

Lent 2024: A Daily Devotional



WESLEY FREEDOM UMC



PALM SUNDAY

March 24th, 8:00AM, 9:30AM, & 11:00AM

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

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



HOLY THURSDAY SERVICE

March 28th
12:00PM

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

LAST SUPPER DINNER EXPERIENCE

March 28th
5:00PM & 7:00PM

As Jesus gathered his disciples, so we will gather around tables to share a fellowship meal. Following the meal we will share Holy Communion & pray in the sanctuary. All ages are encouraged. Register at wesleyfreedom.org/lent.

GOOD FRIDAY SERVICES

March 29th
12:00PM - Traditional
7:00PM - Cantata

Remember Christ's passion at a traditional service of hymns and scripture, or with a cantata choir & orchestra presenting "I Am The Lord Of The Dance," a cantata for Holy Week. Nursery provided at 7:00pm.

Easter 2024

Saturday, March 30th
Easter Vigil
7:00PM

Celebrate Easter like ancient Christians - the night before! Hear the story of salvation proclaimed, remember your baptism, and celebrate Holy Communion on the holiest night of the year!

Sunday, March 31st
Sunrise Holy Communion
Piney Run Park - 6:45AM
(Gates Open at 6:30AM)

Sanctuary Services

- 8:00AM Traditional Communion with Choir & Orchestra.
- 9:30AM Traditional with Choir & Orchestra. Sunday School & Nursery provided.
- 11:00AM Contemporary with Nursery.



Sunday, February 11

Welcome to the 2024 Lent Devotional! The 40-day season of Lent is a time of intense spiritual devotion as we prepare ourselves to commemorate the crucifixion and death of Christ on Good Friday, and then celebrate his resurrection on Easter Sunday. Traditionally, Lent is a time of increased prayer and spiritual discipline, as well as a time of fasting – that is, abstaining from eating certain meals or kinds of food. If it is healthy for you to do this, I commend it to you as an ancient spiritual practice that has helped many saints grow closer to God. However, in the modern world, we are also more aware that there are some for whom fasting from food is not healthy, and in these days where we are constantly bombarded with bad news, I hesitate to ask anyone to give up anything that brings them a spark of joy. However, one fast we can all make is a fast of time. I challenge all of us to sacrifice at least 15 minutes each day – either as soon as we rise or just before going to sleep – to read scripture and pray.

This devotional guide is meant to be a practical aid to help focus your prayer and scripture reading during this season. Each weekday has a scripture passage to read, and a brief reflection and prayer written by the staff, members, and friends of Wesley Freedom. Saturdays will be days of rest with no readings. On Sundays, attend worship. The first two devotions of this devotional (Feb 12 & 13), while technically not yet in the season of Lent, are included to prepare our mindset for our Lenten journey. On Wednesday, February 14, we will observe Ash Wednesday, the ritual beginning of the Lenten season. During these services we receive ashes on our foreheads and begin our fast.

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

May God's love be with you this Lent.

In Christ,

Rev. Ian Collier

Associate Pastor & Editor, Wesley Freedom Devotionals

Monday, February 12

Psalm 103

REFLECTION

“Praise the LORD, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.”

As you begin this Holy Season, I encourage you to give God space to speak so that you may be reminded of the depth and height, power and gentleness of God’s love for you. I know you will be blessed by reading the words written by those who worship and serve around you; still, give primary attention to the scriptures which are given.

If you haven’t already, pause now and read Psalm 103. Remember, the psalms are prayers or lyrics written to invite a conversation with God. As we read this psalm, we are swept up into a song of praise and adoration. The poem begins and ends with the psalmist inviting his soul, the deepest places of his being, to praise the name of the Lord.

Praise is where this week begins as we witness the Lord’s glory on the mountain of transfiguration. The center of the psalm gives us cause to continue in worship even as we grow closer to Ash Wednesday:

“As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust...
But from everlasting to everlasting
the LORD’s love is with those who fear him”

Soon we will invite the mark of dust upon our foreheads, a stark reminder of our fragile humanity and certain mortality. Still, we have cause to praise the Lord all the more for his love is everlasting! The Lord’s love is offered to us in our frailty and will continue through our death for everlasting life!

PRAYER

Pray Psalm 103 as your prayer for the day.

The Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith is Wesley Freedom’s Senior Pastor.

Tuesday, February 13

2 Corinthians 5:20 – 6:10

REFLECTION

Today's passage begins like so many year-end phone calls from higher education institutions: "Hello! This is *so-and-so*, a student ambassador for *Whatever* school! It's time for our annual appeal!" But where the callers usually then turn to nostalgia or talking about the good work the school is doing in the lives of their students, St. Paul lists how awful his life has become (by earthly standards) in service to God's mission. Not exactly 'inspiring' or 'uplifting,' Paul!

But, of course, Paul is not making an appeal for donations; he is urging the Corinthians towards repentance and righteousness. Remember, Paul's own experience of reconciliation with God was intense! Paul had persecuted Christians and was complicit in the lynching of St. Stephen. Jesus threw St. Paul from his horse and blinded him until he was reconciled to God. I can't even imagine how Paul would look back on his former life, but I have to imagine that with an experience like his, Paul would understand the dire need to be reconciled with God. He couldn't bear for his congregations to fall to the depths of sin Paul had formerly been in and was willing to go to extreme lengths to implore them towards reconciliation.

The witness of the extremes Paul was willing to endure to share the Gospel with the world should cause us to pause and ask, "Am I fully reconciled with God? Have I accepted God's grace but then fallen back into sin? Have I so focused on the 'uplifting' and 'inspiring' that I haven't confronted my own shortcomings before the Lord?" Lent is the time to make this self-examination. I can't promise that a life reconciled to God will be prosperous by earthly standards; but, with Paul, I can tell you that it will be eternally worth it.

PRAYER

Lord, give me eyes to see where I have accepted your grace in vain. Give me the words with which to repent, and even more so the gift of virtue to amend my life. Amen.

The Rev. Ian Collier is Wesley Freedom's Associate Pastor.

Ash Wednesday, February 14
Isaiah 58:1-12

REFLECTION

Throughout the prophetic books of the Old Testament, the authors come into conflict with the court-prophets who worked in the palaces. While the court-prophets seemed to encourage the king and people to focus on following the ritual law of God to ensure prosperity, the authors issued dire warnings that continuing to violate the moral commandments – specifically the mistreatment of the poor and needy – would lead to God’s wrath, regardless of how well they kept the ritual laws. The traumatic conquests that destroyed Israel and Judah, followed by the exiles that wiped out most of the Hebrew tribes and left Judah in captivity, ultimately proved these prophets correct. Probably written after the return of the Jews to Judah, in today’s passage, a prophet once again chastises God’s people as they resume their cycle of holy days and festivals.

Against the solemn ritual of Ash Wednesday and the start of our Lenten Fast, this passage from Isaiah smacks us with a prophetic critique. We do well to begin this season with fasting, and the imposition of ashes. It is good to remember that we are mortal, doomed for death and, if not for the grace of God, damnation. But ritualized repentance and symbolic penance are not the fasts God prefers. To return to right relationship with God also entails re-joining his mission in the world: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, to share our bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into our house. Notice, God is faithful to respond to true faith on our part, but it is God – and not us – who gets to define what faith looks like. According to this passage, true faith shows up in charity and working for justice.

