

2025 Lent Devotional  
Chapel in the Pines Presbyterian Church  
Part 2: March 31 – April 20



*Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud. –Psalm 27:7*



## Introduction

Lent comes from the Old English word for “lengthen,” referring to the growing daylight. Lent builds to Easter and the promise of resurrection and new life—glimpses that we might understand in the blooming time of the year. Particularly in the South, the signs of spring and new life are all around us: the singing birds, the frogs with their kazoos, the smiling daffodils, and the redbud trees resembling frozen fireworks.

But Lent also encourages us to consider the journey of Jesus to his death.

I have written this devotional for each day in Lent. I have highlighted a Bible verse, jotted down a very brief reflection, and then offered a breath prayer. After beginning with reflections on Deuteronomy 26, I offer a study of one of the psalms for the remaining weeks. The psalms touch on a wide range of human experiences and emotions, including death, suffering, and anxiety. Perhaps by acknowledging the shadow side of faith, we might fully embrace the light of love.

A final note: Lent covers the forty days except Sundays! Therefore, instead of the usual format, I have left space on Sunday for you to create. You are welcome to write or draw your reflections, either sparked from previous devotions or from what God has placed on your heart that day. Have fun! And I’d love to read or view whatever you decide to create if you care to share with me.

Wherever you are on your journey, I’m grateful for you. I hope that we will travel into Lent together in faith, hope, and love.

Andrew Taylor-Troutman  
March 3, 2025

Day 23 (March 31)

We were like those in a dream... Psalm 126:1

Psalm 126 is a song of ascents, literally meaning that the ancient Israelites sung these words while on pilgrimage up the mountain to the Temple in Jerusalem. It also represents an ascent of the heart—the words are meant to lift our spirits.

Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, “I have a dream,” which referred to the future. But this psalm opens with nostalgia: the good old days when the Lord allowed the exiles to return from Babylon. That day was “like a dream.”

Perhaps you have such a dreamlike memory of the past, a time in your life when God seemed close to you. While it's true that we can avoid the present by yearning for the past, it's also true that reminiscing about happy moments from the past can provide comfort when we're feeling down or, as the psalmist puts it, "in the pit." I love the way Jenny Slate looks at it: “You can see the problematic pit is really just a small hole along the path that is otherwise lined with the other living things that shot up toward the light.”

Inhale: I have a dream.

Exhale: God is faithful.

Day 24 (April 1)

Then our mouth was filled with laughter ... Psalm 126:2

I bet you know someone in your life who laughs with their head thrown back and mouth wide open. A word for that kind of laughter is guffaw, and guffawing is contagious.

I believe laughter can be holy, including during a worship service. Not that I want to do standup in the pulpit. But a genuine moment of glee brings people together. Notice how the word mouth is singular; it is as if the people guffawed as one. What could be more beautiful than that?

Inhale: The joy of the Lord.

Exhale: The promise of peace.

Day 25 (April 2)

The Lord has done great things for us ... Psalm 126:3

Earlier in the Old Testament, this exact phrase was declared by the Israelites after their miraculous deliverance from the Egyptian army when the Lord parted the Red Sea. After more than a thousand years, the psalmist recalls a new exodus from Babylon as more evidence of God's "great things."

Christians also remember sacred and great things in our past, specifically at the Lord's table. We break the bread and share the cup "in remembrance of him," likewise believing that Jesus is strong to save (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). This remembrance, however, is not depicting a mighty military conquest but a humble fellowship, a holy communion. Remember, then, where true greatness lies. Sing the faith.

Inhale: How great thou art.

Exhale: Great is thy faithfulness.

Day 26 (April 3)  
Like the watercourses in the Negeb... Psalm 126:4

With this verse, Psalm 126 shifts from past recollection of God's mighty acts to the present difficulties. Negeb literally means "dry" and refers to the desert in southern Judah. To this day, the area lacks water. The psalmist is both acknowledging the barren reality and pointing toward a future change. The metaphor is that, as the desert becomes a place of flowing water, the people who have experienced frustration upon returning to the promised land will one day have peace and prosperity.

I wonder if our experience of such wondrous change is actually more gradual, less like a river suddenly gushing through a desert and more like a slow trickle that fills up a dry basin. The small yet steady buildup of water is almost imperceptible until one day there is a pond with water lilies, buzzing dragonflies, and wild geese honking their songs of joy.

Inhale: Fill me.

Exhale: Use me.

Day 27 (April 4)  
May those who sow in tears ... Psalm 126:5

This is one of my most beloved verses of scripture. Perhaps it calls to mind another verse: “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). Don’t get me wrong, that’s beautiful as well!

