

Lent 2021: A Daily Devotional

WESLEY FREEDOM UMC



Tuesday, February 16

Welcome to the 2021 Wesley Freedom Lent Devotional! The season of Lent is a time of intense spiritual devotion for Christians as we prepare ourselves to commemorate the crucifixion and death of Christ on Good Friday, and then his resurrection on Easter Sunday. Traditionally, Lent is a time of increased prayer & devotion, as well as a time of fasting – that is, abstaining from eating certain kinds of foods or meals.

The point of this “taking on” and “giving up” is a kind of spiritual workout. Just as someone in a gym will choose to lift artificial weights in order to train their muscles to be able to lift items of great size, the increased prayer and fasting that Christians take on during Lent helps to train our souls. The idea is, if we learn to exercise our will in order to give up some of the insignificant pleasures of the world – like a kind of food, or the frivolous way we would fill our prayer time – we will be better able to say no to sinful pleasures when we are tempted with them. On the other hand, just like how it’s unlikely that someone out of shape physically could lift a heavy object, if we remain spiritually untrained, then when temptation does come along, we won’t have the practice and spiritual muscles needed to resist it.

I hope you can come along on this workout with me. So, find something that you really like – tv, a kind of food or drink, or (if your doctor gives you permission) a meal of the day – and make the commitment to exercise your soul by abstaining from it for the next 40 days. Then, set aside 15 more minutes than you normally do every day for scripture reading and prayer. I hope this devotional guide will give you a starting place for this devotional time.

May God bless you this Lent and may your relationship to God be strengthened by your exercises over the coming weeks.

Peace,

Rev. Ian Collier
Associate Pastor, Wesley Freedom UMC

Wednesday, February 17
Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

REFLECTION

We begin the season of Lent hearing Joel's call to rend our hearts and return to the Lord. Having witnessed the hope and joy of Christ's incarnation at Christmas, it is always a temptation to hear the Good News that God has come to save humanity as an unconditional affirmation of everything we might do, and any sort of person we might become. God's love is certainly unconditional, and the gift of grace is free. However, though love is *given* without condition, it doesn't do us any good if we don't *respond*; grace is free, but it isn't cheap – grace empowers us to return to the Lord and we are held accountable to actually changing our lives with God's help.

The prophet Joel shakes us out of our complacency. The Day of the Lord is still coming – a day of judgment when God will hold all persons accountable for who they have chosen to be. Just like the student who waits until the last possible moment to begin writing a term paper, we are tempted to wait until the last possible moment before our judgment to repent and reform; Joel tells us that we can't wait any longer!

But even with God sounding the alarm, Lent is a season of hopeful penitence. Joel writes, "the LORD, your God...is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing." So, this Lent we begin a time of sanctification as an entire congregation – from the aged to the infants at the breast, from those mourning a death to newlyweds in the bridal chamber. Let a fast be sanctified, let us tear open our hearts, and let this be the season in which we cooperate with God's grace to become the kind of people who will not be found wanting on the Day of the Lord.

PRAYER

"Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" Help us turn back to you and be made holy. Amen.

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

Thursday, February 18
2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10

REFLECTION

For many young people, the question of their purpose in life is one that lurks in the back of their mind and causes sleepless nights and maybe even waves of existential dread. But, as it turns out, though we still need to each decide how we will pay our bills, our purpose and assignment from God is not something we need to search for, it is given to us plainly: we are commissioned to be in this world as ambassadors for Christ.

As we take this Lent to prepare for the Day of the Lord, this commission is one of the aspects on which we will be judged. As ambassadors, we must understand ourselves as aliens in a foreign land. Our country is not our home – it is our mission field. Our culture’s values are not our message – they are the opposition to be overcome as we proclaim the true Gospel of God’s Kingdom. And the offers from this world to pledge allegiance to any ‘sovereign’ lands or rulers must be rejected; as ambassadors, we are direct representatives of one King – a King who is jealous for our hearts.

Now, don’t get me wrong, this is not an easy job. There is a reason Lent requires discipline. Living as an ambassador of God and dismissing the calls to pledge allegiance to earthly rulers will probably land you in worldly dishonor. Your reputation might suffer. But in the face of the violence of the world, our King commands a very specific response from us, his ambassadors: patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, and truthful speech. The world’s violence is easy; being an ambassador of God is hard, but ultimately it is the only way to continue in the power of God.

PRAYER

Lord, give me the words to speak truly in this world. Remind me that I am a foreigner in this land and only serve you and your kingdom. Through my words and deeds, help me bring others into your service. Amen.

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

Friday, February 19
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

REFLECTION

When I was a youth, our leaders encouraged us to each give up something for Lent. Everyone in my youth group gave up something like chips, soda, or television. A few tried to give up homework or chores but were reminded these were not sacrifices. The trouble with these acts of supposed piety is we mostly gave these up so that we would look cool for our Christian friends. We wanted to look as serious about our faith as our Catholic friends who seemed to have Lent figured out – including their faithful eating of fish on Fridays.

In today's gospel lesson Jesus asks us to consider our motives when we are practicing our faith. If we come to church to be seen, pray to show off, or give to look good we are missing the potential power of these endeavors. Worship, prayer, fasting, giving, and scripture reading are all means of grace. They are ways in which we open the door and invite Jesus to come into our lives. These are spaces where we are open to the movement of the Spirit which can heal, transform, and empower us, and these are spaces where we communicate our love to God.

Consider how you will observe these days of Lent. How can you claim space to be alone with the Lord? Choose a means of grace or two to practice each day and as you do so remember God is your audience!

PRAYER

Almighty God, you know all things. Examine my motives and make clear to me any place where I am seeking attention instead of giving you my attention. Amen.

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

Saturday, February 20
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.

Sunday, February 21

Worship with us at 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 22

Mark 1:9-15

REFLECTION

On this first Sunday of Lent we read the events which introduce us to Jesus in Mark's Gospel. Lacking birth narratives, Mark offers Jesus' baptism as the revelation of his identity. As Jesus is baptized in the Jordan, a dove manifesting the Holy Spirit descends on him and the voice of God the Father proclaims, "This is my Son." This monumental moment is followed immediately by that same Holy Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness where he spends 40 days.

In Biblical terms, the number 40 is just enough time for God to accomplish what God needs to accomplish. In this time away from life's distractions, Jesus is both tempted by the Devil and tended by God's angels. The trials and the tending reinforce Jesus' relationship with God the Father.

