

2021 LENTEN DEVOTIONALS

THE ROOM

WHERE IT HAPPENED



St. Luke's
United Methodist Church

The Room Where It Happened

Lent is the 40-day period (not counting Sundays) before Easter. Historically, it was a time of preparation for people who were going to be baptized on Easter. It continues to be a time when we prepare our hearts and minds for a better understanding of Easter. The spiritual journey begins with Ash Wednesday, when we consider our mortality, and ends with the Resurrection of Christ, in which we realize our immortality in Him.

This year, along with the devotionals written by St. Luke's Staff, we will be looking at the disciples who traveled with Jesus for three years. They sat at His feet and learned about life in God's kingdom. Jesus showed them how to live and serve, all in the light of God's grace found in Jesus. One thing was for sure, the lives of the disciples were not the same after they encountered Jesus. As they gathered in the Upper Room on the night before Jesus died, they realized that change was coming. Who they were when Jesus found them was no more. Join us as we look at the disciples and who they became as they emerged from that room and experienced the power of the Resurrection.

It was back in 1991 and Marsha and I had a wonderful life in Houston. Her parents and mine lived in the area as well as other family members. Our children, Kelly and Paul were in a good school and had lots of friends. We had built our own home and loved the area it was in. But we received a phone call from our Bishop asking us to visit a church in Oklahoma. Marsha and I traveled to Oklahoma with no intention of accepting the appointment; we were just going at the request of our Bishop, who told us that we could turn the appointment down if we didn't want to accept it. So, we went and visited St. Luke's thinking it would be a quick little get away. However, the moment when we walked into the sanctuary, something happened. We looked at each other - we both felt at home. We had a choice to make. Everything we knew and loved was back at Houston. But we had a sense that God had been in the sanctuary with us, calling us to Oklahoma City.



We will all have times when we're faced with a choice - move forward into the unknown or return to the life we've known. Intellectually, it made the most practical sense for us to stay in Houston, but spiritually, going to Oklahoma felt right to us. It is one of the best decisions we ever made and has blessed our family many times over. If we would have known then how coming to St. Luke's would give us an incredible family of faith, dear friends, and that Oklahoma would be where both of our children would meet their spouses - we wouldn't have hesitated a moment to make that initial visit to St. Luke's. But we didn't know then what we know now. What we did have then was an awareness of the presence of God with us and an assurance that moving into the unknown felt right. When you feel God calling you into a new future, don't let fear of the unknown send you back to what's more familiar. Stay with God and have faith in the adventure ahead!

Dr. Bob Long, Senior Pastor

Thursday, February 18

It was the beginning of the spring semester of my sophomore year in college. I was a member of the Chi Omega Sorority and mentoring a younger pledge member, a “little.” I loved getting to know her and our friendship was getting stronger every day. She was everything a freshman in college should be: kind, excited, giggly, and motivated.

It was a Tuesday night, and I was attending Overflow, the weekly worship where college students from all walks of life and denominations would gather for an hour of worship. I knew my Little was there, but I was not sitting next to her. During one of the songs, I felt an overwhelming feeling to find her, tell her I loved her, and that I was there for her always. I found her with a group of friends singing and smiling. I told her what God had laid on my heart and she replied with that giggle, “Big! I know! I am so glad we found each other.” I went back to my seat and carried on with worship.

Fast forward a few hours, I’m sitting in my apartment and my roommate walked in and told me news that would change the course of my Little’s life forever. My little was just informed that her parents were in a car accident and neither survived. It was a gut-wrenching moment I will never forget. The entire house got together to pray then I went up to her room to help her get ready to head back to her hometown to join her other three siblings.

The next several days were filled with family and friends gathering to help the four young adults figure out life without their parents. It was amazing to see family, friends and a community come together to help in a time of need. Today, all four are thriving and enjoying life, married with kids. Although their lives were forever changed, through their devotion to God’s goodness, they found joy even in the absence of the two people they loved most.

I often reflect on that night at Overflow, the room where it happened for me. The room where God so vividly laid on my heart my responsibility as His child to love, care for, and be there for a friend. Most importantly God also inspired me to tell her those things. I had no idea what this would actually look like in just a few hours, but God had already prepared my heart.

I cannot help but think of the Last Supper. Jesus was preparing the disciples for what was about to happen. The road ahead would not be easy, and not always fun, but they were prepared with the promise of God’s love, mercy, and most importantly, the Holy Spirit coming to guide them along the way.

Sarah Cohea, Edmond Campus Director of Youth Ministry

No end there is! We depart in peace. He loves beyond the uttermost: In every room in our Father's house. He will be there as Lord and Host. - An Upper Room Did Our Lord Prepare

In Fred Pratt Green's hymn about the Upper Room he makes a distinct reference to John 14:2 Jesus says "*My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?*" This familiar passage is read at many memorial or funeral services. When reading the story about the Upper Room, I also recalled how Jesus asked the disciples in Mark 14:12 to "*go and prepare*" a place for eating the Passover. What really struck me in these passages is that Jesus focused on **preparation**. What does it mean that Jesus would prepare for a special meal with His disciples, or that God the Father would prepare a place for us (in Heaven)?

Throughout my life, I've enjoyed looking forward to special trips or occasions and making preparations for enjoying those experiences. The anticipation of a vacation, the preparation of a special meal, and that work that goes into making an event special for the participants is actually a significant part of the whole experience. When I think about God making preparations for us, it tells me that our presence and involvement is important to our Creator. It causes me to think that God's care for the details, whether in heaven or on earth, is intended to help us know that we matter to God. As I think about the ways that God is preparing a place for me personally at the table or in heaven, it gives me hope in the midst of discouraging times.

I also believe this concept of preparing is important for us to consider in our relationships. How are we helping God by preparing for our friends, family or acquaintances to know God better? What practical steps are we taking to help others grow in their faith? Maybe a kind word, an encouraging note, a bit of advice or counsel, or even a simple prayer will help someone else to grow closer to God. When we are intentional about preparing for others to experience God, we can be part of God's work in the world today!

Rev. Phil Greenwald, Executive Pastor of Administration

*A*fter this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?"

John 6:1-9

HYMN: Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart

*Rejoice, ye pure in heart;
rejoice, give thanks, and sing;
your glorious banner wave on high,
the cross of Christ your King.*

*Yes, on through life's long path,
still chanting as ye go;
from youth to age, by night and day,
in gladness and in woe.*

*Praise God who reigns on high,
the Lord whom we adore,
the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
one God forevermore.*

*Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice,
give thanks and sing.*

Edward H. Plumptre, 1865
(Psalm 20:4; Psalm 147:1; Philippians 4:4)

Study of Andrew

Andrew was the brother of Jesus. Like Peter, Andrew was a fisherman. He would have spent his life on the sea of Galilee, working to provide for his family and to provide food for the community.

Andrew was not simply a fisherman. It would seem his heart looked to the world of faith. Unlike Peter, who seemed to find his foundation doing the work of fishing, Andrew looked to the spiritual world, as well. That is why he first becomes a disciple of John the Baptist. It is his time with John that prepares him to be one of the first followers of Jesus. John also tells us that he is the first to declare Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:41). John's gospel also reminds us that it is Andrew who tells Peter about Jesus. Because Andrew followed Jesus first, the early Byzantine church called him the Protoklete, or "The First Called."

Although Andrew one of the first disciples, Peter quickly becomes the more prominent figure in the scriptures and in the history of the church. Andrew continues to be named several times in the scriptures. In John's gospel it is Andrew who helps with the feeding

of the 5,000. It is Andrew who finds the boy with a few loaves bread and fish.

After the events of Easter, Andrew is thought to have taken the good news of Jesus to the area around the Black Sea. That is a long way away from Galilee and Jerusalem. Legend says that, like his brother Peter, he is arrested and sentenced to be crucified. Because he did not think he was worthy to die the same way as Jesus, he was crucified horizontally. Today, the "St. Andrew's Cross" is the symbol found on many flags around the world, including Scotland.

Like so many, Andrew surely wrestled with his faith. When facing the large crowd, his disbelief was revealed as he asked Jesus, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many?" His doubt was present but so was his faith.

