

Love Wins





2023 Lenten Sermon Series, *Love Wins*

In the midst of conflict and confusion, it is important to remember that we are not alone. Christ is with us. Christ came to be with us and show us the way to really triumph over adversities. In Christ's life and teachings, in His death and resurrection, we know that God's love wins!



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.

Wednesday, February 22

I love the passage from 1 John chapter 4 that says, *He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.*

I have found that too often people tend to read the passage with a sense of guilt. They have a tendency to read, “He who does not love does not know God,” as a statement that they must not be connected to God because they don’t fully love in all the ways that they should. It is a shame because it really is a complete misreading of the passage. Perhaps it would help if people read the first sentence in the following way, “If one loves, they know God; for God is love.”

This is affirmed in the second sentence, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” The message of the important scripture is that Christ came into the world so that we can live in His love. Instead of expecting us to have perfect love before we can know God, Christ came into the world for the specific reason of helping us to love. Living in Jesus means living in love and conversely, living in love means we are living in Jesus.

Lent is a time of preparation as we move closer and closer to the death and resurrection of Christ. There are things in all our lives that we need to turn over - to let die - so that we can truly experience the new life we have in Christ. If you have any sense of guilt, worry, or fear about your relationship with God - let it die during this season of Lent. Give up those emotions that weigh down your soul so that you might fully realize the life we have in Christ. He came to set us free from anything that would hold us back. The benefit is not only for us, the more we live in Christ, the more we live in Love. The more we live in His love, the better able we are to see the ways we can make a difference in the lives of those around us. While guilt and fear can slow us down at times, Christ came to remind us that through it all, love wins.

Dr. Bob Long, *Senior Pastor*

Thursday, February 23

The season of Lent is a time Christians have set aside to prepare for the great celebration of Easter. Lent is 40 days of preparation, not including Sundays, because every Sunday is a day to celebrate the gift of our Lord Jesus. The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The early church chose 40 days as the length of time because that is how long Jesus spent in the wilderness: fasting, praying, and being tempted. (Matthew 4:1-11) Lent is a gift to the people of faith, as it draws us close to our God and helps make us more aware of the gift of life that comes through Easter.

Throughout history, Christians have used many practices to help make the journey of Lent a more tangible and meaningful experience. Like Jesus in the wilderness, Christians often use fasting, additional times of prayer, and study to help better connect ourselves with the God who loves us so greatly that He would endure the cross, the grave, and the resurrection to bring new life filled with hope and joy to us. Lent is a gift. It is a time to change our ordinary practices so that we can connect with the extraordinary.

I have tried many practices during Lent. Most commonly, I have given up many of the foods that I enjoy. It is a challenging exercise to deny oneself. This is why Jesus, during his 40 days in the wilderness, said, “It is written, one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” This statement is not simply Jesus saying we do not need food. This is a reminder that we have life because of God. In the first chapter of the book of Genesis, we learn that God speaks and humanity comes into existence. Jesus is reminding us that our life is a gift of God, and our daily bread is a gift of God.

Because the purpose of Lent is to connect us to the One who gives us life, I have found that it is not enough to deny ourselves, we must take the time to connect with the One who speaks to us today. If you fast from lunch, spend that time reading scripture and praying. Find a new Bible study to grow in your faith. When we fast from something particular, we create time and space for God to do something new in us and through us. Lent is a gift. I hope you will join me this season and connect with the One who loves us and wants to give us the gift of life, abundant and full.

Rev. Keith King, *Pastor of Worship*

Friday, February 24

I find Oklahoma to be one of the most consistent, peaceful, lovely places in which to grow up. I am biased since I grew up here, but I have lived all over the place and I still come back to the undeniable stillness that exists when you gaze out over the highway and the land stretches for miles, farther than the eye can see, and the sky seems like it doesn't have an end...that peace has never left. When I would return from New York, LA, London, or India, I couldn't help but feel like I could breathe better here. The consistency and stability of Oklahoma is a gift that I don't take for granted.

I was recently at dinner with a close friend, and she asked me about some upcoming travels that my husband and I have planned. I told her I have always had extreme anxiety when it comes to travel. It usually takes me weeks to prepare to get on a plane because the fear of flying is something I struggle to overcome. I cling to what is familiar, unchanging, consistent, and safe. Until a couple of years ago, I have not really known the word "home." It struck me that I was living in fear, even if it's for a good reason, it isn't the fulfillment to which God is calling me. He has more for me, and although change scares us, He knows what is best for us and "has plans to prosper us and not to harm us" Jeremiah 29:11.

Jesus wanted to change the scope of an entire way of believing. We act like that is just normal or at least as a child, I just assumed "yeah, Jesus came and told them how to change and then the world was saved!" Clearly, that was not the case. People thousands of years ago didn't want change, so what makes us think they would want it now? Change is scary. It leaves us open and vulnerable, which could turn us into animals feeling the need to protect ourselves from danger.

Yet, Jesus didn't come to force anyone to change, just to provide a fresh perspective. So maybe change isn't something that we need to brace ourselves for, but rather take a deep breath and slowly move into it like when we dip our toes into cold water. My favorite verses, Ephesians 3:20 - 21 of The Message translation, are so clear, *God can do anything, far more than we could ever guess or request in our wildest dreams. He does it not by pushing around, but by working within us. His spirit deeply, and gently within us.* We are not pushed around to change, we just need to invite Him in to make the change within us.

Kelsey Paul, Downtown *LifeLight Worship Leader, Director of Arts Education*



Saturday and Sunday, February 25 & 26

Excerpt From John Wesley's Sermon, Scriptural Christianity

"But it did not satisfy him, barely to abstain from doing evil. his soul was athirst to do good. The language of his heart continually was, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." My Lord went about doing good; and shall not I tread in his steps?" As he had opportunity therefore, if he could do no good of a higher kind, he fed the hungry, clothed the naked, helped the fatherless or stranger, visited and assisted them that were sick or in prison. he gave all his goods to feed the poor. he rejoiced to labour or to suffer for them; and wheresoever he might profit another, there especially to "deny himself." he counted nothing too dear to part with for them, as well remembering the word of his Lord, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (Matt. 25:40).

Charles Wesley's Hymn, Jesus, Lover of My Soul

*Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high:
Hide me, O my Savior, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide;
O receive my soul at last.*

*Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin;
Let the healing streams abound;
Make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art,
Freely let me take of Thee;
Spring Thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity.*

Monday, February 27

Every year we experience different holidays and seasons, and there are also seasons in the Christian calendar we recognize like Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. Each season and each holiday reminds us of something different and teaches us along the way. As Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, *There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens.*

This season of Lent is the 40 days before Easter when we prepare and get ready for Easter. Lent is a more solemn season, a time of reflecting and fasting before the great celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. Maybe you have fasted or given something up during the season of Lent. These sacrifices help us to focus on our relationship with God and to reflect upon the sacrifice that Christ made for us. There is a time for everything: and a time to give up something can be an important part of our faith journey.

Bob Goff is an inspirational speaker and author. In his book and study, *Love Does*, he talks about his practice of quitting something every Thursday, about how this can be anything from quitting habits, attitudes, or behaviors. It might be quitting something that frees up more time or space in our lives. Bob says, “We can’t change much if we don’t quit much.” The practice of fasting and giving up during Lent fits right into this thought – it can bring change when we’re willing to quit something. So maybe during this season of Lent, if you haven’t chosen a daily fasting discipline, you could choose to quit something every Thursday over the next several weeks.

But Bob Goff knows the importance of quitting the right stuff. And he is the kind of person who is all about adventure and whimsy. He would encourage the importance of trying something new. That’s what life is all about – a balance of starting and ending, holding on and letting go. Seasons help us to experience these times and changes. And no matter what season of life we are in – maybe a time of new beginnings, a time of quitting, or letting something go, God is with us.

Amy Givens, *Director of Youth Ministry & Discipleship*

Tuesday, February 28

As he neared his destination, on his way to make a very important speech in Scotland, an Englishman's mode of transportation got stuck in the mud. Across the field, a Scottish farm boy noticed the problem, recognized that he needed help, and approached the Englishman.