PRAYER

God, as we fast and pray this day that you might have mercy on our souls, keep our eyes focused on the fast you would choose for us: loosing the bonds of injustice and caring for those in need. Amen.

The Rev. Ian Collier is Wesley Freedom’s Associate Pastor.

Thursday, February 15
Deuteronomy 30:15-20

REFLECTION

In Moses' words of encouragement to God's people, we find a simple path to a rich and blessed life. His words, as paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in *The Message*, tell us to "Love God, YOUR God. Walk in his ways. Keep his commandments." Distilled down, this seems extremely doable and, at a casual glance, easy. How then do we so often stumble and struggle? Perhaps that freedom to choose causes us to lose our focus and resolve.

While I know that I can always find direction and purpose in the Bible, I am consistently seeking God in the secular. I recently came across a video of actor Jeff Goldblum responding to the question of what keeps him inspired. He quoted George Bernard Shaw: "I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it what I can. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations." These words seemed to align with Moses' words. Loving God provides purpose to your life. Walking with God draws you to serving God's people, pulling you to focus on others instead of self. Keeping his commandments provides the foundation for informed good decisions. What we do for God and how we care for his people is a privilege and a responsibility.

We can't love God fully – let alone walk with him or keep his ordinances – because we have allowed other things to take precedence. During Lent, what would it look like to set aside or fast from being busy and shift our focus to loving God fully so that our walk with him is more pleasing?

PRAYER

Gracious God, the life you have promised is rich and full of blessings. Help us to keep our focus on you. It is easy to stray and to stumble. We ask that you keep our feet on the path. Guide our decisions so that we honor you. Amen.

Sherry Perrine is the Director of Children & Family Ministries.

Friday, February 16

Psalm 51

REFLECTION

King David, “a man after God’s own heart,” falls short of the mark set by God. David sinned not only against his fellow man by lusting, adultery, and even murder, but also against God himself. David’s reaction after being shown the error and harm of his ways was lament, confession, and calling upon God’s unfailing love and mercy to forgive him, cleanse him, and give him a new heart.

It is Lent, which means that now is our daily opportunity to turn our eyes inward, looking at all aspects of our lives – child, parent, spouse, teacher, friend, neighbor, boss, employer, employee, etc. – looking for areas where we each have missed the mark. Perhaps use a magnifying glass if you have trouble seeing anything.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy on me!

Where have I done something I should not have or left something undone I should have done – not loved my neighbor as I so love myself; as his child, not loved my Father as I should have. Help me lament for what I see, confess to my Savior who died for me while I was yet a sinner, and with a grateful, clean, joyful heart and a new and right spirit, await the peace, joy, love, and hope of Easter.

PRAYER

Let us pray and reflect on David’s words:

Create in me a clean, pure heart; renew an abiding, committed spirit within me; cast me not away from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation. And grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me and give me a job teaching, showing others your ways, so the lost can find their way home.

Mary Louise Carter is a member of Wesley Freedom.

Saturday, February 17
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 18

Worship with us at 8:00AM, 9:30AM, or 11:00AM
(9:30AM & 11:00AM Livestream 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 forever. Amen.

Monday, February 19

Luke 4:1-13

REFLECTION

Lent begins with Jesus being tempted by the Devil. As you read this encounter, don't overly spiritualize it. Let the Devil's targeted and hateful lies land as painfully and absurdly as they are spoken. Given that we are theologians, we know stuff about God; we are not concerned that Jesus, the perfect one, will give in to the Devil's schemes. We know Jesus will endure; Jesus will stick with God's will, speak godly rebuttals, and emerge from the desert temptations all the stronger. Jesus' victory, though, should not erase how painful and difficult these temptations must have been. The New Testament authors tell us, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus was not immune to the stabbing hunger pains as he refused the Devil's bread, nor was it an easy thing to deny Satan's offer of a kingdom now when Jesus knew his kingdom would only come on the other side of sacrificial death.

We begin Lent witnessing how Jesus overcomes very real temptation. Examine your life today. Where are you being tempted to compromise your allegiance to God in order to satisfy fleshy hungers or to obtain power, wealth, or comfort? Study how Jesus overcomes temptation and join him in this careful, painful, critical work. Remember to keep your head up and eyes open. The Devil is always awaiting "an opportune time" to return and tempt us to abandon our loyalty to Christ.

PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith is Wesley Freedom's Senior Pastor.

Tuesday, February 20
Romans 10:9-17

REFLECTION

In today's reading, Paul reminds us of the importance of our mouths as well as our hearts with respect to the good news. We need to do more than believe. We need to share the message. Not that it's a work required for salvation, but our sharing should reflect that salvation. Our responsibility isn't just to ourselves, but also to our community in spreading our beliefs.

Sharing our beliefs can be uncomfortable; it can seem very personal. A common perception of sharing the message involves "street corner evangelism" – the overpowering approach. But of course, there are more relatable methods.

For both of us, believing is much easier than evangelizing. While we work on becoming more comfortable with evangelizing, we put our love for our neighbors into action. Verse 12 says that "there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all," which means that our Muslim friends (who we work with as part of the Heart For Refugees ministry) deserve to hear about Jesus and what he means to us. It is not our mission to convert them to Christianity; it is to show them what Christian love looks like.

While we get to know the Afghan refugee family we support and help to meet their material needs, we hope to also tell them why we care for them (because Jesus first cared for us). Verse 15 says "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." I hope that as we care for the Nabizada family, we will be the hands and feet of Jesus and they will hear the message.

PRAYER

Father, we ask that you continue to guide us in doing more with spreading your good news. Amen.

Kate & Paul Ledbetter lead Wesley Freedom's Heart For Refugees team.

Wednesday, February 21

Revelation 3:14-22

REFLECTION

In this scripture, Jesus rebukes the people of Laodicea by comparing them to useless and tasteless food or drink. He invites them to repent of their sins and recognize that they aren't as righteous as they think they are. Because of his love, he doesn't stop there. He offers them the riches (gold, clothes, and eye salve) of a relationship with him. Instead of the material riches they think they need and the empty life they lead, he comes to their “door” and knocks, because he wants a relationship with them.

The words used in this passage can seem harsh, but sometimes harshness is needed in order to wake someone up from sin. It can be scary to read something like this. One could feel anxious or afraid when reading this harsh language. But Jesus contrasts his rebuke by knocking on their door with his invitation to “eat with you and you with me” and with the reward of a “place with me on my throne.”

The life of material things is just that – material. In it is death. Cars break, money comes and goes, big TVs break, fame is only temporary, physical beauty changes with age, and all those things do not fill us up. At the end, we find ourselves empty and facing the wrong way instead of facing God and his love. In the material world there is death, but with God there is everlasting life.

PRAYER

Almighty God, you pursue us with your goodness and mercy: No matter where we are, give us the courage to open the door of our hearts to you, that you may do your healing work in us and that we may know the peace of your presence in our lives; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Greg Walker is a member of Wesley Freedom & Hind Walker is a baptismal candidate.

