

40 Days of Grace

2022

Wesley Freedom  
Lent Devotional



# Holy Week 2022

April 10 - 16th

## **Palm Sunday, April 10**

8:00, 9:30, 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 (8:00am & 11:00am) or their Sunday School classroom (9:30am).

## **Holy Thursday, April 14**

Traditional Communion Service - 12:00PM (Sanctuary)

This is a simple service of mid-day prayer, scripture, song, and communion. All are welcome; no pre-registration required.

## Holy Thursday Last Supper Experiences

- 5:00PM – 6:30PM (Community Life Center)
- 7:00PM – 8:30PM (Community Life Center)

As Jesus gathered his disciples, so we will gather around tables to share a fellowship meal. As we eat, our confirmands will immerse us in the flavors, sights, smells, and dialogue of the Last Supper. Following the meal we will gather in the sanctuary to share Holy Communion and prayer. All ages are encouraged.

Pre-Registration Required at [wesleyfreedom.org/lent](https://wesleyfreedom.org/lent)

## Good Friday, April 15

- 12:00PM – Traditional Service
- 7:00PM – Traditional Service (with nursery)

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, registration appreciated at [wesleyfreedom.org/lent](http://wesleyfreedom.org/lent)

# EASTER

## *Services*

Saturday, April 16th & Sunday, April 17

- **Saturday Night, 7:00pm Easter Eve (April 16th)**  
Holy days begin at sundown! Worship according to the ancient tradition of the church by celebrating Easter on Saturday night and be the first to celebrate resurrection!
- **6:30a.m. Sunrise Communion Service**  
We begin in the warmth of the sanctuary and move outside to celebrate communion at sunrise.
- **8:00a.m. Traditional Communion Service**  
With brass. All the grandeur of Easter morning just ahead of the crowd!
- **9:30a.m. Traditional Easter Service**  
Brass and choir & Sunday School through 5th grade
- **11:00a.m. Contemporary Easter Celebration**

## Members and Friends of Wesley Freedom,

Welcome to Wesley Freedom's 2022 Lent Devotional. Each weekday of Lent you will find a daily scripture reading, a reflection on that reading, and a brief prayer. On Sunday, you are encouraged to worship with Wesley Freedom. The reflection on Wednesdays will include a poem and reflection questions written by Bishop La'Trelle Miller Easterling in her Lenten study, *Speak A Word*. Saturdays will be a day of rest and have no readings or reflections.

The Lenten season is the forty-day season of repentance, enhanced spiritual devotion, and preparation before the great celebration of Easter. We are reminded in the United Methodist Ash Wednesday service:

*"Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: the early Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church that before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation.*

*During this season converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to participation in the life of the Church. In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith.*

*I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word."*

As we enter the Lenten season and focus on preparing ourselves to observe the holiest days of the year which mark our remembrance of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is our prayer that this devotional guide written by the staff, members, and friends of Wesley Freedom UMC might be a helpful aide to this holy season.

In Christ,  
Pastor Jenny & Pastor Ian

## A Note on the Letters of St. Paul

As we continue in our year-long sermon series preaching through the Christian Scriptures, we have come to the section of the New Testament containing the Epistles – letters – of the Apostles to the first Christian communities. Throughout Lent we will be preaching through some of the Letters of St. Paul and these letters make up the content of the majority of this Devotional's daily readings after the First Sunday of Lent.

As you read these books, remember that we are reading someone else's mail; we are eavesdropping on conversations between a Pastor and his congregations in the 50s and 60s AD. Much like our own experience as Christians living in a multi-cultural world, the Christians Paul was writing to were dealing with challenging social, economic, political, and religious pressures, and they were trying to apply the Good News of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to their daily lives. In some places, you will see Paul call his congregations to radical departures from their cultures, and in other places it seems like the cultural assumptions of Paul's day are left unquestioned, even when today we have come to the realization that the Gospel demands that those former cultural assumptions be changed or abolished (I'm thinking here of things like Paul's tacit endorsement of slavery as a practice).

Much like the Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job), the Epistles record the ways that faithful men and women wrestled with the implications of God's action – here, the gracious adoption of the world as siblings of Christ – a wrestling that we all continue today. I hope you will find some kinship with the communities Paul was writing to and learn from their struggles. I pray that we can all reflect on the places that we still struggle to apply the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our lives, those places where we have taken it a step further than even the communities in Paul's day, and those places where we might have backslidden.

As always, my prayers are with you.

~Pastor Ian

Ash Wednesday, March 2

[Mark 10:32-52](#)

## REFLECTION

The Ash Wednesday service begins our Lenten season with haunting words of mortality – ‘You are dust, and to dust you will return. Repent and believe the Gospel.’ After having spent such a long time reading through the Gospels this winter and then transitioning into hearing about the incredible actions of the Apostles, it is tempting to hear the victorious proclamation of eternal life through Christ and choose to only listen to the promise of sharing in God’s glory. And to be clear, this glory *is* the sure promise of God. Victory *is* assured and God *has* destined all of us who believe in Christ to become like Christ when we are resurrected from the dead. However, solely focusing on glory is a trap when it means we overlook how that glory was won.

In today’s reading, James and John fall into the trap of setting their eyes so intently on the promised horizon that they fail to comprehend what is right in front of them. Between them and glory was the cross – both Christ’s own crucifixion, and the way that James & John themselves would need to be symbolically drink of Christ’s cup and go through their own suffering and death – and the judgment of God regarding their place in the Kingdom.

Lent is a reminder that our faith is not one where we say magic words and then get to live an easy life or become immortal. Rather, having faith in Christ means living as those prepared to experience hardship, prepared to die, and prepared to face the judgment of God. Jesus coached the disciples to prepare by becoming the servants of all.

How are you preparing your soul for the day that your mortal flesh will return to dust and your soul will stand before the judgment seat of God?

## PRAYER

*O God, maker of every thing and judge of all that you have made, from the dust of the earth you have formed us and from the dust of the earth you would raise us up. By the redemptive power of the cross, create in us clean hearts and put within us a new spirit, that we may repent of our sins and lead lives worthy of your calling; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (UMH #353)*

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

Thursday, March 3

[Matthew 4:1-17](#)

## REFLECTION

On this second day of Lent, we read of Jesus who was led by the Spirit into the desert for 40 days. We are told at the onset that this journey will involve being tempted by the devil. Jesus, likely knowing that a trial was approaching, prepares by fasting. When the devil appears on day 40, Jesus is hungry, but he is not weak. The devil taunts Jesus about his choice to deny himself of sustenance saying, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” The devil insinuates that power is displayed through miraculous acts. Jesus replies, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone.’” Those with true power don’t need to show off, power is exhibited in restraint, in discipline, and total surrender to God. Jesus knew from 40 days of fasting that he did not need bread or anything else the devil had to offer. Fasting from food or other significant things is a way to cut off our dependence on earthly things in order to remember our dependence on God alone.