The boy told him that he would hook his team of horses to the horses pulling the Englishman's carriage and pull it free. True to his word, the boy did exactly what he said and it worked. Just before the Englishman left, he asked the young man if he could help him in any way and asked, "Is there anything that you plan to do in the future?" The young boy replied, "Oh yes, I plan to go to school and be a doctor." The curiosity, as well as the generosity of the Englishman, was sparked, and he replied, "Then, son, I will help you." And he did this by paying for the boy's education.

Many years later, another great Englishman of Parliament, Winston Churchill, was in Morocco for a wartime speech when he was stricken with pneumonia and about to die. However, a miracle drug called "penicillin" saved Churchill's life. The drug in its earliest form had been discovered many years before by Sir Alexander Fleming, who was the Scottish farm boy that helped a man out of a mud pit, who in turn helped the boy become a doctor. The man who paid for his education was Randolph Churchill, the father of Winston Churchill.

Think about the ripple effect of each action in this story: Randolph Churchill on his way to make an important speech at the Parliament got stuck in the mud, and found himself in need of help; a Scottish farm boy responded, upon which Randolph, a man of means enabled a young boy to achieve his dream of becoming a doctor; Dr. Fleming, the Scottish farm boy helps to invent a miracle drug called Penicillin that ended up saving the life of Randolph's son, Winston Churchill.

That's how the ripple effect works! The ripple effect is based on the understanding that we are all connected. The connections stretch like an incredibly interwoven and complicated tapestry. The Amazing Law of Influence, a belief that guides my worldview, states it this way: "One life touches another and both lives are changed; one life touches another and potentially the entire world is changed."

Our actions have the potential to impact all of creation. Does that mean then, that we really can live a life where our actions contribute to a world where Love Wins? I believe so!

Rev. Linda Harker, *Online Campus Pastor*

Wednesday, March 1

Living in today's culture, it is obvious life is engulfed in competition. People compete vigorously in sports, arts, entertainment, fashion, politics, and the list goes on. Sadly, it pits human against human. For winners, self-esteem is enhanced, ego is pumped, popularity is affirmed and in some events, finances are substantially rewarded. On the other hand, losers of competitions feel insignificant and egos and self-assurance are deflated. Even as individuals, we find competition within ourselves. We struggle with bettering ourselves physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. We compete with breaking old habits, beginning new and healthy lifestyles, and even strengthening our spiritual devotion to God and others.

While competition in any form can sometimes be seen as ugly and grueling, there is also a positive spin. Anyone who competes is driven to work harder, increase focus and simply strive to be a stronger and better person. I find it encouraging when the winners of awards acknowledge their colleagues as also being winners; recognizing that their hard work had value and significance, that they were winners in their own right. I believe losing a competition can lead us to work harder, re-evaluate current behavioral practices and strive to give one's all.

In life, we are all recipients of the ultimate Grand Prize: God's Love. It seems more and more that we are faced with Team Love or Team Hate. As a child of God, I am grateful that being on Team Love is not even an option. I choose to be a team player and love every human being of every race, nationality, and religion. As God is our Captain of Team Love, we should all be the best competitors we can possibly be and assure that Love Wins and that we did our part to build a better world.

Robert Fasol, *Organist and Choirmaster*

Thursday, March 2

One morning when Brooks was a young boy, I was backing out of the garage and became distracted. I felt a dull thud as my car hit the basketball goal. I groaned and asked Brooks to hop out and check if there was any damage. I watched him walk to the back of the car and then - thoroughly examine the basketball goal for any marks. He got back in and said, "Whew, it's fine." I sat there for a second and then asked him if he checked the car. He seemed surprised but immediately got out and gave the bumper a cursory look before letting me know that it too, was ok.

I've often thought of the incredulity I felt over Brooks not realizing that I was concerned about my car. But I'm sure that Brooks was just as surprised that I wasn't more worried about the basketball goal. The truth is that we will all have different things that we consider important at different times of our lives. It becomes even more complicated in times when we are busy. In those moments, judgment is impaired by the emotions that are evoked by busyness. On a stressful morning, after backing into a basketball goal - I was concerned about the car bumper. The reality was (and is) that a bumper, as well as a basketball goal, pale in comparison to how important my children are.

I miss the time I had with Brooks when I drove him to school. And now that our daughter Hannah is living in Texas, I miss getting to see her on a daily basis. Of course, I wish that I would have made more special time with them instead of the things I considered "important" at the time; but I can't change the past, and feeling guilty doesn't help me in the present. But, I can make the most of the Lenten season to refocus my heart and mind on what is truly important in life.

It is why I continually practice giving something up for Lent. I have found that giving up something minor (coffee, diet soda, sweets, etc.) becomes a daily reminder to recenter my life toward the things that really matter. Giving up the insignificant helps me to remember the significant things in my life.

In hindsight, a car bumper has never been important. But our basketball goal is a source of numerous memories - the games that have been played and all the conversations that have happened between me and my kids and between the two of them. If I had been looking in the rearview mirror and not been distracted, I would have seen what really mattered - time with my family. Let Lent be a time when you look in the mirror to see what is truly important in your life.

Rev. Wendy Lambert, *Senior Executive Pastor*

Friday, March 3

When you're stressed out while traveling, the last thing you want to see is an employee who is lying down on the job. But *sitting* down on the job? That became a blessing to an entire flight of passengers - especially a woman with a serious case of aerophobia, an extreme fear of flying... something 25 million Americans struggle to overcome.

She was recently on a Delta flight from Charlotte to New York, and expressed to the person seated behind her, Molly Simonson Lee, that she was nervous about the trip. Even before takeoff, she became visibly shaken by each sound the plane made (and commercial planes make a lot of strange noises). What happened next inspired Molly to post the experience on Facebook.

The crew of any commercial airline is extremely busy before takeoff, but Delta flight attendant Floyd Dean-Shannon could see the stress on that woman's face, and so he took the time to give her his undivided attention. "He took notice and began explaining what each sound was, with the warmest, calmest tone," Molly said.

But the *really* impressive display of kindness happened about halfway through the flight. The aerophobic woman was now fighting back tears, paralyzed with fear. Floyd took notice, sat down right next to her in the aisle, and gently grabbed her hand. He sat there, comforting her, for the rest of the flight.

Floyd didn't stop there. Another woman nearby was celebrating a birthday. Sure, he could have tossed her an extra bag of pretzels, but he decided to *sing* to her and make an impromptu cake with whatever goodies he could find in the back.

Those who saw Molly's Facebook post were truly inspired. "(Delta), I hope you see this!" one person commented. "These are the types of people that deserve raises." Another person wrote, "I love this. This is what society is lacking. Empathy and kindness towards people in times of need." A fellow passenger recalled, "I was on a flight with him today. He exudes joy and is intentional about making a connection with each person!" "It was obvious he is just a good, kind soul who shares that generously with everyone he encounters," Molly wrote. "Such kindness is rare and a true gift when encountered."

We often give up or add something to our daily lives during the season of Lent. What better way to honor Jesus Christ than to add simple acts of kindness to our routines? "Loving our neighbor" inspires others to do the same, to share what they witnessed. The message of Christ spreads quickly through acts of love... much faster than a Facebook post about getting an extra bag of pretzels on your flight.

Ed Doney, *Videographer/Writer*



Saturday and Sunday, March 4 & 5

Excerpt from John Wesley's Sermon, The Marks of the New Birth

"The necessary fruit of this love of God is the love of our neighbor, of every soul which God hath made...a love whereby we love every man as ourselves - as we love our own souls. Nay, our Lord has expressed it still more strongly, teaching us to 'love one another even as he hath loved us.' Accordingly the commandment written in the hearts of all those that love God is no other than this, 'As I have loved you, so love ye one another.' Now 'herein perceive we the love of God, in that he laid down his life for us. We ought', then, as the Apostle justly infers, 'to lay down our lives for our brethren' (1 John 3:16).

George Matheson's Hymn, O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go

*Oh love that will not let me go
I rest my weary soul in thee
I give thee back the life I owe
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be*

*Oh light that followest all my way
I yield my flickering torch to thee
My heart restores its borrowed ray
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be*

*Oh joy that seekest me through pain
I cannot close my heart to thee
I trace the rainbow through the rain
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be*

Monday, March 6

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you or forsake you.