At the moment of your baptism, your identity as God's child was announced. I pray you will receive these 40 days of Lent as time set apart for you to examine how you are living in this identity. Give yourself space to see the temptations which lead you away from God. Call upon the Lord for help to resist temptation and fully devote yourself to God's purposes. Likewise, give yourself space in prayer to welcome God's angels to tend you. I pray this season will be just long enough to abandon the temptations and re-claim our identity as children of God.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you followed the prompting of the Holy Spirit to claim time away to confront temptation and overcome it. Lead me by your Spirit, teach me to be still and attentive; help me recognize the temptations which seek to distort my relationship with You. Empower me to resist temptation and live in your righteousness. When I am weak and worn send your angels to tend me. Amen.

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

Tuesday, February 23
Matthew 6:7-15

REFLECTION

“Dear Journal, what an exhilarating day. My recent baptism made me feel enthused about our faith and hope for the promised Messiah. When I heard that Jesus was in the neighborhood, and I saw the multitude of people following him, I decided to tag along. We went with Jesus to a nearby mountain. He went to the top of it and began to speak. While listening to this man, I realized what a great instructor, sage, and storyteller he is. My heart burned within me as he explained life. I was spiritually encouraged, especially when he proposed a unique method of prayer. His proposal was impressive.

He astonished me with the opening words; Our Father”! That staggered my mind. The inclusiveness made me feel that I was connected to Jesus in a family way. He used the title of God as Father. We aren’t supposed to use God’s name and here is Jesus telling us to call on him with that title. Wow!

With a reverent voice, Jesus helped remind me of how hallowed God’s Being is. Jesus then went on to speak of heaven. He implored it to come and be with us now. That’s unimaginable. Then, Jesus spoke of how we only need “daily” bread, as it was in Exodus. He went on to mention how to supplicate our trespasses with God and his forgiveness. This is based on our ability to forgive those who offend us. He also spoke of how we need God’s help to not be tempted to do wrong. Jesus built our confidence in the assuredness of God’s absolute and definitive supremeness. He finalized the importance of forgiveness which is something I need to work on. It reminded me of other expressions such as: it’s in giving that we receive, and it’s in our loving that we are loved. I truly believe that this is the Man. I can’t wait to know him more. To be continued...”

PRAYER

Holy Father, sovereign and majestic is your being. Please bring us closer to you and your purpose for our lives. Guide us through your Word and manifest a Christ-like life in us to the glory of your name. Amen.

Victor Cison is a Small Group Leader at Wesley Freedom UMC

Wednesday, February 24
Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32

REFLECTION

The word “*Lent*” stems from the Anglo-Saxon word for “spring” and refers to the penitential period that precedes Easter. Though I do not find reference of this observance in Scripture, early Christians felt it important to be in prayer, self-examination, and a time of repentance as they approached the celebration of one of the holiest observances – the resurrection of our Lord. However, this act of introspection should not only be during Lent. Our walk with God is a partnership that requires communion with Him. It is reading His word, and prayer. And not just when we are in desperate need or experiencing poor health. Are we in tune with God?

God called Jonah to go to Nineveh to proclaim the message of repentance or they would be destroyed. Jonah disobeyed; he was not interested in saving Nineveh. He wound up in the belly of the fish where he cried out to God for deliverance. The Lord commanded the fish to spit Jonah out on dry land. Finally, Jonah obeyed and went to Nineveh to give God’s decree and scripture tells us all of Nineveh was saved, even the king!

How often do we, as Christians, fail to heed that small voice that tugs at our conscience, urging us to do something that we do not feel “called” to do, or think someone else can do it? Author E. Edwin Young penned these words, “I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus, who died upon the cruel tree. To think of His great sacrifice at Calvary! I know my Lord expects the best from me.” Nothing starts a day better than quiet time spent with the Lord. It takes my mind off the trials of this world and draws my heart and thoughts heavenward.

PRAYER

Gracious Lord, my heart is ever so grateful for the finished work of Calvary. I am unworthy of your mercy but am blessed beyond words that I am saved by your Grace, not by works. We are redeemed by your blood. Amen

Alice Shank is a member of Wesley Freedom UMC

Thursday, February 25
Matthew 7:7-12

REFLECTION

Ask, search, knock, and living the Golden Rule. This scripture reading is not about activities that you would typically associate with Lent, a time of repentance, self-denial, and prayer for Christians in preparation for Easter Sunday. But God's ways are not always our ways, so if we dig a bit deeper below the surface, we may find what we're looking for. The repentance (from the Greek word *metanoia*) called for throughout the Bible is a summons to a personal and absolute surrender to God as Sovereign. Though it includes sorrow and regret, it is understood to be so much more than that. For in repentance, one makes a *complete* change of direction (a 180° turn) *toward* God.

Ask. Jesus is not telling us that we can have what we want whenever we want. We ask in prayer, yes, but what and when and how we receive is His will. “Thy will be done” is the Lord’s prayer, not “*our* will be done.”

“Self-denial” during Lent is commonly understood to mean giving up something we like to do. But what if we thought of this season as a time to *search* and find what sin we must turn *away* from that will allow us to *turn to* God? He is always there; it is we who must seek our way to Him.

Knock, and the door will be opened. Here’s another call to action, providing encouragement to us to be in communion and re-communion with God, to experience and keep experiencing a re-connection with God, through our repentance and continual practice of turning away from sin and towards God.

PRAYER

Almighty Father, help us understand the obstacles that keep us from you. During this time of Lent, help us to Ask, Search, Knock so that we can be in communion with You, practically living Your Golden Rule in all our ways.

Gina Eriksson and Robert Jacoby attend Wesley Freedom UMC

Friday, February 26

Psalm 1

REFLECTION

“Happy” is the first word of the first prayer in the most influential book of prayers in human history. Happiness is what the psalmist offers, though not the kind we expect. It is found when we shun the self-serving advice of the world, and instead cling to God’s *torah*, translated as “law,” “teaching,” or “instruction.” *Torah* includes all the ways God communicates to us, from ancient revelations of tradition and scripture, to the ways God continues to speak through the Holy Spirit. Its purpose is not to beat us down with endless rules, leaving us sad, guilty, stifled people. Rather, *torah* is a gift, a guide to true happiness.