Like Andrew, we see all that God has done for us. We can be easily be grateful for the significant things in our lives, like grace, family, church and friends. However, we often fail to see the significance of the little things in our lives. In the feeding of the 5,000, Andrew struggles to see



how important a few loaves of bread and fish truly are, especially when God is involved. It reminds us that our practice of gratitude must extend

to the little things, for God does big things with what we consider small. Andrew's story reminds us that even the little things are important.

This Week:

Take some time to consider all that you have to be grateful for. What are the "little things" in your life that you need to give thanks to God for today?

Questions to Consider:

1. Are you typically in a rush and/or multitasking?
2. When someone talks with you, do you look them in the eyes and focus on what they're saying?
3. Do you control your technology or does it sometimes control you?

Focus for the Week:

This week pay special attention to where you are. Limit your multitasking (studies show that multitasking doesn't accomplish more and what is accomplished isn't as successful as focusing on one subject at a time.) Give yourself space and time to focus on what's around you and especially who is with you. If you don't have one already, start a journal where you right down three things each day for which you're grateful, and then make sure to give God thanks for them as well.

Tuesday, February 23

When I get on Facebook, the very first thing that pops up is always a photo from the past, smiling faces of my children, years younger. Every August, it may be a photo of Noel's first day of kindergarten or Madeline's teeny tiny self at a soccer game, eyes gleaming, front teeth missing. On other days it may be the beautiful blue of the ocean and our family standing on a sandy beach on a fabulous vacation. Every single time I scroll through these photos I am overcome with a salty mixture of gratitude and sadness for the passing of time. How can my cuddly baby be 11 years old? Where is the giggling, curly-haired toddler who is now preparing for her driver's permit? And then the guilt comes. The wave of regret for every moment I spent watching Netflix when I could have been out in the yard playing in the grass with our two girls. I wake up in the middle of the night on occasion and think, "We have two years with Noel in the house. Two years! I better start making those memories - STAT!"

Our family of four is entering into a season of change. These little souls are transforming right before our eyes, learning to make decisions, spreading their wings and growing up. Change is so very hard, and we can't help but put all the blame upon ourselves for the things we didn't do, left off the calendar, and never prioritized. These feelings are part of being human, but I am taking time every day to check in with myself, my husband, and my children, to give grace because we are doing the very best we can with what we have. Yes, time will continue to speed by, photos will become memories, trips will end, and we will enter new chapters of our story, but for today, I intend to live in the moment with my family because this moment is absolutely perfect.

Candice Hillenbrand, Director of Mission Engagement

Worship was an essential part of my youth group. Every Sunday night, when I was a teenager, we would gather in a small room on the second floor of our church and have worship. It was a special time when we would sing, pray for one another, and hear the scriptures read. Those nights were so important to my faith. They helped to connect me to Jesus.

The disciples had followed Jesus for three years. They listened to Him as He taught. They watched as He performed miracles. They shared in the same work as Jesus sent them out into the world. When they first met Jesus, they were simple tradesmen. They fished, collected taxes, and were business owners. They left everything behind to follow Jesus and become His students, His apprentices. At the end of three years, they were not the same. Their time with Jesus changed them. They would eventually become leaders of the new church, become evangelists, apostles, and their work would reshape the world.

The night before Jesus was to die, He gathered with His disciples and they shared the Passover meal together. They gathered in a room and Jesus would show them, *“the full extent of his love.”* (John 13:1) It is in this room that Jesus would wash the disciples’ feet, share the first Holy Communion and remind them that they were being called to serve. Soon after leaving this room they would become the people of faith who would spread the love and hope of God they had experienced with Jesus.

Lent is a season Christians set aside to focus on their faith. During Lent, we are asked to consider who we are in light of who Jesus calls us to be. We are called to sing, pray, and read scripture. We do these things so that we can be reshaped into the image of God. When I was a teenager and I spent time in worship, I saw my faith more clearly. When those disciples entered the Upper Room with Jesus, they saw their calling more clearly. Lent is our time to focus on Jesus. It is our time to be intentional about the practices that connect us to the one who loves us so much.

It is my hope that, during this season of Lent, we will take time to focus on our faith. Let us read the stories of Jesus and His disciples, especially those that happened in the Upper Room. Let them be a reminder of the love God has for us and the love God calls us to share. It is that time we spend with Jesus that will shape us into the servants of God who share His love and bring hope to the world.

Rev. Keith King, Pastor of Worship

Thursday, February 25

I used to be a broadcaster. I read the news on the radio. I never saw my audience but I knew thousands were listening. I can still remember my first newscast in the mid 1970's and the feeling in the pit of my stomach. I knew that no matter what I had to keep reading. If I made a mistake, keep going. If you stop talking, you have "dead air" and in radio, that is a cardinal sin. Keep going until you reach a commercial. When I entered ministry years later I began to preach. I knew that like radio, once in the pulpit I had to keep going. Only there were no commercial breaks to let you catch your breath. We all have fears in life. How do we deal with the fear of failure?

For ABC news anchor, Dan Harris, he had to step back from his life and deal with the voices in his head that constantly told him, "You're not good enough." It was a June morning in 2004 when Dan was reading the news and he had a panic attack. In the middle of a story he stumbles on a word or two, he stops and looks down. He knows he is in trouble so he bails out of the newscast. Meantime, the video from the next story about a new Harry Potter movie begins to roll but Dan cannot read the copy. He calls it the most humiliating day of his life.

For Dan Harris, he began a "journey of discovery" to find out what was wrong and how he could fix it. That journey led him to counselors, to pastors, and finally to the Buddhist art of meditation and mindfulness where one is encouraged to look at their life and their failures and do it without judgment. Harris even wrote a book called *Ten Percent Happier* in which he tells his story and now has a podcast. During the pandemic, he has encouraged people to care for themselves through meditation and other habits such as virtually connecting with friends and doing acts of kindness.

In this season of Lent, we need to care for our souls. One of the spiritual disciplines you can do to quiet your soul is Christian meditation. It's similar to what Dan Harris practices but different in important ways. Prayer is the discipline that focuses on the interactive relationship we have with God. Christian meditation is the listening side of this interactive relationship. How often do you take time to practice this discipline of being quiet and listening? Lent is the perfect time to start this discipline. Jesus reminds us that He is the Good Shepherd and that His sheep know His voice. His voice is not hard to hear; His vocabulary is not difficult to understand. One of my favorite scriptures is from the Psalms, "Be still and know that I am God." Take time in Lent to grow still and believe God has something to say to you.

Rev. David Poteet, Pastor of Congregational Care

On my first day of orientation for seminary, I was given a notebook that had a quote on it. I had no idea how much I would come back to that quote to help me find encouragement through my seminary journey. The quote was from Rainer Maria Rilke and it said:

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

When I started seminary, I thought I was solid in my faith. I had grown up in church, was active in the youth group, went to a United Methodist school for my undergraduate, and had served in the church for several years at that point. However, as I started taking my seminary classes I quickly realized just how much I didn't know about my faith. It started to raise all kinds of questions for me about what I believed, and the fact that I had questions that I didn't have the answers to was frightening.

It was in the times late at night when I had questions on my mind with no answers in sight that I would come back to this quote on the front of my journal. I had always loved answers because there was something reassuring and steady about having answers. For the first time in my life, I found myself trying to love the questions as much as I loved the answers. Along the way, I discovered a few answers, but today I probably have more questions than ever before, and I love it.

That's really what the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ is all about. The first disciples had no idea what was in store for them when they started following Jesus. They didn't have all the answers. They just followed and lived the questions as they went. By the time they were sharing the Last Supper they still didn't have the answers to what was next, but they just kept following. It was in living the life of a disciple that they were transformed, and eventually would get to live the resurrection life.

The same thing is true for us. When we follow Jesus, we don't have to have all the answers. We just have to be willing to love and live the questions, follow where the Holy Spirit leads, and one day we will look back with amazement at the transforming work of God's grace in our lives.

Rev. Josh Attaway, Edmond Campus Pastor

And he said to them, “When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “Nothing.” He said to them, “But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one. For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, ‘And he was reckoned with transgressors’; for what is written about me has its fulfilment.” And they said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords.” And he said to them, “It is enough.”