Thursday, February 22
Genesis 27; 32:3-32

REFLECTION

Initially, I had difficulty making sense of what was going on in the assigned passage, let alone finding a personal connection. The story is about Jacob who struggles with, and feels less than, his twin brother, Esau, and is seeking the love and affection of their ailing father. Jacob's feelings of inferiority drive him to participate in shady shenanigans to fool their father into thinking Jacob is Esau so that Jacob will be the one to receive his father's final blessing. The problem is that although Jacob eventually receives the blessing, he then lives in fear of Esau's revenge on him, and is disappointed because the life he thought would be better is not.

From an educator's standpoint, this makes me think of children who exhibit attention-seeking behavior and people who, throughout the stages of human development, display behavior to get attention – whether it is positive or negative! People often desire to be noticed by family, friends, teachers, coaches, coworkers, etc. Bad decisions should not be made to get what we want.

Later in the passage, we find Jacob wrestling with a 'mysterious man', who is presumed to be God. It is through that match that Jacob actually receives the ultimate blessing; he prevails in faith and not by deception. Not only does God grant Jacob his divine blessing, God changes his name from Jacob to Israel. This change solidifies their relationship, and signifies who Jacob was and who he becomes. As Christians, we need to try to remember that it is God, above all others, whose love and affection we should be seeking.

PRAYER

God, your love is like a hurricane; I am a tree bending beneath the weight of your wind and mercy. Thank you. Amen.

(Prayer after "How He Loves" by John Mark McMillan).

Kim Woodward is the Assistant Director of Wesley Freedom's Early Years Learning Center.

Friday, February 23

Acts 8:26-40

REFLECTION

God gave Philip a task. He was to travel south with no indication where he was to go or what he was to do along the way. He met an outcast Gentile who was a believer and was reading the Bible. As Philip came alongside, the Gentile asked him what the scriptures meant; who was it talking about? Philip then related the good news to this Gentile who was from another country and Philip even baptized him. Philip was ready with the knowledge he had gained from Jesus and was ready to share that gospel with others.

Philip wasn't warned that this is what God was going to do. He didn't have time to write down answers to typical questions about Jesus. He couldn't practice a speech. He did, however, have the help of the Holy Spirit who gave him the courage and the words to share with the Gentile.

Many times, I feel that I cannot tell others the good news of Jesus Christ, that I don't have the words, that I don't know enough to answer all the questions. I am nervous about speaking out.

But, just as with Philip, if God wants you to share the good news, he will provide the courage and the words. He provides this through our study of the bible, our prayer, and our community – the more we do, the more confident we can be. Living the gospel gives us plenty to talk about.

We are blessed with a God who cares for us and helps us along the way. Praise God!

PRAYER

Lord, as you did for Philip, equip us to share your word with those we meet and guide us to places where opportunities to share your grace abound. Amen.

Mark DeVault is a Lay Leader at Wesley Freedom and is on the leadership team of the South Carroll Food Pantry.

Saturday, February 24
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 25

Worship with us at 8:00AM, 9:30AM, or 11:00AM
(9:30AM & 11:00AM Livestream 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, forever and ever. Amen.

Monday, February 26
Romans 3:9-25

REFLECTION

“All have turned away, they have together become worthless...” Pastor Paul is blunt. He sure doesn’t sugarcoat the human condition in this letter to the believers in Rome. He wants them, and us, to be keenly aware that we are sinners. We have turned away from God and become people who speak evil, inflict harm, and disrupt peace. In case you are looking around to identify those sinners, let Paul clarify, “*All* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” That’s you, me, and every human on the planet.

Just as we begin to fear that we might all perish in this dreadful God-forsaken space, Paul reveals God’s plan for our return to him: “All are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” We can be justified – made right with God – by his grace. We can be redeemed from the alienation our sin created into a restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Over the next few weeks we will unpack how our redemption is accomplished. For today, and throughout this week, I invite you to change your posture so that you will be in a position to receive the grace which Christ extends.

Repent! Physically stand up with your back to a window. Notice how you are intentionally denying the light and the view offered. Let this be a reminder of your sinful state wherein you reject the light and vision of the Lord. Confess how you have turned away from God and list the sins that alienation allows. Now turn around and pray:

PRAYER

Almighty God, I confess that I have lived much of my life rejecting your love and grace. I have sinned and fallen short. I turn back to you this day. By the grace of Jesus Christ restore my relationship with you. Give me faith to face you, and redeem me by your grace. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith is Wesley Freedom’s Senior Pastor.

Tuesday, February 27
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-19

REFLECTION

Say this one five times fast: Protoevangelium (Bet you couldn't do it the first time!). Besides being a fancy word that you can impress your Bible Study friends with, Protoevangelium is a concept that is awesome, and it is rooted right in the middle of Genesis chapter 3:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

As you have probably surmised, God is the speaker and is saying this to the Serpent in relation to Eve and her sin of eating of the forbidden fruit in Eden. So, why is this passage so awesome? Because it is the first mention of the good news of God saving us from ourselves; after all, it isn't the Serpent who sins for us, we do that on our own. The moment humans rebel against God is not the moment God turns against us in wrath; instead, it's the instant where God shows us how much he loves us.

Protoevangelium means 'First Gospel' in our language, and it is the promise that the offspring of Eve will defeat evil on our behalf. This offspring is our great hope and God's promise, Jesus Christ. He is the plan of God from the get-go, showing that the Fall of Man is not somehow a surprise susceptibility in the designs of a supposedly faultless God. On the contrary, the sinning of mankind is the 'happy fault' that leads us to know God values us over everything, more than we ever could, ourselves. So, belt out that big Greek word, Protoevangelium; it's really good news if you do!

PRAYER

Good and gracious God, we thank you and we praise you for creating us, for creating the universe around us and the universe within us. Embed in our hearts the faith that even in the moments of our downfall, you are there loving us more than we could ever imagine. Help us to love you and your creation even half as much. Amen.

Tim McKenzie is the Director of Youth Ministry.

Wednesday, February 28
Matthew 5:21-48

REFLECTION

When I read this message, I can really relate to the part of the scripture that says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” As a high school student, I am around quite a few unkind words every day. It’s easy to ignore these harmful words and just go on with my day. After all, they weren’t talking to me. So, does it really affect me? The answer is yes. I feel for those on the other end of the “just joking” comments. Because, let’s be honest, we all know that those comments sometimes hurt the most. And when I am on the receiving end of these words, it’s easy for me to do one of two things: say something I’m going to regret saying later, or just take the words and let the sadness of their words consume me.

No matter how I react to words, it’s hard for me to feel for the person actually delivering them. But, as it says in the scripture, “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?” If we just love the people that love us back, how will we ever spread kindness? Even though it is sometimes hard, I must have the patience to be kind to everyone. When I hear someone getting bullied, I pray not only for the victim, but also the offender, that they find peace within themselves and that they may find a better way to deal with insecurities and emotions. Because if we happened to be the ones saying those words, wouldn’t we appreciate someone praying for us to have peace?

PRAYER

God, as I go through my life, please help me have more patience with people. Help me realize that everyone has their own story and that everyone is going through something. Please make me your servant, that I may spread your love wherever I go. Amen.