Following *torah* requires a change in perspective. We must give up the childish image of a universe with ourselves at its center so we can see reality as it is, centered on God. We must get this right, or our goals will be helplessly misguided. If I am the center of my universe, then my ultimate goal in life, the thing which will make me happy, is to become the very best version of myself. I need to study hard, do well in school, get a good job, make lots of money, have a nice family, retire in comfort, and die having made my mark on the world. But because God is the true center, the only goal of human existence is to live that truth. True happiness is delighting in *torah*, meditating day and night.

The fictitious image of the universe with ourselves at its center is constantly reinforced by social media, advertising, and false cultural narratives extolling autonomy and self-reliance. But God’s *torah* destroys these imposters to the truth. We pray Psalm 1 and remember God at the center of it all.

PRAYER

Pray Psalm 1 aloud, concluding with the Gloria Patri:

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship at Wesley Freedom UMC

Saturday, February 27
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.

Sunday, February 28

Worship with us at 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 1

Mark 8:31-38

REFLECTION

“Those who are ashamed of me and of my words...of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” I usually hear this verse taken out of context by Christians trying to guilt others into agreeing with some question of public policy by issuing an ultimatum: you either agree with me, or you go against God. But as we see in the Gospel reading, being “ashamed” of Christ isn’t about trying to shoehorn Christ into secular spaces, nor about posting tacky pictures on Facebook. Christ is addressing his church regarding their own unwillingness to give up their *prosperity* in this world and their safe & secure lives.

Christianity, at its core, is a religion that throws all its eggs in one basket – God’s eventual victory over evil and His vindication of the way of Jesus. That means that Christian lives lived well should look like failures until the Day of Judgment. Peter seemed to be ashamed of this reality. Peter would rather Christ have told Christians that they should devote their lives to gaining the world. He would have rather been a part of a movement which aimed at national recognition of Jesus’ authority. This is the true temptation Christ is trying to address – not the lack of identifying as Christian, but of identifying as Christian while being more concerned about prosperity than faithfulness to a poor, homeless, executed Messiah.

If you struggle with the temptation of being ashamed of Christ’s Gospel, know that there is yet hope. Peter, who Christ even called ‘Satan’ for his sin, would become the leader of the Church and *would* lay down his life for the Gospel. This Lent, we are reminded that we must walk Peter’s road – to stop being ashamed of Christian humility.

PRAYER

Take my life, Lord, and put me to what you will. Let me never shrink away from faithfulness because of shame of being lowly in the eyes of the world. Amen.

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

Tuesday, March 2
Matthew 23:1-12

REFLECTION

This passage comes after Jesus has endured a round of questioning by the Sadducees and the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus is now addressing these Jewish religious leaders, his own disciples, and probably many others (verse 1 cites “the crowds”). In reading this, the first thing that strikes me is that Jesus is instructing people in how NOT to act.

When I was growing up, my mother had a saying: “Do as I say, not as I do.” She was telling me that I should heed what she was telling me, but that I should not do the same things she was doing. That may seem like a strange thing for a parent to tell a child, and at the time all it meant to me is that I should do what she told me. Looking back, however, I realize that she understood something about herself, that she was not a shining example, and that I could and should be better.

This is what I see Jesus telling his disciples and us today. We should not be like the scribes and Pharisees, whom Jesus later calls hypocrites. We should listen to what they say, and do that, but we should not do what they do. Jesus goes on to spell out that the scribes and Pharisees like to be recognized as authorities or teachers, but that all their teaching consists of is spouting rules (the Law of Moses). They do not seek to help the people live more righteous lives, and they certainly do not show how to do so themselves. Likewise, no one should seek to be called teacher or leader, as Jesus is the only true teacher that anyone needs and our one true Lord. At the same time, no one should call anyone on earth Father, for God is our one and only Father. Finally, Jesus tells us to let our service, our actions, speak for us; let this be why we are recognized.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we come to You as humble servants and we pray that You help us to be better people, guiding our actions so we can be a shining example to our friends, our coworkers, our neighbors, and our world. Amen.

Kevin Silberzahn is the Lay Leader of Wesley Freedom UMC

Wednesday, March 3
Matthew 20:17-28

REFLECTION

As we read Matthew 20:17-28, we read a mother's request for her sons to be seated next to Jesus in his kingdom. In response to the mother, Jesus teaches them the goal of being a humble servant.

I was baptized, confirmed and married at Abington Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania. I grew up spending my time in the church youth choirs and teaching 4-year-old Sunday school. I never felt like I fit in anywhere. I felt unworthy and unaccepted. I wished for someone to understand me. In my junior year in high school, the youth minister asked me to attend the confirmation retreat as a youth leader. After years of him trying to get me involved, I relented. As I was speaking to the 9th graders about all the ways they could serve without attending youth group, I realized my resistance to joining the youth group was a fear of rejection and judgment. I began to attend youth group after that retreat and attended the weekly Bible study at my pastor's home. I went on a mission trip and helped to repair a home for battered women. My faith journey began self-centered with how things affect me. Church gave me an escape. In my church youth activities, I found connection, friendship and acceptance. Sometimes our reason for serving begins with other motives and ideas.

We see in these verses that the disciples were not perfect and struggled with discernment in what Jesus wanted them to learn. It is human to be concerned with our own interests and advancements. Jesus asks us to lay down our life in servanthood. God meets us where we are on our faith journey. He calls upon us flaws and all. He challenges us to be his humble servants. For it is through our service we show our love so that others may see Christ.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for all the opportunities you give us to learn and grow. Thank you for your guiding light. May we follow that light and serve in your name so that others may see you in us. Amen

Jen Shatto is a Small Group Leader at Wesley Freedom UMC

Thursday, March 4

Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31

REFLECTION

In the Jeremiah passage, God tells us that we are “cursed” if we trust in man. The verses compare our lives to a “bush in the wastelands” and “dwelling in parched places,” plainly meaning a feeling of hardship. Alternatively, he tells us that we will be blessed if we trust in the Lord. I take the former as meaning that we eventually are destined for failure if we rely only on our own plans or those in power for guidance. Trusting in God’s plans for our life is much easier said than done, which I can absolutely attest to, but is necessary for our growth as Christians.