- Deuteronomy 31:6

Change is an inevitable part of life. We grow and evolve, and with each new season, we face challenges and opportunities for growth. It can be difficult to let go of the familiar and embrace the unknown, but sometimes change becomes our greatest blessing.

In 2020, I started singing with the LifeLight worship team in Edmond while attending the University of Central Oklahoma. I was searching for a church home, having grown up singing in the worship band at the United Methodist Church in Muskogee, Oklahoma. I immediately fell in love with St. Luke's. Everyone was so welcoming, and I felt like I could be myself when I was there. As I kept singing with St. Luke's I became more and more involved. I started working in the Children's Center, helping as an assistant director for the Children's Choir, and directing musicals over the summer at the church. When I was facing graduation in 2022, I felt God pushing me more and more into ministry at St. Luke's. I knew I wanted to stay here and be a part of something bigger than myself. God was calling me to use the gifts He had given me to spread love and bring hope into this world.

This change was not part of my original dream, but I trusted that God knew where I belonged, and He opened all the right doors to lead me to where I am today. I had to trust Him that this huge change in my life would end up being my greatest blessing. You see, when I was a little girl, I used to dream about being a famous singer. With God's help, I get to sing every Sunday and share this gift of music with people all over the world. I am famous in my Father's eyes because I am using the gifts He gave me to share His unfailing love.

The Bible reminds us that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He never abandons us in times of uncertainty; He is always with us, guiding us through every change we face. When we trust God, He gives us the peace and comfort we need in the midst of the unknown. So don't be afraid of change. Trust that God is using you in ways in which you may have never dreamed. Know that His love for you is unmeasurable and no matter what changes you may face our God will be there with open arms.

Madison Eckerson, *Edmond Interim Youth Director and Edmond Director of Welcoming Ministries*

Tuesday, March 7

I love each of the gospel stories that tell of Jesus' death and resurrection. However, my favorite might be found in the Gospel of John: Jesus has been taken down from the cross, and placed in a borrowed grave. Mary and the disciples returned to the tomb, early that morning, expecting to find the body of Jesus; only to discover an empty tomb. Make no mistake about it, the women and disciples were disappointed; they were afraid; they trembled in fear wondering what had gone wrong; what would happen now to them. Peter and the other disciples left the tomb, heartbroken and confused, wondering how things could have gone so wrong.

But Mary Magdalene remained: devastated, weeping, wondering how people could be so cruel? Mary had seen and been through a lot of tough times, but never anything as heart-wrenching as what she witnessed on what we call "Good Friday." For the One who was the first to treat her like a human being; the One who had touched and changed her life, the One she had watched do so many wondrous things, the One on whom she had pinned such hopes... was dead! Crucified!

In the midst of her grief, Jesus calls to Mary twice: The first time we hear Jesus say, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" At first, Mary didn't recognize Him; she didn't understand. What happens next is significant. Jesus calls her by name! Mary! While we don't know the intonations of Jesus' voice, I can only imagine it to be full of tenderness and love for this woman who loved Him so deeply, who had followed Him as faithfully as any of the disciples. Mary, I'm here. So many things must have rushed through her mind at that moment: Am I dreaming? Is it true? Are you really alive?

As she reaches for Him, Jesus tells her, "don't hold on to me." Perhaps Mary's thoughts quickly turned to the things she remembered He had said or done; "I will not leave you alone. I will not abandon you." Evil will not have the last word... ever. New life is possible. Love is better than hate. Love wins!

I don't understand, nor can I explain what happened next; all I can say is that when Jesus called her by name, Easter became personal, real, genuine, powerful, authentic, and life-changing for Mary. As it does for us. Mary leaves the tomb, and her grief, and goes forth to tell anyone and everyone who will listen, "I have seen the Lord!"

We don't really know if the first disciples believed her or not, but we do know that one by one the disciples began to believe, not because they could explain it, but because they had experienced it. So have I! Jesus Lives! Love Wins!

Rev. Linda Harker, *Online Campus Pastor*

Wednesday, March 8

Love wins every time. God's love is absolutely guaranteed every single time. No matter what you do in life, our heavenly Father is there for you and me. There have been times that I doubted God's love for me when I have gone through difficult challenges.

When I was in college, I had a hard time coping with college life and being an "adult." I chose to skip some of my college classes, especially those scheduled at 8 a.m. I know I am not the first college student to do this, and I doubt I will be the last. I had a tough time figuring out what I wanted to do with my life. At 18 years old, I thought I was meant to be a performer by dancing my way through life. My dreams were quickly crushed and as a dramatic young adult, I thought my life was over. My parents were my cheerleaders during this time. They told me to continue my college education at Oklahoma City University and encouraged me to enjoy my passion of dancing as a hobby. They lifted me up and reminded me that I needed to keep my mind and heart open to new possibilities.

Little did I realize that God was helping me through this difficult time in my life. He has always been there for me. He spoke to me through my parents because I was having trouble putting my faith in Him. God's love was there for me, even when I was doubting His devotion to me.

I was meant to be an early childhood educator, not a dance performance major. I was meant to stay at Oklahoma City University so I would meet my husband, Brian. I was meant to be an early childhood educator in the state of Oklahoma for 15 years, teaching and nurturing the future of our state. I was meant to become a member of St. Luke's Methodist Church in 2014. I was meant to become the Director of Children's Ministries for St. Luke's Edmond to share my love for Jesus Christ with the young children of our congregation.

God's love prevailed in my life, time and time again. I have not always been privy to His plans, but I have greatly benefited from them. I have prayed to God for all the riches in my life and His love for me has provided. I am grateful for His endless love and thank Him over and over.

Jocelyn Morgan, *Edmond Campus Director of Children's Ministry*

Thursday, March 9

“A work in progress!” Those are the only words I can use to describe myself at this time in my life. I’ve lived long enough and had enough experiences to mature in some ways, but I still say and do cringe-worthy things. When will I ever learn? I believe the answer is found in 1 John 4:12: *No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.*

What a great scripture! So, how do we love one another? When I think of loving others, I always think of my grandkids. I love them unconditionally. When they say or do something they shouldn’t do, I forgive them.

I always give them the benefit of the doubt by thinking about their intentions instead of their actions. I love watching them learn new things and can see the numerous ways God has blessed them with intelligence, talent, beauty, and wonderful personalities... ok, I’ll stop! You get the idea. I need to see everyone through this same lens of love, through the eyes of God.

But what do we do about those who are difficult to love? We all have those people in our lives who can say and do things that really irritate us. By looking at that person through God’s lens of love, it’s so much easier to forgive and move on. We can ask, “what makes this person want to express their opinion?” or “why does this person feel the need to monopolize the conversation?” or “why does this person say rude things about others?” If we look closely, we can usually identify the answers.

I’ve concluded that I’m to love God and everyone else - no matter what and I don’t want to give the irritator or the irritations the honor of consuming my thoughts.

Philippians 4:8 says, *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things.* I prefer to dwell on things that are pleasant and to accept love and gratitude from those who appreciate me. People like my grandkids!

And on days when it’s difficult to love others, God always nudges me with the reminder that it’s likely I’m an irritating person to someone else, even if I have the best intentions.

Through these 40 days of Lent, I hope to give up something important, and that’s the ability of others to irritate me! I pray to see others through the eyes of God, as His beautiful children, created in His image. What do you need to give up?

Susan Meharg, *Assistant to the Executive Pastors*

Friday, March 10

I have always felt like I am one of the lucky ones. I've gone to all the camps and events I could. I've always felt like God and I were best buds. I had difficult times but I always knew that God was there and I didn't have to be afraid.

That was until I faced my darkest moment. A time when I felt guilt, pain, and darkness all around. It made me so confused and scared that I might not know what light was anymore. I could relate well to King David as well as the Disciples.

David was known as the "Man after God's own heart." We all know the story of David and Goliath and how he became King of Israel, yet even the man who was so close to the Lord still had his own failings. He sinned with Bathsheba and even had her husband murdered.