Kate Newcomer is a Youth member of Wesley Freedom.

Thursday, February 29
James 1:12-16

REFLECTION

Have you ever questioned the line in the Lord's prayer, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil?" I know I have! Would God really tempt us? Would he test his children in that way? James tells us that, in fact, NO, God does not lead us in such a way. But temptation does exist. Our own thoughts and desires tempt us to sin.

When we are bitter, or angry, or envious, we allow our desire to be "conceived," we then allow sin to be born, and that leads to our sinful actions. When we forgive, offer grace, and show gratitude, we are blessed because we have "stood the test" and persevered, giving God the glory and thus receiving the "crown of life" that he has promised us because we loved him."

I struggle with knowing when God is leading me to do something, or when my hubris is rearing its head. I heard on a radio segment someone say, "You will know the difference between God calling you and the enemy tempting you. God calls you by name, while the enemy calls you by your sin." Our God wants us to search for him, to reach for him, to choose him. Ready your hearts by reading God's word. Then fill your thoughts, words, and actions with seeds of his love, kindness and compassion. This will help to drive out the deceitful and tempestuous thoughts and feelings that ultimately lead to sin. When we do this, we exemplify our Lord God, and bring others to the crown of life!

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, we thank you for your unending grace and mercies that overflow. We ask you to enter our hearts so that the Holy Spirit can guide us in the way that glorifies you and protects us from deceitful and evil-inspiring thoughts. Forgive us our sins, dear Lord. Help us to be the light in the darkness of this world, so that others will search for, reach for, and choose you. Amen.

Gloria Stankiewicz leads the Bible & Breakfast women's group.

Friday, March 1
Psalm 32

REFLECTION

“It’s not the crime, it’s the cover up.” This familiar saying, arising in the wake of the Watergate scandal in the 1970s, points out that often the consequences of a wrong action are dwarfed by the consequences we incur by trying to keep it a secret. We see this play out in all areas of our life – in our jobs, our relationships, and our communities. In Psalm 32, we have a poetic reflection on this dynamic in the life of faith.

There is great power in a good apology. We all make mistakes; we all miss the mark. When we do, one of the most ineffectual things we can do is try to hide it. Who exactly are we trying to fool? The people we affected already know. God surely knows. Sometimes, the only person we are lying to successfully is ourselves.

When we keep silent, we waste away under the affliction of our sin. But when we acknowledge our sins, when we confess them to God, we can receive full forgiveness. This not only heals us of the sins we have committed, but it also enables us to move forward in the process of sanctification. Freed from our sin, we can follow God’s instruction, set our paths straight, and rejoice as we are surrounded by God’s love.

PRAYER

Loving God, perfect in holiness and endless in mercy, I acknowledge that I have sinned against my neighbors and against you. I also acknowledge the ways I have tried to hide these sins in secret. Hear me in love, as I confess these things to you:

(take a moment to speak specifically the sins you have committed)

I trust in you and rejoice in your forgiveness. Lead me in your paths, so that I will become less and less in need of forgiving as I am sanctified and recreated in your image. Amen.

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship.

Saturday, March 2
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 3

Worship with us at 8:00AM, 9:30AM, or 11:00AM
(9:30AM & 11:00AM Livestream 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, forever and ever.
Amen.*

Monday, March 4
Romans 5:6-21

REFLECTION

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” When we do something miserable and become aware of the pain we have caused, we seek out something we can do to make it better. We may apologize, we may seek to do good to cancel out the bad, we may overcompensate with helpfulness. Still, if we are honest, we know there is nothing we can truly do to undo our mess.

In the Hebrew Bible, God is aware of our anxious guilt and provides the sacrificial system. People are invited to bring sacrifices as a means to show remorse and the priest receives the sacrifices as a “blood offering.” The priest offers words of grace which at least, in part, communicate God’s forgiveness. A few steps from the temple though, the humans sin again and so the cycle repeats. While we, like our Hebrew cousins, try to restore our relationship with God, there is nothing we can offer which can fully restore us to righteousness.

Jesus comes as the great high priest who is able to take away the sins of the world. God offers him, and Jesus offers himself, as the perfect and final sacrifice. In the blood of Jesus, which flows down from the cross, God offers what is necessary for our redemption. God makes the sacrifice, enduring the pain of the cross in order to release us from the sting of sin and death. The blood of Christ is “God’s abundant provision of grace.” While it is an affront to our modern sensibilities, we are wise to envision ourselves as covered in the blood of Jesus. This is how God sees us, not as the miserable sinners we are, but as those covered by the sacrificial love and grace of our Lord.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, give me humility and courage to see myself covered by your blood that I might receive the forgiveness and new life your crucifixion and resurrection afford. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith is Wesley Freedom’s Senior Pastor.

Tuesday, March 5
Leviticus 16

REFLECTION

The history behind the Day of Atonement – *Yom Kippur*, the holiest day of the year for god-fearing Jews, both then and now – is found in Leviticus 16. This chapter is all about reconciliation and the process of bringing conflicting parties or people together. As Christians, we see in this chapter God giving Israel an image of the reconciliation that God would complete himself in Jesus Christ. Leviticus 16 picks up where Leviticus 10 leaves off. Aaron's sons and fellow priests, Nadab and Abihu, carelessly tried to worship God outside of the protocol that God required. They were destroyed by God. In today's passage, God provides a method of reconciliation for Aaron, his family, and the Israelites through sacrifices. In the New Testament, God provides the ultimate reconciliation for us sinners, through the sacrifice of Jesus, who made it possible for us to have final peace with God and with each other. As our high priest, Jesus Christ made a full and final sacrifice for our salvation (Heb. 7:27). We believers, who have been justified by faith and reconciled to God by Jesus Christ's victory over sin and death (Rom. 5:1-10), are called to be agents of reconciliation for others (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Leviticus 16 speaks also of a scapegoat that takes the sins of the people and is led away into the wilderness. Jesus is our scapegoat. He takes our sins away and is led to Calvary. He “bore our sins, in his body, on a tree so we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). Praise God. Aaron couldn't come near the mercy seat but once a year, lest he die; we need to come near Jesus, our mercy seat, at all times, that we may live. And when we do, we are to approach God with veneration, reverence, and the ultimate awareness of His supreme being.

PRAYER

O heavenly Father, purify our hearts, forgive us our sins, help us live a life that reflects your glory and holiness to all the world around us.

Vic Cison leads the Stories Made New Adult Sunday School Class.

Wednesday, March 6
Hebrews 9:11-28

REFLECTION

Encouragement can be a helpful rhetorical tool for presenting an idea that is difficult for a congregation to grasp, or one that it may resist. This strategy is appropriate for bolstering the listeners' confidence in important matters. The author of Hebrews succeeds in this goal by offering hope for the future. He speaks of "good things to come" that are rooted in the effective high priestly ministry of Christ, especially highlighting an important effect of Christ's priestly service, the eradication of guilt over past sins.

