayer was for the church he had faithfully served, that God would continue to work out those promises in generations and generations to come.

#### PRAYER

*Faithful God, help me to trust in your promises. When I have fallen, help me to stand. And when I am standing firm, help me to sing with strength and conviction, to share this confidence with those who need hope. Amen.*

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship.

Thursday, March 23  
Matthew 7:24-29

## REFLECTION

At times in my life, particularly early on, there were periods of seemingly boundless happiness and optimism. My family was healthy, friends were abundant, and activities abounded. During these times, it's easy to take life for granted, with the bright light of good fortune ironically clouding out the true source of that happiness, our Lord Jesus Christ.

For me, at age 24 when my mother passed away rather suddenly from cancer while I was away at graduate school, I found myself devastated, as up to that point in my life it seemed nothing could be, or feel, so wrong. On my long drive home, I struggled with God for taking her at such a young age. Why her? Why now? Why wasn't I there? But as my mom was a true believer and led our family to be true believers as well, I also remembered the scripture for today's reading where Jesus advises his followers to build their houses on rock, and not on the sand. The rain did fall, the floods came quickly, and the wind howled. I felt my foundation shaking at its core. But, somehow, I knew through her steadfast belief and quiet, unwavering faith, that God would be leading her to a peaceful place, and that that the rock of faith to which she guided me would keep me on my feet and pointed in the right direction; no storm could blow me astray.

Surely there will be more challenges, more tribulations, more uncertainties. While Jesus sees all of us experience times where we fall into an overconfident sense of earthly invincibility, he offers us a true, rock-solid, God-based reality of invincibility to endure any trial if we choose to build our homes on the foundation that only he can provide.

## PRAYER

*Lord, thank you for your faithfulness to us. Give us the grace to build our life on the solid rock of your grace. Amen.*

Peter Brown is a Member of Wesley Freedom.

Friday, March 24  
Matthew 16:13-23

## REFLECTION

As we journey through this Lenten season, it is a good time for us to examine our beliefs about who Jesus is and what role he plays in our life. Often, depending on our current situation (the mountaintop or valley we are in), the answers to these questions may change. But one thing is for sure – God’s love and grace do not change.

The disciple Peter was impulsive – both positively and negatively – throughout scripture. In this passage we find Jesus asking the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” When Simon Peter responds with, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God,” Jesus affirms this answer by stating that Peter is the rock on which Jesus will build his church. Peter starts positively by recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. But then, his priority becomes wanting to prevent the human suffering and pain associated with Jesus’ death. This gets in the way of Peter’s faith and understanding of what kind of Messiah Jesus was to be. This impulse to put human desires ahead of God’s plan of salvation for the whole world leads to Jesus calling Peter, “Satan.”

God, through the Holy Spirit, can tell us what is right, good, and noble, but we can easily forget what was revealed to us and go another way. Even though Peter was not perfect as a disciple, he was always learning even though he made mistakes along the way. *But* God still used him to build God’s church on earth. God showed grace to Peter. So, God can use each of us, despite our flaws and lack of faith, to do his work. This is why Peter is one character in the Bible who gives us hope.

## PRAYER

*God, treat us as you did Peter. Tell us what is right, good, and noble. Correct us when we go astray. And use us to build your church according to your will. Amen.*

Tim & JoEllen Boyer serve on the Wesley Freedom Missions Team & Women’s Retreat Leadership Team, respectively.

Saturday, March 25  
The Fifth Sabbath of Lent

Pray for the Earth: That all people might revere it as God's handiwork and give it due honor as a reflection of God's glory.  
Conclude your prayer by saying:

*Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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Sunday, March 26

Worship with us at 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(8:00am & 11:00am Livestream at [www.WesleyFreedom.org](http://www.WesleyFreedom.org))

Before bed, conclude your prayers by saying:

*Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

Monday, March 27

Luke 10:38-42

## REFLECTION

Yikes! I was born to be a 'Martha'! The way I show my love is through acts of service. I also do most of my processing while doing those acts. The cooking, baking, cleaning, etc. provide me the space in my head to sort things out and discern. My dear friend is a 'Mary' and quality time with others is important to her. I don't believe that these characteristics are absolute. Indeed, there are situations where we must listen and others where we must be in action!