This Lent, how will you observe the fast? I challenge you to avoid giving up trivial things as this is more of a show than a discipline. For example, when I was 12 I gave up makeup; the pandemic has taught me I never need makeup again. Rather, observe a fast, give up something that you depend on, something you crave, something that may be squeezing God out as your source of courage and comfort. In this, you will be forced to intentionally shift your dependence onto Christ. You may choose to fast every day of Lent or to set a day of the week for fasting. Following the practice of John Wesley and the early Methodists you may wish to join me in fasting on Wednesdays from sunup to sundown.

While we are considering what we will set aside, Jesus reminds us clearly what we are to depend on; we CAN live on “every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus Christ, you fasted for 40 days and in the strength of the Holy Spirit overcame every temptation. Lead me into these 40 days; prompt me to choose a discipline that will challenge me to more fully depend on you. Help me understand your word so that you can be my daily bread. Amen.*

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

Friday, March 4

[Luke 10:38-42](#)

## REFLECTION

Two days ago, we observed the annual ritual of Ash Wednesday. Facing the reminder of our sinfulness and mortality, we confessed our shortcomings. Receiving the assurance of God's forgiveness, we made commitments. You may have had some success abstaining from sin on Wednesday while you wore the sign of the cross on your forehead. But if you are at all like me, then today you probably have a few more things you need to confess. It is tempting to obsess over every tiny detail of our lives and behavior in an attempt to be perfect, to do no harm at all, and to do only good. But then, when we inevitably fail, we can either fall into guilt, or into hopelessness. We say, "Why try if I know I will fail?"

This story reminds us of that which is truly important in the Lent season. Martha, in her efforts toward hospitality, forgets the focus of her hospitality: Jesus. Likewise, for us, confession, repentance, and self-denial are a means to an end; they are not the point. All of these spiritual practices are intended to bring us closer to Jesus. If you find yourself thinking more about the sin you have done than the Savior who has forgiven you, have you truly received forgiveness? In two more days, we will gather together to worship on the first Sunday of Lent. Let go of your sins, not for their sake, but to open your hands to receive the gift of Christ's presence.

## PRAYER

*God, forgive me for the wrong I have done and the good I have failed to do. Help me trust in Your forgiveness, so that I can live every moment of every day in Your presence. Amen.*

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship at Wesley Freedom UMC



Saturday, March 5  
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, March 6

Worship with us at 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(11:00am Worship Live Stream 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, March 7

[Romans 3:9-4:25](#) (focus on Romans 3:9-31)

## REFLECTION

This Lent we have a challenge ahead of us. We will read the letters the Apostle Paul wrote to some of the first churches. We begin this week with Romans, a book which shares the heart of Paul's message of salvation by grace through faith. As you read each letter, consider the context in which Paul is writing. He is both seeking to form the church's beliefs and help them find ways to follow Jesus amid a complicated, often hostile, culture.

Our starting place can either be read as an insult or a relief, "**All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.**" This is an important place to begin our journey in grace. We need God's grace because on our own we fall into selfish or disruptive behaviors and mindsets. The Law, when carefully interpreted, can help us know what is right but that doesn't give us the will or the power to always DO what's right. In and of ourselves, we humans are selfish and our character flaws and ignorance cause harm even when that is not our intent. Paul is not pointing the finger at any one of us, but rather lifting up for all of us our shared need for God's grace.

This leads to the good news: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **and are justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus offers redemption from sin into a right relationship with God. We are justified, made right with God, by God's grace alone. We cannot earn this gift, but we can receive it.

## PRAYER EXERCISE

If possible, steal some time away outside or in a quiet place. Consider today the character flaws and selfish choices that cause you to fall short of loving God, loving yourself, and loving your neighbors well. Coming out of denial into reality about ourselves is not an exercise in self-hate but rather an opportunity to experience relief. Offer this, the worst of yourself to God, and ask God to forgive you of all sin and failures. Ask God to justify you, to restore you to a right relationship with God. Give thanks for God's grace, his unmerited kindness, that makes this gift possible. Finally, welcome the Holy Spirit to continue working in you that over time your thoughts, words, and actions will become as right as God has already declared you to be.

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

Tuesday, March 8

[Romans 6-7](#)

## REFLECTION

As we journey toward Jerusalem during this season of Lent, it is an ideal time to evaluate our present lives as followers of Christ. In Romans 6, Paul explains that we have been made dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus.

Just as plants find new life in spring after being buried in winter's cold, Jesus' resurrection offers us new life. The chains of sin and death have been broken, and we have been given the choice of wallowing in sin or living alive in Christ.

Once we accept Jesus as our Savior, we no longer need to obey the Devil, but have been enabled to pledge our allegiance to Christ the Lord. We are no longer under the Law but are now under the grace of God. By saying "no" to sin and "yes" to the Almighty, we are free to live a life in Christ.

Even though sin no longer has a hold on us, this is often not our experience in life. We are constantly being tempted by the world around us and by our own desires. When we submit ourselves completely to God, we need to resist the thoughts and actions that lead us away from God. And, when we do stray from righteousness, we need to seek God's forgiveness and accept it when God showers us with grace.

As we choose to give ourselves completely to Jesus, we need to seek the presence of God in everything we do, say, and think; praying for guidance, studying God's Word, serving others, and praising and loving God with our whole hearts.

## PRAYER

*Precious Lord, help us always to choose You. In the darkness, help us to see Your Light. In Your brightness, help us always to praise you. In Jesus' loving name, we pray. Amen*

Lorena Stone is a member of Wesley Freedom UMC and a discussion group leader for the Wesley Wednesday Disciple Bible Study

Wednesday, March 9

[Numbers 21:4-9 & John 3:1-21](#)

*From* Week 1: Seek Truth *of the* Speak A Word 2022 Lenten Study

“No More Masks”

God of Truth,

What would happen if we removed our masks?

If we removed our masks and stood  
in truth before you?

If we removed our masks and stood  
in truth before one another?

If we removed our masks and stood  
in truth before the mirror?

Strengthen our faith that we might know the  
burden of the mask is unnecessary before you.

Reveal the joy that could be ours if we really accepted others as you created  
them.

Encourage our hearts that we might understand  
the shalom of loving our true selves.

No more masks. Amen.

– by Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling, October 31, 2014

Moment of Reflection:

Nicodemus comes seeking light, even as he uses darkness as a cover. Do you ever wrestle between darkness and light? What is one area in your life in which you hide your true self by putting on a mask or cover? How does this mask separate you from who God intends you to be?