Preoccupation with guilt over past sins has a debilitating effect on a person, snatching away joy, confidence, and hope. As a good pastor, the author knows that a troubled conscience may prevent one from entering into God's presence. In Hebrews 6:1-3 he had addressed his congregation's need to lay "again the foundation of repentance from dead works," which in this context refers to sins. Guilt over past sins prevented them from moving to mature faith (Hebrews 6:1). The ability of Christ's death to purify their consciences from that guilt recalls the earlier exhortation and adds to it the reassurance that his listeners are now able to approach God freely in worship.

During this Lenten season let us renew our confidence in the belief of Hebrews that Christ's death has effectively dealt with sin. When he comes again, his work will be to bring salvation.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, by your death you have set us free. Amen

Alan C. Mitchell, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Georgetown University.

Thursday, March 7
Colossians 2:6-15

REFLECTION

One of my favorite hymns, *Because He Lives*, begins with this verse:

God sent his Son, they called him Jesus.
He came to love, heal, and forgive,
He lived and died to buy my pardon,
An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.

God came to earth in human form so that we might have a closer relationship with him. Jesus, both divine and human, battled with demons, suffered, was crucified, and then resurrected – all for us. Our sins were forgiven and erased, and we were given new life. Fear and guilt are no longer ours. Death has been abolished for us forever. Eternal life is ours.

Colossians 2:6-15 provides guidance for us in living this new life of freedom in Christ Jesus, for maturing in our faith. Paul tells us that we already have a strong foundation on which to build. Studying God's word and communicating with God in prayer are effective building blocks. Following in Jesus's footsteps and not straying from the path we were baptized into will lead to a life alive in Christ.

Just as there are good building blocks in strengthening our faith, Paul cautions us to be wary of the materialistic world that tempts us, cultural ways that lead us from the truth of God, and false teachings that can readily confuse us, unless we keep our eyes on Jesus and what he has done for us. God has done it all! To God we owe our thanksgiving and praise for this great gift of love and life.

PRAYER

"Come into our hearts, Lord Jesus. Come in today. Come in to stay." Help us to walk with you in the path of Truth. Guide us and strengthen our faith as we live with you in our hearts. In your holy name we pray, Amen.

Lorena Stone serves on the Adult Discipleship Leadership Team.

Friday, March 8
James 2:14-26

REFLECTION

We have all heard the expression, “Put your money where your mouth is,” meaning, “Enough talk, it’s time for action.” According to today’s scripture, the expression could be, “Put your actions where your faith is.” James 2:17 states, “So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” Faith, by nature, is intangible until we, the faithful, bring it to life with our actions. This is living faith. The way we live our lives, through our actions or works, is the lifeblood of our faith.

So, what is good work? It can be a great effort that includes planning, organizing, preparing and physical exertion to help many in need, like volunteering through the Food Pantry or going on Mission Trips. Conversely, good work can also be a phone call, a visit, showing kindness, and praying through our Prayer Chain and Stephen Ministry.

This wide range of good works that are faith-in-action should be intertwined in our daily lives. I am reminded of the quote by Oscar Wilde, “The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention.” I have this quote taped to my computer so I can be reminded that I can incorporate faith-in-action everyday just by being kind and intentionally praying for those in need. What comfort it is to know that through the guidance of Jesus, we have the ability to keep our faith alive!

PRAYER

Precious Lord, guide me to action and good works to keep my faith vibrant and alive. Help me keep my prayers intentional and sincere. Give me the strength when I am called to stretch my capacity to help those in need without boasting. Help me turn my intentions, no matter the size, into action. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Cindy Shruell is the Executive Assistant to the Pastors.

Saturday, March 9
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.

Sunday, March 10

Worship with us at 8:00AM, 9:30AmM, or 11:00AM
(9:30AM & 11:00AM Livestream 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 forever. Amen.

Monday, March 11
Romans 4:1-5; 4:16-5:5

REFLECTION

In today's scripture we find perhaps the greatest scandal in Christianity. God credits the ungodly – the wicked, the scoundrel, the person who commits the most heinous, unforgiveable atrocities – as if they were morally perfect as soon as the person places their trust in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

On its face this is crazy! It seems unfitting for God to be anything other than perfectly just, and justice seems to demand that God give to everyone what they are due. Do good, get good; do bad, get hell. But this view of God makes an improper assumption: that God is neutral. See, God is just, but he's not disinterested; God has a well-known pro-humanity bias. And this is good news for us since, at the end of the day, all of our moral ledgers are in the red. Sure, some are more wicked than others, but none of us on our own can even come close to achieving righteousness. It *is* a scandal that God would treat murderers as his beloved children, but no more scandalous than the fact that God has freely chosen to forgive you, too!

As it turns out, God's forgiveness for those who have faith in him points to a deeper reality than our notions of a disinterested, unbiased accounting of our actions. God does desire us to actually become righteous, and the way to make this happen is for God to love us so intensely, despite our sinfulness, that we begin to reflect that love. God calls us righteous so that we can grow into righteousness. God forgives us through our faith so that we can have the freedom to become the kind of people who no longer sin. God is biased on our side so that we can become what God planned us to be all along. Thanks be to God!

PRAYER

Father, I believe in you; help my unbelief. Give me the faith to accept your forgiveness. Call me righteous until I am righteous. Love me until I become love. Call me your child until I rest in your household. Amen.

Rev. Ian Collier is Wesley Freedom's Associate Pastor.

Tuesday, March 12
Hebrews 11:1-16

REFLECTION

“Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

As a lifelong pragmatist with a healthy dose of anxiety, as well as an adult finder of Christian faith, I’ve always been challenged by the idea of having faith without assurance. It is in our human nature to want to know the “right” thing to do before we act. I want to step forward boldly in my life with faith that God is guiding every step, but I also really want to know before I start if I’ll be happy where I’ll end up!

Yet, within this passage, we see everyday humans whose faith in God’s promise allowed them to make extraordinary choices that set a new course for their lives without any earthly guarantee of what was next. Noah built an ark, collected animals, and had faith sufficient enough that his family got on a boat with him based on a warning given to him from God. Abraham set off to a land where he was considered a foreigner, living in a tent and trusting that God would provide children to his barren wife. Both men had faith in God’s promises to them, even when all logic said that what they were preparing for was not probable in the slightest.

Yes, faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase. Interestingly though, each step we take up that staircase reveals the next step – our next opportunity to grow in our faith, to share the story of God’s grace with others, and to trust in God’s promise. For this Lenten season, I’m leaning into the idea that even though I might not see the whole staircase, God certainly does!

PRAYER

Lord, give me the faith to take my next step towards you, even when my uncertainty and ignorance threaten to hold me back. Help me to rest in your promises and trust your providence. Amen.

Dana Parisi is the Chairperson of Wesley Freedom’s Church Council.

Wednesday, March 13
Galatians 3

REFLECTION

Have you ever felt confined, restricted, or oppressed? Confinement can not only occur physically, but one can experience it emotionally, financially, and in a myriad of other ways. I recall a dream I had as a child where I envisioned my room turned around. When I got out of my bed (sleepwalking) and went to where the door should have been, I encountered a wall and was trapped. My loud cries and screams woke my parents and when they turned my light on, I returned to “normalcy.” The sensation of freedom I experienced was exhilarating. If you have ever felt some type of imprisonment and subsequent freedom, you certainly can relate.

