

# LENT 2017

## Weekly Devotional



First Baptist Church of Dayton  
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## Ash Wednesday March 1, 2017

*Isaiah 58:1-12*

*Psalms 51:1-17*

*2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10*

*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

[Below is a blog post I wrote back in 2010, which still seems relevant today.]

### **Remember that you are dust..**

A few months ago our church, like many others, was making budget preparations, deciding how much we would allocate to this and that function of the church. And one day I found myself reflecting aloud to a fellow pastor about the extent to which long-time members of the church were invested in keeping the church, both its life and its building, exactly as it was or continues to be. We are all guilty of this to some extent, though some more than others. Wanting to hold on to an experience or atmosphere or style of being church that works for us, we can become attached to our traditions and place of worship. The problem is that the church is not meant to be a static institution, but a dynamic organism (the Body of Christ!).

So I began to wonder if part of the problem had something to do with an inability to accept our mortality. I wondered if the desire to preserve the building and the life of the church “the way it’s always been” for us ignores or denies the reality that we will not always be alive to enjoy it. This desire ignores or denies the reality that the Church is constantly changing—dying and rising—with new members who have new gifts and talents and ideas for ministry. I am convinced that churches many churches have succumbed to this desire and have become ingrown—forgetting to invite and welcome new members or preventing what new members there may be from exploring and expressing their gifts for ministry. And they are dying physically and spiritually as churches, even as they secure themselves in their beautiful places of worship, telling one another that they will live forever.

I believe that Ash Wednesday provides a way out of this scenario, a wake-up call, if you will: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” When those ashes are placed on our foreheads it can/should impress upon us the sometimes shocking reminder that we are finite beings with relatively little time to concern ourselves with things that do not matter. For however much we may want to ignore or deny it, we will return to dust. Therefore, let us spend our life’s energy striving for the kingdom of God for ourselves and those yet to come, because it alone endures forever. Amen.

Rev. Jason Alspaugh

## First Sunday in Lent March 5, 2017

*Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7*

*Psalms 32*

*Romans 5:12-19*

*Matthew 4:1-11*



In traditional Christian lectionaries, the Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent is always the story of Jesus's Temptation. This year we get St. Matthew's account. And the remaining pieces of the lectionary for the day seem deliberately to support the centrality of that dramatic narrative.

The reading from the Hebrew Scriptures is the familiar story of God's commandment to Adam and Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden and their temptation, their disobedience, their Fall. The story of Jesus's temptation is the direct counterpart, abounding with parallels. Jesus is tempted in the wilderness rather than the idyllic Garden. The tempter

appears in a more insidious disguise (in Milton's *Paradise Regained*)—that of a hermit requesting Jesus's help. But Jesus succeeds where Adam and Eve fail, and the story ends with angels coming to minister to him, not angels presiding over the expulsion from the Garden of Eden into a fallen world.

Psalms 32 continues the focus on confession of our iniquities, our own failures to resist temptation, coupled with the assurance of God's forgiveness. And the ending of the Psalm reinforces the ending of the Temptation narrative: "The Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him."

The passage from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans holds up Abraham as exemplifying the figure justified by faith (not works). Paul quotes from Psalm 32: "Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven," providing yet another link with the beginning of our Lenten period of confession and contrition.

Then we get the familiar Temptation narrative, with Jesus as the new Abraham and new Moses, fulfilling the Law, being tempted in every way as we are, but not falling. I am particularly drawn to the 12<sup>th</sup>-century mosaic depiction of the narrative sequence in St. Mark's Basilica, Venice. It follows the order of Matthew's account, "reading" from left to right—first the temptation to turn stones into bread, then the temptation to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, then the display of all the kingdoms of the world from the mountain top and the invitation to worship the devil in order to gain all of that power and material wealth. (St. Luke's account reverses the last two temptations.) The mosaic displays Satan clearly as a fallen angel. It shows a Jesus not as an emaciated ascetic, but resplendent in robes and armed with the scrolls of the Hebrew Scripture, which he uses authoritatively to renounce Satan—quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13. By stressing Jesus's forty days and forty nights of fasting, the story allows an identification between Jesus and those subsequently embarking on the forty days of

Lenten fast. And the mosaic ends with the angels who come to minister to Jesus, dwarfing the defeated Satan, now tumbling downward.

Thus the particular resonance of the Collect traditionally assigned for the First Sunday in Lent (and I quote the contemporary version now found in the Church of England's *Common Worship*): "Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted as we are, yet without sin: give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit; and, as you know our weakness, so may we know your power to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."