But while Psalm 126:5 describes tears transforming into joy, it is not a metaphor of the sun rising, which happens beyond our control. Instead, Psalm 126 implies an effort; it is an image of agricultural labor—sowing and reaping.

Grief, in my opinion, is a laborious process that requires work, much like tending to a garden. A loss of a dream or loved one can leave us feeling as bereft as barren soil, yet our tears are like seeds. If we tend to our feelings with care, they can grow into new things. It’s like these lines from Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer:

*Still that barren, hopeless feeling,  
but also, there it is, a single green tip  
of garlic planted five months ago  
that finds its way up to the sun.*

Garlic never sounded so good!

Inhale: Sow in tears

Exhale: Reap with joy.



Day 28 (April 5)  
Carrying their sheaves ... Psalm 126:6

A sheaf is a bundle of harvested grain that has been tied for transport from the fields to a barn or storage room. A sheaf represents the measurement for what one person can carry. The Bible uses this word to symbolize God's gifts to an individual. Accordingly, it also represents an individual's effort or labor. The analogy in this psalm is that, though we experience trials and hardships (weeping and sowing), God is faithful in the end (joy and harvest). In other parts of the Bible, our salvation is imagined as a harvest.

Despite this figurative language, I don't want us to lose sight of what Wendell Berry calls the "this-worldly aspect of Biblical thought." It's true that the Bible is far more concerned about living day-to-day in this world than details about eternity in the world to come. A sheaf is a grace that you can have, hold, and maybe give to others. What is yours to carry that you might be called to share?

Inhale: Grateful for gifts.

Exhale: Grateful to share.

## Sabbath Recreation

*Space for you to create! You might write, draw, doodle, pray, journal... it's up to you!*

Day 29 (April 7)  
God's steadfast love endures forever ...  
Psalm 118:1 and Psalm 118:29

Jewish and Christian worshipping communities read Psalm 118 at sacred times in the year: for Jews, at Passover, and for Christians, on Palm Sunday. Old Testament scholars identify Psalm 118 as a liturgy of thanksgiving (in Hebrew, *toda*) that specifically celebrates "God's steadfast love" (*hesed*), a phrase that begins and ends this psalm.

But what is a concrete way to think of the abstract idea of steadfast love? I am not the first person to notice that God spelled backward is dog. Mary Oliver wrote, "Steadfastness, it seems, is more about dogs than about us." We are fickle, aren't we? Prone to self-indulgence and other petty concerns, rationalizing our sins to justify ourselves.

But God is steadfast, like that faithful best friend who never fails to greet you at the door when you return home.

Inhale: Steadfast love.

Exhale: Endures forever.

Day 30 (April 8)  
The stone that the builders rejected .... Psalm 118:22

These “builders” are those people of power and authority who establish the foundations and norms of society. The “rejected stones” are the outcasts and undesirables—the very people whom Jesus helped and identified with: “I was in prison, and you visited me” (read Matthew 25:31-46).

Jill McDonough has a beautiful collection of poetry titled *American Treasure* that details her experience of teaching to the incarcerated. Among those who have been rejected, she often finds treasure:

“I love them. Men and women trying to start fresh. People we keep trying to throw away. I love their easy laughs in impossible circumstances: nothing more American than that.”

The meaning of the cross is that God chooses to use for good (the “cornerstone”) what we often reject. In our lives, such a cornerstone might be an experience of frustration, disappointment, even failure. God’s ways are mysterious, often confounding our understanding. The verse challenges us not to judge or reject others; it is also a word of grace, for the things that others intended for evil, God can use for good (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28).

Inhale: You accept me.

Exhale: I extend grace to others.

## Day 31 (April 9)

This is the day that the Lord has made ... Psalm 118:24

As previously mentioned, Jews read Psalm 118 during Passover, while Christians read it on Palm Sunday. Every Sunday, we read Psalm 118:24 at Chapel in the Pines. It's helpful to know the larger context of this verse; it's also important to understand what we are saying.

“This is the day that the Lord has made, and a day we'll have to make our way through.” Padraig O Tuama, an Irish theologian and poet, wrote that variation because, as he said last fall while speaking at Duke Chapel, he doesn't always feel like “rejoicing and being glad.” I certainly understand that joy is not forced cheerfulness. Pain, sadness, and grief are real.

O Tuama continues, “May we find stories and memories even in the most complicated corners.” A corner can seem like a dead end, yet if we turn, we might find a new direction. We might even be surprised by joy.

Inhale: This is the day.