Paul’s letter to the Galatians is the charter of Christian freedom. Paul proclaims our liberty in Christ, freedom from law, and freedom to serve our Lord. Paul warns not to be confined to the law, for the law can never take the place of the Holy Spirit in us. Laws are needed, but laws can only establish rules and associated punishments. They “do not rest in faith.” Christ “redeemed us from the curse of law,” so that we do not have to bear our own punishment.

We are all children of God through faith. Today, more than ever, we are a transparent, diverse community and the common denominator is Christ Jesus. Regardless of race, gender identity, age, financial status, etc., we all seek comfort knowing we are saved by faith. And remember those feelings of freedom? We re-live them every time we love and serve and carry each other’s burdens.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for saving us from judgment and granting us salvation by faith – a faith that will lead us through all confinements and oppressions that we are experiencing, and will experience, during our mortal life. Let us experience true freedom, recognizing that we are not free to disobey you, but we are free to love and serve in your name. Amen.

Denise Reeser serves on Wesley Freedom’s Finance Team.

Thursday, March 14
Matthew 21:23-32

REFLECTION

Today's passage poses an interesting question to us as disciples. The actions and words of Jesus Christ our savior – like John's baptism – seem to the religious leaders to come from "human origin." Why then should we believe the words of God if they are being spoken in this manner? Of course, if Christ's words are really of divine origin, we have to take them seriously! Jesus assures us that our Father has a plan for every single one of us and asks us to have faith in him, and his plan for us. He challenges us to not follow him blindly, but with anticipating hearts, open to any possibilities.

In the end, inheriting God's will means challenging ourselves to follow his plans for us as revealed by John the Baptist and Jesus. As Jesus said in verses 31-32, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."

Doing the right thing in the name of the Lord without questioning whether this will benefit us is how Jesus encourages us to live. We may not fully understand why or how this will help us, but we can have faith that doing the right thing in the name of the Lord will lead you to a path of righteousness and deepen our relationship with God.

PRAYER

Dear heavenly father, thank you for giving us purpose, and thank you for giving us a meaningful life. Help us to use the blessings you have given us to better ourselves, and the world around us. Amen.

Nolan Mailhot is a Youth member of Wesley Freedom.

Friday, March 15
1 John 1:5-10

REFLECTION

To me, this passage speaks about being honest with ourselves. I think so many of us – too many of us – try to portray to the outside world that we have it all together. Our posts on social media show our friends and family the beautiful vacations we went on, the adorable outfits our kids wore, and the perfect family photo we had taken. But why can't we show the real, raw moments? Are we trying to convince everyone else that our life is perfect, or are we trying to convince ourselves?

I have been on a health journey and have started journaling what I eat in a day. However, I found that I was only journaling when I was eating well. I didn't write down the meals or snacks that I was ashamed of. Obviously, I knew that I ate them, but I was afraid to put pen to paper and fully confess it. We know when we haven't done our best, but sometimes it's challenging to acknowledge that we aren't perfect.

1 John 1:8 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." In order to have an honest relationship with ourselves and a healthy relationship with God, we need to be vulnerable. We need to dive in, and figure out what we are hiding from, and what we need in order to be honest with ourselves and with God. Are we actually doing our best, or are we deceiving ourselves? God doesn't only love us when we're perfect; He loves us despite our imperfections. When we confess our sins, we allow ourselves to freely walk with Jesus.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for loving me even when I have sinned. Please help me to be honest with myself and love myself even in my imperfect moments. Help us to walk in your light and share your love with others. Amen.

Kate Ritchie is a member of Wesley Freedom.

Saturday, March 16
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.

Sunday, March 17

Worship with us at 8:00AM, 9:30AM, or 11:00AM
(9:30AM & 11:00AM Livestream 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 forever. Amen.

Monday, March 18
Romans 6

REFLECTION

Did you know that there is more to being saved than just accepting God's forgiveness? Paul is so insistent on his doctrine of justification by faith that many Christians read his brilliant arguments and feel his excitement pour off the pages of their Bibles and their hearts fill with thankfulness for what God has done for them – and rightly so! But as wonderful and exciting as God's forgiveness is, this isn't the end of salvation. Justification (God forgiving our sins and declaring us righteous in spite of ourselves) helps us understand what we are saved *from* – namely, estrangement from God due to sin. But, being a forgiven sinner is not all there is in this earthly life. Instead, we believe that we have been freed from the guilt of sin so that we can cooperate with God's grace to reach a point of spiritual maturity where we no longer sin anymore. This process is called Sanctification – literally, being made holy. The goal of our faith is not just to accept Christ's forgiveness and then go on sinning; the goal is that the freedom we are gifted by Christ's forgiveness gives us the confidence to devote our full selves to imitating Christ and living sinlessly.

During Lent we remember Christ's sacrifice on the cross. But Christ's death was not something he suffered in our place so we wouldn't have to; the cross is an invitation to join Christ. Christ's sinless death opens the door for us to die to our sin, and Christ's resurrection opens the door for us to live our lives sinlessly in him.

Being justified by faith is a good first step, but it's not full salvation. Be sanctified; die to your sin and live in holiness. Become perfect. That's what God saved you *for*.

PRAYER

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Ian Collier is Wesley Freedom's Associate Pastor.

Tuesday, March 19
Philippians 3:7-21

REFLECTION

Throughout our lives, we often feel pressure to compete. Whether that's comparing ourselves to classmates, family members, friends, or coworkers, there is a drive that pushes us to want to be better. I am sure I am not alone in having some accomplishments or wins that I am personally incredibly proud of. Sometimes that accomplishment is completing a big project; sometimes I'm extremely proud of myself for just getting out of bed in the morning.

In verse 8, we read that knowing Christ Jesus is of such value that everything else is not only irrelevant but considered a loss. Wait ... hold on! Why would our performance be of negative value to us? If you're like me, you might experience some feelings as you read that part of the passage. I think this verse might be providing an opportunity for those feelings to surface so we may acknowledge our pride. I don't believe being proud of ourselves is always bad; however, this passage reminds us to be self-aware of this pride and to analyze the different material and non-material things that hold importance for us. These achievements might actually be preventing us from solely seeking and holding value in knowing Christ.

By posing a barrier to us, we might make sense of how these things might be of negative value to us and to our true goal of deepening our faith and drawing closer to God. But try not to worry, if you are like the writer of this passage, you may not have perfected this skill yet. That's ok! However, we should aim to continue pressing on to make this our target – to value our relationship with Christ above and before anything and everything else.

PRAYER

Lord, we pray that you would strengthen us in our desire to continue growing closer to you. Give us the humility to be aware of anything we place in the way of our relationship with you. May our relationship with you be the foundation of our life and may we always seek to honor you in all that we do. Amen.

Brok Hess is a member of Wesley Freedom.

Wednesday, March 20
Ephesians 4

REFLECTION

In Ephesians 4, Paul holds a magnifying glass to our blood-bought calling and what it requires of us. If you've ever wondered, 'what's my purpose?', or ever felt lost and aren't sure of where you belong, worry no more – Ephesians 4 offers hope and purpose. Don't be mistaken though, it's with intention and self-examination that we are to focus on being humble, gentle, patient, to go out of our way to eagerly accommodate and love the people around us, maintaining the unity we have as followers of Jesus in the Spirit – a purpose that resonates deeply.