Luke 22:35-38

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as he sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Matthew 9:9-13

HYMN: All Praise to Our Redeeming Lord

*All praise to our redeeming Lord,
who joins us by His grace,
and bids us, each to each restored,
together seek His face.*

*He bids us build each other up;
and, gathered into one,
to our high calling's glorious hope
we hand in hand go on.*

*And if our fellowship below
in Jesus be so sweet,
what height of rapture shall we know
when round His throne we meet!*

Charles Wesley, 1747

Monday, March 1

Study of Matthew and Simon

At the time of Jesus the Roman government had publicans, chief tax collectors, who were charged with the responsibility of collecting the taxes in a region. Zaccheus is an example of a chief tax collector in the Bible. In turn, they would employ many different people in the region to actually collect the taxes. There were a multitude of taxes: everyone over a certain age was taxed with the exception of the elderly, there were travel taxes on roads, import taxes on multiple products, food taxes, etc.

The chief tax collector made his living by setting the taxes; he knew what the Government was expecting to receive and so he added to the tax so that he could profit. He would then tell his tax collectors what he expected them to collect, and they would do the same thing. They would tax the people a bit more so that could also have their cut. So the amount the Roman government wanted was increased for the sake of the publicans (chief tax collectors) and then increased again for the local tax collectors. A little bit of an upcharge would have been accepted for the person to make a living, but the fact that they were often very wealthy suggests that they weren't satisfied with a modest salary.

Zealots were people who believed that they were called to overthrow the foreign Roman government to purify their land. They felt paying taxes to the Romans was a sin because it supported the enemy government which made it a treasonous affront to God.

Remember the account found in Mark 12:13-17 where leaders were trying to entrap Jesus and so in a large group of people where many advocated loyalty to the Temple above all and others who advocated loyalty to the Roman authority above all and then asked Jesus the question, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Jesus responded by asking them whose picture and inscription were on the coin and said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Jesus didn't say if one ideology was correct and He didn't condemn the other ideology. Instead, he revealed the insignificance in their infighting compared to giving one's self to God.

When Jesus chose His inner circle of 12 disciples, he called Matthew, who was a tax collector, and Simon, who was a Zealot. There had to be some initial arguments between the two men; was paying taxes necessary for the country's infrastructure or was



it a sin before God? But Jesus called them to follow Him and focus on the things that mattered to God. Jesus brought them together because they both needed connection to God and they both could be helpful in growing the future church.

We sometimes allow our thoughts to become so narrow-minded that we think most issues, questions, arguments have only one right answer and that any other idea is not only wrong, but harmful. Most of the time we don't ask whether the argument

was worth having in the first place. Christ loved both Matthew and Simon the Zealot and used them in His ministry. That is an important lesson for all of us. When we take up an issue, how do we feel about the people on the "other side"? Are we treating them as a child of God? Of course we won't always disagree, but it's the way we disagree that can be harmful. If you disagree with someone's beliefs, make sure they know that the disagreement of ideas has no bearing on how you value them as a person. They belong to God.

This week:

If you find yourself getting irritated or angry at the views of someone, take a moment and remember that they're a child of God. No matter how outlandish, offensive, or wrong you believe their ideas to be, remember that they're still loved by God, as you are.

Questions to Consider:

1. Are there people whose beliefs or actions are so disagreeable to you that you would not be able to have a conversation with them?
2. Do you believe that God loves all people?
3. Which is more important to you: to win an argument and be right, or to share God's love and be kind?

Focus for the Week:

Be intentional about listening to the concerns of others. This week, focus on trying to understand the people who have differing views than yours. Put yourself in their place and try to determine their fears and understand their feelings. Then, say a prayer for them and ask God to bless them.

Tuesday, March 2

The season of Lent begins a time of spring cleaning of my life. Whether giving up something tangible or intangible, it feels good for my soul to let something go. A few years ago, I dropped social media. It was crazy how much better I felt about my life. It's extremely easy to compare your life to another's. You see "perfect" family photos or extravagant five-year-old birthday party decorations or even wonder why you weren't invited to that fun event. We all know how hateful people can be with their comments as well.

The worst was when both of my daughters told me I ignored them when I was on Facebook and they were right! I would be so involved with scrolling through my news feed that an hour would quickly go by. I remember answering questions, but having no recollection of what was said or what I had agreed to! That was a punch to the gut. I knew I needed to focus my energy in a more positive direction.

Since giving it up a few years ago, I've trained myself to jump on a few times a week to post a birthday message or I'll a picture here and there. I'll watch a church service with my husband, comment on a post, or like or love a picture.

I have absolutely no idea how social media will play out in the coming years, as my girls get to an age where it might start to consume them. I hear the dangers all the time from friends who have kids in middle school. I know, firsthand, how addicting it can be. I challenge you to take a step back; to spring clean your life. You never know, it might open your eyes and give you freedom from something that you didn't even know was weighing you down.

Jamie Williamson, Edmond Campus Director of Administration

Bob Goff is one of my favorite authors. I was introduced to his work while in high school; our Youth Director, Amy Givens, led us in the study of Goff's book, *Love Does*. Recently, I started reading his book, *Dream Big*. In the introduction, Goff says that the advice to never change, is some of the worst advice he has ever received. He states that we are supposed to constantly be changing into kinder, humbler, and more faithful people. Of course, with change comes the risk of failure. In fact, there are often many mistakes along the path of change.

As people learn new things, experience different activities, and grow into deeper faith they will naturally fail at times. Most often the problem is not the mistake itself, but rather focusing on it. Guilt about sin can stop us in our tracks when we're supposed to be going and growing forward. Our measure as Christians is not based on how many times we fail or fall short of the glory of God. God's love for us isn't conditional on if we never sin. God loves us whatever we do – whether we do right, wrong, or nothing at all. It is misleading to think that doing nothing is the safest bet, it is the most counter-productive thing we can do to leading the life that we've been created for. We will always face changing circumstances around us; it's important we know how to navigate change in ways that are healthy for us and others. And we can't do that if we're constantly held fast by our past failures.

As a college student, I have faced lots of change, from the day I moved into the dorm and attended my first class to living through how the global pandemic brought about virtual classrooms. In almost two years of college, I've made my share of mistakes. But those failures can become distractions to my purpose. I'm a perfectionist and in the past I really struggled over failure. I would feel terrible at not achieving the time I wanted in cross country, or getting a grade I didn't want on a test, or having a hectic schedule that didn't seem to allow for everything I wanted to accomplish. It was easy to slip into a place where I didn't feel good about myself. I would believe that God didn't feel good about me, either. But, the reality is that God loves us no matter what.

Whether we win gold or never even make the podium, God's love is everlasting. Feeling ashamed of your mistakes holds you back from learning from them and moving forward. This Lenten season, do not focus on your failures, but instead look at how you can improve yourself through change. We are called to follow Christ; His love will see us through.

Brooks Lambert, St. Luke's Ministry Intern

Thursday, March 4

Recently I was driving into work when I saw a father and his daughter waiting at the bus stop. I had seen them before; she appears to be around six or seven years of age and her father always accompanies her to the bus stop and waits with her till she boards the bus. Sometimes he stands by himself while his daughter and other waiting children run and play around him. This particular morning was very cold and they were the only ones waiting outside for the bus. The little girl had her arms crossed trying to keep warm while her father stood behind her to block her from the wind. He adjusted her coat to make sure it was zipped to the top and that her hood was snug. Finally, he took off his outer jacket and was wrapping it around his daughter. I knew he must be cold being outside in just a flannel shirt, but his focus was on his daughter. The image of the two of them struck me as an apt visual metaphor of God.

Sometimes the circumstances of life are bitter and we might feel cold and alone, but God is there with us. God didn't cause the troubles and doesn't always take them away. But what we can count on, is that whenever we do find ourselves out in the cold, God is there with us. God is faithful and whatever we are experiencing, He is there with us.

The father I saw that morning couldn't completely take the cold from his daughter. But even more important than his attempts to shield the wind and shelter her in his jacket, was the inner warmth he offered through relationship. The cold grows more bitter alone.