In the Luke passage, Jesus is telling a story of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. The rich man was greedy and not helpful to Lazarus when he was hungry. This is a good reminder to be sharing and serve others especially less fortunate than us. I see this story not only as a message to feed those who are literally hungry, but also to “feed” those who are hungry for the Word of God. In the current times of feeling isolated from others, it can be difficult to know when someone is in need since we have less in-person interactions, but we should still try to stay watchful and reach out when possible. Even though we may have a good life in terms of our human standards and our own personal view, we have a responsibility, like the rich man, to bless others and share God’s Word with others as a way of praising God.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you for gift of knowing you and having a relationship with you. Please help us to extend a hand to others that may not yet know you as difficult as that may be. We know your plans for our lives are what’s best for us. Guide us and help us to understand them and follow them. Amen.

Jarod Spessard is a Small Group Leader at Wesley Freedom UMC

Friday, March 5

Psalm 22

REFLECTION

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This psalm of David, echoed by Jesus on the cross, introduces a paradox that all Christians experience. Not just “a” God or “the” God but *my* God has abandoned me. We who know God well enough to claim God as our own still have hard times when God feels frustratingly distant. In fact, God’s absence is often felt most acutely by those who have experienced God’s presence.

In the midst of this lament, there is some comfort. First, if even David, the man after God’s own heart, and Jesus, God’s own Son, felt the need to ask, “why have you forsaken me?”, then we are not risking God’s disapproval when we ask our own pointed questions. We are not alone in our loneliness. Second, no feeling of abandonment can ever prove that God has ceased to be ours. The psalmist, “from the mouth of the lion,” still claims God as “my” and trusts God to deliver and save. Finally, we are assured that the waiting will end. In the twenty-first verse, the psalm abruptly leaps forward in time to when the prayer has been answered (“you have rescued me”). God will return to us.

And the end of our separation from God will be the end to all separations. The barriers between rich and poor, “us” and “them,” present and future, even life and death, will be erased as all humanity unites in praise. God’s absence stung against our memories of God’s presence, but now we are ready for the joy of God’s presence to move us beyond ourselves. Praying Psalm 22 affirms our lament of “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” and our hope for the universal refrain that God indeed “has done it.”

PRAYER

Pray Psalm 22 aloud, concluding with the Gloria Patri:

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship at Wesley Freedom UMC

Saturday, March 6
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.

Sunday, March 7

Worship with us at 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 8

Exodus 20:1-17

REFLECTION

Our scripture lesson today is the big ten! First etched into tablets for Moses to deliver to God's children, the Israelites, these have since been written, carved, engraved, printed and stitched into surfaces around the world. We teach our children the Ten Commandments, especially number six. And if we are wise, we seek to live by them our entire lives.

Often in our attempt to get to the rules, we skip over the preface where it is written: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." This, I believe, is the most important line in the chapter. You see, before God offers us rules to live by God reminds us who is giving the rules. This is not a dictator making a decree to control his subjects, this is not a master setting fences to hold slaves captive, this is not a prison guard putting up fences to hold us in bondage. The one speaking the commandments is God alone, our God, whose goodness is evident and whose faithfulness has been demonstrated.

Our God who gives us the commandments is our God who brought us out of slavery and into freedom. These ten rules are not meant to enslave us, but to teach us how to live in relationship with God and avoid the bondage that follows sin. Keeping in mind who offers these rules, re-read the Ten Commandments. Which are you keeping faithfully? What behaviors or priorities in your life need to change in order to honor God in all ten areas? Remember, anywhere you are bending the rules you are running the risk of being held captive by sin.

PRAYER

O Lord my God, who sets captives free, give me wisdom to see where I am breaking your commands. Set me free from the sin and selfishness which would lead to my disobedience. Give me your power to overcome sin that I might live in your freedom. Amen.

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

Tuesday, March 9
Matthew 18:21-35

REFLECTION

In this passage, a parable about a master and his slave is used to speak on forgiveness. In the story, the slave is in debt to his master, but the master forgives the debt of the slave. The slave then goes and hassles another slave who owes him money. Jesus uses this parable to portray the master as God who forgives all sins. The disciples have an eternal debt of gratitude to God because he forgives their sins. If these disciples go into the world and don't forgive others who wrong them, then they are like the slave who has all debt washed away but cannot forgive others.

As disciples, we must treat others as Jesus treats us. Jesus is calling his disciples to forgive as God does, even when others have wronged us. This is a challenge for us. We are not an eternal God. We do not have never-ending grace for all. But this is a challenge to overcome, not a reason to hold a grudge against those who have wronged you. It gives me hope that we can love enough to forgive others no matter how in debt they are to us. God calls his disciples to love as he does and to forgive others as he forgives us for all of our sins. God has washed away the largest debt of all, so we are called to love others enough to forgive them for their wrongdoing because that debt will never be as large as what God forgives us constantly.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you for giving us this time to focus on your teachings, to learn more about being a disciple during this time of Lent. I pray that you are able to give us the grace and love to forgive those around us to be able to be more like you. I pray that throughout this holy season of Lent we can focus on the gift of forgiveness that you have granted us and that we can pay it forward to friends, family members and people in our everyday lives. Thank you for your grace. Amen.

Hannah Bauer is a Young Adult member of Wesley Freedom UMC

Wednesday, March 10
Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9

REFLECTION

This passage connects me to the promises we make during each baptism as each child becomes our child collectively. We promise to surround the newly baptized with a community of love and to provide for them both teaching and example so that they may be able to accept God's grace for themselves. As God's children, we are called to nurture and share with all the future generations.

I was blessed to grow up in a small town surrounded by family and a community who guided my life. Central to that time was the Savage Methodist Church. I remember fondly those saints who shared the stories of Jesus and God's Kingdom during Sunday School, VBS, and Worship. In retrospect, some of my biggest lessons unfolded away from the church building. Perhaps because the town was so small, I learned very quickly that faith was more than what you did on Sunday. I was provided with a living example that a relationship with God should guide your everyday life and inform how you interact with both strangers and friends. God's grace and hospitality were modeled over and over in simple acts. Forgiveness over a broken window caused by an errant ball, an invitation to wait for the bus out of the rain, and innumerable helping hands. Each act was generally accompanied with conversations that have been woven into the fabric of my life.

My church family was everywhere – the post office, the tiny corner market, the bus stop and almost every other sidewalk crack! Along with the tangible teaching, I knew that I was being held accountable to be the best person I could be. I am thankful that I am once again surrounded by a wonderful church family that teaches me new insights and models God's Grace to our community.