The Disciples were right there with Jesus through all the miracles and stories. They heard each parable and each word that Jesus spoke. But when Jesus approached His crucifixion, they all betrayed Him and ran away. We know that Peter directly denied Jesus but wouldn't the other ten also have denied knowing Jesus in their own way? When imagining all these well-known people in the Bible, I realize they must have felt like I did. They felt guilt, they felt pain, and they lost their hope.

But what else do they have in common? They were brought back into the light. David had Nathan correct him and help him become better. The disciples were reintroduced to Jesus and they then became inspired to spread the good news! In our lives when we face death and pain; when we are stuck in the darkness it can be hard to see the light. However, we remember that our faith isn't based solely on His death, but we are defined by the Resurrection. We don't need to hold onto feelings of guilt, pain, hurt, sadness, or anything else that plagues us. Jesus calls us to grow and to share His love. During this Lent season, whenever you feel down, you feel guilty, or sad, know that God has called you to life!

Brooks Lambert, *Ministry Intern*



Saturday and Sunday, March 11 & 12

Excerpt from John Wesley's Sermon, 'Awake, Thou that Sleepest'

"God is light, and will give Himself to every awakened sinner that waiteth for Him; and thou shalt then be a temple of the living God, and Christ shall 'dwell in thy heart by faith': and, 'being rooted and grounded in love, thou shalt be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge,' that thou mayest be filled with all the fullness of God."

Charles Wesley's Hymn, And Can It Be that I Should Gain

*And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

*Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.*

*Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

Monday, March 13

My paternal grandmother, “Granny Ruth” as we called her, was a woman of great faith. She had a diligent daily devotional practice, taught Sunday School classes, and played the organ at the small Baptist church she and my grandfather attended until she was in her 80s. When you called their home telephone and they weren’t there to answer, the voicemail message that greeted you began with the line from Psalms 118, *This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

A few weeks ago, I was having of a particularly challenging weekend morning. My toddler-aged son was upset, my energy levels were zapped due to pregnancy, and I had a list of chores that needed to be completed to set my family up for a successful week ahead. As I began to feel sorry for myself, those famous words spoken in my grandmother’s voice entered my head, “This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” In a moment in which I felt anything but “glad,” I was reminded that every day is a gift from God. It’s easy for us to rejoice when everything is going our way: it’s 70 degrees out, the sun is shining, all our work is done on time and our kids are happily playing. However, I often need to be reminded that our blessings from God are not based on our circumstances. Every day can contain something to rejoice and be glad in when we open our eyes to see it.

This Lenten season, I am committing to begin each day by reminding myself that it is one that the Lord has made. And, because of the promise of Easter, I can also rest assured that I will one day see my grandmother again in the kingdom of heaven - and what rejoicing there will be!

Morgan Jones, *Associate Director of Meals on Wheels OKC*

Tuesday, March 14

Every week I have the good fortune of being a part of a tangible representation of Christ's love- our St. Luke's Food Ministry program. It has many components: we provide home-delivered meals through Meals on Wheels, and we hand out fresh produce and other food staples to families and individuals through Community Market each week. We also help support a monthly meal to Sisu Youth Services clients, and we bring the Community Market to many in our El Sistema family.

It is a joy to participate with hundreds of volunteers from our family of faith and the community to help carry out these valuable programs. Sometimes the number of people that need these services is staggering - we serve close to 11,000 meals a month through Meals on Wheels, and close to 5,000 people are helped through Community Market and other parts of our food ministry each month. We are a visible representation of God's love. Sometimes our clients will share concerns in their lives in the brief moment we have with them illnesses, financial needs, relationship issues, or spiritual needs. At that moment, we represent the care and concern they need, the listening ear and friendship they long for, and the love of Christ. Because they trust us, I believe it is important to deliver more than just food - we also deliver God's love through our smile, our whispered prayer of intervention, and our kindness.

During Christ's time on earth, He often met a physical need while also addressing a spiritual need. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and delivered people from danger. This example reminds us that by helping our neighbors in palpable ways, we can represent the love of Christ to them as well.

During the Lenten season, I invite you to join me in any of the many opportunities to be a part of the St. Luke's Food Ministry. You can show others God's love in a very real way with a warm meal, a box of groceries, a bright smile, and a kind word.

Lori Hall, *Executive Director of Missions*

Wednesday, March 15

As a middle school student growing up at St. Luke's, I remember my first mission trip. I was going into the 7th grade and we were spending a week of our summer traveling to West Monroe, Louisiana for Youth Force. Youth Force is a mission trip camp that St. Luke's youth still do today. Students from all different churches come together for a week of working on homes to do repairs that the homeowners physically are not able to do themselves and cannot afford to pay someone else to do. In the evenings the students all come together after working on homes across the city for a time of worship, games, and small groups.

I can still vividly remember the church we stayed at and sleeping on air mattresses each night. I remember playing basketball in the gymnasium during our free time with new friends I had met from other churches. I remember worshipping together in the sanctuary each evening. I distinctly remember the awful smell of the nearby paper mill each morning as we were heading off to our job sites. But what I remember most are the homeowners of the home on which my group was working.

I do not recall their names, but I can still picture their faces and the little yellow house with white trim they lived in. We were tasked with fixing the steps up to their front porch, replacing some siding, cleaning up the yard, repainting the house, and doing a few other little jobs around the house. In the grand scheme of things, the tasks we accomplished probably were not all that life-changing but there is no doubt that the love we all got to share together was.

They were an elderly couple with very little to their name, and yet the love they shared with us all week was overflowing. Their joy was not based on their material possessions. It was based purely on this deeper love they had experienced, and they wanted to share it with everyone they encountered.

I went to Louisiana that week thinking I was going to serve someone else. I had no idea how much my life would be changed because of that experience of their love. I continued to go back to Youth Force year after year as a middle school and high school student. I firmly believe it was one of the main contributing factors that helped me hear God calling me to the ministry. It was not some theological dissertation that I read that compelled me to enter the ministry. It was an experience of profound love that unexpectedly transformed my life. But that is what love does. I guess I should not have been so surprised.

Rev. Josh Attaway, *Edmond Campus Pastor*

Thursday, March 16

Like a lot of you, I do not like change. I will do whatever is needed to ensure I don't have to change. I don't like disruptions to my routine, my profession, or even my friends. As much as I don't like it, I have learned that I do need to embrace change. Since I became a mother seven years ago, there has been a lot of change in my life. Children are anything but predictable. They may like a certain food one day, and absolutely despise it the next. Once your children get on a good sleep schedule, don't worry they will soon forfeit their sleep time for playtime in the middle of the night. As frustrating as it is, we love our children throughout it all.

Can you imagine how God feels about all of us, His children? He is constantly trying to keep up with our ever-changing minds. As a child, I attended church every Sunday with my family. My parents were avid volunteers and I also loved volunteering for my home church in Fort Worth, TX. I ventured to Oklahoma City University for college and had a hard time finding a church where I felt I belonged. Brian, my boyfriend at the time and now my husband, reintroduced me to my heavenly Father when we began dating 17 years ago. We began attending church together and naturally began volunteering together to serve our church.

I was lost for a few years, but God never gave up on me. He was always there for me and with me through those years. God had to wait for me during that time of change. I had to go through a life metamorphosis from adolescence to the young adult stage of my life.

I recently was reintroduced to a song, *Come to Me* by the Goo Goo Dolls and the lyrics spoke to me.

*Come to me my sweetest friend, Can you feel my heart again,
I'll take you back where you belong... Come to me with secrets bare
I'll love you more so don't be scared.*

God is calling me as His sweetest friend. He says to me, "Can you feel my heart again? I'll take you back to where you belong." God will always lead us back to Him. We must be actively listening and watching Him work in our lives. He invites us all to come to Him with our secrets. He knows all our secrets and He loves us just the same. God will always be our biggest fan. There is no need to be scared because He loves us more than we can ever imagine. His love is never ending and has no limitations. He loves us through our sins, and He gladly takes our sins as His own.

My God and my heavenly Father, Embrace me throughout the changes in my life, just as I embrace my children's changes. It is through their changes and mine, we learn how to become better people, inside and out.