Exhale: God be with me.

Day 32 (April 10)  
Save us! (Hosanna) ... Psalm 118:25

The Gospel of Mark first recorded the crowd's cry, "Hosanna!" as Jesus entered Jerusalem (Mark 11:9). Hosanna means "save us" and can relate to an experience of deliverance in the past or a hope for deliverance in the future. Hosanna recalls the Israelites crying out to God when enslaved in Egypt. Jews, suffering under the Romans, shouted Hosanna. I also imagine Hosanna on the lips of people today who suffer in war zones and under tyrants.

Hosanna is just a word. Jean L. Connor, a poet who wrote at Wake Robin Retirement Community in Vermont, understood the limitations of words:

*Frail words, mere raft of reeds,  
what are you before the rising river  
of our grief and a world in need?*

Therefore, we place our hope not just in any word but in the Word made flesh, the world's savior (see John 1:1-5).

Inhale: Hosanna, save me.

Exhale: Christ, the Word of God.

Day 33 (April 11)

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord ...

Psalm 118:26

In all four Gospels, the crowd hailing Jesus' entry into Jerusalem utters this verse. In the original context of Psalm 118, "the one who comes" refers back to any person who "enters the gates of righteousness" or the Temple (Psalm 118:19).

At Chapel in the Pines, we say that all are welcome. Might we say that each person who walks through our doors is blessed?

As Barbara Brown Taylor clarifies, "A blessing does not overlook complexity or the pain and suffering that can accompany it. [To bless] is to learn to look with compassion upon God's creation."

The point is that, by offering a blessing, we do not confer holiness; the holiness is already there. God created that person in God's image, meaning that they share God's holiness. The blessing is to name that truth for you, for me, and for anyone.

Inhale: God blesses me.

Exhale: God blesses them.

## Day 34 (April 12)

Bind the festal procession with branches ... Psalm 118:27

Finally, after a week of studying Psalm 118, we get to the palm branches! This is what gives Palm Sunday its name. Only the Gospel of John 12:13 makes a specific New Testament reference to the palms, yet the Christian tradition incorporates them on this Sunday. What do they mean?

I have mentioned that Psalm 118 is read at Passover, yet palms do not have significance in that holiday. They are found in a different Jewish holiday, the Feast of the Tabernacles or Booths. But in the centuries before Jesus, Jews did use palms to symbolize the rededication of the Temple after the Maccabean revolt. Later, in 66 CE, palms were symbols of the Jewish insurgents against the Roman Empire. The Romans crushed that revolution and destroyed the Temple in 70 CE. Then, Rome mocked the defeated rebels by printing Roman coins with the palm symbol.

All these years later, we wave palm branches, but we must be clear about what we are celebrating. We are not calling for armed resistance. We are not celebrating violent nationalism. We palm-wavers are peacemakers in the name of the One who came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:26-28).

Inhale: I will pray for peace.

Exhale: I will work for peace.



## Sabbath Recreation

*Space for you to create! You might write, draw, doodle, pray, journal... it's up to you!*

## Holy Monday (April 14)

Into your hands, I commit my spirit ... Psalm 31:5

Christians probably know Psalm 31 best for this verse, which Jesus said from the cross before he died. As such, there are records of the same verse as the last words of people of faith across history, from Polycarp, an ancient church father, to Martin Luther.

However, this verse may also be read as a declaration of trust for living in this world. We can offer prayers for God's help with our physical and emotional troubles. We can surrender in trust and faith while we have breath in us. In the coming days, I'll reflect on the idea of body and spirit.

At the start of Holy Week, I invite us into prayer meditation upon Jesus on the cross.

Inhale: Into your hands,

Exhale: I commit my spirit.

Holy Tuesday (April 15)  
I am in distress... Psalm 31:9

This “distress” is both physical and psychological. The psalmist suffers from “eye” to “bones” (Psalm 31:9-10), which we might characterize as from head to toe. We are also familiar with the expression “wasting away” that is used twice in this psalm (Psalm 31:9-10).

In addition to physical pain, there is “sorrow and sighing” (Psalm 31:10). Emotional distress or suffering can even feel worse than bodily pain.

Our culture often makes a false distinction between body and spirit. A physical pain can result in feelings of depression; grief might cause us to lose appetite. Body and spirit are intertwined as everyday experience reveals “sweetness and violence” (Eamon Grennan).

Whether we suffer in body or spirit, Psalm 31 encourages us to pray, “Be gracious, O God” (Psalm 31:9). Grace is a mystery, which reminds me of Krista Tippett’s claim, “Our bodies are access points to mystery.” Once more, our physical sensations, thoughts, and feelings entangle with our spirit. Tippett: “We have to have feet planted on the ground to reach toward what is beyond and above us.”