Whether we face difficult moments or times of celebration, we tend to focus on the circumstances themselves. We can lose sight of God. But we know better; God has always been faithful to us. We have known the inner joy and warmth of God's presence seeing us through the ups and downs that have come. Make sure you focus on God's presence and not the ever-changing circumstances around you. Spend time each day giving thanks for a Heavenly Father who is there for you while you enjoy the sunny days, and is there to offer shelter when you experience the wintry ones.

Rev. Wendy Lambert, Senior Executive Pastor

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. - Ephesians 4:31-32

I used to spend way too much time in my life angry about one thing or another. After being frustrated with managing people, I decided there had to be a better way. I came to realize that people want to be spoken to in a way that makes them feel like they matter. They want to be heard in a way that makes them feel someone is listening. I genuinely care about people but used to wonder why they thought I didn't have time for them.

People became disheartened and angry with me. When I started to ask why, the answer was typically, "you don't have time to talk to me," or "you are not listening when I speak." My eyes were opened with each of these statements. I needed to be able to communicate effectively with my staff, so they were not angry or frustrated with me. There is a lot of value and wisdom in what I received from their feedback. I knew enough to realize that if something is not working, you must change the way you are doing it.

Let our eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. - Proverbs 4:25

These words resonate with me, so I must look at who is in front of me and not be busy with everything around me. Focus on the people who are important in my personal and work life, to make sure that they are heard, helping to alleviate the anger and frustration. I am able to look back and see how this hindered me in my life and ask for forgiveness. I am grateful for their forgiveness and ability to make me see how important each and every one of them are to me.

When you are angry with someone, or someone is angry with you, find a way to look deeper into the reason for this feeling. Sometimes you are the one who needs to change and forgive in order for the situation to improve. Sometimes you have to apologize and be forgiven. Is there someone you have a misunderstanding with today? Look deeper and forgive. It will be a great weight lifted from your mind.

Gabrielle Moon, Executive Director, St. Luke's Children's Centers

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

John 20:24-29

HYMN: Take My Life, and Let It Be

*Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

*Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for Thee.*

*Take my will, and make it Thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own;
it shall be Thy royal throne.*

*Take my love, my Lord, I pour
at Thy feet its treasure-store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for Thee.*

Frances R. Havergal, 1873
(Romans 12:1)

Monday, March 8

Study of Thomas

One of Jesus most loyal disciples was Thomas who was also called Didymus. Didymus means “the twin.” There is little that we know about Thomas. This could mean that he comes from a less-than-noteworthy background. Perhaps he was a simple tradesman, or a fisherman, we will never know. The writers of the gospels thought it more important to tell about Christ.

Thomas is often referred to as “Doubting Thomas.” He came by this title in the 20th chapter of John. After the resurrection, Jesus appears to His disciples. Thomas is not present that day. When he hears about Jesus he says, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” This is a predictable reaction. He did not see. He wanted to believe, but he saw Jesus arrested. It was a very real thing that Jesus died. To rise again... it would take great faith to believe without seeing. Because he doubted what his fellow disciples reported, he is known as Doubting Thomas. Thomas is also credited with making the clearest statement of Jesus’ divinity in the scriptures. Shortly after this encounter Thomas sees

Jesus. When Jesus appears Thomas makes his declaration, “My Lord and My God.” This beautiful statement makes very clear who the risen Lord is to Thomas and the world.

Loyalty was trademark of Thomas. When Jesus wanted to go to his friends Lazarus who was sick, Mary and Martha, many of the disciples urged him not to go because they knew his life was in danger. It was Thomas who said, “*Let us also go, that we may die with him.*” (John 11:16)

Later, after Jesus’ resurrection Thomas becomes the apostle who leads a mission to India. It is said that Thomas was selected by the disciples to carry the good news of Jesus to India. Thomas was reluctant to travel that far from his home and worried that he would survive the journey. He establishes several churches along the way. While he was doing this work, Thomas is said to die as a martyr. His final act was giving money as charity.

Thomas left his simple life to follow Jesus. He had no idea where he would go, or what would happen to him as he followed Jesus. He witnessed many amazing and miraculous things because he was



willing to trust in God's amazing grace. From Galilee to India, Thomas trusted God. Because he believed and trusted he was able to share God's love and hope with so much of the world.

The life of Thomas tells us that all disciples will have moments of strong faith and moments of doubt.

This Week:

Consider your own faith, its strength and weakness. One sure way to strengthen your faith is through gratitude. What about God's amazing grace are you thankful for? Take time to pray and offer your gratitude to God, that your faith may be strengthened today.

Questions to Consider:

1. What questions do you have about faith?
2. How important is it to you to grow in your faith?
3. Do you have a deeper faith now than you did five years ago?
Why or why not?

Focus for the Week:

Just like any discipline, if you want to do better or know more, you have to practice and study. Give time to grow in your faith through study. When you have doubts or questions, don't be afraid to share them with others. Make time each day this week to reflect on the phrase, "*I believe; help my unbelief!*" (Mark 9:16-29)

Tuesday, March 9

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. - 2 Corinthians 13:11

I have been raised in the church my whole life and have always been grateful for the gift of God's grace, found in Jesus Christ. Living in that grace has inspired me to strive to live in the world as a peacemaker. What better way could I learn than from following the example of Christ?

I'm the middle child in a family of three children and, for the most part, we got along pretty well. I smile as I remember a saying of my Dad's that he would use sometimes when we were downright mad at each other. He'd say, "Just remember, you can get glad in the same pants you got mad in." Now, he didn't expect us to agree all of the time, but he did expect us to work things out. He wanted us to take the time to talk through our differences with patience, respect and love. Oftentimes that was hard, and we could be quite stubborn! I remember thinking, "We're kids... this must be much easier for grown-ups!" We had to mature into our willingness and ability to see things differently, through the eyes of another. That almost always meant compromise. I'm so grateful to my Dad for this rich lesson because that foundation has helped me throughout my adult life, and I've discovered that it's really not easier for "grown-ups!" The path to being a peacemaker is a lifelong pursuit.

The truth is that there will be many things and people in our lives that will offend us. We must remember that we have the power to choose how we react during those difficult times. During this season of Lent, I will do my best to look at others as Jesus would see them. With all of the problems in our world today, it is oftentimes hard to see things through the eyes of another. We see many people who are not willing to sit down and talk through their differences with patience, respect and love. It is hard, and they are stubborn. But if we look at others through the eyes of Jesus, we will see that He can bring peace in the presence of unresolved problems and increasing chaos and strife. Jesus gave his life for all of us. His ultimate sacrifice was not easy, but His peace is everlasting and is a precious gift from God.

I hope you will join me in letting go of anger and resentment and offering peace and words of healing in their place. Maybe we can all bring a smile to someone's face by initiating forgiveness and showing love. You really can get glad in the same pants you got mad in. My Daddy was right!

Marsha Long, Director of Hospitality Ministry

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father.
There is no shadow of turning with Thee.
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not.
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.
Great is Thy faithfulness, great is Thy faithfulness.
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided.
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

- Great is Thy Faithfulness, Thomas Obadiah -

I have a fond childhood memory of attending a small country church while visiting relatives. It was a Baptist church which held both Sunday morning and evening services. We were attending the evening service with about 50 worshippers. As we were singing a vibrant, old gospel hymn, an older gentleman behind us had a little coughing spell. Instead of joining the rest of us in the verse of the hymn, he chose to pick up where he left off. Myself and the other children giggled as this gent continued singing even though the rest of us had finished. The pastor and other adults smiled and waited patiently until he completed his singing. He was hard of hearing and never really knew how far off from the other singers he was. I later learned this was a weekly ritual in this congregation. Years later, I admire this devout church goer for his persistence in honoring God in song and making up for lost beats and text. A determination to get to the finish line, so to speak.