PRAYER

Gracious God, please remind us of the great privilege and responsibility we have to pass the faith along. Help us use our actions to further your kingdom in order that our words will ring true. Amen.

Sherry Perrine is the Director of Children & Family Ministries

Thursday, March 11
Luke 11:14-23

REFLECTION

Jesus clearly had to deal with his share of trolls. Critics are going to hound us wherever we go, whatever we do. They are part of life's struggle and we all must learn how to answer and rise above them.

In Jesus' case, his critics were accusing him of being in league with Satan for driving out demons of Satan. This accusation is preposterous, as Jesus points out, but since when did accuracy or veracity ever bother trolls?

Jesus answers his critics (Luke 11:20-22) with an assertion that each of us must reckon with. "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you." Is Jesus correct? And if so, does it cause you to ask the question, "What can I do to join His kingdom?" If it does, then the Holy Spirit is calling you today to follow Him. The call is real, and a very long list of Bible characters (Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, etc.) have heard it the same as you and me.

A leader of the nation Israel, Joshua, who led his people into the promised land, had this to say as he began the conquest of Canaan: "Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, **choose this day** whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

Count me in, Joshua. Let's Go!

PRAYER

"Jesus, I wish to follow in the footsteps of the Bible characters who lived before me and commit my heart and my life to you as my Lord and savior. Please save me now."

Ben White is a Small Group Leader at Wesley Freedom UMC

Friday, March 12

Psalm 19

REFLECTION

This prayer begins with the wordless speech of the heavens declaring God's power and supremacy over the universe. God made everything. God is in charge. In mythological imagery, God instructs the sun to move across the sky, and the sun does as it is told. Restated scientifically, all matter unswervingly follows the physical laws of nature instituted by God at the beginning of creation.

Humanity, however, is blessed with free will. We possess the ability to live life in the way God intends or, if we choose, make our own way. God speaks directly to us in the form of *torah*, translated as "law." This is not a legal, punitive, fire-and-brimstone sort of law. Neither is it an irresistible physical law of nature. Rather, it is a law of cause and effect. Following the commandments of God's *torah* leads to life, wisdom, joy, and clear vision. It inspires "fear of the Lord," the intense feeling of awe and reverence we experience when we are confronted by God's power and perfection. These gifts are not a reward doled out for good behavior. They are a natural consequence of living the way God created us to live.

And so, after hearing the great, wordless speech of the heavens, and the perfection of God's *torah*, we are now the small, quiet, human voice that responds in faithful confession, "Help me, God. I don't even know all the ways I've gone off course. Help me to be more like you, so that my own words, down to the quietest whispers of my heart, reflect the reality of your creating power and redeeming grace." Pray this psalm with confidence that the same God who created the universe created you, forgives you, and will guide you forward.

PRAYER

Pray Psalm 19 aloud, concluding with the Gloria Patri:

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship at Wesley Freedom UMC

Saturday, March 13
The Third 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.

Sunday, March 14

Worship with us at 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 15
Ephesians 2:1-10

REFLECTION

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

I was raised by dairy farmers who literally pulled themselves up by their bootstraps. Hard work is a part of my DNA. We had to work every day, for the rhythm of feeding, bedding, tending, and milking our herd did not stop for any matter under heaven. This year, if we are wise, we feel particularly grateful and indebted to those in occupations that could not stop for fear of COVID but pressed on to meet human needs.

Today’s scripture dances with our understanding of how faith and “works” fit together. The apostle Paul begins by making clear that we are saved by the grace of God through faith. How humbling to accept that the most important, most lasting thing we will ever experience is a gift which we cannot earn. Our salvation from sin and death is made possible through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and given to us freely by God. Even our ability to receive the gift comes through the faith which God gives us.

So then, we might conclude there is nothing for us to do. Not so, dear friends; read farther. God has prepared good works for you to do as your **way of life**. “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

PRAYER

Generous God, I am grateful for your gift of salvation. Reveal to me the work you have prepared for me to do to honor you in this season. Amen

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

Tuesday, March 16
Luke 15:11-32

REFLECTION

God works in mysterious ways. Those ways might not always seem fair, though. When you are struggling with something and others are not, you feel like God has abandoned you. God would never abandon any of his children, though, which this scripture reaffirms. The scripture tells a story of a young man who lost his way. When he finally came home, he was celebrated with the most lavish party – a party that the oldest son, who was faithful to his father, never once received. This shows how God will always be there for you and will celebrate you when you come back to him. Even if you have lost faith and are led astray, he will never give up on you and will give you everything that you need to continue to build a relationship with him. Even if your relationship needs more work than others’.

God treats his children with equity and not equality. That doesn’t mean anything bad though. It means that God will give you everything you need and more to be able to create a relationship with him. If you need all the guidance in the world, he will give that to you. Or, if you need only a slight nudge, then he will be there to nudge you. He won’t treat every person equally, but he will ensure that every person who is willing to try will gain a relationship with him, no matter how long it takes.

In this COVID-19 season we are all struggling. Whether it’s from the death of a loved one, or from isolation. God knows this and he knows that your faith will be tested on this journey. He is there every step of the way, though, and is giving you everything that you need to come back to him.

PRAYER

Dear Father, thank you for always being there for us even when we are led astray and have lost faith for just a moment. Thank you for giving us everything that we need in order to build and continue to have a relationship with you. I ask that you continue to guide us through this COVID-19 season and all that we may face along the way. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Samantha Mailhot is a Youth Member of Wesley Freedom UMC

The Feast of Saint Patrick, Wednesday, March 17

1 Peter 4:8-11

REFLECTION

When I was young, my grandmother would make my bed every day. This quiet act of grace and love was reflective of her love for me. She gave me my first Bible and Guidepost Christmas stories. In the moments that I skipped by her room when she wanted to read them with me, or when they remained unread on my book shelf, she never faulted me. She extended grace and love, and she prayed for me. Although her life had been difficult, full of loss and challenge, she chose to enter into a relationship with God and live her life as a reflection of Christ. She was, in my eyes, the personification of 1 Peter 4:8-11 that begins “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

In this reflection on my life with my sweet grandmother, I am reminded of the life and mission of St. Patrick. This was a man who grew up in the comfort of a Christian home but with a heart closed to Christ. It was when he was kidnapped into slavery that he began a relationship with God and became passionate about spreading the good news of Christ's love. In his suffering he was transformed. This transformation became a mission to share Christ's love as described in 1 Peter and go back to his captors and the land where he was enslaved with a heart filled with forgiveness and grace as a reflection of Christ.