This part of Ephesians 4 never fails to leave me breathless: "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive..." Because Jesus did not stay dead when he was crucified and because he ascended on high, I am free. Moreover, we can't escape the paradoxical beauty of the fact that when we willingly become prisoners of the Lord, we truly find genuine freedom.

In the recovery community, our first step is to come out of denial about the struggles in our lives that have made it unmanageable. Step 2 is believing that God can restore us. Step 3 is turning our will and our lives over to God. Ephesians 4 supports that thinking when it tells us to put away our former lives, our old self, and to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. We now clothe ourselves with the new self, created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

During this season of Lent, are you ready to take on this magnificent calling that was purchased with our savior's blood? Are you ready to truly surrender your will and be renewed? The journey awaits!

PRAYER

Lord, help me to live a life worthy of this calling. Thank you for your sacrifice and resurrection and for taking captive captivity!

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

Thursday, March 21

2 Peter 1:1-11

REFLECTION

Simon Peter, an apostle of Jesus, tells us that we have been given, through God's grace, all that we need to follow in Jesus' footsteps. I feel that my task during Lent is to become more like Jesus during this journey of 40 days with prayers, daily devotions, re-examination of my current life by surrendering my non-Jesus-like ways.

It has taken me many years of various life experiences (not always pleasant!) and church participation in different areas to begin to develop an awareness of the enormity of God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. I was not brought up in a regular church attendance family. It wasn't until my immediate family moved across the country to Maryland in the late 1960s that a neighbor (my age) invited me to her church. It was then that I became involved in Senior High United Methodist Youth Fellowship and the choir. She planted the seed, and it was up to me, with Jesus' guidance and help, to continue my life-long journey.

Today's scripture reveals a clear and understandable pathway on the journey, well worth our efforts. We start with our faith and to that add: 1. good character; 2. spiritual understanding (knowledge); 3. self-control (discipline); 4. passionate patience; 5. reverent wonder; 6. warm friendliness to all; 7. generous love. I find these seven "faith builders" help me focus on what is really important in becoming more like Jesus!

PRAYER

Lord, I give you all the thanks and praise for the many blessings in my life! I pray for continued growth in my endeavors to be more like you. I thank you for your apostles who continued your teachings on how to grow in faith. Continue to guide me on this life-long journey with you. Amen

Susan Steiner is a member of the Chancel Choir and Director of the Wesley Freedom Handbells.

Friday, March 22
Ezekiel 36:22-38

REFLECTION

This Old Testament reading takes us back to the 500s BC. At this time, God's people, as consequence of their sins – including disobedience and profaning God's holy name – were exiled and captives within the Babylonian Empire. Through Ezekiel, a prophet exiled in Babylon, God declares that he will act to sanctify his holy name and remind everyone that he is the Lord God. But God is merciful. He also declares that he will sprinkle clean water to cleanse his people and put in them a new heart and a new spirit. To show his power, God promises to rebuild all that has been broken.

But what does this message from God during the Babylonian captivity have to do with us today? The circumstances may be different in time and place, but the story of our many sins, including disobedience and profaning God's holy name, is the same. As then, God remains merciful to us today, and we are a people blessed to be given new life through Jesus Christ. And as then, we are a people called to be holy (that is, set apart) for God's good purpose. When we are baptized, we are born again and given a new heart that can receive the Holy Spirit. We can be in right relationship with God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – by turning away from our sins and receiving God's mercy.

God promised to rebuild what was broken then; and he did, by rebuilding the towns and walls of Israel. Today he rebuilds us through his grace and our faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

PRAYER

Almighty God, help me to see the consequences of my sins, how broken I am and how much I need you. Heal me. Help me be obedient to your Word and follow your commandments to love you with my whole heart and love my neighbors as myself. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Robert & Gina Jacoby serve on the Adult Discipleship Leadership Team.

Saturday, March 23
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.

Palm Sunday, March 24

Worship with us at 8:00AM, 9:30AM, or 11:00AM
(9:30AM & 11:00AM Livestream 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, forever and ever. Amen.

Monday, March 25

Mark 11:1-11

REFLECTION

Throughout this Lent we have been considering many postures of faith. We have stood tall, kneeled, turned, and bowed low. This Holy Week, I encourage you to spiritually, and if possible physically, walk. *Walk with Jesus.* Live this Holy Week as it is depicted in the scriptures; a fast-paced walk led by Jesus.

We begin on Palm Sunday as Jesus willingly walks, and for a few moments rides a donkey, into the city of Jerusalem. We are invited to picture many lining the streets waving palms and shouting, “Hosanna,” but we see, as well, the many who walk behind him. Don’t just stand watching; walk with Jesus into the holy city. Notice how willingly he enters; how brisk his step is as he comes to give the fullness of himself for our salvation.

Each day of this Holy Week, continue the journey with Jesus. Acknowledge the places where the crowds turn against him and even his friends fail to follow. Notice how few walk with Jesus as he goes to Gethsemane. Keep walking, all the way to Golgotha, that you may see the extent of Jesus’ resolve to save you. He will not stop until his feet are lifted from the path onto the cross. Here you can pause, here you can wait, until invited to run and look into Easter’s empty tomb!

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, give me faith and stamina to walk with you from the gates of Jerusalem all the way to the cross. Open me to acknowledge your sacrificial love which drives each step. Teach me to walk in the ways of unconditional love and justice until my earthly feet rest and I join you in glory. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith is Wesley Freedom’s Senior Pastor.

Tuesday, March 26
John 12:1-11

REFLECTION

We all have something we value. Be it a sentimental possession you have, an item you desperately want, or a goal you wish to attain, we all place value in something. At times we also see what others have and put value in attaining that for ourselves. My thoughts go to my neighbor with that beautiful red Corvette he proudly shines up on the weekend. I wonder, at times, if my possessions and ambitions truly honor my Lord Jesus Christ. Have I, perhaps, made these things a bigger priority in my life than Christ because of what I think they may gain me? What value does anything truly have if it cannot honor Jesus Christ?

As you read the passage in John 12:1-11, Jesus makes a trip to Bethany for a dinner being held in his honor. Mary took pure nard, which is an expensive perfume, and poured it on Jesus's feet. She then wiped his feet with her hair. The perfume had great value and could net a great profit – a year's wages! – if sold. Mary placed more value in using the perfume to honor Jesus, despite the monetary value that the perfume could bring. Furthermore, she showed humility by using her own hair to wipe Jesus's feet.

The world appears to place so much value on what we can physically possess or attain, and teaches that the value of these things should be honored. But the Gospel teaches that what we possess and the ambitions we have are gifts from God to help us forge ahead in this world for his glory. These gifts are also meant to be shared with others for their journey towards Christ as well. Honor Jesus Christ with all you have, for your greatest possession is his love.

PRAYER

God, please help us to stay focused on honoring you. Humble us to see that in your love and grace it is not what we physically possess that is important, but how we use what we have to honor you. Lead us closer to you in every action we take, so your love shines through us and to others abundantly.

