

BISHOP TRACY S. MALONE INVITES US ON A

# Journey through Lent to Easter

## *Saying Yes to Christ!*



I invite us on a journey of deepening our faith in Jesus Christ and reaffirming our commitment to practice the spiritual disciplines that lead to greater discipleship. I invite us to focus on each week's provided theme and scriptures, and to take time to listen to how the Holy Spirit is speaking into our lives and calling us to respond.

During Holy Week and on Easter Sunday, I invite you to read the daily devotion that I wrote for publication in *The Upper Room Disciplines: A Book of Daily Devotions 2024*, available at [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com).

Every day we choose to say yes!

### **Week 1—Feb 14—20**

#### **WORSHIP**

##### **Read: Hebrews 10:25**

The Bible tells us to not neglect meeting together, as some have made a habit, but we are to encourage one another, to spur one another on to doing good and to have hope. Worship is our form of highest praise. When we surrender our hearts to God in worship, our spirit is uplifted, and our joy is renewed. We extend the gift of fellowship when we invite others to worship with us.

### **Week 2—Feb 21—Feb 27**

#### **PRAY**

##### **Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Philippians 4:6**

Prayer is essential to our faith and our walk with Christ. The hymn writer wrote, "prayer is the soul's sincere desire". There are many times people feel powerless in their lives, especially when they experience loss, suffering and hardship. We pray for ourselves, pray for others, and pray on behalf of others to petition God for healing, deliverance, peace, mercy, forgiveness, and hope.

## **Week 3—Feb 28—March 5**

### **LOVE**

#### **Read: Galatians 5:6**

People will know that we are Christians by how we love. There is so much hurt, pain, hate, violence, and division in the world, and that people experience in their lives. The greatest gift and power that we can offer and embody is the love of Jesus Christ ... a love that can bring healing, transformation, and restoration ... a love that welcomes ... a love that extends community.

## **Week 4—March 6—12**

### **GROW**

#### **Read: 2 Peter 3:18;**

#### **Luke 17:5;**

#### **Galatians 5:22-23**

Discipleship is a lifelong journey. As we study the Word of God and take time to pray, we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and grow in love and compassion for others. We have to ask the Lord to increase our faith. As we grow in Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives and is manifested through how we demonstrate love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

## **Week 5—March 13—19**

### **SERVE**

#### **Read: Matthew 25:40**

The Bible tells us that whatever we do for one of the least of these our sisters, brothers, and siblings, we did for him. We must keep our eyes on Christ ... focused on our mission of disciple-making, healing, hope, and transformation. Let us not grow weary in doing good, loving our neighbors ... welcoming the stranger, serving the poor, dismantling racism, building beloved community, addressing violence, and creating better and safer communities. People need Christ ... and the world needs The United Methodist Church.

## **Week 6—March 20—24**

### **LISTEN**

#### **Read: James 1:19**

Taking time to listen to another person's story, perspective, and experience is an act of faith and an act of grace. As the Body of Christ we are to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. We are called to exercise humility, not looking only to our own interests, but to the interests of others.



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**MONDAY, MARCH 25**  
READ: ISAIAH 42:1-9

We all experience times in our lives when we feel overwhelmed by the difficult circumstances that we personally come up against and by painful conditions in our environment that impact us. As a person of faith, I was taught as a child to never question God's presence and to look to the Lord as my source of help and strength. I have discovered across these many years that no matter how deep and abiding one's faith and hope is in Jesus Christ that we will find ourselves asking God, how much more and how much longer can we bear the struggles we endure. How many of us have prayed to God and found that we had no words but questions?

As I read this passage, I can imagine the Israelites asking many questions as they found themselves in exile, feeling defeated and abandoned. The prophet Isaiah proclaims a message of hope and reassures the people of Israel that despite their present circumstances and conditions that the Lord was with them and was upholding them right there in the middle of their suffering. Isaiah declares that God will send a servant who will bring justice and healing to the nations, and he will not be defeated by sin and darkness. As God's covenant people, God will redeem them and will empower them to be God's agents of love, light, justice, and hope to the nations and to the world.