Many times we hear the familiar phrase “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” Talking or dreaming about changes can be exciting and sometimes even terrifying. But it’s those comfort zones that hinder our desire or need to change. Change requires planning, faith, courage, and definitely persistence. So, don’t “put off tomorrow what you could do today.” Go ahead, volunteer for that charitable organization, begin that exercise program, clean out that garage, travel somewhere you’ve never been. Best of all, start those daily devotions. God promises to hold our hand with every step, each moment and breath. Instead of worrying about the outcome of change, be like the wayward hymn singer and persist to that final note regardless of setbacks or interruptions. One thing that thankfully never changes: God’s great faithfulness.

Robert Fasol, Organist and Choir Master

Thursday, March 11

It's been a whole year since we all made adjustments because of the COVID-19 pandemic! We've all probably spent more time at home and less time out and about. Still from the start, many continued to go to work as essential workers while others stayed home for jobs and schools. There have been lots of adjustments to get back into these settings, and we've experienced changes and new ways to work, learn, shop, worship, or interact with others.

My family has spent much more time at home than before. School and work from home has become the new normal. Our kitchen is used more as almost all of our meals are prepared and eaten there. Our dining room and living room are also used for school work. Bedrooms provide a more private and quiet space for Zoom meetings. We've tried to find a sense of routine and normalcy, so the days and weeks at home can run together. While we've spent a bit of time in other settings when we can, these rooms in our home are really where it all happens right now! But sometimes I ask myself, what is really happening?

As I reflect on this last year, I think about the changes that have occurred. We've definitely learned a lot more about engaging with technology in new ways. We've (hopefully) learned more about respecting and understanding each other as we've spent so much time together. My kids have both grown taller and have needed bigger shoes! Even though we've experienced big changes (living through a pandemic), a lot of the growth because of these changes happens so slowly that it's not something you notice from one day to another. Just like you don't notice the physical growth as it happens, but when you compare heights and shoes to several months ago, we realize that changes have truly happened. It's not only this way with our physical changes – it can be this way with our emotional, mental, and spiritual growth as well. Sometimes there might be big adjustments and obvious changes, but much of our growth and changes happen slowly over time. It's not something that we notice each day. But when we look back and compare our actions or attitudes that we see more of these of these gradual changes.

Take some time to reflect back on your life over the last few weeks, months, or years. Celebrate the growth you have made over time. Identify those habits you want to hold on to, and those you don't. And most importantly, look for the ways God has been at work throughout these times. Maybe you weren't aware at the time just how God has used people and events to show you His presence and grace. Thank God for the way He is in the work of change and transformation in your life!

Amy Givens, Director of Youth Ministry

I still remember my college dorm room, it has been over 30 years since I lived there, but I can still vividly recall every aspect of my room. By today's standards it was small, simple, and maybe even stark. The walls were a pale green (calming, someone once told me), two twin beds, two closets, and one built in chest of drawers with a mirror at the top. We had one giant window that opened overlooking the campus. Simple, yes, but perfect. Over the years my various roommates and I would rearrange the space, place endless posters and décor on the wall, always with plasti-tak so we didn't harm those plaster walls.

When my mom and dad dropped me off my freshman year, I was so excited and a tad bit scared as well. I was so happy to have a new bedspread, towels, a mini refrigerator, and a slightly used, but new to me IBM Selectric typewriter. As my mom was leaving, she said, "You will be a different person when you leave this room someday." The wistful statement, perhaps offered as advice for college, didn't resonate with me until I left four years later. The last time I looked in that room I thought, "I have changed." I was moving off to Kansas and my first real job right out of college, I never moved home again.

Of course, I know, it wasn't the room that I lived in that changed me. The collective years of experience, growing independence, successes, and failures that helped build my confidence and resilience. I had changed from the timid freshman to a person who thought she was ready to take on something big. I was transformed by experiences in my dorm room but it wasn't the room that changed me.

We hear so much about the significance of the Upper Room. When Jesus' disciples entered the room, they may not have known their lives would be changed the way it was. The room where they shared the Last Supper and where Jesus washed their feet transformed their lives, but the room was important because of who was there. The real transformation for the disciples came about because of the time they spent learning, witnessing, and experiencing the love of Jesus Christ and what He told them during that final time together. I'm certain that the Upper Room symbolized a moment of change for each of them, they would always remember where they were when they had the Last Supper with Christ.

This Lenten season, think of a place that symbolized a transformation in your life. Think of the circumstances that helped guide you to that change. Thank God for places that remind us of the importance of change in our lives.

Lori Hall, Executive Director of Missions

***L**et not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father?'"*

John 14:1-9

HYMN: I Love to Tell the Story

*I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.
I love to tell the story, because I know 'tis true;
it satisfies my longings as nothing else can do.*

*I love to tell the story, for those who know it best
seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.
And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song,
'twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long.*

*I love to tell the story, 'twill be my theme in glory,
to tell the old, old story of Jesus and His love.*

Katherine Hankey, 1868

Study of Philip

There aren't a lot of Bible passages that mention Philip, but the ones that do create an interesting image of the disciple. Philip was from Bethsaida and when Jesus saw him, He said to Philip, "Follow me." The first thing that Philip did after that was to find Nathaniel and tell him to come and follow Jesus. When the early church was growing in numbers, there was a disagreement over how the widows were being cared for. In the distribution of goods to help the widows, the Gentiles felt that their widows were not getting the same treatment. To put an end to the argument and to carry on with caring for the widows and the work of growing the church, the leadership decided on choosing seven men to organize and carry out the missional distribution.

Stephen was also chosen and is perhaps the most remembered of the seven due to the fact that he was martyred for his faith. Philip would then go to Samaria and preach the Gospel. There were so many who responded to his message and the signs that were done, that Peter and John came to assist in the ministry. After they arrived, an angel of the Lord appeared to Philip and sent him to stand by the road that went from

Jerusalem to Gaza. A eunuch who served the queen of Ethiopia came by in a chariot. He was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Holy Spirit told Philip to go to the chariot. Philip then explained the meaning of the text to the man. The eunuch asked to be baptized and after Philip baptized him, the Holy Spirit took Philip to another area to preach. The final account of Philip occurs toward the end of the book of Acts. The apostle Paul was returning after one of his missionary journeys and came to the town of Caesarea. It reads, "On the morrow we departed and came to Caesarea; and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him."

Years had passed since Philip had heard the call from Christ. He had settled down, raised a family. And the author of the book of Acts called out his achievements - he called him "Philip the evangelist" and reminded the reader that Philip was "one of the seven." Philip was an older man and was given the titles of what he had accomplished in life.

Perhaps the best known scripture involving Philip was the exchange he had with Jesus after Jesus told the disciples that if they knew Him,



they knew His Father. Philip replied, “Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied.” While his reply earned a rebuke from Jesus, it does show that Philip was searching for

more information. He was hungry to know more about Christ. Are you committed to growing in your faith? What are you doing to achieve that goal?

This week:

Spend time seeking more information about Christ. During your daily devotional time, make sure to include time to read the Bible. Be hungry to know more about Christ; it will bless and enrich your life in ways you can’t imagine!

Questions to Consider:

1. How would you describe your desire to know more about God?
2. Are you currently involved in a Bible study or class to grow in your faith?
3. How much time do you give each day to reading the Bible and devotional books?

Focus for the Week:

Make sure to read a portion of the Bible each day. This week, make a commitment to read through a book of the Bible; one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) would be an excellent choice during Lent. You can also join in one of the online classes or re-watch a sermon or class at stlukesokc.org/studios.

Tuesday, March 16

As a child, I loved building forts. We had many grand battles behind a fence made of broken limbs. There were other forts made of cardboard or leftover construction materials. But my favorite forts were the ones built in trees. There is something powerful about getting off the ground and up in the air when you are 10 years old! My dad helped me build a fort in our backyard that overlooked a lake, and we could spy on all the boats passing by. There were many adventures in which my friends and I played the parts of pirates, soldiers, or settlers.

One of the things I loved about having a fort was it felt like a safe space to retreat. Despite the rickety nature of most of the forts we built, they came with a sense of security, protection, secrecy, and mystery. I find myself pondering what the disciples must have experienced in the Upper Room. They retreated from a world filled with uncertainty to a place of comfort and seclusion. I think we often need that same type of experience, to retreat to a place where we can be in God's presence and experience the mystery of God. Maybe that place is under a blanket with a favorite devotional. Maybe it's a walk in the woods to enjoy God's creation. Maybe it's a lake house, boat, or a favorite stream. Regardless of the actual location, the experience allows us to step away from the daily hustle and bustle in order to listen, watch, reflect, and pray.