Martha wasn't just providing the hospitality that was culturally ingrained, I believe she was also attending to Jesus' words. She was honored to have him in her home and made him feel welcomed and comfortable. Spiritual practices and how we engage are so varied. How you connect is not how others may connect. We must become aware of how God is present in us and, more importantly, how God is present in others.

I take inspiration from my husband's grandmother who was given the name Mary Martha. She was a strong, faithful woman and perhaps provides the clarity needed that what is necessary to navigate this complicated world is to be both a person of deeds and a quiet reflective listener. I think that Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 states it best, "To everything there is a season." There are always going to be seasons of action and duty, and hopefully they will be balanced with seasons of meditation. Simply stated, Martha showed her love for Jesus through acts of service, but sometimes a pause is needed. Mary showed her love by spending quality time with him; but I do hope that when Jesus departed, having been filled with his wisdom, Mary cleaned up!

## PRAYER

*Dear God, I ask that all my actions demonstrate how you are present in me. Help me seek that same understanding of how you are present in others. Fill me with your grace and let me extend that grace to those I encounter. Amen.*

Sherry Perrine is the Director of Children & Family Ministries.

Tuesday, March 28

*Take Time To Be Holy* (UMH #395)

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;  
abide in him always, and feed on his word.  
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,  
forgetting in nothing his blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;  
spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.  
By looking to Jesus, like him thou shalt be;  
thy friends in thy conduct his likeness shall see.

Take time to be holy, let him be thy guide,  
and run not before him, whatever betide.  
In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord,  
and, looking to Jesus, still trust in his word.

Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,  
each thought and each motive beneath his control.  
Thus led by his spirit to fountains of love,  
thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.

## REFLECTION

This hymn is based on 1 Peter 1:16: “For it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated as “Holy,” *qadosh*, literally means “set apart”. This was the purpose of the levitical laws of Torah, to set the Hebrew people apart from their neighbors as God’s chosen people. They observed distinctive dress, diet, and religious observances that made them different from surrounding nations. Likewise, the behaviors instructed by this hymn call us to separate from the busyness of life to intentionally spend time with Jesus. That is the “holiness” we are called to – not “holier than thou” moralism, but the state of having a closer connection with God than with the world.

In contrast to other hymns we have explored, “Take Time To Be Holy” lacks any direct reference to the action of God. All of the

activity described in these words are taken by us, the Christian. It is fitting in this Lenten season to take a closer look at ourselves, guided by the directives of the hymn. As you read through each line, ask yourself how well you are embodying these behaviors. Are you “taking time to be holy”? How often do you speak with your Lord? Is there an area in particular you feel called to emphasize in this season?

#### PRAYER

*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Call me to step away from the noise of the world, into the still silence of your presence, so that all my actions will be guided by your Spirit. Amen.*

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship.

Wednesday, March 29

Acts 2:43-47

## REFLECTION

In today's reading, St. Luke mentions the activities that characterized the early Christian community. They committed themselves to spiritual growth by studying the Scriptures together, sharing their resources, and praying together. Their faith, joy and loving support were so contagious that many more became believers.

This is an almost utopian vision. This group of people “who believed [in Jesus] were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.” But is this possible? Is Luke saying anything less than utopia is a failure? On the contrary, Luke is outlining what the church *can* be when it lends itself to the conviction of the Gospel.

In today's church, we continue to struggle with acceptance and inclusiveness. The ask today is that those who gather believe and have God at the center of their hearts. The church is a vital part of the community. It should be a safe place; free of judgement, open to all. It is a place that we should give and receive encouragement, help those in need, share fellowship, and hold each other accountable.

While we may not be always be the utopia outlined by Luke, we should look at ourselves, our church, and our community to determine how we get closer to utopian church.

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus: You are the head and we are the body. Revive your church and fill us with the same love and passion as the early believers. Give us a persistent hunger for your word – that our lives may be conformed to your teaching.*

David & Rae Ann Schafer serve one the Youth Ministry, Finance, and Hope Rising Resource Center leadership teams.