Jocelyn Morgan, Edmond Campus Director of Children's Ministry

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.
- 1 Peter 4:8

In Genesis 3, we are introduced to the concept of sin when Adam and Eve partake of the tree in the Garden from which God had specifically told them not to eat. Shortly after, Adam and Eve hear God walking in the garden and hide among the trees. God calls to them, “*Where are you?*” Adam answers, “*I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so, I hid.*” - Genesis 3:8-10

Adam and Eve’s sin caused a brokenness in their relationship with their Creator. They were “afraid” because of their nakedness. Their sin had left them exposed and vulnerable, and their pure relationships with God and one another became tainted by fear. Oh, how easily I identify with Adam and Eve. Too often, in my own life, I have violated God’s word (through selfishness, greed, anger, unforgiveness, etc.) and been left feeling exposed and afraid.

After disciplining their sin, because he loved them, God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife. The Hebrew word for clothing in Genesis 3:21 is “*kethoneth*,” meaning “to cover.” Adam and Eve had to face the reality of their sin, however, God did not want them to live in the “shame” their transgression had caused; therefore, He covered them. God’s action here is a beautiful foreshadowing of what He did for all humanity through His Son, Jesus - He became our covering. His perfect love covered over our dishonor, indignity, and fear. As Romans 5:8 says, *But God demonstrates His own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

In 1 Peter, we are admonished to follow Christ’s example to “cover” the offenses of others by our love. We are not to condemn or shame, we are to “cover.” Cover is not equivalent to “hide.” God did not hide Adam and Eve’s sin; rather, He covered the vulnerability and shame their sin exposed, protecting their honor and dignity as His beloved children.

In a culture so focused on taking offense, the concept of covering over offenses seems foreign. However, we are called by God to be different, set apart, and holy. We are called “a chosen people, a holy nation, God’s special possession” so that we might proclaim the praises of Him who called us from darkness into His light. For we are the people of God, and we have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10). As Christ’s Church, let’s not be quick to wear offenses, like the world around us, but let’s be quick to cover offenses so the world may know us by our love.

Suzanne Manning, *Willow Ministries*



Saturday and Sunday, March 18 & 19

Excerpt from John Wesley's Sermon, The Way to the Kingdom

Dost thou now believe? Then ‘the love of God is’ now ‘shed abroad in thy heart.’ Thou lovest Him, because He first loved us. And, because thou lovest God, thou lovest thy brother also. And being filled with ‘love, peace, joy,’ thou art also filled with ‘long-suffering, gentleness, fidelity, goodness, meekness, temperance,’ and all the other fruits of the same Spirit; in a word, with whatever dispositions are holy, are heavenly, or divine. For while thou ‘beholdest with open,’ uncovered ‘face’ (the veil now being taken away) ‘the glory of the Lord,’ His glorious love, and the glorious image wherein thou wast created, thou art ‘changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.’

Isaac Watts's Hymn, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

*When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest Gain I count but Loss,
And pour Contempt on all my Pride.*

*See from his Head, his Hands, his Feet,
Sorrow and Love flow mingled down!
Did ever such Love and Sorrow meet?
Or Thorns compose so rich a Crown?*

*Were the whole Realm of Nature mine,
That were a Present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my Soul, my Life, my All.*

Monday, March 20

Every year there seems to be a new trend or family tradition popping up during different holidays. A few years ago, it was Elf on the Shelf. During the month of December, a little ornery elf appears in different places in homes to help countdown to Christmas. Every family assigns a name to their Elf and the fun begins!

I've also heard of parents creating specialty-filled goody bags to use on New Year's Eve to help count down the hours until midnight. The family opens one bag every hour to enjoy the surprises inside.

Most recently, I learned of families celebrating Valentine's Day uniquely. Each morning, from February 1- 14, they place a heart on their child's bedroom door stating something they love about that child. I thought this was a great way to celebrate not only Valentine's Day but also celebrate the uniqueness of their children. This would be a great way to celebrate a spouse, too!

In the Methodist tradition, we usually celebrate Lent by giving something up during the 40 days before Easter. I tend to try and add things to each day, like a random act of kindness, taking extra time for my daily devotional, or writing a card to someone I've not spoken to in a while. This year I've decided as a family we will make paper crosses and every day we'll write something that we love about Jesus. By the time Easter arrives, we will have a door, wall, or notebook full of all the reasons we love Jesus.

I've always been a visual learner and my son is as well. I'm looking forward to waking up on Easter morning to this visual representation of all the ways and things we love about Jesus.

I encourage you as an individual or as a family to try and add something into your daily life to help you grow in your relationship with Christ. I'd love to see or hear your ideas. Let's make this Lenten season memorable!

Taylor Easttom, *Downtown Campus Director of Children's Ministry*

Tuesday, March 21

One of the practices I use to help me connect to God is listening to music. There are so many wonderful Christian songs with powerful messages. Whether they are great hymns or contemporary songs, I find tremendous comfort and inspiration in the lyrics, melodies, and performances of these songs. One of the songs that I have enjoyed of late is “How Far” by Tasha Layton. It is a powerful song that reflects so beautifully on the message of our faith.

The opening of this song expresses the feelings that so many people have about their own life. It also reflects the depth and breadth of the mercy and love of God. Here are the opening lyrics to *How Far*:

*How far is too far. I thought I'd be there by now. I followed shame to the place.
I was sure Your grace ran out. So I kept running and running and running.
But You kept chasing and chasing and chasing. A million miles of my mistakes.
Still couldn't keep Your love away. However far away I am from home.
That's how far Your love will go.*

Have you ever thought, “I have gone too far and done too much for God’s love to reach me?” We often struggle with our past. We dwell on our mistakes. It does not take much reflection on our lives to find thoughts of disappointment and even shame. It can lead us to a place where we feel isolated. We worry that no one, especially God, could truly love us if they truly knew us.

Here is the good news: There is no distance we can travel, that God is not already there waiting for us. There is no action that we can take that God’s love is not still present, working in our lives. There is no obstacle that God will not overcome, just to draw close to us and work to restore us to the people he created us to be.

The mistakes of our past are not the full story. God’s love is more than capable of overcoming our failures. God is willing to rewrite our story. As the Apostle Paul writes, *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:38-39)

I am truly thankful for how far God’s love will go. As we continue together in this season of Lent, I want to encourage you to stop running from your past and stop running from God. Be still and know that our God is love. Our God is for us, and because of God’s great love for us, nothing can separate us from the one who truly knows us and who truly cares for us.

Rev. Keith King, *Pastor of Worship*

Wednesday, March 22

For much of my career, my success depended solely on what I knew and what I did. But when I became a manager, my success suddenly depended on others. The change was disquieting, to say the least. My mentor explained, “Your job now isn’t to know everything; it’s to know how to handle things.” He told me there would be times I would try things that wouldn’t work, and I’d have to try something else. “Chris,” he said, “you have to learn to be comfortable with discomfort.” I thought he was just talking about my job, but he was really talking about life.

“Your job isn’t to know everything...” Tucked away in my keepsakes is a pin signifying 19 years of perfect attendance in Sunday School. Church has always been important to my family. My fraternal grandfather was a Pentecostal Holiness preacher, my maternal grandmother taught an adult Sunday School class well into her 80s, and my Mom was our youth leader for a time. I was born on Easter Sunday and have been immersed in church ever since. I’ve read and studied the Bible a lot. But sometimes I lose sight that the Bible and its stories are all about God’s love. Instead, I weaponize my knowledge to judge and condemn others.

“Your job is to know how to handle things.” Jesus replied, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”* Really? Life was easy when everything was black and white, right or wrong. Now Jesus comes along and says, “Love your neighbor.” He doesn’t say “if they look like you, think like you or live like you.” Just, “Love your neighbor.”

“Learn to be comfortable with discomfort.” The beliefs I grew up with will always be part of me. But I’ve seen how focusing on judgment pushes people away from God. A man who’s been a father to me was made to think he could never be holy enough. One friend that I worked with and another I’ve come to love were chased out of their churches for being different. All three grew up loving God until people like me made them feel God could never love them. I would say I’m through with judgment and I’m going to leave that to God, but there will always be a battle within me. I choose to be comfortable with the discomfort, and I choose love.

Chris Lambert, *Meals on Wheels Oklahoma City*

Thursday, March 23

Over the last few months, my oldest daughter Cate has been taking piano lessons with Candace Fish, the Director of Traditional Worship at the Edmond Campus. Candace is so incredible with Cate; she is calm, kind, and patient - everything you could want in a teacher.