Thursday, March 10

[Romans 8](#)

REFLECTION

The season of Lent is a time of purposeful reflection, repentance, and preparation leading up to the celebration of Easter and the hope of the risen Christ. In the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul writes a hopeful and hope-filled message to his readers concerning the basic doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul explains first that, for believers, there is a new life in the Spirit and that this Spirit has set us free. Secondly, Paul writes that there is a Spirit of adoption for the children of God, who are now "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). Thirdly and lastly in chapter 8, Paul writes of the Spirit of glory. This is the believer's hope of glory, knowing that God has given his Spirit as the guarantee for our redemption.

So, our hope is in the promise that through God all things work for our good. As Paul writes in concluding this chapter: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

This Lenten season, we do well to reflect on our new life in the Holy Spirit, how this powerful force makes us children of God, and thus how we have hope in our glory, now and in the kingdom to come. The Protestant reformer Martin Luther wrote of this chapter, "The Holy Spirit assures us that we are God's children no matter how furiously sin may rage within us, so long as we follow the Spirit and struggle against sin in order to kill it." The 40 days of Lent reflect Christ's season of sacrifice and withdrawal in the desert culminating in the celebration of Easter, the hope of resurrection life.

PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, This Lenten season, give our minds new understandings of your redemptive work through your son Jesus Christ, and refresh our spirits with the new life you gave through your Holy Spirit to set us free. Let the power of the cross flow freely through us so that we may enjoy our new lives as your children, through Christ's Easter sacrifice. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

Robert & Gina Jacoby are members of Wesley Freedom UMC and discussion group leaders for the Wesley Wednesday Disciple Bible Study

Friday, March 11

[Romans 12-13](#)

## REFLECTION

The most important word in this reading, in my opinion, is the very first one: “Therefore.” The implication of this word is that everything that follows is caused by everything that comes before. Chapters twelve and thirteen of Paul’s Letter to the Romans go into great detail about who we ought to be as Christians and how we ought to live as the Church. But as you read, keep in mind, as many bible teachers have said, “What’s the ‘therefore’ there for?”

We have spent the week reading Paul’s theology of human sin and Christ’s ultimate redemption. Today’s reading reminds us that our salvation is not the end of the story, but a new beginning. We are called to worship, not just by showing up to church on Sunday mornings, not just by singing songs and listening to scripture and preaching, and not just by putting a portion of our money in an offering plate. We are called to worship through the sacrifice of our entire lives, as we submit ourselves to be transformed by Christ’s sacrifice for us. Knowing what Christ has done for us, how can we offer back anything less?

## PRAYER

*Thank you, God, for your free gift of forgiveness and love offered in the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus. I offer myself back to you. Transform me in your image, so that I can offer love and forgiveness to all. Amen.*

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship at Wesley Freedom UMC

Saturday, March 12  
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 13

Worship with us at 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(11:00am Worship Live Stream 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 14

[1 Corinthians 2-3](#)

REFLECTION

Who can help us understand? Where does true wisdom come from? Whether we are wrestling to understand a scripture or seeking to figure out how to respond to the people around us, we spend much of our lives searching for understanding.

Paul begins his First Letter to the Corinthians by telling us what we already painfully know: human wisdom is limited. In light of this, we are encouraged to seek the wisdom that the Spirit alone can give. Those who follow Christ are given the Spirit of God, which is a perpetual source of wisdom. It's especially powerful to hear in 1 Cor 2:16 that with the Spirit's help we can develop "the mind of Christ." We know that our mindset makes a huge impact on how we make decisions and, ultimately, on the outcomes of our life. Therefore, there could be no greater gift of discernment than developing the "mind of Christ."

Before this conversation starts to feel too philosophical, we read chapter 3. It seems that those in the church who could have the "mind of Christ" have become fools because their minds are set on worldly matters. They are acting like "mere men." We might recognize some of their mindsets and behaviors: jealousy, quarreling, divisiveness. Paul explains that they are coming apart because they are building their lives on worldly understandings. They are fighting over which group they are a part of and arguing over which of their leaders is the best. We see here that believers will lack clarity and the church will come apart if we don't continually ask the Holy Spirit to instill in us the mind of Christ.

What is the most challenging situation or the biggest question in your life? Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you in wisdom and give you "the mind of Christ." Where do you see the church seeking the Spirit or becoming foolish? What are the outcomes?

PRAYER

*Holy Spirit, lead us towards wisdom. Where we are ignorant or misguided, correct us. Give us the mind of Christ that we can think and act in ways that bring you glory and build your community. Protect our church from foolishness. Give us discipline to seek and understand your wisdom. Amen.*

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



Tuesday, March 15

[1 Corinthians 8-9](#)

REFLECTION

Though decisions we may make are acceptable, are they helpful? I suggest this passage indicates the Christian's self-sacrificing role is to show God's compassion through our actions toward others. This, simply, is an obligation for us who claim the love of God. With God's help, we can discern appropriate sacrifice; however, we recognize this task is a challenge in which we will fail repeatedly. Sacrificing our liberties for the sake of others is unlikely to come naturally.

I (Eric) am a professor, teaching some of the most sensitive courses our institution offers. When students are understandably uncomfortable engaging with course material, I remind them of Martin Luther (the Catholic priest turned leader of the Protestant Reformation). Luther encouraged his followers to "sin boldly." I do the same in higher education. I tell my students that we are going to make mistakes, we do not have the answers, and we will, undoubtedly, inappropriately speak for theorists.

I challenge us to acknowledge the commonality in the classroom – imperfection – is similar within the church. In the church, our ideas of "sin[ning] boldly" are more specific and certainly definite. Through God's discernment, we acknowledge our judgment is inevitably flawed. However, we are comforted when we realize God recognizes our mortality, yet provides grace and wisdom. We can be bold to accept such divine compassion. We find comfort in the metaphorical idea of boldly sinning by collaboratively learning, caring, and sacrificing. The importance of Luther's challenge is a call for us to recognize our arrogance, our imperfections, and rest in this new-found commission.

PRAYER

*In the words of Martin Luther, help us to "be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly. For [you are] victorious over sin, death, and the world." We acknowledge your grace completes our broken cycle of imperfection and compels us to sacrifice.*

Eric & Brooke Hess are members of Wesley Freedom UMC. Eric serves on the Leadership Development Team and is a Lay Delegate to Annual Conference.

Wednesday, March 16

[Exodus 17:1-7 & John 4:1-42](#)

*From* Week 2: Trust in Provision *of the* Speak A Word 2022 Lenten Study

“You Have Always Made Provision”

Darkness covered the face of the deep and  
Nothing that is formed had been formed as chaos loomed,  
And you called forth order and light and seasons and life.  
You have always made provision, and yet I doubt.