Thursday, March 30  
Titus 3:1-11

## REFLECTION

The Lenten season is a time of reflection and preparation. If you can, search online for this Bible passage, and select the different translations to see the various descriptive headings the publishing companies have used for this scripture. These include, Maintain Good Deeds, Saved in Order to Do Good, and Be Ready for Every Good Work. “Maintain,” “Do Good,” “Be Ready.” The common theme is preparation to do the Lord’s work. Just as you maintain what you own (house, car, body), you need to maintain your spiritual connection with the Lord and his Church. Why? In order to “do”. Maintenance and preparation are means to the end of “doing,” or, ‘the job’.

In God’s economy, our job is the Lord’s work that has been given to us; so, the maintenance and preparation should be a daily activity, not an “emergency” when a water pipe bursts. Regular connection with the Lord and his Church is our maintenance and preparation work. To do what? The work of the Lord. And what is that? That depends on your place in the Lord’s body and where God’s placed you for your best fit.

In verses 6 and 7 we read: “This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” We become heirs by working with the Lord in the work that the Lord has provided to us.

## PRAYER

*Father God, this Lenten season renew in us a spirit of seeking you out in order to do the work you have selected for each one of us. Show us the way to your riches in Jesus Christ our Savior, for the building of your kingdom here, as it is in heaven. Amen.*

Robert & Gina Jacoby serve on the Adult Discipleship Team.

Friday, March 31  
John 13:1-17

## REFLECTION

How deeply uncomfortable must St. John have been in this moment to have this memory seared so specifically in his brain? He could have just written it in a few lines, but John slows down and zooms in. John remembers Jesus getting up and taking his outer robe off – how strange – then he wrapped himself in a towel – even weirder – Jesus then took water and began to wash the disciples' feet. For three years these men had followed Jesus around Galilee & Judea, they had pledged themselves to his way of life, they made him their Lord! They chose to *serve* him; now, even the internal social order of their small community was disrupted. How deeply uncomfortable must St. John have been in this moment?

I think that was Jesus' point. He knew that he was about to die, and that his disciples would be crushed, but he also knew he would rise from the dead, ascend into heaven, and send the Holy Spirit to empower the disciples to establish the Church. These people would inherit the spiritual power of God – the authority to forgive (and not forgive) people's sins, and the ability to wield the words of God incarnate to build up or to tear down. And so, Christ had to shock them – even if they didn't understand why – to drill it into their heads that when the time came for Christ to return to the Father and entrust his mission to the Church, that their job was to be servants, not rulers. They would become leaders, but always leaders who remain the disciples of one who became a servant.

We – all of us – have been entrusted with the sacred deposit of Christ's mission & teachings. May we all remember that a servant is never greater than their master and that all of us are called to become the servants of God in service to the world.

## PRAYER

*Lord, may I receive your gifts and use them in the service of others. Help me remember your example and become more like you. Amen.*

Rev. Ian Collier is the Associate Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Saturday, April 1  
The Sixth Sabbath of Lent

Pray for the Grieving: That God's Spirit might fill them with comfort, peace, and hope. Conclude your prayer by saying:

*Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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Palm Sunday, April 2

Worship with us at 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(8:00am & 11:00am Livestream at [www.WesleyFreedom.org](http://www.WesleyFreedom.org))

Before bed, conclude your prayers by saying:

*Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Monday, April 3  
Luke 19:29-48

### REFLECTION

This excerpt from St. Luke's Gospel follows Jesus' return to Jerusalem and his discovery of what had become of the temple. But before he returned, he stopped at the Mount of Olives to retrieve a donkey on which to ride into town. Jesus told his disciples that this colt has never been ridden before and to tell the owners that "the Lord needs it." The disciples did exactly as they were told and retrieved the colt and Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

The Lord calls on everyone, in their own way, to serve him. The colt had never been ridden before, yet it was still of use to the Lord for something just as simple as a short ride. This is no different to when God calls us to serve him; you might not know it right away, but God has a plan for each of us. Whether it is something big or small, in the Lord's eyes everything and everyone is just as important to him. Something as small as being kind to a neighbor or bringing a friend to church can be exactly what God is looking for.

A key takeaway I found in this passage is to value yourself, have faith in God, and trust in his plans for you too. The same way that Jesus and his disciples needed the colt, he needs you today. Always remember that you are here for a reason, and you have purpose in life.

### PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, we give love and thanks for your son's love and courage. We ask that you give us courage when facing hardships and to remind us to spread love and bring light to a world covered in darkness. Amen.*

Colin Murphy is a Youth Member of Wesley Freedom.

Tuesday, April 4  
John 14:1-14

### REFLECTION

“Where are you going?” “Can we go too?” “How long will you be gone?” “When will you be back?” These are some questions our children would ask when they were younger as my husband and I would leave to go out. And it never failed, one of them would call before the evening was over and ask when we would be home. Did they trust we would return if they couldn’t be with or see us?

Before John 14, Jesus had told his disciples that someone was going to betray him, and that he would be leaving them. Like our children, the disciples must have been full of questions. “Where are you going?” “Can we go too?” “How long will you be gone?” “When will you be back?” And to add to the already distressing news, Jesus told them that where he was going, they could not come, at least not now. Did they also struggle with trust if they couldn’t be with or see Jesus? This must have caused great confusion and anxiety for them with all the talk of betrayal, denial and Jesus leaving them. Knowing how they were feeling, Jesus responds to his disciples by saying, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me” (John 14:1). Jesus assures them that he is not abandoning them. He will be back and take them with him.

Before going out, my husband and I would answer all the kids’ questions, and this would help ease their minds. We encouraged them to call us if they needed anything, and like a phone call, God is only a prayer away when we find we need answers or are unsure about a situation. When problems come up while we are carrying on Jesus’ mission and need assistance, we can ask in his name and all that he has will be at our disposal.

### PRAYER

*Jesus, thank you for showing us the Father in how you lived and interacted with others. Remind us daily that you are with us, you have not abandoned us and we only need to call out to you, Jesus, and you hear us. Amen.*

Audrey Rothstein serves on the Hospitality & Office Volunteer Teams.

Wednesday, April 5

*O Love Divine, What Hast Thou Done* (UMH #287)

O Love divine, what hast thou done!  
The immortal God hath died for me!  
The Father's coeternal Son  
bore all my sins upon the tree.  
The immortal God hath died for me!  
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

Is crucified for me and you,  
to bring us rebels back to God.  
Believe, believe the record true,  
ye all are bought with Jesus' blood.  
Pardon for all flows from his side:  
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

Behold him, all ye that pass by,  
the bleeding Prince of life and peace!  
Come, sinners, see your Savior die,  
and say, "Was ever grief like his?"  
Come, feel with me his blood applied:  
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

## REFLECTION

It is easy for us who were raised in Christianity to miss the unique and revolutionary message of Christ's passion. In the polytheistic religions that dominated the ancient world, there was a firm, impassable boundary between the human and divine. The gods, while often no more moral than humans, were impossibly and insurmountably more powerful. If there were sacrifices made, they were only ever in one direction. Sacrifices were made by humans, for the gods, in the hope of gaining their favor and assistance in earthly affairs.

Jesus takes this paradigm and flips it upside down. Though infinitely powerful and morally unimpeachable, he makes himself the sacrifice for us. There have been many mythological tales of gods dying and

being reborn, typically in cosmic battle or world-ending cataclysm. Jesus is unique in facing death for our benefit.

There is no neat call to action in this hymn. Only an echo of the words of Lamentations 1:12a - “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow.” Today, stop and wait, be still and behold. Ponder this great gift and sacrifice: “My Lord, my Love, is crucified.”

#### PRAYER

*Jesus, my Lord, my Love, there is no way to say “thank you” for the gift you have given me in your sacrifice on the cross. So, what I have, I give freely to you – my plans, my possessions, even my life – so that your love will be known by all the world. Amen.*

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship.

Maundy Thursday, April 6  
Matthew 27:11-23

## REFLECTION

So, what's the deal with tight lipped Jesus? Does this not seem like the best moment to share that he is the Messiah? The crowd probably saw this as evidence that the gig was up. Like a criminal who's been caught, here stands Jesus, not putting up a fight and not shouting claims of legitimacy in what he knew were his final hours.

What we now know is that this was not an admission of fraud or guilt, but was a visual of someone who knew what had to be done and was holding up his end of the deal.