Now, something you should know about Cate is that she has some sensory processing hurdles and upper limb weakness which can make something like playing the piano, which requires strong hands and loud noises, tricky. Additionally, she can be incredibly hard on herself when she doesn't get everything right on the first try.

She has been so excited each week to come home and show us what she has learned. She is thrilled to practice alongside me and teach me what she is learning. For Christmas, my parents bought her a piano for her room to practice at home.

A little over a month ago, they had a specifically hard practice. Cate couldn't quite get the notes to play the way she wanted, and her hands weren't cooperating. The more she tried, the worse her mood and temperament grew. It would have been so easy for Candace to have ended the lesson and said she just couldn't handle it. Instead, she took her aside, away from the piano, helped her to calm her body, and then talked to her in the kindest way, helped her process her emotions, and then tried again, successfully.

I am so grateful for the love that was shown to her during a trying time for my seven-year-old.

Is there something you are struggling with? I encourage you to step back, take some deep breaths, and reconnect with and ask for help from God before you try to tackle it again.

Mandi Coleman, Director, *St. Luke's Children's Center*



Friday, March 24

I am writing this devotional on Groundhog Day in February. The day, of course, centers around a groundhog who foretells the weather. But what I think about most on this day is the hilarious movie, *Groundhog Day*, starring Bill Murray.

It is the story of a cynical TV weatherman, Phil Connor, who finds himself reliving the same day over and over when he goes to the small town of Punxsutawney to film a report about their annual Groundhog Day. Phil is the sort of guy who thinks he is better than everyone. He believes he should be working in a bigger market, and he hates doing “fluff” pieces. He treats everyone around him poorly. It is here in this little nowhere town the story begins. Every day he wakes up in his bed hearing the same song on the radio by Sonny and Cher, *I Got You, Babe*. He meets the same people every day in the same locations doing the same thing they did yesterday and the day before that and the day before that.

While this movie is a comedy... it is also a movie with a message about how people can change if given the time... time to look into their souls and see how their actions and attitudes affect the people around them. Phil goes through several cycles of varying emotions. At first, he decides he can do whatever he wants. He eats all he wants and tells a worried friend that he doesn't worry anymore about cholesterol or flossing. At one point he says, “I'm not going to live by their rules anymore.” After a while, the novelty of having no consequences wears off, and he moves on to acceptance of his situation and at the end of the film takes on an attitude of service. Instead of looking down on everyone he decides it is better to help others. Phil Connor has realized it is better to serve others than to push them away because you're so much better than them.

Andie MacDowell, who plays Murray's love interest in the movie was quoted as saying this film is a lot like the classic, *It's A Wonderful Life*. “It makes you realize how gorgeous life is and how to be a good person.” In the season of Lent, we are called to do a “heart check” and to examine how we are living our life. Are we serving others and putting Christ first or are our lives focused more on our wants and desires?

I believe we can change, and it starts by looking in a mirror during this Lenten season and seeing the true condition of our hearts. I believe God's love and grace allow us to do that and then we have to decide if we really want to change. God doesn't force us. But we can pray the words of the old hymn, “Thou art the Potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will.” We have this day to live and we'll never have it again unlike in the movie. What will you do with it?

Rev. Dave Poteet, *Pastor of Congregational Care*



Saturday and Sunday, March 25 & 26

Excerpt from John Wesley's Sermon, Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, IV

“Let your light so shine:” -- Your lowliness of heart; your gentleness, and meekness of wisdom; your serious, weighty concern for the things of eternity, and sorrow for the sins and miseries of men; your earnest desire of universal holiness, and full happiness in God; your tender good-will to all mankind, and fervent love to your supreme Benefactor. Endeavour not to conceal this light, wherewith God hath enlightened your soul; but let it shine before men, before all with whom you are, in the whole tenor of your conversation. Let it shine still more eminently in your actions, in your doing all possible good to all men; and in your suffering for righteousness’ sake, while you “rejoice and are exceeding glad, knowing that great is your reward in heaven.”

Charles Wesley's Hymn, Forth in Thy Name, O Lord

*Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
my daily labor to pursue;
thee, only thee, resolved to know
in all I think or speak or do.*

*The task thy wisdom hath assigned,
O let me cheerfully fulfill,
in all my works thy presence find,
and prove thy good and perfect will.*

*For thee delightfully employ
what e'er thy bounteous grace hath given;
and run my course with even joy,
and closely walk with thee to heaven.*

Monday, March 27

A significant and meaningful part of my earlier career was helping several Oral and Maxillofacial surgery practices merge and create a larger multi-site practice, Oral and Maxillofacial Associates. I was their Administrator for seven years and the life lessons I learned during those years were profound.

Dr. William (Bill) Croom was one of the doctors I worked with, who was also a member of St. Luke's. Our families were close, and we shared many of life's milestones together. He was a devoted surgeon who had a heart for the needy and underserved. He volunteered locally, providing oral surgery services at King's Klinik and Crossings Clinic, as well as volunteering at Living Faith Ministry for ex-offenders. We loved his stories about this work, but the memories we made with Bill when Bob and I traveled to Russia with our mission group are treasured ones. Although I was not clinically trained, I did my best and assisted him with his surgeries on that trip. He returned to Russia three more times and remained tireless in his efforts to help those in need. Bill developed Parkinson's later in his life and faced his many challenges with courage and optimism. He continued to live life fully, thanks to his strong faith in Christ and the help of his loving family and friends.

Bill passed away on Christmas Day 2021 and his memorial service was held later in January. One of the bittersweet memories of that day was being able to reconnect with most of the oral surgeons I worked with but hadn't seen in years. At a family dinner that followed, I was grateful for the opportunity to visit with Dr. Scott Searcey, who had been undergoing very rigorous treatment for neck cancer. I had heard about his cancer diagnosis and its recurrence, and I was anxious to see how he was doing. It was sad to me that he was suffering from some of the same challenges his own patients encountered. When I told him how sorry I was for all that he was going through, his response was, "I feel very blessed." He was hopeful about his outcome and said that living with this diagnosis helped strengthen his relationship with God.

In a recent conversation, Scott told me of a second recurrence and his extensive treatment, for which he was grateful to have had the strength to endure. Having faith gives him hope and gratitude and he said he is now living some of the happiest days of his life.

I am grateful for the inspiration these two men have brought to my life. Christ was with them in their joy and in their adversities, giving them the strength to truly make a difference in our world. They both inspire me to live in a spirit of gratitude and service to others. May we all treat each day as a gift and give thanks, knowing that God's love wins!

Marsha Long, *Director of Hospitality Ministry*



Tuesday, March 28

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. - Psalm 119:105

When I take time to think about how I have strayed from His path, it is easy to look back and remember the moments when I chose self-indulgence rather than the path of righteousness. The path is so clear, it is already lit in the darkness before us, but we often cave to our desires and our selfish ways.

This line from the Book of Psalms is beautiful imagery for the path we attempt to travel to avoid sinful ways. *We all have an internal compass that alerts us when we are about to stray*, but in those moments will our self-control keep us going down the correct path?

Christ Jesus has already lit the way... but He is also our guide when we stray. We must remember that even when we have gone so far off the path, Christ is still walking with us. He will never stop comforting us as we struggle through the wilderness of life.

Greet Him as you start your day today. Christ walks beside you.

Logan Fish, *Director of Arts and Edmond Campus Director of Hospitality*

Wednesday, March 29

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. - II Corinthians 3-4

November 11, 1981, is one of the happiest days of my life. It was the day my oldest daughter, Michelle Emily, was born! She was a happy child, and she did well in school. She graduated in the year 2000, Y2K when all the computer programs were predicted to crash. I will never forget; we had enough firewood and water for ten years!

Michelle wanted to be a pharmacist, and she and her best friend were accepted to Southwestern Oklahoma State University and were roommates. She loved college, worked hard, and was accepted into Pharmacy School. She started dating her roommate's brother and they were married in May of 2006, and Michelle graduated from Pharmacy school that December.

