

FOR GOD *SO LOVED* THE WORLD

THE REAL MEANING OF THE CROSS



2024 LENTEN DEVOTIONALS



St. Luke's
METHODIST CHURCH



FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

THE REAL MEANING OF THE CROSS

2024 Lenten Sermon Series

For God So Loved the World, The Real Meaning of the Cross

For God so loved the world... The season of Lent is a time to reflect on our relationship with Christ; and it begins with His love for us. Part of our journey toward Easter includes a focus on the cross; rather than a symbol that elicits fear or guilt, it is meant to be a reminder of the everlasting love of God. For God sent the Son not to condemn, but that the world might be saved through Him.



ASH WEDNESDAY

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.



On my first Easter as a pastor, I planned for an Easter Sunrise Service at the church I was serving. It was a small rural church where I served part-time while I also worked as a physical therapist and started seminary coursework. I was so excited to plan the Sunrise Service. I had always enjoyed the early morning service when I was growing up. I was eager for the congregation to witness the sunrise together. I wanted to ensure that we didn't miss it, so the service was scheduled early - really early. In fact, way too early - for when I came to the closing song, it was still pitch black outside. We sang an extra song or two, but the sun was clearly a long way off, so we all moved to the Fellowship Hall for breakfast together. Finally, about halfway through our early breakfast, the sky started to lighten, and we were able to move outside and watch the sunrise.

Sometimes in life it seems that the light is a long time in coming. When we're in dark times, we are eager for the sun to shine. The reality is that the sun is present even though our part of the world hasn't fully rotated to bring it into view. Even in the darkest midnight - we know that the sun is there and, in just a few hours, will be fully visible.

The Son is always present in our lives, whether or not our eyes are capable of seeing Him. The Light of the World is with us, even when everything looks to be shrouded in darkness. Since we know the ever-faithful presence of Christ, we need not fear the darkness; we know that it is temporary.

Lent is a time when darker colors are often used to remind us of our own mortality. We began the season with the dark ashes on Ash Wednesday and will continue the journey through the extinguishing of the last candle on Good Friday. The darkness is not the absence of Christ but rather a tool to help us ignore the distractions in the world around us and focus on our relationship with Jesus. The darkness can help you to turn inward and reflect upon your identity as a child of God.

During this season, be sure to spend time in devotional reading and prayer. Be intentional to set aside moments where the clutter of a busy schedule doesn't interrupt your time with God. Remember that even the darkest night ends with the rise of the sun. The quiet stillness of Lent ends in the joyful light of Easter morning!

Rev. Wendy Lambert, Senior Executive Pastor



Thursday, February 15

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. - John 3:16

Have you ever asked yourself, “Now what do I do?”

I remember asking myself this question after my divorce was final. I asked this after retiring in my 50s and still having the desire to work. I asked the question after my mother passed away and I couldn’t imagine life without her. I’ve asked it many times over the years, and without fail, God has answered my question! Was it immediate? Not always. But He did answer, and sometimes it was a big surprise.

When I became a single mother and so many things were changing, God’s answer to, “Now what do I do?” was that I needed to work on myself. As a result, I took every Bible study I could find, dove deeply into trying to be the best mother I could be, read books about how to be a successful single mother, and sought my pastor’s advice. I worked on my mind, body, and soul! It was a long process, but the things I learned during that time have made me a much better version of myself. I’m more patient, more loving, more kind, and though I still have far to go, I’m a better person!

When I desired a new profession, I fervently opened my heart to God and asked that His will be done in my life. He almost immediately opened doors that enabled me to go into full-time ministry. It required me to leave the place where I’d lived for nearly 30 years and to live alone for the first time in my life. Both were things that could have been scary, but I knew I was in the center of God’s will for my life, and I was excited!

The passing of my mother was perhaps the greatest loss I’ve ever suffered. My, “Now what do I do?” came with lots of tears and a broken heart. However, our ever-faithful Lord wrapped His loving arms around me and gave me this message, “Be grateful you had a wonderful mother who loved you unconditionally and who you will miss every day; not everyone has a mother like this.”

Are you in a place where you’re asking yourself, “Now what do I do?” If so, I hope the place you’ll look for answers is not in other people or things, but in a personal relationship with the One who loves you unconditionally, who gave His life for you, and who wants only good for you! “For God so loved YOU...”