St. Patrick's Day is a celebration of Christ's love, grace, forgiveness and the mission to share the good news. It is also a day to celebrate those in our lives, like my grandmother, who share the unconditional love of Christ in their acts of kindness and message of faith.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help me to recognize and learn from those who demonstrate a life reflecting Christ. Guide me to a place of grace so I may love unconditionally and recognize the possibility of my own transformation through the Love of God. Amen.

Cindy Shruell is the Front Office Assistant at Wesley Freedom UMC

Thursday, March 18
John 8:1-11

REFLECTION

In this scripture, the Pharisees bring a woman to Jesus. This woman has been caught committing adultery and they have brought her to him in hopes that Jesus might condemn her, thus allowing the Pharisees to find some sort of wrongdoing on his part. The Pharisees are sinning by trying to test Jesus. Essentially, a group of sinners is “tattling” on another sinner to Jesus. Jesus decides to use this against them. He tells them that if they have been free of sin their entire life and have never sinned before, they may throw a stone at the woman.

With all the chaos going on in the world today, we often are too quick to point our fingers at our neighbor. We are quick to blame others for the issues going on and find ourselves turning against our neighbors, when we should be uniting together in love and peace. In our present times where the world is angry and hateful, we need to be the light of Jesus shining on others, even if we disagree with them or see them doing sinful things. That is how we grow and maintain the kingdom of God in a society that is slowly giving up hope.

Instead of being another stressor or reason for someone to turn away from Jesus, be their God-sighting. Be the reason that they know that Jesus is alive and well. We are all struggling with our own sins and our own demons. Jesus is the relief we all need, and to be able to be that relief for someone in your life is a blessing.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you for breathing air into my lungs today. Thank you for sending your Son to die on the cross for me and my sins. Please grant me the patience and awareness to recognize when others need a helping hand. Grant me the strength to be your light in these times of darkness. Grant me the strength that I need to simply get through the day. Use me, Lord. I love you. Amen.

Grace Kulp is a Young Adult member of Wesley Freedom UMC

Friday, March 19

Psalm 107

REFLECTION

The first three verses of this psalm set the stage for all that follows. What are we called on to do? Give thanks. Why? God is good. What's so good about God? Two words in English ("steadfast love") translating one of the most important Hebrew words in the entire Bible: *hesed*. *Hesed* is a deep, eternal, all-encompassing love, desiring goodness and wholeness for its object. It is both an emotional disposition and a physical act. For love to be *hesed* it must be lived out in action.

Who will tell us about God's *hesed*? The "redeemed of the Lord" now tell their stories: wanderers in the wilderness (vv 4-9), those in prison (10-16), the "sin-sick" (17-22) and endangered sailors (23-32). They each cry for help and are saved, so they join the refrain, giving thanks for God's *hesed*. As you read, place yourself in these scenes. We all at times feel hopelessly lost, trapped in darkness, sick to our stomach with guilt, or terrified for our lives. Remembering the ways God has shown *hesed* to us in the past reminds us to trust God through our present trials and the trials to come.

Finally, the psalm closes with an image of reversals. In contrast to the hopeful images of deliverance, there is doom in store for those who have used their privileges to exploit and oppress. For as the wanderers are brought in, the powers-that-be will be cast out to the wilderness themselves. Which are we? That is a troubling question, and perhaps the answer varies from day to day. So now at the end of the psalm, the call changes. Now, instead of "give thanks," the psalmist says, "give heed!" We will be wise to ask the hard questions of ourselves, and cling tightly to the *hesed* of the Lord.

PRAYER

Pray Psalm 107 aloud, concluding with the Gloria Patri:

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship at Wesley Freedom UMC

Saturday, March 20
The Third 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.

Sunday, March 21

Worship with us at 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 22

John 12:20-33

REFLECTION

Are we ready to bear much fruit? Throughout the Gospels, Christ teaches about the importance of being fruitful. Bearing fruit is the mark of faithful discipleship, and the quality of the fruit we bear is an indication of our progress in becoming more like Christ. We hear these metaphors and desire to be the kind of person who has a healthy, flourishing faith – a faith that produces abundant fruit.

However, in today's scriptures, Christ gives each of us a reality check – becoming a flourishing, fruit-producing tree in this world cannot happen by doing the things that come easy to us. In fact, compared to the lives we have been living, the process of becoming a fruit-bearing Christian might even seem contrary to the 'best practices' we have learned for living this life. Those who love their life as they have been living it in this world – as dormant seeds – will lose it; those who hate their life in this world, and who are ready to give up their current lifestyle for the sake of the Gospel, will keep their life for eternity.

Now, as we are in the fifth week of our Lenten journey, Christ's death is within sight. We cannot shy away from the enormity of what following a crucified God means for us – those who would follow Christ must follow him all the way. We are given the challenge and command to not allow anything in this life – our possessions, our friendships, and even our parents, spouses and children – to keep us from serving Christ faithfully. This is the necessary posture to take in order to bear fruit. Are you ready to bear much fruit?

PRAYER

Lord of the harvest, when the day of judgment comes, may I be found to have been a fruitful disciple. As Christ did not let even the preservation of mortal life stand in the way of acting faithfully and righteously, give me the strength to make you the first priority in my life, and supersede all other attachments. Amen.

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

Tuesday, March 23
Daniel 3:14-20, 91-95

REFLECTION

When I go to Ren Fest, my favorite stop is the blacksmith's forge. Driven by air from the bellows, the fire hovers between 3000° and 4000° F. Standing directly in front of the fire, the blacksmith coaxes the maximum amount of heat out of the fire. When the fire is hot enough, he places metal into the fire until it turns orange and then shapes the metal to his will.

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were threatened with the furnace, they knew that death awaited them. All they needed to do to avoid this death was worship the statue placed before them. The men refuse. Once they are tossed into the fire, God takes that moment and shapes it to his will. Looking inside the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar sees not three, but four men walking in the fire unharmed. One of the men looked like a God. Demanding the furnace be opened, he discovered that not a single hair on the heads of the three men were singed nor did they smell like smoke. He acknowledged the power of the one true God and ordered all in his kingdom to worship the Lord.

While we don't face physical furnaces, we do face our own furnaces that threaten to consume us. We can freely choose whether or not we face the challenges of this world with our eyes firmly on God and songs of praise in our hearts. God will choose how to answer our prayers, using the heat of the fire around us to shape us into something new.