When we feel far from God's presence or feel that God is far from us, let us remember that Jesus is our strength, our deliverer, and our hope. Jesus is right there with us in the middle of our circumstances. Our doubts and questions will never separate us from this promise or from God's presence.

*God help us to always place our trust and hope in you.  
Remind us that you always hear us when we pray!*

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**TUESDAY, MARCH 26**

READ: JOHN 12:20-36

In September of 1995 my mother called our family together to share the news that we needed to start preparing for her death. She knew that it was just a matter of time before she would go home to be with the Lord. I can remember experiencing how troubled my mother's spirit was and yet, being amazed at her unwavering hope and trust in the Lord. No matter what she faced in those difficult days leading to her death, she focused on her faith and shared her joy in having Jesus Christ as her personal Lord and Savior. Many that came to visit April to say their good-byes said that while they were in her presence it was as if they had been in the presence of Christ.

Jesus' soul was troubled as he shared the news that the time had come for him to be exalted. The disciples heard him talk about his death before but now it was imminent. Jesus was not expecting for them to feel sorry for him, but he needed them to understand how his death would impact them and have eternal impact in the world. It was in this moment that the disciples had to make a choice. Each one of them had to ask themselves if they were willing to follow wherever Jesus led them. There was no turning back! Jesus said, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me." (vs. 26, NIV).

During this Holy Week we are invited to examine ourselves and ask if we are being faithful in following Jesus wherever he leads us. Who are the people we are called to serve? Where are the places we are called to go?

*Lord, make your ways known to us and give us your grace to follow wherever you lead us. In Christ's name, Amen!*

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**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27**  
**READ: HEBREWS 12:1-3**

What does it really mean to let go of all the stuff that weighs us down and make us feel trapped? What will it take for us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus as we run this race called life?

The Apostle Paul knew something about the need of letting go of some things and the feeling of being entangled with sin. He had done some things in his past that he was not proud of. Paul had a life-changing moment with God and the Holy Spirit came upon him and transformed his life. Paul began preaching the good news of Jesus Christ.

We find in this passage words of encouragement that teaches us that we can look to the examples of disciples of Christ, in the Holy Scriptures and in our own lives, who went through trials and tribulations and yet kept the faith. And even more than this, we can keep our eyes on Jesus who is the foundation and sustainer of our faith. Jesus is our ultimate example of faithfulness and reveals to us what steadfastness looks like as he endured the cross. Jesus never lost sight of God's divine plan and purpose for his life.

We all have a race to run and will encounter stumbling blocks along the way. Sometimes these are circumstances we have no control over and sometimes they are situations that we create for ourselves. Hear the good news! No matter what your condition is and whatever your case may be, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus! Do not become discouraged and do not grow weary in your faith. God has an amazing way of showing up in our lives when we least expect it, and the Holy Spirit moves in life-changing ways. Stay the course!

Loving God, when things get hard or when we feel helpless, give us eyes to see Jesus and help us find strength through the power of your Holy Spirit.



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**THURSDAY, MARCH 28**

READ: JOHN 13:1-17; 31b-35

Today is Maundy Thursday also known as Holy Thursday in the Christian Tradition. I grew up in The United Methodist Church and on the evening of this day my home church observed the tradition of the Washing of the Feet and The Celebration of the Lord's Supper. Everyone who attended the worship service, no matter their position, status, and title, was invited to wash the feet of someone and to allow someone to wash their feet. We were each given a bowl of water and a towel and then were invited to kneel and take turns serving each other. As we poured the water on each other's feet we said, "Jesus loves you and you are a beloved child of God." And after this ritual we celebrated the Lord's Supper and again, had the opportunity to serve each other.

Washing someone's feet and allowing them to wash yours is a sacred act of humility and service. Being able to be vulnerable with one another reminds us of our own humanness and how fragile we really are. Serving others and allowing others to serve us help us to recognize our own needs and help us see Christ in each other. How might we serve and treat people differently if we saw all people as God's beloved children? How might we serve or receive from others differently if we considered the acts of love, kindness, and compassion, as sacred acts of humility and service?

Today we are reminded of our call to serve with humility and grace. As we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we are shown the way of love and to becoming beloved community. Jesus said that no servant is greater than the master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. (vs. 16).