Manna rained down from the heavens and  
Water sprang forth from impervious rock  
In the desert places you provided succor for life.  
You have always made provision, and yet I grumble against you.

Enemies pursued and encamped around me  
As the hoofbeat of horses and the breath of death was hot on my back  
You parted the waters into walls of safe passage on dry ground.  
You have always made provision, and yet I lack faith.

Judgment rose against the rejected and the sting of exclusion pierced the heart  
Seeking the solace of the solitary and yet imprisoned within the same  
You cast aside custom and transcended tradition to see me and speak truth into my life.  
You have always made provision, and yet I lose hope.

You have always made provision  
You are making provision  
You will always make provision

May I learn to trust you as Jehovah Jireh.  
May I learn to have confidence in your provision.  
May I learn to tell others of your constant providence.

– by Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling

Moment of Reflection:

Where in your life have you grumbled against God? Do you trust that God is present when difficulties arise in your life? What are you really thirsting for in this season; what are you bringing to Jesus at the well?

Thursday, March 17

[1 Corinthians 15](#)

REFLECTION

“Christ rose first; then when Christ comes back, all his people will become alive again.” (1 Corinthians 15:23 TLB)

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us of the Good News, the resurrection truth: Jesus lives! Paul recalls the facts: Jesus Christ died on the cross, was buried in a tomb, and God raised him from the grave three days later. He was seen by more than 500 people, including Paul himself.

The resurrection truth: Jesus lives, and he is the first of millions who will come back to life again someday. He promises to come back for us; and when he returns, all of his people will become alive again. There will be victory. Jesus will win the battle against all enemies, even death, and God will reign supreme. Our earthly bodies will transform into super-natural, spiritual bodies that will live forever. Sin will be gone.

There is power in understanding the resurrection truth. Jesus lives and he’s coming back to set us free!

PRAYER

*Dear Heavenly Father, I praise You for Your Almighty power that raised Jesus from His death. Thank You for the miracle of life; abundant life here on earth, and eternal life with You in Heaven. Fill me with your Holy Spirit, Lord, and help me shine Your light every day as I seek You. Today, I say with the Apostle Paul, “Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?” In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Mary Poston is a member of Wesley Freedom UMC and teaches the 3-year-old Sunday School class

Friday, March 18

[2 Corinthians 4-5](#)

REFLECTION

“All these pieces, broken and scattered / in mercy gathered, mended and whole / Empty handed, but not forsaken / I’ve been set free, I’ve been set free”

These words open the song, “[Broken Vessels](#)”, by worship leaders Jonas Myrin and Joel Houston of Hillsong Church in Australia. They bring us to a familiar place, in the aftermath of tragedy, of failure, and of loss, remembering the grace of God that helps put us back together. You may find yourself in need of being gathered and mended as you read this today. If not, you can surely remember a time when you were. Our reading from Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians gives us hope that our human weakness and finitude are not impediments to God’s work in and through us. Rather, God chooses us because of our weakness, so that through us God’s perfection can be seen more clearly. This power is “from God and not from us” (2 Cor 4:7). As the second verse of the song puts it:

“You take our failure, You take our weakness / You set Your treasure in jars of clay / So take this heart, Lord, I’ll be Your vessel / The world to see, Your life in me”

Even in our limitations, we are not limited in our capacity to share God’s light and love and life with others.

PRAYER

*God, I feel broken, flawed, and inadequate for the mission to which You have called me. Show your power in my weakness, and your perfection in my imperfection, so that the world will see You glorified through me. Amen.*

Dan Eschlman is the Director of Worship at Wesley Freedom UMC

Saturday, March 19  
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 20

Worship with us at 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(11:00am Worship Live Stream 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 21

[Galatians 1-2](#) (focus on 2:20-21)

## REFLECTION

This week we read the letter of Paul to the churches in the province of Galatia. Paul was the planting pastor of these churches. He and his companions had shared the Gospel with them based on what Paul had discovered in his own conversion experience (Acts 9). We do not enter into relationship with God by perfectly adhering to the Law of Moses, but rather by God's grace and initiative. This salvation which is given by grace and received through faith sets the believer free from having to earn righteousness through the requirements of the Law.

Paul has learned that teachers have come to Galatia who are imposing requirements of the Law, such as circumcision, on the Gentiles. Paul is furious. He sees this "Judaizing" as a way the religious are seeking to control the new converts, get them to conform to the former practices, and rob them of the freedom.

In Chapter 2, Paul explains that he has seen this before. Titus, his companion, had been led to be circumcised even though he was a Greek. St. Peter, who had a clear vision from God that he was permitted to eat with Gentiles, was drawing back and separating himself from the Gentiles because those in the "circumcision group" were judging his behavior. Here we discover what is really at stake. Why does it matter if we fall back under the Law instead of being led by the Spirit? Because this will disrupt our own understanding of being saved, not by our works, but by grace. AND because our witness is to invite people into freedom with Christ. If following the Law creates barriers between us and "the Gentiles" and heaps up requirements on their conversion, the "good news" will rarely be shared.

Throughout this week consider what it means to you to live according to grace rather than according to the Law. How does this understanding impact how you interact with and share your faith with others?

## PRAYER

*Almighty God, keep me focused on your gift upon the cross that my actions and my witness may not be influenced by the judgment of humans nor the requirements of the Law but rather steered by your grace and your example. Amen.*

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

Tuesday, March 22

[Galatians 3-4](#)

REFLECTION

From the moment we are born, we are seeking love and belonging. Some are blessed with a strong, caring family, surrounded by a supportive community, and are introduced to Jesus at an early age. Some seek that love and belonging through misguided adventures and damaging relationships. We often function within a law-based system where love and acceptance are given based on how you perform and how well you live up to expectations. We tend to judge ourselves using those same parameters and deem ourselves as unworthy and unlovable. Setting ourselves up for an unhealthy pattern of failure and rejection. Jesus came to reverse that pattern.

Philip Yancy writes, “Grace does not depend on what we have done for God but rather what God has done for us. Ask people what they must do to get to heaven and most reply, “Be good.” Jesus’ stories contradict that answer. All we must do is cry, “Help!””

Paul is writing to the Galatians as a community. He is guiding them to embrace a new understanding of their relationship with God through Jesus. For me, community is essential. As an individual, I have professed my faith in Jesus. However, it has been within this community of faith that I have grown. It is where I have been challenged, been given new perspectives, gleaned new understandings, been held accountable and loved. Grace in community is an essential part of my faith.

Since reading this scripture, the song by Sister Sledge “We are Family” keeps playing in my head. What a tremendous thing to be adopted by God! Through our adoption God accepts us, he embraces us, and he lays before us all the promises he made to Abraham. We are indeed family when we accept Jesus Christ into our lives. Brene Brown states it beautifully, “When you get to a place where you understand that love and belonging, your worthiness, is a birth right and not something you have to earn, anything is possible.”