R. Alan Kimbrough

## Forty days and forty nights

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Forty days and forty nights  
thou wast fasting in the wild;  
forty days and forty nights  
tempted, and yet undefiled.

Should not we thy sorrow share  
and from worldly joys abstain,  
fasting with unceasing prayer,  
strong with thee to suffer pain?

Then if Satan on us press,  
Jesus, Savior, hear our call!  
Victor in the wilderness,  
grant we may not faint or fall!

So shall we have peace divine:  
holier gladness ours shall be;  
round us, too, shall angels shine,  
such as ministered to thee.

Keep, O keep us, Savior dear,  
ever constant by thy side;  
that we thee we may appear  
at the eternal Eastertide.

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Words: George Hunt Smyttan (1822-1870), 1856

MIDI: Aus der Tiefe rufe ich (Heinlein) (*Nürnbergisches Gesangbuch*, 1676, attributed to Martin Herbst, 1654-1681)

Second Sunday in Lent  
March 12, 2017

*Genesis 12:1-4a*

*Psalm 121*

*Romans 4:1-5, 13-17*

*John 3:1-17*

I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?

All across this wonderful country of ours there are beautiful mountains of all shapes and sizes. I love all of them! From the Great Smokey Mountains of my home state of North Carolina, to the Alleghenies, to the Rocky Mountains, to the Chugach Mountains of Alaska, they all inspire me. Perhaps the pilgrim psalmist was looking to the mountains around Jerusalem as his inspiration, with their strength of form and spiritual shrines. Or perhaps he was thinking of the perilous journey through the ravines and gorges, hiding places of wild beasts and robbers.

The priest or choir answers him in calm, steady words of assurance and trust. Just as God promised Abram that he would be blessed, God is ever attentive to our needs. He will not let our feet slip, because He does not rest. He is our keeper, our shade, and our right hand. Our life is in His hands, which are wide enough to keep our coming in and our going out of this world.

In fact, He loves us so much that he gave us his son Jesus.

Mountains inspire me and remind me of the eternal strength of our God. They also remind me that not all life is lived on the mountain top with soaring spirits, but God is with us as we make our pilgrim journey through the ravines and gorges in life.

May God travel with you today, and every day. Amen.

My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

David Coggins

Third Sunday in Lent  
March 19, 2017

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

“We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment  
he already has thrown them open to us.”

*THE MESSAGE // REMIX*  
*The Bible in Contemporary Language*

Toward getting people to that point of connection and understanding, Jesus went through a lot. He knew somehow what he had to do on that final trek to Jerusalem. Keep on keeping on, pointing toward that city and, through the power God gave him, feeding and healing. Convincing some, under the scrutiny of others. Walking into certain death.

Speaking to everyone of the hour coming when those who believe in his connection with God will see and understand his sacrifice on behalf of all. Will know his post-death resurrection, then - through faith - experience it themselves.

Always, but especially in twenty-first century America, as important to us all as Jesus' crucifixion, then resurrection into life, is the character, endurance, suffering - the courage of Jesus on his journey toward arrest and death on the cross.

Charlene Bayless

**Fourth Sunday in Lent**  
**March 26, 2017**

*1 Samuel 16:1-13*

*Psalms 23*

*Ephesians 5:8-14*

*John 9:1-41*

The New Testament lesson for today from John chapter nine involves Jesus' healing of a blind man.

This passage raises a question for me: Who is blind? Upon seeing the blind man, Jesus' disciples posed a curious question regarding sin. They reasoned that either the blind man or his parents were sinful obviously causing the blindness. Jesus told his disciples that sin had nothing to do with the man's blindness. How many of us look on people whose fortunes are less than ours and make the same mistake of Jesus' disciples? Many times we hear and/or say, "It is their fault that they are having problems." Most of the time we say this in a state of ignorance.

In this story, and throughout his life, Jesus demonstrated that people in need of help do not need our judgement. He healed the man's blindness demonstrating that his love, and the love of the One who sent him, is constant and without condition. It is we who offer judgement instead of help, who are blind.

My prayer for the day:

God, our Creator, Redeemer and our constant Spirit of Goodness,  
Have mercy on me for my acts of blindness. Fill me with your spirit of love and goodness so that I can indeed see the world of need that surrounds me. Steer me away from my natural need of being judgmental and lead me in acts of love. This I fervently pray in the name and spirit of the one who you sent, Jesus Christ, my Savior. Amen.

Ray Landis

Fifth Sunday in Lent  
April 2, 2017

*Ezekiel 37:1-14*

*Psalm 130*

*Romans 8:6-11*

*John 11:1-45*

These are familiar passages.