*Holy Spirit, grow in us a desire to love and serve with grace and humility and, so we might reflect your goodness in the world.*

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**FRIDAY, MARCH 29**  
READ: JOHN 18:1-19; 42

I've talked with many Christians throughout my ministry who said they avoid Good Friday because they find it to be too funereal. The sorrow and gloominess of the day is too much for them to handle. Some of them ask the age-old question, "What is good about Good Friday?" This is a question that I think every Christian should ponder. How do we find good in the suffering, crucifixion, and death of Jesus Christ? Truth be told, it is hard to reconcile suffering and death with what we call "good. We know that suffering and death are universal experiences, but we do not ordinarily refer to them as being good.

Good Friday marks the culmination of God's plan to save the world. We celebrate the goodness of God and the radical love of Jesus who willingly suffered and sacrificed his life for the sins of the world. Jesus loved God with all his heart, and with all his soul and with all his strength, and with all his mind—and he loved all his friends so much that he bore the weight of their guilt and shame. Jesus' relentless faith set us free and through faith in Jesus Christ we can experience life in all of God's abundance.

What happened on Good Friday isn't just about what happens to Jesus, it is also about what happens to us. We witness how God's redemptive love and power can transcend even the darkest hour of suffering and death. If God can redeem suffering and death, we know that God can redeem any hardships we face in our lives. We can wait on God because we know that God always has the last word! And that is good news!

*Lord, thank you for the Good News that we proclaim on Good Friday!  
May the somberness of this day remind us of your radical love for us!*

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**SATURDAY, MARCH 30**  
READ: 1 PETER 4:1-8

When I was younger, I used to look forward to Holy Saturday because I knew that it was the last day that I was expected to fast from the things that I said I would give up for Lent. My parents used to make us write those things down. I would often put on my list the things I needed to do less of us like eating sweets, soda, and chips. As I matured in my faith, I gained a deeper understanding of the meaning of Lent. I began to put not only the things I wanted to give up and let go of on my list, but also the things I wanted to take on and add to my life. I started adding to my list things like being more patient with others and becoming more disciplined in prayer.

The season of Lent is a journey of surrendering our will to God. It is a journey of transformation. It is a time for us to gain more of Christ and for our faith to be renewed in Christ.

Jesus came to love and to serve. He gave his life to set us free from sin and from the burdens of life. He knows temptation. He knows discouragement. He knows loneliness and betrayal. He knows pain and suffering. He knows grief and death. And he knows the power of the resurrection. Jesus knows us and cares about all that concerns us.

What are the struggles or sin in your life that you need to give up and let go of? What are you missing or seeking to add to your life? Peter encourages us not to dwell on our past or focus on who we once were but to choose to live a life fully surrendered to Jesus Christ.

*Almighty God help us to surrender all our past , our worries and needs to you. May your will be done in our lives.*

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**SUNDAY, MARCH 31**  
*Easter Sunday*  
READ: JOHN 20:1-18

The tomb is empty! Jesus has conquered the grave! Christ is Risen! These facts remain the same and the promise is true yesterday, today, and all our tomorrows. The Easter story reveals how God is always working for good in our lives and in the world bringing light into the darkness, hope out of despair, and turning tragedy into triumph. There is nothing impossible for God! No matter how dark, tragic, or hopeless a circumstance or situation might be, the worst day or the worst thing is never the last thing.

As an Easter people we must decide every day not to shrink in fear and doubt. We must choose not to succumb to the suffering we experience and the evil and injustice that is pervasive throughout the world. We must have the faith to claim Christ's resurrection power in our own lives, and choose to live victoriously, embodying and proclaiming God's love, compassion, justice, peace and hope in the world. We do this by relying on God's endless supply of grace and mercy and resting in the knowledge that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Every day we must proclaim that we are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ who is our hope and salvation and through whom all things are possible. Why? Because this is a fact and a promise!

Jesus told Mary Magdalene not to hold on to him but to go and share that she had seen him. We give witness to the power of the Resurrection by sharing testimonies of our faith in Christ. Who will you go and tell today that Christ is Risen?

*Almighty God, help us to experience the joy of Easter, today and always!  
May our lives be a testimony to your love and power of the Resurrection.*

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