PRAYER

*Gracious God, we are thankful for your Grace. Help us to reflect that Grace to others as we strive to grow in faith building a community centered on your son, Jesus. Amen*

Sherry Perrine is the Director of Children & Family Ministries at Wesley Freedom UMC

Wednesday, March 23

[Isaiah 35:4-7a & John 9:1-42](#)

*From* Week 3: Anticipate Healing *of the* Speak A Word 2022 Lenten Study

“Master Healer”

God of All Healing,  
You who knit us together in the womb of a woman,  
fashioning our bodies in intricate ways –  
fearfully and wonderfully made,  
bearers of the image and likeness of the Creator,  
temples of the Holy One –  
you know every cell and sinew.

When we long for healing beyond the bounds of  
human hands and medicine,  
beyond the threshold of disease and diagnosis,  
we turn to you.

You are the Master Healer.

When you touch we are healed.  
When you touch we are whole.  
When you touch we are restored.

Touch, God of all healing, touch. Amen.

– by Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling, April 29, 2014

Moment of Reflection:

What restoration and healing are you longing for? What healing is necessary in the community around you and in the world? Where do our eyes need to be opened to fuller understanding of God’s intention for the beloved community?



Thursday, March 24

[Galatians 5](#)

REFLECTION

When I first read Galatians 5, it sounded to me like Paul was angry with the Galatians since they were still following the old traditions and customs when the old Law had been replaced by “this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Galatians 5:14). He was telling the Galatians that because they are free, they no longer have to follow the old laws like circumcision. But Paul also was also concerned with Galatians not following any laws at all. He reminds the Galatians that just because they now have this new freedom, it doesn’t mean that they can take advantage of it to sin. Paul wanted the Galatians to understand that they needed to use their newfound freedom to follow the fruit of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22).

We need to remember this as well so that we, too, are not taking advantage of the freedom that God gives us. As a teenager, my parents give me certain freedoms, but they expect that I will respect, obey, and listen to them in return. I also know that my parents will always love me no matter what I do, but that doesn’t mean I go around getting into trouble everyday just because I can. It’s not much different with God. We know that God will forgive us no matter what, but we can’t sin all the time because of that.

PRAYER

*Dear God, please help us love our neighbors as ourselves. Please help us not provoke others to sin, as well as ourselves. But if we do, we pray that you would forgive us. Amen.*

Anna Gibson is a Youth member of Wesley Freedom UMC

Friday, March 25

[Galatians 6](#)

REFLECTION

How do you measure success in your life? This closing chapter of Paul's Letter to the Galatians calls us to examine our answers to this question. Do we put more value on the outward signs, or the inner reality? In the church, we have often lost our way by measuring the wrong things. As a veteran church leader, I know how often we evaluate ourselves based on the wrong things – the size of our buildings, or our budgets, or the number of people in the pews on Sunday morning. But in reality, the measure of our success is harder to measure, not in rites observed but in lives transformed.

If “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision mean anything” – perhaps the most severe outward transformation possible – how can we trick ourselves into thinking that something as superficial as the life we present for ourselves on social media is worth anything at all? Turn your focus inward, to the true state of your heart. Are you living out the new creation Christ has made in you? If not, what needs to change to make this possible?

PRAYER

*God, transform me from the inside out, so that I can be the person You have called me to be. Help me let go of others' perceptions of me, and trust in Your opinion and no other. Amen.*

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship at Wesley Freedom UMC

Saturday, March 26  
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 27

Worship with us at 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(11:00am Worship Live Stream 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 28

[1 Thessalonians 3-4](#)

REFLECTION

For most of us, when we think about freedom we are talking about the ability to do what we want to do – to fulfill whatever desires we have, to say what we want, to live how we want – without someone else preventing us from doing so. While we accept that living in a society will put some limits on pure freedom insofar as we have to respect the freedoms of others, the core of it remains almost sacrosanct in the American imagination.

However, compared to St. Paul and other ancient moral philosophers, the way modern people think about what it means to have freedom is almost completely upside down. For Paul, the desires we have that do not originate in our rational will (but rather emerge from our flesh) – hunger, wrath, and especially lust – exist in opposition to true freedom. To give into an urge is to surrender the freedom of our will and our rational mind; true freedom only exists for Paul when we have mastery over our own bodies and have dedicated our bodies (along with our hearts and minds) to God.

As you read the passages like today's in which Paul reminds us that for the Christian the only acceptable form of sexual expression is in the context of a marriage, remember that this is one aspect of Paul's larger concern: the dedication to God ("sanctification," lit. making holy) of our flesh, and our freedom from all forces that would seek to limit our freedom – even our own desires.

PRAYER

*Most merciful God, I dedicate myself to you – mind, body, and soul. Put far away from me all wrong desires and give me the strength to live in freedom and not submit myself back to the tyranny of my own fallen flesh from which I have been freed in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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

Tuesday, March 29

[1 Thessalonians 5](#)

REFLECTION

In this passage, Paul is reaching out to the community of believers in Thessalonica, reminding them that they have been given the good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ, and that they are now children of the light. He therefore urges them to encourage and support one another and to build up each other. This includes respecting spiritual leaders, admonishing those who may be idlers or disruptive, encouraging those who are fainthearted, helping the weak, and in everything being patient with everyone.

In our baptismal covenant, when someone is being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all of us, the community of believers at Wesley Freedom UMC, are asked: "Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life and include these persons now before you in your care?"

Our response exemplifies what Paul wants from the believers in Thessalonica and what we are called to do if we follow Christ. We say: "With God's help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround these persons with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be found faithful in their service to others. We will pray for them, that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life."

The key is that we do this "with God's help," in faith, love, and hope: the faith that God is in control, the love that God has for us and that we can therefore show to all people, and the hope of salvation promised to us through Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

*God, grant me patience and help me to encourage my fellow believers through a life of faith, love, and hope. Let my faith in you, the love you have for me, and the hope of salvation I've received through belief and acceptance of Jesus as my Lord and Savior work within me to nourish community among the people at Wesley Freedom, our community, and beyond. Amen.*

Kevin Silberzahn is the Lay Leader of Wesley Freedom UMC

Wednesday, March 30

[Ezekiel 37:1-14 & John 11:1-46](#)

*From* Week 4: Have Hope *of the* Speak A Word 2022 Lenten Study

“Why Is It Well?”

Gracious and Holy God,

As the words rise from my lips  
and fall upon the ears of the world  
I ask myself, “Why is it well with my soul?”

It is well because I have resigned myself  
to the belief that my present circumstances  
will dictate my future or control my destiny?  
No!