Ezekiel: the raising of the “dry bones”

Psalm 30: “Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel.”

Romans 8:6-11: “...the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.”

John 11:1-45: the story of Lazarus

They tell of death and restoration/resurrection/redemption.

It starts with the story of...

## BONES

An early reference to Bones is where Moses brought Joseph’s bones to the promised land. Apparently, bringing “bones” was not just an honor, but was also to bring the character of the person with you, i.e. Joseph’s leadership, integrity, compassion. “The Jerusalem Talmud (Mo’ed Katan 1:5) describes the practice of likut atzamot (gathering of bones), a two-phase procedure of burying Jewish bodies in deep pits (mahamorot) and waiting for the skin to dissolve before removing the bones for reburial. The bones were then placed in an ossuary, or bone box, in anticipation of the resurrection of the dead. The Jewish acceptance of ossuaries was probably based on Ezekiel’s prophecy of the Valley of the Dry Bones (37:1-14)...” <http://www.avotaynu.com/books/Chapter1a.pdf>

I just got an email from a friend who had broken her hand bone, remembering the difficulties from a previous break. We so easily take our bones for granted until something happens. There are over 45 references to bones in the Bible and more than 50 idioms that refer to bones, so it is obvious that we all understand the reference. For me, right now, I have been feeling “bone-tired” and “bone-dry.” I think you can relate. These passages remind us that God can infuse us with life-giving, spirit-filling...

## BREATH

and perhaps, like Lazarus who “slept” for four days, we just need a bit of time to be “resurrected.”

Lord, when we are bone-tired or bone-dry,  
please remind us to “breathe”  
and fill us with your divine BREATH.

Carol Suddath

## Sixth Sunday in Lent

### Palm Sunday

April 9, 2017

*Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29*

*Matthew 21: 1-11*

Jesus knew. The events that lay before him were determined. His days were drawing painfully short. His journey through various towns seeing the gathered people, healing the afflicted, giving hope to the outcast drew him to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Throngs of believers and seekers gathered to take part in and be a part of this most holy time. They heard the news; their king would be there. The king that would save them and overthrow their oppression. But Jesus was not the king bringing military victory, but a king bringing lasting peace. The type of spiritual hope and peace which is eternal. Jesus knew his appearance brought the greatest hope and would usher in a new kingdom unlike any before him.

Jesus saw their faces. Riding a donkey, a symbol of peace, he saw their outstretched arms wanting to touch his garment. He saw their knees bent praising him as he rode on the path covered in branches in honor of royalty. Jesus saw the children, the women, the men young and aged. He heard their shouts of “Hosanna” as they rushed beside him. He knew from their faces they longed for salvation, to be saved, and to live in a kingdom free from fear punctuated by love. Their faces told the stories but their eyes were lifted upward as they saw their savior.

Jesus reenters Jerusalem today. It’s a feast, perhaps Passover, perhaps a different feast or another city or town not Jerusalem, one in which we live. Rumors abound that a man proclaiming peace and the kingdom of heaven is to enter. Most of us are busy, preoccupied, it’s a holiday, but there are obligations and expectations. The traffic is notoriously heavy on this date, I really haven’t felt all that good lately; I could use a day of rest. What’s his name? Will he be here for a while? I’ll catch it on the news. But okay; I guess I can spare an hour. I see someone walking this way. There are a few women walking behind him and some children. He nears me and stops. His hand reaches up to me and touches my face. I feel the roughness of his hand and see the depth of his eyes. He kisses my cheek and enfolds me in his arms. As he walks away, I feel his everlasting peace. I join the others shouting, “Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest.”

Ed Wingham

## Maundy Thursday April 13, 2017

*Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14*

*Psalms 116:1-2, 12-19*

*1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

*John 13:1-17, 31b-35*

**Maundy Thursday** is a day during the Lenten season when we remember one of the most somber nights of Christ's Passion week—a night that was a surprise, a night no one but Jesus saw coming: the Last Supper, the Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Arrest of Jesus.

Of course, no one referred to it as the Last Supper, and maybe, when you think about it, it should never be.

No one knew then it was the last time they would eat with Jesus before he died. It was just supper. The Feast of the Unleavened Bread, yes, but still—supper. A comfortable word, a routine good moment with the Savior. Until they go to the garden where Jesus is arrested.