I often think about going back to the days of playing in a fort with the innocence of a child's mind and heart. But then I remember that God has placed me wherever I am today in order to bless lives and make a difference. We can use the times of retreating to give us strength for our work; whether that is vocational work, missional work, or the work of building relationships with our family and friends. So, find a good, high place to look out and see how God can use you to share His love and bring hope to the world!

Rev. Phil Greenwald, Executive Pastor of Administration

Like many, as my husband and I became parents of our son, Andrew, everything changed. For us though, our experience was a little bit different. We met our son as a four-year-old as we got our first placement as Foster Parents. He was scared and uncertain and we were terrified as well (and maybe even more so). We went from just the two of us to parenting a four-year-old in a day.

When I think about this experience I think about the story of the Disciples. In Matthew 4, Jesus encounters Peter, Andrew, John, and James on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and calls them to follow Him. They drop their nets and follow Him immediately. The disciples understood change. They understood what it meant to go from one way of living to quickly finding themselves in a situation radically different than just the day before.

Change is hard. Change is often even painful because change means that a part of who we were or what we like gets removed or pruned. Over my life as a follower of Jesus, I have seen change all throughout my journey. From changing my major in school, to spending a month in Japan doing ministry with college friends, followed by shifts in jobs, to experiencing the loss of my mom way too early, and now in my time as a foster and adoptive mom, I have experienced the good and hard parts of change.

Following Jesus is all about change. As we move forward in the work of being transformed into the image of Jesus, everything changes. What I know with certainty today is that regardless of my hesitancy or flat-out refusal to change in the moment, once I was on the other side of the change, I know I have experienced the guiding presence of God along the way. My husband often says that we more naturally see the work of God's guidance in the rear-view mirror. I know this is my truth. I am not always able to see God working in the exact moment of change, but just like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, the change in my life is my first step in truly following and depending on Jesus.

Natalie Smith, Director of Facilities Administration

Thursday, March 18

As a non-medical professional, I've found myself using some new terminology this past year; super spreader, social distancing, airborne transmission, asymptomatic, herd immunity, and PPE to name a few. Isn't it incredible that it's been just a year since our lives were changed by COVID-19, and we began learning about this dangerous virus?

I've discovered many things I previously took for granted. I've missed dining out, shopping, having large family gatherings, going to yoga classes, celebrating milestones with loved ones, spending time with work buddies, and many other activities. I long for the days when things will return to normal. But will they?

In *A New Kind of Normal*, Carol Kent tells the story of her only child, an over-achiever, delightful son, and exemplary citizen. He married a woman who had two daughters, discovered that their biological father had been abusing them, and killed the man. Consequently, her only son was sentenced to life in prison without an opportunity for parole. After this ordeal, Carol and her husband moved to Florida to be near the prison and regularly visit their incarcerated son.

Over the years, the Kent's have chosen to embrace life with gratitude, vulnerability, forgiveness, and action. They've developed a prison ministry, and she's become an international speaker, helping people discover how to have enduring faith in this imperfect world. The Kent's encourage others to hold on to hope, even in the face of unthinkable circumstances.

While it's difficult for me to imagine how this would feel, I do know what it feels like to have my world turned upside down by circumstances. We all do! In this imperfect world we have family disputes, we lose jobs, people we love have life-threatening illnesses, and some of them die. A tornado can blow through an area and destroy homes and lives in just minutes. There's only one promise that God gives us, and that's His presence with us, no matter what happens.

Just as surely as God never left Moses and the Israelites as they journeyed out of Egypt, or Noah and his family during the flood, or Rahab as she risked her life to save the spies, or Jesus as he hung on the cross, God never leaves us! He's with us always, through the good and the bad. And that's the hope we have today and forever. Our "normal" may never be the same, but God is the same today, tomorrow, and always.

Susan Easttom, Director of Family Ministry

Reading the gospels about what happened in the Upper Room, I have always been intrigued by Jesus stepping into the role of a servant and washing the feet of the disciples. I remember at church revivals and youth camps where this was put into an action where we would take time to wash each other's feet. This was meaningful to those that were in attendance. Unlike the disciples, those who were participating took showers daily, but it still was not easy for people to take their shoes off and allow someone else to wash their feet.

Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" - John 13:6-9

When looking at this scripture, most of the time we focus on what Peter says and we overlook Jesus' initial response. "What I am doing you do not understand now." What a powerful statement. Peter and the other disciples didn't know what was happening at the time.

In the book of John, Jesus went on to teach His disciples for another four chapters. The headings for those teachings are as follows: Jesus Predicts His Betrayal, Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial, Jesus Comforts His Disciples, Jesus the Way to the Father, Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit, The Vine and the Branches, The World Hates the Disciples, The Work of the Holy Spirit, The Disciples' Grief Will Turn to Joy, Jesus Prays to Be Glorified, Jesus Prays for His Disciples, Jesus Prays for All Believers.

I was surprised that all of these teachings took place in the Upper Room. But I don't think Jesus was just talking to the Disciples when He said, "What I am doing you do not understand now." I think each of us lack the understanding of what God is doing now. My desire during Lent, is to spend time reading these four chapters so that I might better understand what took place in the room where it happened.

Brent Manning, Director of Communications

***A**nd James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.*

Mark 10:35-41

HYMN: Be Thou My Vision

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.*

*Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
great God of heaven, my treasure Thou art.*

Ancient Irish, trans. by Mary E. Byrne, 1905;
versed by Eleanor H. Hull, 1912

Study of John

Along with Peter, John is one of the two best known disciples of Jesus. John had a deep capacity to love and always desired to love even more deeply. John was the last of the 12 to leave Jesus at the crucifixion. When Jesus looked down from the cross and saw His mother and John, He charged John with caring for His mother, and His mother with caring for John. He knew that in their grief, both would need someone to care for as well as someone to care for them. When James and John asked Jesus if they could sit on each side of Him, Jesus told them that they didn't realize what they were asking. Then Jesus asked them if they were able to drink the same cup. It's important to view this scripture in its full context. The verses immediately preceding their request help us to understand their thoughts a bit better:

“And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn

him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise.” And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”(John 14:32-38)

John and his brother weren't asking to sit beside Jesus for glory's sake, they were telling Him that they were ready to take His side in the troubles He would face. Jesus had just been telling them about the persecution that He would endure, even to death, and after those words, they asked to take His side. It was still naive of them to feel that they would be able to endure the same suffering that He would, but it reveals their passion. John wanted to give his all for the sake of Jesus.



This Week:

What is your commitment to Christ? When you love someone, you want to spend time with them; you want to talk with them and listen to them. If you want to grow closer to Christ, spend time with Him each day.

Questions to Consider:

1. How would you describe your commitment to Christ?
2. How much does your love for God impact your daily life?
3. How would your closest friends and family describe your relationship with God?

Focus for the Week:

Be intentional about having a daily devotional time. Set aside extra time to pray in the morning and evening to give thanks for God's unconditional, everlasting love. Begin and end each day this week talking (and especially listening) to God.

Tuesday, March 23

This year, May 27, 2021 will mark my 14th year working at St. Luke's Children's Centers. What a ride it has been. When I started, at almost 16, I had little knowledge about children, how child development worked, only the notion that I enjoyed working with children and that my mom had been a director in a children's center all my life. I continued to work at St. Luke's in a variety of capacities, Assistant Teacher, Lead Teacher, Summer Program Teacher, Administrative Assistant, Nursery Coordinator, Assistant Director, and now for the last five years, I have been the Director at the Downtown Campus.

I was and am continually challenged through the different sets of tools and skills needed to complete the tasks at hand and, vastly, they vary from role to role. As a director, I have filled in as a baby room teacher, showed kids a snake, and drove a van; all in one day. I am a counselor for teachers, hug-giver and ouch-fixer for children, and a listening ear for parents. I like to laugh that everything falls into other duties as assigned.