PRAYER

Dear God, I pray that you grant me the faith of the furnace. When faced with great injustice or seemingly insurmountable challenges, I will stand for what is right. Give me the courage to trust you to shape me into something new.

Bettina Wesloh is a member of Wesley Freedom UMC

Wednesday, March 24
Matthew 7:15-20

REFLECTION

In the 21st century, I doubt if many would really know off-hand the meaning of a prophet. However, I'd wager that just about anyone could read Matthew 7:15-20 and understand the gist meaning of the scripture. So many modern-day sayings have their roots to this passage: "all that glitters isn't gold," "practice what you preach," "actions speak louder than words," etc.

Was this meant to give us a measure to judge others by? I don't think so. I think it's a guide for us to use to measure ourselves. Are we a good or bad tree? Are we producing fruit (helping others, being good community citizens, good parents, reliable employees)? Or are we a beautiful, full-leafed tree that doesn't produce fruit? Matthew also states that we need to watch or be aware of false prophets. In the 21st century could these be scam artists, get rich quick schemes, religious organizations promising fame and fortune for believers, fill in others as you please.

In my mind, this passage is a reminder that all of us are God's children (trees) and have fruit-bearing qualities. We might need some cultivation and pruning from time to time to improve production and quality of our fruit. The Lenten season is a perfect time to assess and to make subtle (or maybe, in some cases, major) changes for us individually.

PRAYER

God, help us to look at ourselves to see if we are fruit-bearing and, if not, to begin working toward that goal of producing fruit. Let us begin at home, our church, our community and our workplace. We ask you to give us strength and knowledge to change things that need changing and the boldness to try new things. Amen.

Richard Lawson is a member of the Worship Team at Wesley Freedom UMC

The Feast of the Annunciation, Thursday, March 25
Luke 1:26-38; Luke 2:34-25

REFLECTION

Today we complicate Lent with the celebration of Christ's conception in Mary. To *celebrate* something just a week before Christ is to be betrayed, arrested, convicted, and executed is jarring. But today, nine months before Christmas, the season observing the end of Christ's earthly life is interrupted by the season celebrating its beginning. Nine months before Christ's birth, the angel appears to Mary; Mary's consent marks the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that all the nations of the world would be blessed through his descendants. The Holy Spirit empowers Mary to contain the fullness of God in a human body within her. Marked today, the very beginning of Jesus' mission is a cause for celebration.

Yet, the celebration is bittersweet. Mary is a model of faithfulness, the example for the church of bearing the Word of God into the world; Mary will also be at the foot of the cross watching her baby boy receive the Roman death penalty. Simeon's prophecy would come true – a sword would pierce Mary's soul, too.

So, yes, today we complicate Lent. We remember the joy of Christmas, and the hope of the beginning of this story. And we remember that we, who are called to bear the Word of God into the world today are called both to rejoice with Mary at the Annunciation, and also weep with her at the cross.

PRAYER

Pour your grace into our hearts, O Lord, that we who have known the incarnation of your Son Jesus Christ, announced by an angel to the Virgin Mary, may by his cross and passion be brought to the glory of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (From The 1979 Book of Common Prayer)

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

Friday, March 26

Psalm 51

REFLECTION

On Ash Wednesday, we began the season of Lent by praying the words of this psalm, a prayer of confession. It is appropriate that today, on the last Friday before we relive the climactic events of the story of salvation during Holy Week, we pray it once more. Like Psalm 22, Psalm 51 is a psalm of lament, but this time, we look inward and lament our own sinfulness. We are born guilty, the psalmist writes. Sin is an inescapable fact of human nature.

However, the bad news of human nature is balanced by the good news of God's grace. We begin the plea for forgiveness by invoking God's steadfast love and abundant mercy, trusting that even from the depths of sin, we can confidently call on God. Furthermore, even as God forgives every one of our past sins, that is not the end of grace. God is not content to wash the surface dirt off our hands and send us back out into the world. Rather, God's desire is to transform us through and through, inside and out, top to bottom. With our clean hearts and new spirits, we are no longer doomed to repeat the same mistakes. We are new creations.

And now, forgiven and recreated, we are called to look outside ourselves and share this good news of God's grace with others. We begin by acknowledging our transgressions and sins. We end with a commitment to seek out transgressors and sinners to show them the way back home to God. And when we return together, our lips opened to praise and our hearts bowed to worship, God will delight.

PRAYER

Pray Psalm 51 aloud, concluding with the Gloria Patri:

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship at Wesley Freedom UMC

Saturday, March 27
The Third 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.

Sunday, March 28

Worship with us at 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, March 29

Mark 11:1-11

REFLECTION

Holy Week begins with worship! As Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem, for a moment the whole world seems to recognize their king. A townspeople sacrifices a donkey for his steed, children wave branches in praise, the crowds shout:

“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”

We know where this procession will lead, and so we might be hesitant to join the chorus. But, faithful ones, it is right to begin this Holy Week in worship and to remain in a posture of worship all week long. For this week, more than any other of the year, we remember the One who is worthy of our praise; the one who comes in the name of the Lord to save us.

Today and every day of this Holy Week, lift your palm branch and shout:

Hosanna! Blessed is the one who come in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna! Blessed is the God who gave me breath!

Hosanna! Blessed is the Lord Jesus Christ who lived to show the way to live a truly human life!

Hosanna! Blessed is the lamb of God who died to take away the sins of the world!

Hosanna! Blessed is the Resurrected One who ushers us into the kingdom of heaven! Amen.

PRAYER

Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Amen.

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

Tuesday, March 30
John 12:1-11

REFLECTION

As I read the scripture for today, I instantly think back to over a year ago when we had friends over for meals, to hang out, or even have a game night, and friends gathering together to celebrate an upcoming holiday, accomplishment, or milestone. I have a group of friends that have always spent so many evenings together with dinner, music, and kids playing together. We have been together though so many challenging times. Over the past year, we were only able to get together one time, celebrating our friendship outside in a safe way. I miss having this group together to be there for each other no matter what we have going on in our lives.

The gathering at Lazarus' home to celebrate Jesus raising him from the dead makes me look forward to a time when we can all gather again to celebrate our own version of being raised from the "dead" – this pandemic which has changed every part of our lives. Then we will celebrate with our friends and family, treating them like Mary did when she cleaned Jesus feet with the expensive perfume, making sure they know they are special and treasured.