It is well because the God I serve intervenes  
in circumstances and turns them into possibilities  
and opportunities not yet envisioned.

It is well because I have accepted that those who  
persecute me will always have the upper hand?  
No!

It is well because the God of deliverance  
has already mapped the course for my  
victory and felled the arrows in flight.

It is well because I have acquiesced to the notion  
that my very being is flawed, detestable, or undesirable?  
No!

It is well because the God of creation has whispered in my ear  
that my being,  
my essence,  
my core,  
is precious, noble, exquisite, beautiful, brilliant and blessed.

It is well because I have believed that joy and security  
will only be mine in the life to come?  
No!

It is well because God has assured me that I will live  
to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

It is well with my soul because today God is able –  
right here and right now –  
to transform and transcend,  
breakthrough and bestow,  
cleanse and create,  
liberate and love.

It is well! Amen.

– by Bishop La'Trelle Miller Easterling, September 16, 2014

Moment of Reflection:

What situation seems dead, dried-up or devoid of possibility in your life? Do you believe God can speak new life into it?

Thursday, March 31

[2 Thessalonians 2](#)

REFLECTION

When reading passages like 2 Thessalonians 2, it can be easy to get bogged down in details – just who is this ‘lawless one’? He’s not Satan since he is mentioned separately. Why is Paul concerned about someone claiming that Christ has already returned in some form? Why is God sending a delusion to people to have them believe what is false and perish?

After re-reading the passage a few times, slowly and carefully, and listening for the word of God to speak about what might be an important part of the passage, it is a bit easier to distill the verses down to something more understandable. If not, then relying on fellow Christians, study groups, and clergy for help may be needed.

At the first read through, these passages created more questions than answers. After re-reading and letting the scripture speak (i.e., listening), the first section was confusing and disheartening, a message that was hard to understand and a lot of talk about deception, destruction, Satan, and the lawless one. And yet, these words serve as cautionary to anyone taking their eyes off Jesus. Troubled times are part of our yesterday, our today, and our tomorrow.

Getting through today and into tomorrow requires remaining steadfast in our faith as expressed through our words and our actions. Reading scripture such as this, and through God’s grace, we have hope, comfort, and strength for each day. And that is the Good News that is finally found in this passage.

PRAYER

*God, thank you for giving us your word, your guide for us. Help us find the truth in it. Help us work with others and together we can follow you more closely. In Jesus name, Amen.*

Mark & Teresa DeVault are members of Wesley Freedom UMC and on the Leadership Team of the South Carroll Food Pantry



Friday, April 1  
[2 Thessalonians 3](#)

## REFLECTION

Almost a month ago, we read the story of Mary and Martha, of how Martha was admonished for working busily when she should have been spending time with Jesus. Now we read a passage from Paul admonishing those who are being “idle and disruptive”, encouraging everyone to “never tire of doing what is good.” What are we to make of this seeming contradiction? Jesus seems to say, “Do less”, but Paul seems to say, “Do more.”

However, we see that the distinction Paul is making is different here. The people who are “idle” are not sitting at the feet of Jesus. Rather, they are being “busybodies,” disrupting the life of the fledgling Christian community in Thessalonica. This gives us a new lens through which to examine ourselves. What is our balance between “hard work” and “idleness”? Rest is a sacred value, embodied in the fifth commandment to “honor the Sabbath and keep it holy.” But we all spend time in non-restful idleness. Did my two hours puzzling over Wordle refresh my soul, bring me closer to Jesus, and renew me for the work I’m called to do? Unlikely. When I spend time with my friends, does our conversation lift us up, or tear others down?

## PRAYER

*God of creation and sabbath, give me discernment to know when to stop, and when to go. Guard me from both non-restful idleness and unhelpful busyness. Forgive my errors, and grant me Your wisdom to do better. Amen.*

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship at Wesley Freedom UMC

Saturday, April 2  
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, April 3

Worship with us at 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(11:00am Worship Live Stream 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, April 4

[Philippians 1-2](#)

## REFLECTION

We often speak about the crucifixion as Christ's sacrifice; and to be sure, laying down his life – God allowing himself to die humanly – so that he could save us from the power of death *is* the biggest sacrifice anyone has ever made in the history of the universe. But sometimes as we approach the cross we forget that Christ's sacrifice did not begin when Judas betrayed him, or at his trial, or when he was nailed to the cross. Christ's sacrifice began when he chose to become human. We are reminded, in what scholars identify as an ancient Christian hymn that Paul seems to be quoting in this letter, that Christ gave up all the glory and power and pleasure that his divine nature afforded him. The word that is used is *kenosis* – literally, pouring out. Christ emptied himself when he became human. Christ's sacrifice began at his conception.

The fact that Christ is God makes his sacrifice to become human and die all the more striking, but it also makes the hope for us as Christians all the greater. The Church Fathers had a concept called *theosis* or divinization. While this literally means “to be made divine,” the idea behind it is that if we are becoming part of the body of Christ, then now that Christ has been re-exalted to his full glory, all of us who are united to him get to share in the glory that he has taken back up. In the incarnation, Christ emptied himself of all but his love so that God's glory could be poured into us now.

This process begins in our earthly life as we share in the mind – the mission, priorities, and character – of Jesus Christ and begin to be transformed to resemble him. It will be completed in the world-to-come when we will become, by the grace of God, what Christ *is* right now in his nature.

## PRAYER

*He left His Father's throne above, So free, so infinite His grace; Emptied Himself of all but love, And bled for Adam's helpless race; 'Tis mercy all, immense and free; For, O my God, it found out me.* (Charles Wesley, *And Can It Be That I Should Gain*)

*Soar we now where Christ has led... Following our exalted Head... Made like him, like him we rise...Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.* (Charles Wesley, *Christ The Lord Is Risen Today*)

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

Tuesday, April 5  
[Philippians 3:1-4:9](#)

## REFLECTION

Philippians has served as a powerful reminder to not allow anxious thoughts to overtake us, as God is here for us to rely on. I especially enjoyed how this passage focuses on prayer in order to further our relationship with Christ. I think that that is what Paul is trying to teach us about the meaning of following Christ – how bringing to God any worries that we have can help us to find everlasting peace.

As I've gotten older, I've understood more and more what the word "peace" means in the context of faith. It's less about our day-to-day worldly struggles and more about the understanding that we can always turn to God in times of hardship. Anxious thoughts seem to be at an all-time high right now due to the pandemic, which makes it even more important that we turn to God. There have been so many times through this pandemic that my situation has seemed hopeless. However, when I turn to God in prayer, I am reminded that nothing in this world is permanent and through him I can get through anything. One day, mask mandates will go away and virtual learning will be a distant memory, but our God will still be there to rely on.