As each opportunity presented itself for my role change, I was given the chance to learn from the previous person, the teachers beside me, and the children I worked with, the leaders above me. I was exposed to trainings, classes, college professors, science and understanding of the child's brain, and experience as a mother. The person I was 14 years ago, with little to no experience or knowledge, has evolved into a director who feels confident in any challenge or daily change that has come my way. I know when to ask for help, how to hope, and change when challenged.

I liken this experience to how we must feel as new Christians, after the love, light, and guidance the Lord offers us daily through both His word and how He shows His great love for us. How much do we change through His leadership to be a new person in Jesus? Through our relationship with Jesus we learn how to ask for help, how to hope, and the skills needed to change when challenged so that we are a new person through him.

Mandi Moon, Director, St. Luke's Children's Center

I distinctively remember last year when the pandemic had just started. We were in the season of Lent, and I remember how hard it was to continue giving up the one small thing I gave up for God amidst all I was forced to give up due to the pandemic, such as a spring break mission trip, prom, or chances to get my ACT score up. I found myself becoming bitter about what I was losing.

I found comfort from the book of Ruth about not giving up when I am going through trials and tribulations in my life. I read about a widow, Naomi, the mother-in-law to Ruth and Orpah (who have both just lost their husbands in war) who is encouraging her daughter-in-laws to return home to their own families. Orpah returned to her family, Ruth insisted on staying with Naomi to provide and take care of her.

Reading further, I noticed Naomi's frustration towards God. Her frustrations cause her to lose sight of her relationships with Ruth and God. She locks it away and becomes bitter with her situation and blames her bitterness on the Lord. "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." (Ruth 1: 20-21)

In contrast, I saw only a chapter later that Ruth goes out of her own comfort zone to provide for herself and Naomi (Ruth 2:2). Both women were facing extreme challenges, but it is how they chose deal with them and live for God in the middle of their discouragement that is important to examine.

As a disciple of Christ, we are all going to face very difficult struggles in our lives. We are called to prepare ourselves for those difficult unknown challenges ahead by building a strong foundation in our faith. We shouldn't dwell in our own bitterness when we are discouraged, we can lose sight of the relationships we hold not only in each other but in God. When we face challenges, we need to reach out to God and the people closest to us, allowing Him to pull us out of our bitterness and into His love.

During Lent this year, it may be hard to give up what God has put upon our hearts but we must remember that we have a choice to make. We can choose to be bitter about things or we can be proactive and choose to turn to God when we are faced with battles. We can always find in Him in the peaks of life and in the driest of valleys.

Thursday, March 25

Change can sometimes be difficult to understand. My life changed forever about eight years ago, the day I found out I was pregnant with my son. I was a young twenty-year-old girl who was scared to death and wasn't walking with God. After I became a mother, change came quickly!

I wanted to be a better person, I wanted to lead my child by example and God began to work in ways that were mysterious to me. When my son was not quite a year old, I started my job in the nursery at the Asbury Campus. I wanted my son to grow up in the church, and decided I might as well get paid for it! What began as a part-time job opportunity changed the trajectory of my life. It opened my eyes to my love for children's ministry. It gave me opportunities to work with some of the sweetest people I've ever met and helped me understand the importance of a church family.

Change was happening in my life faster than I realized. St. Luke's needed help at the Downtown Campus in Threefold, and as much as it saddened me to leave the Asbury Campus, God was making changes in my life that helped me grow in faith. After graduating college, I found myself managing Threefold and was offered the opportunity to work in Edmond part-time in the Children's Ministry. Once again, God was moving quickly!

In August of 2016, I became the full-time Director of Children's Ministry at the Edmond Campus. I never anticipated this, but God took hold of my heart and life and in three short years, He turned my world around. I've learned so much since starting at St. Luke's but one of the biggest lessons is this: in order to grow we must be willing to go through change. Even if the change is painful, difficult or scary, we can trust that God has a bigger plan! He wants only good for us.

God had a bigger plan for Jesus! He knew what His son was going to have to endure, He knew the challenges and ridicule He would have to face. Jesus knew, too, and even asked God to change His plan for Him, but God knew what Jesus would have to do in order for the world to be saved. During this season of Lent, I pray we can all look for ways to change and grow, in order to grow closer to God.

Taylor Easttom, Edmond Campus Director of Children's Ministries

“You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” - John 13:12-17

That first Holy Week began with a triumphal entry. Jesus was seated on a colt, entering the Holy City of Jerusalem. The crowds gathered on the street as Jesus approached. They waved palm branches and shouted, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the Lord” and, “Blessed is the king of Israel!” It was a powerful moment. The people’s hope for salvation was being placed before the one who had performed miracles, taught with great authority, and now the hope was that he would restore the people and the nation.

The end of Holy Week would redefine how we see the word triumph. The night before Jesus was to die, He gathered in the Upper Room with His disciples. They had seen so much before gathering for this Passover meal. They had witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus, the triumphal entry and Jesus clearing the money changers from the Temple. Jesus was fully demonstrating His power and they assumed He was well on His way to the throne.

This is why the disciples must have been shocked when, during the Passover meal, Jesus stood, wrapped a towel around himself, poured water into a basin and began to wash their feet. The disciples recoiled, and Peter asked, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” It was a powerful moment! It was as powerful as anything they had witnessed with Jesus. Jesus, the one they called Rabbi and Lord was washing their feet. He was taking the role of a servant.

Holy Week teaches us many things about our faith, but perhaps the teaching we need to consider most is when Jesus tells us, His disciples, *“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.”* This is the great calling of our faith...to love and serve! My friends, *“If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”*

Rev. Keith King, Pastor of Worship

***T**hen they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. Peter followed at a distance; and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later some one else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.*

Luke 22:54-62

HYMN: Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive

*“Forgive our sins as we forgive,”
You taught us, Lord, to pray;
but You alone can grant us grace
to live the words we say.*

*How can Your pardon reach
and bless the unforgiving heart
that broods on wrongs and
will not let old bitterness depart?*

*In blazing light Your cross reveals
the truth we dimly knew:
what trivial debts are owed to us,
how great our debt to You!*

*Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls,
and bid resentment cease;
then, bound to all in bonds of love,
our lives will spread Your peace.*

Rosamond E. Herklots, 1966
(Matthew 6:12)

Study of Simon Peter

Simon was the brother of Andrew. He was a fisherman from Galilee. He had a family and a home in Capernaum. Andrew first encountered Jesus, but he quickly went to tell his brother, *“We have found the Messiah and he brought him to Jesus.”* (John 1:41-42) Simon would quickly become a follower of Jesus and soon would be amongst Jesus’ closest disciples.

Jesus undoubtedly recognized Simon’s great passion. Simon, also called Peter, was often the first disciple to speak out in difficult situations. He was the one who stepped out on the water with Jesus. It was Peter’s passion that helped him to boldly proclaim that Jesus is, *“The Christ, the Son of the living God.”* (Matthew 16:16) *Simon’s passion led Jesus to say, “I tell you, you are Peter; on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.”* (Matthew 16:17) Peter was passionate, he was steadfast, he was the leader of the disciples, as they followed Jesus.

Peter’s passion failed on the night that Jesus was arrested. Peter followed Jesus to the house of the

High Priest. He sat with the people gathered there, trying to stay close to Jesus. However, when the people began to question Peter, Peter’s passion for Jesus began to shrink. His worry for himself led Peter to deny his relationship with Jesus not once, but three times. In one night, Simon Peter went from being the zealous leader to the one who disowned his Lord.

In three short years Peter became a leader of the disciples, and in one night he ran from Jesus and his faith. It was a terrible night for Peter. Everything Peter knew, he denied. Thankfully, Jesus demonstrated that our faith was about forgiveness and restoration, not punishment and condemnation. Shortly after Jesus’ resurrection, Peter and Jesus meet on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus restores Peter and calls him to, *“Feed my sheep.”* (John 12:17)

Simon Peter will go on to boldly lead the early church into brave new frontiers. He, along with the Apostle Paul, help to take the good news of Jesus to Gentiles. He helps to take the faith beyond a Jewish faith from Galilee to a world-wide faith for all. Peter boldly preaches the faith as the



book of Acts opens with Pentecost and his work would eventually take him to Rome where he would passionately preach the love and hope of Jesus until he is arrested and becomes a martyr for the sake of Christ.