Throughout Lent we've been preparing ourselves to understand the weight of Christ's death and resurrection. I hope today's reading can highlight one of the most incredible parts of our Salvation: Knowing that Jesus went willingly to the cross. Note: Jesus did not go joyfully to the cross. Matthew has no mention of skipping or heel-kicks in this passage. But as obvious as the absence of joy is in this story, it's Jesus' lack of a fight that always stands out to me. Despite Pilate's questioning, Jesus never screams his defense. Jesus never tries to run from death because he knew that God would raise him to life everlasting. To the crowd, this solidified Jesus' insanity. But to us, those who carry the legacy of the empty tomb, we know that Jesus was silent because God was speaking.

So, how will we choose to trust in God's promise? Through Easter we know how our stories will end, and yet we still find ourselves screaming and running from life's hardships. I hope we can follow Jesus' lead. That we might be silent when God is trying to speak and that we would live with the utmost confidence in knowing how our stories will end.

## PRAYER

*In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me. (Psalm 31).*

Taylor Boone is the Director of Youth Ministries.

Good Friday, April 7  
John 19:16-38

## REFLECTION

Today is a solemn day. I pray you can claim moments for quiet, for prayer, for grief. Make space to read the scripture slowly. Witness, through the testimony of the author, the crucifixion of our Lord.

Focus in, if you can, on the moment in which Jesus is pierced in the side. We are told that blood and water flow down from the wound. This painful detail is important, for the presence of water confirms to the executioners that their work is complete. After death, water pulls from the cells and runs from a corpse. They do not need to break his legs, Jesus is finished. The pouring out of blood and water also gives opportunity for us to remember who it is that dies here for us. Within this flesh runs water, the most basic element of human life. Jesus, our brother, dies here.

Alongside the stuff of earth flows the divine blood of God. This is the blood of a new covenant poured out for the forgiveness of the sins of many. While the relationship between God and humans had previously been marked by the blood of a sacrificial lamb, for those who follow Jesus a new covenant is poured out from the cross. The sacrifice is God's and through the outpouring of divine blood we receive the forgiveness of our sins.

In the flesh of Jesus God and humanity became one, through the outpouring of water and blood we humans can be joined to God through love and forgiveness.

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus Christ, there are no words which could possibly convey our sorrow and gratitude. Forgive us. Forgive us. Forgive us. By your grace resurrect us from death to new life. Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith is the Senior Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Holy Saturday, April 8  
John 19:39-42 & 1 Peter 3:18-19; 4:5-6

On this day, Christ's body lays cold in the tomb as his spirit preaches the good news in the land of the dead to the spirits in prison.

Pray for the Departed: That as Christ descended into Hades to preach even to the souls in prison, God's mercy might extend even to persons who have left this life, that they might find welcome in God's kingdom. Conclude your prayer by saying:

*O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

**Worship with us at 7:00PM for the Great Vigil of Easter  
(The First Service of Easter)**

Easter Sunday, April 9

Luke 24:1-35

## REFLECTION

**Resurrection.** More intimidating than a dead prophet, social activist, or teacher; Jesus is alive, present, and promises that, because of him and his work, we'll be eternally present with God too.

The women come to the cemetery in the darkness (Where were the male disciples?). Jesus's tomb is empty! They run back to tell the cowering men, "He is risen! The story of Jesus and us isn't over; it's just beginning! Everything's up for grabs."

Response of the male disciples? "You're nuts."

None of the disciples expected the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. Even when resurrected Christ stood before them and led the Bible study, they couldn't see. The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus are mixed with fear, misapprehension, evening meals, locked doors, breakfast on the beach, and the disciples' sexist unwillingness to believe the testimony of women. Even with the risen Christ standing in front of them speaking, some doubted. Mary Magdalene mistook him for a gardener.

God's new age breaking in among us is so new and unexpected that we have trouble figuring it out.

Better than a resuscitation of a dead body, the Resurrection is a vindication of crucified Jesus. Much more than the return of the robin in the spring, the butterfly emerging from the cocoon, or Jesus living on in the disciples' memories, Resurrection is God's great "No!" to the forces of sin and death that nailed Jesus to the cross. The one who forgave his crucifiers, who reached out to sinner and outcast, who stood up to the authorities, and spoke of a world shifting on its axis, the one who invited everybody to jump on board his revolution and was brutally nailed to a cross, that one is the only one God ever raised from the dead.