Inhale: I am here in my body and spirit.

Exhale: God is here with me.

Holy Wednesday (April 16)

I am a scorn... a horror ... and object of dread ...

Psalm 31:11

Yesterday, I encouraged us to think about body and spirit. Today, the psalm shifts to the individual and community. In this verse, Psalm 31 clarifies that suffering can be a result of the mistreatment of others. Not only is the psalmist a scorn to adversaries but also a horror and object of dread to neighbors and (supposed) friends! This scene is heartbreaking, isn't it? The people who should come close with love and care instead "see me in the street and flee from me" (Psalm 31:11).

Jesus knew what it was like to be betrayed and abandoned by his closest friends and allies. Think of Peter. But who among us would not be tempted to do the same and deny Jesus out of fear for our lives? This truth should cause humble soul-searching and confession. When have we turned away from someone in pain rather than being present in that moment with tenderness?

Mother Teresa said that following Jesus is a call to serve the sick and hurting, which "is to move from repulsion to compassion and from compassion to wonderment." It is the second half of that claim that fascinates me; wonderment is a beautiful step toward holy community.

Inhale: Forgive me, O God.

Exhale: Help me see the wonder in others.

Maundy Thursday (April 17)  
My times are in your hand... Psalm 31:15

Earlier verses confess that the psalmist's own hands fail in strength, while the hands of others are fists that scorn or terrorize. Yet, this verse also recalls the faith, "Into your hands, I commit my spirit" (Psalm 31:5). Gentle, kind, present, and stronger than all else, God holds our days, even the tough times. Even when the psalmist has felt abandoned, God has been there. This verse reminds me of the Irish blessing: May God hold you in the palm of His hand. Kimberly Clayton puts it beautifully: "While Psalm 31:5 is the moving words of those who die in faith, verse 15 is the moving words of those who live in faith." To live in faith is to trust the Higher Power at all times, including our suffering and anguish.

Of course, this living faith is much easier to write about than to put into practice. Hopefully, these breath prayers have helped you over this season of Lent. You might continue to pray and meditate in the days ahead. I think this verse is helpful all year long.

Inhale: My times are in your hand.

Exhale: My times are in your hand.

## Good Friday (April 18)

This day is “good” only in retrospect. The truth is that the story is bleak, haunted, and immensely sad. The betrayal. The sham trial. The mocking and beating. The slow drudge to the Place of Skulls. The nails. The blood. The anguish. *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*

On Friday, March 7, Brad Sigmon was executed in South Carolina. Through his lawyer, Sigmon said, “I want my closing statement to be one of love and a calling to my fellow Christians to help us end the death penalty.” I’m remembering his words today as I remember the words of my Lord, who quoted Psalm 22 out of agony and desperation.

This day is “good” only in retrospect, and part of the goodness that can result from the violence is our wholehearted conviction that we would not forsake the sinful and brokenhearted. For are not the same spikes of pride, greed, envy, wrath, and lust in our own hearts?

Inhale: Lord, have mercy.

Exhale: Christ, have mercy.

## Holy Saturday (April 19)

The ancient creed teaches that “Christ descended into the dead,” meaning the underworld, Hades, or Sheol. This afterlife is “hell,” if by that, we refer to a place of torment. There is limited scripture reference to Christ’s descent into the shadowy afterlife to bring salvation to souls since the beginning of the world (Ephesians 4:9; 1 Peter 3:18-19; 4:6). This idea is known as the Harrowing of Hell.

A harrowing experience refers to a painful or traumatic one, but “harrow” originally referred to plowing a field. The image is that Christ is breaking up the earth and freeing the spirits of the dead like a tractor tilling the soil. It’s a poetic metaphor, part of the holy imagination of writers from Milton and Dante to the modern day. Padraig O Tuama recently published a series of poems that imagine conversations between Jesus and Persephone, yet another god who entered Hades and emerged alive.

Maybe I’ll try and write a poem today. I imagine, however, that I’ll spend quiet reflection on the teaching of Christ that, unless a kernel of grain falls into the ground and dies, it remains a single seed (John 12:24).

And let’s end this Lenten devotional series with the same breath prayer that we used at the very beginning (March 5).

Inhale: Grace.

Exhale: Gratitude.

The Lord is Risen! The Lord is Risen Indeed!

Happy Easter!



in chalk on sidewalk  
a child writes *your love is light*—  
Easter faith proclaimed