My main take away from this passage is that prayer is the foundation of a strong relationship with God. Prayer allows us to trust in our Lord's plan and ease any of our worries by finding peace through him.

## PRAYER

*Lord, give me the courage to turn to you in times of worry. Allow me to turn to you and your everlasting love to find peace, even when my situation seems endless. I pray that I am reminded that you God are always there for me to rely on.*

Lynsie Szalecki is a Young Adult member of Wesley Freedom and serves on the Church Council

Wednesday, April 6

[1 Kings 17:8-16 & John 12:1-11](#)

*From* Week 5: Love Abundantly *of the* Speak A Word 2022 Lenten Study

“Your Extravagant Love”

Good and Gracious God,

Your extravagant love is poured over my life as a balm,  
as a salve to heal my brokenness and restore my joy.  
Even as death encircled me and my very breath was being stripped away,  
your love saved me.

Your extravagant love provided abundance in my deepest hour of need.  
As I laid awake and heavy burdened by the weight and worry of  
    Hunger without sufficient food  
    Diagnosis but no means for care  
    Impending storms and insufficient shelter  
your love restored me.

Your extravagant love performed miracles when  
mountains seemed too high and valleys appeared too low.  
As circumstances became challenges and challenges became crises  
you took notice of my despair and spoke calm over my life,  
your love blessed me.

Your extravagant love calls me to a life of extravagant praise  
    my tongue extols your greatness  
    my knees bend in adoration  
    my feet dance in gratitude  
    my whole being praises your holy name!

Your extravagant love is my all and all.

– by Bishop La'Trelle Miller Easterling, January 12, 2013

Moment of Reflection:

The widow named her burdens – "only a handful of flour in a jar and a bit of oil in a bottle...We'll eat the last of the food and then die." Name your burdens and also where you see signs of God's abundant love.

Thursday, April 7

[Philippians 4:10-23](#)

## REFLECTION

George Bernard Shaw famously quoted, “Youth is wasted on the young,” referring to the wisdom which is gained throughout life as the body gets older while a person has less time to benefit from it. I heard this quote in my twenties and I didn’t get it. Now in my fifties, I get it. Age and experience change your vision of life. Struggles, as well as successes, can transform your view of faith and God.

In Philippians 4, Paul wrote about his experience of the extreme downside of life, as well as prosperity. He tells the Philippians that having God centered in your life provides not only contentment, but more strength in the dark and more joy in the light. There was a time when my own power and control seemed to be withering along with any comfort appropriate to my situation. So, I shifted, turning to God for strength and support, gaining a sense of peace and contentment through the difficult as well as joy filled moments. Paul gives us hope and comfort to the point where we wish we could re-live our youth with this newfound wisdom about God and his power and provision. Imagine if we could visit our younger selves armored with Philippians 4, especially 4:13 *I can do all this through him who gives me strength*. Paul states that we can do hard things, handle challenges, stay humble in prosperity and be content in our lives. Wisdom that is valuable at any age.

I am reminded of another quote made famous by Bette Davis: “Growing old is not for sissies.” This may be the case but having the love and strength of God centered in our lives will ease any burdens that age may bring.

## PRAYER

*Dear Lord, thank you for being my strength, peace, and comfort. I look to you when I am challenged and anxious and when I am prospering and filled with joy. You are the center of my life and you bring me contentment in any situation. I pray for the wisdom to remember all that you are in my life. Amen.*

Cindy Shruell is the Front Office Assistant at Wesley Freedom UMC

Friday, April 8

[Luke 19:28-40](#)

## REFLECTION

Our passage today is Luke's version of the Palm Sunday story. This story appears in all four gospels, but Luke includes a brief dialogue the others omit. As the crowds shout their "hosanna"-s and "blessed be"-s, the religious leaders pull Jesus aside and tell him to rebuke the crowd, clearly incensed at the blasphemy of Jesus being the object of the crowd's adoration. Jesus replies cryptically, "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." Jesus is the culmination of the religion embodied by the stones of the Jerusalem temple, whether the crowds, or the Pharisees, or you and I recognize him as such.

In two days, we will begin the observance of Holy Week, containing the lowest and highest points of the Christian year. We will join our voices with the crowd to shout "Hosanna!", and then, just a few days later, find that same crowd shouting "Crucify!" Make worship a priority in your life this week- the more you engage with the "lows" of Holy Week, the more spiritual blessing you will gain from the "high" of Easter Sunday.

## PRAYER

*Holy God, free me from distraction as I prepare to commemorate Your triumphant entry into the Holy City, your last dinner with your friends, your betrayal, arrest, and death, and your glorious resurrection. Help me to worship You in spirit and in truth, Jesus the Christ, God's Son, the savior of all humankind. Amen.*

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship at Wesley Freedom UMC

Saturday, April 9  
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 10

Worship with us at 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(11:00am Worship Live Stream 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 11

[John 12:20-50](#)

## REFLECTION

The energy and anticipation in Jerusalem must have been building. Yesterday's grand procession into the city at last elevated Jesus to influencer status. Many in the city, especially the disciples, were eager to see what he would do next. Would he leverage the affection of the crowd to raise an army to liberate the Jews and their beloved Jerusalem from Roman occupation? Would he use the power that allowed him to raise Lazarus from the dead to bring down the oppressive government or the hypocritical religious system? Based on what they had seen, Jesus could do anything he chose, and his followers were eager to watch him, and be with him, as he rose in power.

In today's passage Jesus assures his followers that this is the time for him to enter his glory, but the road to liberation will be through his death and resurrection. Jesus acknowledges that his soul is troubled as the time for his suffering draws near, but he surrenders to the reason for which he came to live among us. He comes not to judge us, but to lay down his life to save us.

Jesus seems to recognize how very difficult this pathway is to comprehend. He asks his followers to follow and trust him. Throughout his earthly life, and especially through his suffering, Jesus shows us what it looks like to "walk in the light". The darkness of human sin will be heavy over the next few days and evident in the words and actions of so many. But Jesus resists the darkness; his absolute surrender to God's will and his resolve to love even in the face of hate reveals the resilience of the light. Jesus will lay down his life out of love for us and then take it up again in order to defeat evil, sin, and death. Only through death and resurrection can Jesus reveal the absolute victory of the God of light.

This Holy week, pay attention to Jesus' words and actions that you might learn what it looks like to "walk in the light."