Easter is God's victory, God's grand self-attestation as if to say, "You want to know who I am, where I'm headed, look to the only one I

ever raised from the dead.” Once you lay aside your prejudices and dare to believe the women running from the tomb, so much about Jesus falls into place. On the other hand, if Jesus has not been resurrected, nothing that the church or Scripture claims about Christ makes sense.

No resurrected Christ, no hope. In his resurrection appearances we learned: It ain’t over between us and God until God says it’s over. Because of Resurrection, Christians don’t do dejection: “People don’t change.” “It’s over and finished.” “Get real.” “Nothing to be done.” If God can raise crucified Jesus, never again can we be sure what’s impossible. Jesus is alive and busy, our labors are not the sole effort, and death never gets the last word. A resurrected God keeps insisting on bringing something fresh into every situation, even the worst. The God of the Exodus and the homecoming after Israel’s exile loves to surprise.

What’s the first thing done by the risen Christ? He goes looking for his dimwitted disciples, returning to the same knuckleheads who betrayed and disappointed him. One would think that on the first day of your resurrected life you would burst into the palace in Jerusalem saying, “Pilate. You made a big mistake. Now it’s payback time.” No, the risen Christ returns to Galilee, land of origin of his disciples. They didn’t go looking for him; once again, he turns to them and then turned them out into the whole world.

That’s why we have never known how to take the risen Christ’s words, “I am with you always.” Promise or threat? It’s as if Christ says, “I had but a few years to harass you before I was murdered. After resurrection, I am with you always. You’ll never be able to get God off your back.”

The Easter mandate? “Go! Tell somebody!”

## PRAYER

*Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!*

Bishop William H. Willimon served as the United Methodist Bishop of Birmingham (North Alabama Conference) from 2004-2012. He now serves as a Professor at Duke Divinity School.

Monday, April 10

Thank you for joining us through this season of repentance, fasting & prayer. It is our prayer that through these scriptures, hymns, devotions, and prayers your faith has been deepened and you now enter the Easter season with joy & thanksgiving!

Our next Wesley Freedom Daily Devotional Guide will be published for the Christian season of Advent (Sunday, December 3, 2023 – Christmas Day, Monday, December 25, 2023). If you would like to join our team of devotion authors, we would love to work with you! Pastor Ian is happy to provide any help or guidance you may require. Your voice will be a blessing to the congregation. If you are interested in joining the team, email Pastor Ian at [icollier@wesleyfreedom.org](mailto:icollier@wesleyfreedom.org).

While this season of daily devotions are coming to an end, know that Wesley Freedom continues to produce a weekly devotional with daily readings & reflections year-round! Print copies can be found on the back of each week's Sunday worship bulletin and digital copies are sent out to our Wesley Freedom Devotionals email list. You can subscribe at [wesleyfreedom.org/devotion](http://wesleyfreedom.org/devotion).

In the coming week, consider continuing your devotional practice with these daily readings:

- Monday: Philippians 2:1-11
- Tuesday: Romans 6:3-11
- Wednesday: 1 Corinthians 15:12-34
- Thursday: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58
- Friday: 1 Thessalonians 4:12-18
- Saturday: Sabbath

May God bless you, now and always.

Happy Easter! Christ is Risen! Hallelujah!

Rev. Ian Collier  
Associate Pastor & Editor, Wesley Freedom Devotionals

Coming April 2023!

## Everyday Resurrections: Living Easter In Daily Life

Easter celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead but what hope does this Resurrection bring to our daily lives? Join us AFTER Easter as we seek to claim the power of the Resurrected Christ to break free from tired patterns of the past and into new abundant life.

*If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also. ~ Romans 8:11*

Sunday Worship Beginning April 16th

- 8:00AM – Traditional Service with Holy Communion
- 9:30AM – Traditional Service with Sunday School & Nursery Care
- 11:00AM – Contemporary Service with Nursery Care & Children's Breakout Opportunities

Learn more about all of our in-person & online worship opportunities at [wesleyfreedom.org/worship](http://wesleyfreedom.org/worship)