I became the proudest GIGI in 2008 when my first grandson Mason was born followed by Carson in 2010. Michelle and her husband struggled, as many couples do at first, they were young and had two children. Sadly, their marriage ended in divorce. As a single mother with two children, her world was rocked when her ex-husband passed away. Thankfully, she had her faith and family in these trying times.

When Michelle started a new job, she sat behind a man named Brian whom she eventually met and married. Brian has taken both boys in as his own. He loves them and guides them like a father should and makes sure that Michelle and both boys are cared for and loved. I was blessed again in August 2021 my youngest grandson Bryson was born. Their marriage is definitely a gift from God. They love each other so much and for a mother to see the struggles and heartache her daughter has endured; is a huge blessing.

As I have watched Michelle through the years I have seen the guiding hand of God at work. We know that our faith does not promise easy times and Michelle has had her share of troubles and sorrows. Through it all, God has walked with her, comforting her, caring for her, and even bringing her peace in the deepest of trials. That is the joy we have as a people of faith. We do not walk alone. God is with us. Just like the season of Lent, God walks us out of the darkness into the great joy of Easter.

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



Thursday, March 30

Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; it is not arrogant. - I Corinthians 13:4

Valentine's Day is a time when we talk a lot about love. We plan dinners and treats for our loved ones and stress about how much money to spend and how elaborate to make it. One story I read this year was about Carmella and John Finnegan, a couple celebrating their 75th Valentine's Day. When asked how they have maintained such a long and happy marriage, Carmella said, "I always say it's the two Ps: patience and perseverance."

God's love is like that: patient and consistent. In the Bible, we are reminded of the stories like that of Saul, where God not only loves through our mistakes but redeems us and changes us so that we can go on to change the world for the better. God took Saul, who was actively speaking against Him, and made him an advocate for Christianity. We are never too far gone or have made too many mistakes. God always has a way forward for us, wrapped in His love and His forgiveness, because His love is persistent and patient.

Are there relationships where we can practice more patience and perseverance? Can we share the kind of love that God gives us? If we practiced more patience in loving those around us, what kind of ripple effect would we have? This Lent, perhaps we can add more patience and perseverance into our relationships and even those with whom we briefly come in contact. In this way, maybe we can bring people closer to God and remind them that love always wins.

Candace Fish, *Edmond Campus Director of Traditional Worship*

Friday, March 31

Because God loves us so much, He wants us to live our lives to the fullest. Like any loving parent, He wants us to use our God-given talents to make each day count. I think God uses those around us to encourage us to make the most of what God has given us.

For Taylor Robertson, that person was first her dad and later her teammates and even her NBA role model who she recently got to meet. Taylor is a member of the Oklahoma Sooners women's basketball team. This is her last season and it's been a special one. In a game against Iowa State in January Taylor hit her 498th three-point shot and that set an NCAA record for the most three-pointers in women's college basketball.

For a girl from a small town in Kansas she has always dreamed big and it was her dad who encouraged her dreams and challenged her to shoot from downtown, beyond the three-point line. Taylor said her dad took her to the gym when she was just six. At first, her only goal was to hit the net, then the rim and finally to sink the basket. Her dad, a long-time Sooner fan, was so excited when she chose to play for OU. Unfortunately, he never got to see her play in Norman dying from cancer before her first game. After that, it was her teammates and coaches who inspired Taylor to greatness. She loves her team because they play selfless basketball caring more about each other's success than themselves.

Finally, Taylor has always idolized Golden State Warriors all-star, Steph Curry. Curry is the NBA's all time three-point shooter and as Taylor says, the best shooter on the planet. After T-Robb broke the record she heard from none other than Steph Curry who congratulated her and invited her to meet him at a Thunder game the following week.

In our own lives, God has used lots of folks to inspire and encourage us.... parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches, and friends. In this season of Lent as we contemplate God's amazing love for us think about whom you can encourage. There are children, youth, and young adults who have so much potential to do great things...to change our world. Some of them just need a nudge and maybe others a push to realize how God has blessed them. Let them know they can aspire to do great things with God's help and a little encouragement from us.

Rev. David Poteet, *Pastor of Congregational Care*



Saturday and Sunday, April 1 & 2

Excerpt from John Wesley's Sermon, On Working Out Our Own Salvation

“Since he (God) worketh in you of his own good pleasure, without any merit of yours, both to will and to do , it is possible for you to fulfil all righteousness. It is possible for you to ‘love God, because he hath first loved us’, and to ‘walk in love’, after the pattern of our great Master . We know indeed that word of his to be absolutely true, ‘Without me ye can do nothing.’ But on the other hand we know, every believer can say, ‘I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.’”

Charles Wesley's Hymn, Jesus, Thin All-Victorious Love

*Jesus, Thine all-victorious love
Shed in my soul abroad;
Then shall my heart no longer rove,
Rooted and fixed in God.*

*Oh, that in me the sacred fire
Might now begin to glow;
Burn up the dross of base desire,
And make the mountains flow.*

*Refining fire, go through my heart,
Illuminate my soul;
Scatter Thy life through every part,
And sanctify the whole.*

Monday, April 3

This past year my family had the privilege of traveling with St. Luke's to Italy and Germany which ended with attending the Oberammergau Passion Play. The play is put on every ten years by citizens of a small town in Germany. This tradition started in 1633 and we were able to see the 42nd installment of the play which is a five-hour performance all in German. The play walks through the final week of Jesus' life as he enters Jerusalem through the Passover meal, trial, and crucifixion, and ends with the resurrection. During the play, besides seeing the life of Christ, there were choir numbers along with what they called Living Pictures. These pictures included actors illustrating an Old Testament story that connected Jewish history to what Jesus was going through during that section of the story.

One of the things this Passion Play brought out that I think many times we overlook is the fact that Jesus was a Jew. He was from the lineage of David and grew up in the synagogue as a faithful Jew. The play did a good job of highlighting the various things that a Jew would do during the final week of His life.

Jesus spent much time in Jerusalem, not only in His ministry but in His childhood. It was in Jerusalem that He was circumcised and consecrated to the Lord. We would also read about when Jesus was 12 years old His family had traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover, which I'm assuming they did most years. Mary and Joseph started back to Nazareth and realized Jesus was not with the family caravan. The scripture says that when His parents found Him after three days, He was in the temple. Luke 2:46-47 says; *After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.*

The Passion Play was eye-opening for me and made me think about Jesus in a different light. I had always seen Him as the Son of God but realizing that He was also a faithful Jew who was connected to the religious leaders in Jerusalem changed my perspective. Seeing how Jesus was arrested and crucified from the viewpoint of someone who knew Him personally really brought home the message that He died for each one of us. If you get a chance to see the Oberammergau Passion Play, I would highly recommend it. It's an experience that will stay with you.

Brent Manning, *Director of Communications*

Tuesday, April 4

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. - Romans 8:37-39

I enjoy J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy novels *The Lord of the Rings* very much. They are a series I read for the first time when I was 12 or 13 years old. Tolkien's writing can be quite verbose, and he often trails off into too much detail on different characters, situations, or various histories within his fantasy world; but these wordy paragraphs give weight to the story. All of Tolkien's world is designed around the battle between good and evil. Tolkien was a devout Roman Catholic, and he admits that his stories reflect his Christian faith.

Without getting too complicated, the main story follows a group of heroes who are on a mission to destroy the ultimate evil. Gandalf the Wizard, the group's protector, comes in and out of the story. Gandalf always arrives at the last moment to give guidance or to turn the battle in the favor of our heroes.

One of the most gripping moments of all (Spoiler Alert) is when Gandalf stands against an ancient fire monster that comes up from the depths. Gandalf engages the monster in a terrible fight. They fight while falling down a horrible chasm and land in an icy lake. They continue fighting through miles and miles of dark tunnels until they are fighting on top of the highest mountain peak. Gandalf finally slays the beast after days, possibly eons, of fighting, but he also collapses and dies, but returns later in the story after some sort of resurrection. Our group of heroes finds him in an old forest, but they do not recognize him. They eventually realize their wizard friend has been changed into something new, and he is with them again to continue their journey.

Gandalf is a tangible Christ-like figure whom we love and trust throughout these books. Tolkien's stories help us remember that nothing will keep Christ from fighting alongside us. He will be with us as we face the greatest monsters in our lives, and He will be with us as we continue our journey.