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We don't know when things will change drastically in our lives. We have no knowledge of things to come, usually. And we are thrown, like the disciples, into chaos. Gethsemane was the place that everything changed: their leader was arrested and stolen from them, and they were in a panic. They thought, **it will never be the same again.**

We too have had those nights in the garden, when everything was snatched from us, when our worlds were turned upside down and we thought about the events that lead to that garden and we think—we will never have a supper like that again. That was the Last time. We are devastated and feel hollow. Our lives are changed and divided into **BEFORE** the garden, and **AFTER** the garden. We are lost. Our hope is shattered. The path we thought we were on is gone.

But in our church, we regularly share a supper called Communion birthed out of that "last" supper—a supper to remember what Christ sacrificed for us. That supper kept going. That supper keeps going every month in our church, and it is not a supper commemorating chaos, or celebrating hopelessness, it is not a supper made from the panic of the night in the garden. It comes from the sure-footed savior who led that supper knowing what was going to happen, guiding his disciples through it with a little bread, a little wine, an explanation they wouldn't understand until **AFTER** the garden. We understand it now. We get it. But they didn't know it then.

Remember this when you are in the garden at night and it's all been taken from you. That God spoke something to you *before* that will make sense *after* and you just have to get *through*. Hold on. You have to believe those times of happiness and comfort will come again, in a different form, and that God has not left you, and that he is with you in the garden still, as you stand there sometimes as angry as Peter, or praying like Jesus, or shocked as the troops take your security away. I believe He never leaves us, and the supper of his presence continues, even beyond your last.

Jerome Stuart

## Good Friday April 14, 2017

*Isaiah 52:13-53:12*

*Psalms 22*

*Hebrews 10:16-25*

*John 18:1-19:42*

We are at the end of Lent. The previous weeks have prepared us, through reflection and repentance, for today, the culmination of Holy Week. Good Friday marks Christ's sacrifice for us and all of creation.

The lessons from the Psalms and Old Testament appointed for today are filled with suffering and lament. Isaiah describes the suffering servant in bleak terms; he (the Messiah) was stricken, afflicted, oppressed, pierced, crushed, condemned, smitten, despised and rejected.

Psalms 22 speaks from the perspective of the innocent sufferer. He makes it plain that suffering is difficult and trying. He has no desire to endure the suffering that is upon him—he cries out, he blames, he asks why. The suffering servant laments his dire situation.

These passages reveal to us that God, in Jesus Christ, has known suffering. And he doesn't candy-coat his experience. It is made plain that he does not want to undergo this hardship—Christ asks why the Father has left him and allowed his enemies to triumph over him. He is angry and pleads to be saved.

I find this extremely comforting. That the God we worship has known and experienced the human condition, including pain, suffering, and death. Although the suffering we've known is different in nature and degree to Christ (and countless others), it is still difficult to bear. And through Christ's example, I am permitted to cry out and mourn, that is, lament, the situation that causes my pain.

But it doesn't end there. Even though grief and despair fill the first two-thirds of Psalm 22, the last third is devoted to praising God and proclaiming his faithfulness. This, for me, is the hard part—to remember that God is good and worthy to be praised even when I'm hurting, the world is hurting and we feel abandoned.

On this most solemn day, let us cry out to our God as we grieve the death of his Son. But let us remember to praise him, "For God...did not turn away from me, but heard me when I cried out." (Psalm 22:25)

### Prayer for today

Grieving God, on the cross your Son embraced death even as he had embraced life: faithfully and with good courage. Grant that we who have been born out of his wounded side may hold fast to our faith in him exalted and may find mercy in all times of need. Amen.

(Taken from://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=35)

Jaimee Ryan

## Holy Saturday April 15, 2017

*Job 14:1-14*

*Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16*

*1 Peter 4:1-8*

*John 19:38-42*

Rogozhin showed the prince the painting. It hung above the great door “in the gloomiest room in the house.” Although Dostoevsky’s characters are fictional, the painting was real, a painting that Dostoevsky viewed in a museum in Basel during the time he wrote his 1868 novel, *The Idiot*. It was oddly shaped, nearly six feet wide but only ten inches high. The rascal Rogozhin admitted that he liked looking at the painting.

"At *that* painting!" the prince suddenly cried out, under the impression of an unexpected thought. "At *that* painting! A man could even lose his faith from *that* painting!"