Chris Pickett serves on the Adult Discipleship Leadership Team.

Wednesday, March 27
John 12:20-36

REFLECTION

As we entered the new year, we both made a commitment to spend time releasing the things that don't serve us well. This may mean clutter in our home, certain relationships, or even certain mindsets. We realized that if we continued to hold on to these things, we would not have room in our lives to truly live the way God wants us to live.

As we reflect on this passage, we recognize what a wise decision we made this year. Letting go is a critical part of living an abundant life. If we are unable to let things die, we cannot experience life. And this is a hard idea for us to embrace because we typically associate death with heartache. Death often signals the end of something special.

But in this passage, we are reminded that to gain eternal life, we have to be willing to give up everything. This idea is often what brings us comfort when we lose someone we love. And we have to remember that dying is what Jesus came here to do for us. He came to give up everything so that we can have eternal life. And although giving things up feels impossible at times, and holding on to all of it is so tempting, it's clear this is not the path we should take. By holding on, we will never experience the glory of eternal life. We will never experience what Jesus wants for us.

What resonates with us the most, however, is the fact that we have a choice. Jesus came to die for many, so will we choose to follow him wherever he goes? Absolutely! We wake up every day, by the grace of God, and we make that choice. And in following his path and his light, we also choose to treat our neighbors well. We choose to let go of what doesn't serve us. We choose love, light, and life.

PRAYER

Lord, allow us to continue seeking you in all that we do. May we live in your light and allow that light to illuminate our path. For we know, your love will always lead us to a path that is guided by goodness and will lead to eternal life.

Martine & Sean Foreman are members of Wesley Freedom.

Holy Thursday, March 28
John 13:21-35

REFLECTION

I imagine myself at the table with Jesus as he reveals that one of us will betray him. Would I have taken the opportunity to lean in and whisper, “Who is it?” while looking side-eyed at the disciples around me? I imagine what Judas was feeling, as he walked out into the night, still chewing on his betrayal, yielding to Satan with each step. We have all lived with our own sin and witnessed the sins of others. We feel the weight of our sins, but Jesus carries the burdens of all our sins. At this difficult time for Jesus, as he sends Judas out knowing the betrayal to come, knowing his own physical life is ending, Jesus speaks of glory and love. God comes to us in human form, is crucified, and sacrifices his life to pay the penalty of our sins. Jesus is the ultimate act of love and mercy, glorifying God.

With this new commandment in John 13:34, Jesus gives us meaning and a path to salvation. It’s a big charge. People will know we are Jesus’ followers based on how we treat one another. This is it. It’s the big “WWJD” of the 1990s. The “In His Steps” of the 1900s, the “love one another as I have loved you” bit. This is how we show the world we are Christians. In a world that caters to self-indulgence and selfishness, let us be different. This love will define us. When it gets hard, when love seems impossible, remember he has given us a beautiful example.

PRAYER

God, what glory I give to you. Thank you for the incredible gift of love. Help me remember that, through you, I am capable of sharing your love, regardless of wrongdoings, including my own. Help me remember that by giving and receiving love, I glorify you. For you have fought the fight and gained victory for the world with your everlasting love. Amen.

Lauren Ellis is a member of Wesley Freedom.

Good Friday, March 29

Luke 23

REFLECTION

Wednesday nights during the school year are times when the Wesley Freedom campus is packed. I teach a bible study, the Choir rehearses, a support group meets, Middle School Ministry fills the Freedom Youth Center, and our Wesley Wednesday: KIDS program learns together in our Community Life Center. The kids in this program always amaze me with the questions they ask about the bible stories they learn – questions that most adults would like the answer to, but feel foolish asking. This fall, one spoke up and asked, “Pastor Ian, why is it called ‘Good Friday’ if Jesus dies? That doesn’t seem good.”

This child, of course, is correct. The death of Christ is the worst day in the history of the cosmos itself, and it is the darkest hour in human history, as we killed God. We are liable for the unjust execution of Jesus. And yet, St. Luke makes clear in his Gospel that Christ willingly allows his life to end. As Messiah, Jesus really could have saved himself; instead, he commits his spirit to his father. And he does it for us. And because of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday, we know that there is more to Friday than our crime. It is here, as Christ’s soul descends to the land of the dead, that our victory is won.

With Christ’s death, Life itself enters the prison of Death and bursts its doors open from the inside. Christ conquers the power of Sin, takes away the Devil’s leverage, and earns for humanity so much merit that any debt we owe to God is paid off. What Christ does on this day, he does for us. And this is *good* news. Look to the cross; know that this is the hour of your redemption and prepare for Easter, the promise of your resurrection.

PRAYER

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

The Rev. Ian Collier is Wesley Freedom’s Associate Pastor.

Holy Saturday, March 30
John 19:39-42 & 1 Peter 3:18-19; 4:5-6

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

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

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

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

Easter Sunday, March 31
John 20:1-18

REFLECTION

We Methodists love prevenient grace, the truth that God is already working to save us before we recognize or respond. God out there in front of us, God already at work. The message of Easter, the good news of resurrection, is that God got there first.

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark,” God’s light already shines, because Jesus – the light of the world (John 8:12) – is already risen. Prevenient light. “Mary Magdalene came to the tomb,” that place where death sought to contain him. But she found the stone removed, because already God’s incarnate life roams freely; Jesus – who is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25) – has already been raised. Prevenient life. Mary seeks Jesus, weeping, because she thinks “they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” But the Lord Jesus got up earlier than Mary that morning, not removed by co-conspirators, but resurrected by the Father in the power of the Spirit. Lord Jesus already knows her grief and pain, and ours too; he is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11) finding his lost sheep and calling her by name. So he promises what only the Lord God can, that his ascension will mean that from now on his Father will be our Father too (vs. 17 uses plural pronouns)! Now Mary has seen what God has already done on Easter: light breaks out, life steps forth, “I have seen the Lord!” Prevenient love.

PRAYER

Glory to you, O Father,

for on this day you raised up the Light of the world to vanquish our darkness.

Glory to you, O Christ,

for on this day you overcame death, and became our Way to everlasting life.

Glory to you, O Holy Spirit,

who dries our tears, joins us in joy, and sends us proclaiming our risen Lord.

Make us again what you have already made us, your enlightened, enlivened, emboldened Easter people. Amen.

The Rev. Brent Laytham, Ph.D., is Dean of St. Mary’s Ecumenical Institute.

Monday, April 1

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

Our next Wesley Freedom Daily Devotional Guide will be published for the Christian season of Advent (Sunday, December 1, 2024 – Christmas Day, Wednesday, December 25, 2024). If you would like to join our team of devotion authors, we would love to work with you! Pastor Ian is happy to provide any help or guidance you may require. Your voice will be a blessing to the congregation. If you are interested in joining the team, email Pastor Ian at icollier@wesleyfreedom.org.

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

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

- Monday: John 20:19-31
- Tuesday: Luke 24:13-35
- Wednesday: Luke 24:36-49
- Thursday: John 21:1-14
- Friday: Luke 24:50-53
- Saturday: Sabbath

May God bless you, now and always.

Happy Easter! Christ is Risen! Hallelujah!

Ian+