Logan Fish, Director of Arts and Edmond Campus Director of Hospitality

There are times when I'm reading scripture and a particular phrase or word will jump out to me. I have learned over the years that when that happens, God is inviting me to spend time with that word or phrase. It was during worship while reading the scripture for the congregation that I had one of those experiences.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. - Romans 12:9 -18

The phrase that spoke so powerfully was verse 18, *If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all.* It didn't take long before the message of that verse convicted my heart. How many times have I taken responsibility for a conversation that didn't go well? How many times was it more important for me to be right than to consider the possibility that perhaps the other person was right? How many times did I sit quietly while observing an argument and not offer a word of grace? If I had only understood peace was dependent on me and to speak differently, it could have turned out better. While I love how God speaks to us through scripture, sometimes it can be a hard message to hear.

When I place this in the context of our Lenten theme "Love Wins" I realize that for love to win in my day-to-day situations and encounters, I need to understand just how much "depends" upon me to live peaceably with all. When I think of Jesus and the last few days of His life, He certainly embodied this message. His witness of living "peaceably with all" - even amid persecution and crucifixion - gives us a beautiful example to model. Will it be easy? No, no, no, but if "living peaceably with all" depends upon me and depends upon you. Let's do our best to model how Jesus loved and lived peaceably with all. For, in the end, that's when "Love Wins."

Rev. Linda Harker, *Online Campus Pastor*

Thursday, April 6

Last summer, we had a chance to lead a group of nearly 80 people from St. Luke's to Europe for a spiritual pilgrimage through Italy and Germany. We ended the trip in Oberammergau, Germany to witness "The Passion Play." This incredible play has been put on once every ten years for nearly 400 years since the time of the Black Plague.

It started as an offering to God from the people of Oberammergau. They were expressing gratitude to God for keeping them safe through the plague and giving thanks for God's faithfulness and mercy. For 400 years, the townspeople of Oberammergau have carried on this tradition to tell the story of God's great love and how it overcomes all things.

For me, one of the most striking parts of the play we witnessed was seeing how they portrayed the character of Judas. I have spent most of my life picturing Judas as this traitorous, greedy, self-centered man. But that was not at all how he was portrayed in the play. He was seen as someone passionate about God and the ministry that Christ was doing. He saw the evils of the Roman Empire and wanted to bring transformation to the people of Israel. He firmly believed that Jesus and His message could bring that transformation.

In the play, it was almost as if Judas was tricked by the religious leaders into betraying Jesus. He did not realize what he had done until it was already too late, and Jesus was being led away. There was a powerful scene where Judas, delivering one of the longest monologues of the entire play, was weeping in anguish over what had happened.

The truth is, we do not know exactly why Judas did what he did, or what he was feeling after Jesus was led away as a prisoner. We are simply told that Judas gave up after that. Watching that unfold on stage reminded me that we often do not know why people do what they do, especially in moments of conflict. We often do not get to fully understand somebody else's heart and emotions. We simply must be willing to show grace and extend love.

I have often wondered if Judas's story could have ended differently if someone had simply been there to show him love in the darkest moment of his life. Maybe you know someone who could use that kind of love today. You do not have to understand everything they are going through. Just be willing to show love. You never know what that might mean to them.

Rev. Josh Attaway, *Edmond Campus Pastor*

Friday, April 7

Recently I came across an article, “100 Worst Foods in the World” list. I quickly agreed with some of the items that were mentioned - a German food called, “Zungenwurst” which contains blood sausage and pickled tongue... “Tête de veau”, a French dish made up of slices of meat from the head of a calf... any number of dishes that featured “offal” (which I pronounce as “awful”)... and a fermented shark meat called “Hákarl” from Iceland. But when I really scanned the article, I found that both American Goulash and American Chop Suey made the list. Basically, they’re the same dish - pasta (typically elbow macaroni), ground beef, and tomatoes often with grated cheese. Growing up in Ohio the dish was called “Johnny Marzetti”, named in honor of the nephew of the owner of the Columbus, Ohio restaurant Marzetti’s. Granted, Johnny Marzetti isn’t fine cuisine and I’ve only made it a couple of times, but I don’t think it ranks as one of the worst dishes in the world. But of course, I imagine there are people who grew up in Germany and say the same thing about zungenwurst. It is easy to see different kinds of foods and label them as the worst without ever having tried them.

A few years ago, St. Luke’s went to Germany and England to study the Protestant Reformation. While in England I was committed to trying blood pudding (which also made the list of 100 Worst Foods in the World). I had always thought it sounded unappealing, but I wanted to try it. Turns out, it was pretty good. I was surprised that I really liked it despite my preconceived ideas.

Being different or unknown to us is not a moral classification. Different is just, different. Why do we shy away from things that are unfamiliar when we all know that we have experienced great joy when we’ve learned something new? Even if we eventually try and decide that something isn’t for us, the new experience is almost like an adventure. I’ve tried calamari three different times and I can honestly cross it off my list. I tried alligator in New Orleans and while it wasn’t for me, I have a little badge of pride knowing that I tried it!

Don’t let fear of the unknown or the unfamiliar hold you back. God created us for the adventure of life - growing, exploring, and experiencing new things. When is the last time you’ve done something for the first time? Have you traveled somewhere for the first time? Have you learned any words in a different language? When was the last time you tried a new food? Easter is a reminder of the new life that is given us in Christ. Make sure you are experiencing newness in your life during this Lenten season.

Rev. Wendy Lambert, *Senior Executive Pastor*



Saturday and Sunday, April 8 & 9

Excerpt from John Wesley's Sermon, Catholic Spirit

“But while he is steadily fixed in his religious principles in what he believes to be the truth as it is in Jesus; while he firmly adheres to that worship of God which he judges to be most acceptable in his sight; and while he is united by the tenderest and closest ties to one particular congregation, --his heart is enlarged toward all mankind, those he knows and those he does not; he embraces with strong and cordial affection neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies. This is catholic or universal love. And he that has this is of a catholic spirit. For love alone gives the title to this character: catholic love is a catholic spirit.”

Charles Wesley's Hymn, Jesus, United by Thy Grace

*Jesus, united by thy grace
and each to each endeared,
with confidence we seek thy face
and know our prayer is heard.*

*Help us to help each other, Lord,
each other's cross to bear;
let all their friendly aid afford,
and feel each other's care.*

*Touched by the lodestone of thy love,
let all our hearts agree,
and ever toward each other move,
and ever move toward thee.*

Learn More at stlukesokc.org/Easter



Easter Offering

Each year St. Luke's collects an Easter Offering to bless lives in our community and around the world. 100% of this offering goes to helping our neighbors in need. When you give, you make the world a better place by Sharing God's Love and Bringing Hope to the World. You can give by mailing a check to the business office, text STL Easter to 73256, or give online at stlukesokc.org/give.

Maundy Thursday Communion Services - April 6



On this night, Christians commemorate the supper Jesus shared with his disciples before his crucifixion when Jesus washed the disciples' feet and instituted the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Services will take place at both the Downtown and Edmond Campus.

Good Friday Services - April 7



Good Friday reaffirms our focus on Jesus Christ through His crucifixion and prepares us for His resurrection on Easter Sunday morning. You're invited to experience a meaningful time with your family of faith at either St. Luke's Downtown or Edmond Campus for Good Friday Service.

Easter Egg Hunts - April 8



Children ages birth to 12 years old will enjoy hunting Easter Eggs at this year's egg hunt. Each egg hunt will consist of multiple age sections and will have thousands of eggs to hunt.

EASTER SERVICES

SUNDAY, APRIL 9

Easter Worship

Each service features St. Luke's musicians, an encouraging message of hope, and a joyful celebration of the good news that Jesus Christ has risen.

Downtown Campus

- 8:15 a.m. Traditional Service
- 9:30 a.m. LifeLight Contemporary Service
- 10:50 a.m. Traditional Service

Edmond Campus

- 5 p.m. LifeLight Contemporary Service (Saturday, April 8)
- 6:30 a.m. Sunrise Service
- 9 a.m. LifeLight Contemporary Service
- 11 a.m. Traditional Service

Online Campus

stlukesokc.org/live



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