“Christ’s Body in the Tomb” by Hans Holbien (1521)

To put the painting in context: most artists romanticized the depiction of religious figures, even the crucified One. But Holbein’s painting captured the prince’s horror for a full five minutes. He exclaims that in it there is not a word about beauty....the dead man's face even shows suffering as if he were feeling it now....this face is horribly hurt by blows, swollen, with horrible, swollen, and bloody bruises, the eyelids are open, the eyes crossed; the large, open whites have a sort of deathly, glassy shine. But, strangely, when you look at the corpse of this tortured man, a particular and curious question arises: ...if all those who believed in him and worshipped him had seen a corpse like that (and it was bound to be exactly like that), how could they believe, looking at such a corpse, that this sufferer would resurrect? Here the notion involuntarily occurs to you that if death is so terrible and the laws of nature are so powerful, how can they be overcome? <sup>1</sup>

Dostoevsky puts into the mouth of his hero an echo of the lectionary text from Job:

For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again.... Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant. But mortals die, and are laid low; humans expire, and where are they? ... mortals lie down and do not rise again; until the heavens are no more, they will not awake or be roused out of their sleep. If mortals die, will they live again? (Job 14:7-12, 14a)

Holbein captures the full humanity of Jesus by painting the grim reality of his death.<sup>2</sup> But what of Jesus’ full divinity? Doesn’t the death of Jesus imply God was somewhere else at the time? Well, that depends in part upon how we understand Jesus’ quotation of Psalm 22:1 while hanging on the cross: “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?”

<sup>1</sup> Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Idiot*. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Vintage Books, 2003 (1868), pp. 215-216, 407.

<sup>2</sup> Matthais Grünewald was another exception to the romanticizing of Jesus.

Jesus quotes this verse in Aramaic, a form of Hebrew spoken among the Jews but probably unintelligible to non-Jewish onlookers. The use of Aramaic would have amounted to a signal flare to the Jews present reminding them of the long historic role the Psalms had played in their lives. When David was afraid, he put his trust in God (Ps 56:3, etc.). When David was alone, he cried out to God (Ps 142:4-5, etc.). All of David's cries are preserved as psalms. In quoting Psalm 22:1, Jesus is crying out just as his ancestor David did. But Jesus is also expecting his hearers to *recall from memory the rest of that psalm!* Spoiler alert: David survives his troubles and praises YHWH in the congregation (22:22, 25). And wherever YHWH is praised, *YHWH is present* (22:3).

Did Jesus' cry call God back from an absence? Wrong question! God was never absent in the first place. (If anything, we could say God was *more* present at the cross than anywhere else.) We all know that John writes that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). God doesn't simply possess the property called "love." God *is* love in God's very being. When we love one another, God *abides*. And, when we love one another we get better at loving (1 Jn 4:12 "love is perfected in us"). What is the paradigm of love, its highest and best form, the archetype which all other love tries to measure up to? *The cross*. Jesus' non-retaliatory, peace-making, forgiveness-granting death is the paradigm of love. Not only is Jesus' death the paradigm of Jesus' love for us. Jesus' death is the paradigm of *God's* love for us (1 Jn 4:10-11). "God is love," John writes for the second time, "and the one who abides in love *abides* in God and God *abides* in this one" (1 Jn 4:16). God wasn't absent; God didn't flee or hide. God was there...*abiding*. At the cross, God was *most* present.

Dostoevsky's hero worries that the painting will erode Christian faith. Similarly, Job's conclusion that "mortals lie down and do not rise again" is based on undeniably solid empirical evidence. All the empirical data scream: All hope is lost! And yet we hope. Why? Because it is only Saturday.

Brad J. Kallenberg

Easter Sunday  
April 16, 2017

*Jeremiah 31:1-6*  
*Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24*  
*Acts 10:34-43*  
*John 20:1-18*

Easter Sunday  
*Lo, I am with you always.*

Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene after the tomb was opened, according to John 20:1-18.

Others were frantically searching for his body...what an interesting aspect from our perspective!

What I love about how God does things is that there is mystery about what God does...things are not according to our ways but according to God's own ways.

Let's listen for the spirit of God in Christ always... there's always more to come!



Janet Lasley

## Additional Devotional Resources for Lent

- Pittsburgh Theological Seminary has created a Daily Devotional for Lent that is available in a variety of formats online (pdf., email, mobile app, etc.). You can find these materials online at [http://www.pts.edu/devotional\\_1](http://www.pts.edu/devotional_1).
- Suggested Books:
  - Brueggemann, Walter, and Richard A. Floyd. *A Way Other Than Our Own: Devotions for Lent*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.
  - Williams, Rowan. *The Sign and the Sacrifice: The Meaning of the Cross and Resurrection*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.
- The Irish Jesuits have created a mobile app available free from the app store called “Sacred Space,” and it provides a daily Scripture reading with guided reflection questions and prayer.