We learn so much from Peter's life. His faith is encouraging to us all. His failures lead to a testimony about the love and grace of God.

We often wrestle with our successes and failures. After reading the story of Peter, how do you believe God deals with our failures? Do you see God as a God of grace and mercy? How does your life and faith reflect God's grace? Are you slow to anger and judgement, or do you lead with mercy and grace? As God extends grace to us, let us start today to extend the same to others.

This Week:

Practice giving others the benefit of the doubt as to their intentions; believe they want to be the best they can be and offer them grace.

Questions to Consider:

1. Would the people who know you best describe you as more likely to show judgment or offer grace?
2. What are the occasions you remember being forgiven by someone?
3. What does God's grace mean to you?

Focus for the Week:

Be conscious of times where you are likely to hold a grudge against someone and focus on forgiving others (whether or not they request it). Forgiving someone is not the same as allowing someone to continue to harm you; forgiveness is what releases you from the prison of bitterness.

Tuesday, March 30

If you witnessed Jesus calm a storm, heal the sick, and raise the dead, would you ever doubt Him again?

The disciples did. After hearing the others say they had seen the risen Christ, Thomas said, *“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”* (John 20:25) One week later, Jesus let him do exactly that, and then said, *“Stop doubting and believe.”* (John 20:27) Even during The Great Commission, when the eleven disciples went to a mountain in Galilee to hear the risen Christ, the Bible says, *“When they saw Him, they worshiped Him, but some doubted.”* (Matthew 28:17)

The disciples needed convincing, over and over, before they changed into champions of Christ. The lessons they learned from Jesus in the Upper Room became more irrefutable over time. So, if your faith hasn't developed in a flash, like the Apostle Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), you're in really good company.

Billy Graham, who preached the Gospel to nearly 215,000,000 people in more than 185 countries and territories, described the subtle change he felt after giving his life to Christ: “No bells went off inside me, no signs flashed across the tabernacle ceiling,” Graham said. “I simply felt at peace. Happy and peaceful.”

Even C.S. Lewis, the author of several famous Christian books, lived as an atheist through his 20s. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis wrote about how the development of faith takes time. “God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind, but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better, but like turning a horse into a winged creature. But there may be a period, while the wings are just beginning to grow, when it cannot do so.”

Whenever I encounter stumbling blocks to my faith, I try to remember that the answers to life's questions are written down in the Bible. In this season of Lent, let's develop our faith by reading scripture and thanking God through prayer for his incredible love and grace, personified in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us to “run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.” Thankfully, it does not mention a stopwatch.

Ed Doney, Writer/Videographer

I was always very close to my Grandmother. I would spend lots of weekends staying with my grandparents growing up. Over the years my love and respect for my Grandmother only grew as did my desire for her approval. It wasn't that she withheld it from me, I had her approval, it was just that sense of wanting a loved one to be proud of me.

When I moved to Oklahoma we made sure to stay close through phone calls, letters, and visits. She was excited for me when I graduated as a physical therapist and got a great job at a hospital. I worked there for a few years but during that time I had a growing sense of being called into ministry. When I made the decision to go into ministry, I called my Grandmother and her reaction wasn't what I expected. When I told her that I was going to go back to school to become a Methodist pastor, she cried out, "Oh, Wendy, are you sure? You know you can serve God as a physical therapist." She wasn't in favor of me going into ministry.

I'm sure it had a lot to do with the fact that the Methodist churches she had seen and attended were small and struggling churches that changed pastors every 3-4 years. She didn't want that kind of life for her granddaughter. I was at a point where I could follow her recommendation and return to a very secure job or step out into an unknown future.

Sometimes following Christ means going against the wisdom of the world. My Grandmother loved me and wanted me to have a stable, financially secure life. It didn't hurt my feelings that she wanted what she thought was best for me, I just had a different awareness of what that was. Going into ministry has blessed me and my family over and over. I wish my Grandmother had lived to see me appointed to St. Luke's - she would have loved it!

It's so important that we deepen our relationships with God so that we can be better aware of the next steps we're to make. Our passions in life will differ from others. Follow your heart and most of all, follow Christ. When you do that, the ones who love you will come around as well.

Rev. Wendy Lambert, Senior Executive Pastor

Thursday, April 1

Every year during Holy Week we celebrate Maundy Thursday. The word Maundy comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, which means mandate or command. It's a reminder of the commands Jesus gave the disciples on the night of the Last Supper. In John 15:12 Jesus said, *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."* He also gave them the command to remember Him every time they shared communion, eating the bread and drinking from the cup. That's why we often celebrate Holy Communion on Maundy Thursday. It's a reminder of the love that Christ has shown to us, and the commandment for us to go and love others as well.

Maundy Thursday is always one of the most meaningful days of Lent for me every year. Most years we have times when we open our Worship Center and invite people to come and receive Holy Communion and spend time in prayer. I love getting to serve those who come because I get to spend a little more time with each person talking about communion, what Maundy Thursday is about, and giving thanks for God's grace. But my favorite part is when children come in with their parents.

I have had the privilege of serving children communion for the very first time on a couple different occasions on Maundy Thursday. It is always a very holy moment as I get to explain to them what communion is all about, the gift of God's grace, and our calling to love our neighbors. After they take communion, they will often go kneel at the railing to pray with their parents, and it is such a special sight to see families coming to the communion rails praying together.

This year will be even more meaningful to me as I will get to serve my daughter Holy Communion for the very first time and tell her about the gift of God's love and our responsibility to love our neighbors. At one year old, she can't comprehend all this intellectually, but I know that the mystery of God's prevenient grace will still be at work already transforming her, just as God's grace transforms all of us.

As we make that journey toward the cross, knowing that resurrection lies on the other side, let us dwell on the gift of God's sacrificial love. It is our experience of God's grace and God's love that compels us to be those who go out and love our neighbors, no exceptions.

Rev. Josh Attaway, Edmond Campus Pastor

Every year, there is a song that resonates with me throughout the Lenten season. The song is *Were You There?* It is an American spiritual that was first published in 1899 with William Eleazar Barton's *Old Plantation Hymns*. Some years later in 1940, it was included in the Episcopal Church hymnal, making it the first American spiritual to be included in any major American hymnal.

The text of this emotional hymn is quite simple, yet powerful. Each stanza asks a different repeating question beginning with "Were you there when..." For example, the first line of the hymn reads, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" After the initial question is repeated twice, every verse contains the line, "O sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble." Then the question of the corresponding stanza is sung once more to end the verse.

When reflecting upon the lyrics of this hymn and our sermon series for Lent, "The Room Where It Happened," I try to put myself into one of the disciples' shoes. I imagine as if I were there in the room where it happened, and I debate how I would react if Jesus got down on His knees and began washing my feet. I contemplate how I would feel if Jesus told us that one of us would betray Him. I wonder what emotions would fill my soul if Jesus told us that we were eating our last meal with Him before He died. It says in Luke 22: 15-16, *And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."* I cannot even begin to fathom what would go through my mind if I heard these words come out of the Son of God's mouth.

Lucky for us, we already know how the story ends. Jesus was crucified only to rise again on the third day, conquering death itself and forever saving us from our sins. Now I don't hear Jesus saying, "This is our last supper together." I hear Him saying, "Be not afraid." There is no need to tremble in fear anymore because Jesus defeated fear on the cross. He already paid the cost of freedom from our sins, so what is there to worry about? There has been so much negativity and darkness throughout this past year, but the truth is that God has been there through it all (even though it might not seem like it). So, I just want to encourage all of you to live fearlessly today, because Jesus is alive, and He is with you!

JD Tatarian, Ministry Intern

***B**ut Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir; if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.*

HYMN: Christ the Lord Is Risen Today

*Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!*

*Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids Him rise, Alleluia!
Christ has opened paradise, Alleluia!*

*Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!*

Charles Wesley, 1739



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