Over the last year some of us have suffered from different ailments – whether it be the virus, depression or anxiety. Personally, I have felt so lonely and disconnected, not only from my friends but also my church. I miss being able to join together with my Wesley Freedom family and friends to celebrate Christmas and Easter and to join together at VBS and the Bazaar. When I start planning for the future, I feel as if I am moving past all of the struggles and begin to move forward to the other side when we will come out stronger.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, I pray that we can all spend more time loving and getting to know you better and remembering that, even during a pandemic, we need to take time to celebrate the little things in life, so when the bigger things return, we will remember to be thankful for our everyday lives.

Erin Wolpert leads the New Member Class at Wesley Freedom UMC

Wednesday, March 31
Matthew 26:14-25

REFLECTION

My first take away from this scripture reading is, “How could Judas Iscariot betray Jesus by offering to deliver him to be killed?” Judas was not tricked by the chief priest, but rather approached him with the offer to deliver Jesus if he were paid, and then accepted 30 pieces of silver to do the dirty deed. It was an out and out betrayal – he could not say later that he had unknowingly betrayed Jesus. Although horrified when reading the account of Jesus’ betrayal, I realize that I, too, am guilty of betraying Jesus whenever I do not follow his commandments.

I have always wondered when reading this scripture, how did Jesus know it was Judas who would betray him? The scripture tells us that while they were eating Jesus told his twelve disciples that one of them would betray him. One by one the disciples asked, “Is it I, Lord?” After Judas said, “Is it I, Master?” Jesus responded, “You have said so.” Obviously, Jesus knew – even though Judas’ question was the same as the other disciples – that he was the one who would betray him. I am sure Jesus also knows when we betray him.

The scripture continues to describe the supper where Jesus told his disciples they would not eat together again until they were in “my Father’s kingdom.” I always considered that to be a foretelling that he would take their sins (including Judas Iscariot’s) onto him when he was crucified and thus they were saved by grace and their sins were forgiven by the Father. May my sins also be forgiven.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give you thanks and praise for all you have given us, including your Son, our savior Jesus Christ. We, like Judas, are sinners even though we strive to follow your commandments. We thank you for forgiving our sins and accepting us into your everlasting life. Help us to continue to strive for perfection, recognizing that we are imperfect.

Don Champ is a member of Wesley Freedom UMC

Holy Thursday, April 1

1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15

REFLECTION

My mom cried all the time when I was growing up. Most of the time I could connect the dots to figure out what was causing each outburst. Sad commercial, final scene of a Disney movie, the collective chaos of pubescent daughters – it all made sense. But I could never figure out why she would cry at church. Especially since as children we're taught that church, and all things Jesus, are *good!* While I can't speak for my mom, I know I've spent my entire life feeling like I wasn't enough. I was never the first pick for sports, never first chair in orchestra, and never the smartest in my class. Somehow this notion of not being good enough trickled over into my faith.

The washing of the disciples' feet in John 13 was never shocking to me. Maybe it's the lack of significance this tradition had in my 20th century childhood, or my aversion to other people's feet, but it's never struck me in the way it does other people. To me, the Chekhov's gun here is the revelation that Jesus knew they would betray him, and yet he washed them anyway (John 13:11).

It's this part of the passage that leaves me overwhelmed with reconciling these two truths: I am not enough, and He loves me anyway. I am not deserving, but He died for me anyway. This is the incomprehensible truth of our salvation. This is the powerful realization that leaves mothers, and daughters alike, weeping in crowded pews.

PRAYER

God, I thank you for Paul's reminder of Christ's request for us to remember Him as often as we eat and drink. Help us to remember that honoring Christ's sacrifice is not something for us to save for the first Sunday of every month. Let us consume it daily. Let us use it to fuel our existence. Let us acknowledge that our lives depend on it. Help us to love in a way that mirrors Jesus. Help us to love those who we deem unworthy, and remind us that they, like us, are loved by you anyway. We bless you, thank you, and love you! Amen.

Taylor Boone is the Director of Youth Ministries

Good Friday, April 2
Isaiah 52:13-53:12

REFLECTION

This is the truth of Sin. As much as we want to cover it up as “not that bad” or tell ourselves that our sin-of-choice is a necessary evil of the modern world, the results of Sin are brutal. In Christ’s crucifixion, we see just how far we have fallen from the goodness God intended for us. When our creator walked among us, instead of clinging to him, all but a handful of people decided that it was better to walk in darkness than in the Light of the World. We, the cultural descendants of Rome, condemned our God to death. With every sin we nail him to the cross. God, sparing us the just consequences of our rebellion, took them upon himself. God suffered humanly so that we might not have to reap the eternal death that each sin we commit deserves.

This is the goodness and love of God. God, not able to bear it that those made in his image should perish, took the consequences of sin on himself. Life Himself, when his children rebelled by choosing death, suffered death to restore the dead to life. The one who made us became one of us, knowing that in our ignorance we would try to destroy him, all so that we could become like him.

There is no celebration this day. This day we remember Christ’s blood poured out in place of ours. We remember, in the words of Charles Wesley, that it was “me who Him to death pursued.” What amazing love has God for us, that when we were yet sinners – when we and our ancestors chose to kill him rather than follow him – Christ died for us. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood? Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! how can it be That Thou, my God, should die for me? (From “And Can It Be” by Charles Wesley)

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

Holy Saturday, April 3
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.

Easter Sunday, April 4

Worship with us at 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.”

PALM SUNDAY

March 28th, 9:30 & 11:00AM

Sunday worship returns to the outdoor sanctuary with a children's palm parade followed by the dramatic telling of the events of Jesus' betrayal and passion. Join us for music, scripture, and communion. Children wishing to participate should arrive 10min early and meet at large playground.



HOLY THURSDAY

April 1

12:00 PM - Indoor*
7:00PM - Outdoor

Remember Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples and celebrate Holy communion.

*COVID rates permitting,
Registration required



STATIONS OF THE CROSS

April 1 & 2

Self-paced "Stations of the Cross" will be available on the church grounds from 12-8pm. Come with your families to pray your way through the last day of Jesus' life. A virtual presentation of the stations will be offered online on Friday.



EASTER SUNDAY

April 4

We will worship live together!

Keep an ear out for times and locations as we approach this holy day of celebration!