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus Christ, you shine light and love in the face of darkness and hate. Give us courage to walk in the light, even when those steps require sacrifice, that we can be a part of your victory over darkness. Amen.*

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

Tuesday, April 12

[Luke 21](#)

## REFLECTION

In Luke 21, verses 1-4, Luke tells us about God's view on offerings. We're told that while the widow who put in her offering did not give as much as the wealthy man, she spiritually gave more because she made a sacrifice to give to God all that she had. In these verses we find that we shouldn't all strive for the same dollar amount as an offering; rather, we should give all that we can to God according to our means. This resonates with our family in more than just a dollars and cents view, but also translates to the gift of time. We recognize Jesus' teachings on tithing and what that means for family finances. But these verses remind us that serving at church is also an offering. We remember that doing something for the church that might not seem enough or may seem small and insignificant is actually very big. This is a message we try to pass on to our children by making sure that they participate in all that they can with the church, no matter how small the task, because each of us can make a difference no matter our station in life. When we take time to serve, we give God our offering of time in our busy earthly lives. If we can all support the church doing all that we can, we can be sure that the church will be able to support those who need it and bring the good news of Jesus to all.

## PRAYER

*Dear God, Please help us to remember the widow's offering and the way she gave all that she had. Please help us to see the ways in which we can help to give all that we have and support our brothers and sisters. Amen.*

David & Becky Deisterhoft are members of Wesley Freedom UMC. David serves on the Board of Trustees.

Wednesday, March 13

[1 Samuel 16:1-13 & John 13:1-17](#)

From Week 5: Humbly Serve *of the* Speak A Word 2022 Lenten Study

“Equal in God’s Sight”

Holy God,

How long until we believe in your Word, O God?

You do not privilege male over female, nor female over male;  
There is no master race, no peoples beloved more than another;  
No being was created to be enslaved, nor to live in forced servitude;  
Your blessing falls on all without reservation.

How long until we live your Word, O God?

Courts, councils, and countries cannot confer on humanity more  
dignity, worth or status than your image imparted on all flesh.  
There exists no creed, constitution or covenant that supersedes  
your divine will for equality, equity, and egalitarianism.  
May our practices fulfill your prophecy on earth as it is in heaven.

How long until we teach your Word, O God?

May we cease devaluing, demeaning, and destroying one another  
out of greed, hatred, and lust.  
From the pew to the pulpit, may our words resound with your  
truth that all flesh – all flesh – is equal in your sight. Amen.

– by Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling, June 20, 2014

Moment of Reflection:

How do your actions mirror the example of Jesus as he washed the disciples' feet at the last supper? What do humility and equality mean before God?

Holy Thursday, April 14

[Luke 22](#)

## REFLECTION

It's no secret that Judas tends to take a majority of the heat when we retell the story of Christ's final days. Focusing on Judas' story allows us to take the comfortable position of pointing a finger at someone for their actions, in hopeful avoidance of our own. Our instinct to label Judas as the "bad guy" seems to reveal a truth we all would rather ignore: We are Peter.

There's no denying how unnatural it is to align ourselves with someone who would hurt our beloved Jesus. If your first instinct is to say, "I would never tell someone I didn't know Jesus," then you're a lot like me. But how often do we deny Christ in other ways? For me, Peter denying Christ felt a lot like sitting in a High School cafeteria and saying nothing while a group of kids mock another student. Or like seeing the surprised look on someone's face when you mention your faith after speaking hatefully or with foul language.

We might not be quoting Peter by shouting, "I don't know him!" But sometimes the way we act or speak are so far removed from Jesus that the people around us have no idea he exists or that we know him at all. It's not natural or comfortable to think about all the ways we are falling short and all the ways we are failing Jesus. But unless we get uncomfortable, until we acknowledge our limitations, we can never fully accept the gift of Easter. We cannot truly accept a gift until we realize we need it. In Christ's death and resurrection, we are offered the beautiful gift of salvation. Today, we prepare for that gift by sitting with the heavy realization that we do not deserve it.

## PRAYER

*"Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you" (Psalm 130:1-4). Amen.*

Taylor Boone is the Director of Youth Ministries at Wesley Freedom UMC

Good Friday, April 15

[Luke 23](#)

**Worship with us at 12:00PM and 7:00PM as we gather in prayer and scripture in Services of Tenebrae (meaning darkness) as candles are extinguished and we grieve the darkness of the world**

“O Love Divine, What Hast Thou Done” by Charles Wesley

O Love divine, what has 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!

#### PRAYER

*Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross so that he might draw the whole world to himself. Grant that we, who glory in this death for our salvation, may also glory in his call to take up our cross and follow him; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* (from The United Methodist Book of Worship)

Holy Saturday, April 16

[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 First Service of Easter**

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Easter Sunday, April 17

**Worship with us 6:30am, 8:00am, 9:30am, or 11:00am  
(Worship Live Stream at [www.WesleyFreedom.org](http://www.WesleyFreedom.org))**

**The Easter Homily of Saint John Chrysostom**

If any man be devout and love God, let him enjoy this fair and radiant triumphal feast. If any man be a wise servant, let him rejoicing enter into the joy of his Lord. If any have labored long in fasting, let him now receive his recompense. If any have wrought from the first hour, let him today receive his just reward. If any have come at the third hour, let him with thankfulness keep the feast. If any have arrived at the sixth hour, let him have no misgivings; because he shall in nowise be deprived thereof. If any have delayed until the ninth hour, let him draw near, fearing nothing. If any have tarried even until the eleventh hour, let him, also, be not alarmed at his tardiness; for the Lord, who is jealous of his honor, will accept the last even as the first; He gives rest unto him who comes at the eleventh hour, even as unto him who has wrought from the first hour.

And He shows mercy upon the last, and cares for the first; and to the one He gives, and upon the other He bestows gifts. And He both accepts the deeds, and welcomes the intention, and honors the acts and praises the offering. Wherefore, enter you all into the joy of your Lord; and receive your reward, both the first, and likewise the second. You rich and poor together, hold high festival. You sober and you heedless, honor the day. Rejoice today, both you who have fasted and you who have disregarded the fast. The table is full-laden; feast ye all sumptuously. The calf is fatted; let no one go hungry away.

Enjoy ye all the feast of faith: Receive ye all the riches of loving-kindness. Let no one bewail his poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one weep for his iniquities, for pardon has shown forth from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Savior's death has set us free. He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it. By descending into Hell, He made Hell captive. He embittered it when it tasted of His flesh. And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry: Hell, said he, was embittered, when it encountered Thee in the lower regions. It was embittered, for it was abolished. It was embittered, for it was mocked. It was embittered, for it was slain. It was embittered, for it was overthrown. It was embittered, for it was fettered in chains. It took a body, and met God face to face. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took that which was seen, and fell upon the unseen.

**O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave. For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be glory and dominion unto ages of ages. Amen.**

St. John Chrysostom was the Archbishop of Constantinople (347-407AD). His eloquence in preaching earned him the name *Chrysostom* – meaning “golden-mouthed.”

**WESLEY FREEDOM UMC**