Susan Meharg, Executive Assistant to the Executive Team



A few days after our youngest son, Park, had just turned 7, strep throat triggered an autoimmune illness that wreaked havoc on him. We were facing so much uncertainty, and I had been instructed that I needed to control things and to navigate and encourage his body to heal. During our long drive to a specialist downtown, I was running through my fears, doubts, and questions for the doctor when I heard Park's little voice singing a song that offered words that we both so desperately needed to hear.

I've had plans shattered and broke. Things I have hoped in, fall through my hands.

You have plans to redeem and restore me, You're behind and before me,

Oh, help me believe. God You don't need me but somehow You want me,

Oh how You love me, somehow that frees me,

to take my hands off of my life and the way it should go.

Oh, God You don't need me, but somehow You want me.

Oh how you love me, somehow that frees me,

to open my hands up, and give You control. Oh, I give You control.

The King of Heaven wants me, so this world has lost its grip on me.

The song, *Control*, by Tenth Avenue North, was sung over and over by that little boy. It is now like an Ebenezer stone for us: a powerful reminder of God's faithfulness and protection when the world was too much, but God reminded us that during it all, we could rest in His love.

Mike Donehey, the lead singer of Tenth Avenue North, has also seen his fair share of the unexpected. As his story goes, "Following a potentially fatal car crash as a teen, Mike learned to play the guitar while still in bed recovering from his injuries. Learning the guitar quickly gave birth to songwriting, and that songwriting soon led to the formation of a band." The band, Tenth Avenue North, became one of the most loved and successful groups in Christian music. Mike has written best-selling books on grace and has a podcast encouraging us to look for the joy of God in unexpected places as well.

As Mike says, "The unexpected has a way of disrupting our lives in ways we might not have ever chosen." For Mike, learning to embrace the unexpected has been the very thing that continues to bring encouraging and soul-healing art.

God is so creative in the ways He can show us love. Music is one of those creative gifts. It has a powerful propensity to ignite hope, so we are elated that Mike Donehey and his band will be at St. Luke's on February 23 during this Lenten season as we turn our eyes to the King of Heaven who wants us.

Kelly Judd, Director of The Grove - Family and Couples Ministry



Saturday and Sunday, February 17 & 18

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)*



My husband, George, and I fast during Lent. We follow his family's tradition, the Orthodox Christian Great Lent Fast. The Great Lent is the longest and most intensive fasting period in the Orthodox Church, lasting for 40 days before Easter. During this time, Orthodox Christians abstain from meat, dairy, and wine. The act of fasting is often misunderstood. It tends to be mischaracterized as a form of deprivation. But we know that Lent is not a season of deprivation.

Father Thomas Hopko, in his book *The Lenten Spring*, paints a beautiful picture of Lent as a blooming season of renewal: "The Lenten spirit in the Church is one of splendor and delight. It breathes with the exhilaration of those girding up to 'fight the good fight' for the One who loves them. It's the invitation to a spiritual adventure. The Church welcomes the Lenten spring with the spirit of exultation!"

Jesus said, "and when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." - Matthew 6:16-18

Lent is about making small and permanent changes to bring us closer to the Lord, changes that will last long after Lent is over. This is the purpose of the Lenten journey. Fasting is an aid to help us in this. It helps us draw near to God, surrender ourselves to God, hear God's direction, and steel ourselves with determination to do God's will.

That's the best outcome we could ever hope for.

I'll leave you with the words from the beautiful hymn, *As the Deer* that was written on the 19th day of a spiritual fast by its composer, Marty Nystrom.

*As the deer panteth for the water, so my soul longeth after Thee.
You alone are my heart's desire, and I long to worship Thee.
You alone are my strength, my shield. To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire, and I long to worship Thee.
You're my friend and You are my brother even though You are a King.
I love You more than any other, so much more than anything.
You alone are my strength, my shield. To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire, and I long to worship Thee.*

Ashley Carr Soter, Director of The Table - Young Adult Ministries



Tuesday, February 20

For the past four years, my sister has been living with and battling stage IV breast cancer. Cancer is an awful disease, and learning that someone close to you has cancer is a sobering experience. Though there are no good things about cancer, there are good things that manifest out of the shared experience. I want to make no attempt to diminish the fact that the hard work and the greatest challenge of cancer or any serious disease lies with the person who has the disease - they endure so much. From the side effects of treatment, the angst of all the decisions, and the impact of the disease itself - the pressure, pain, and suffering come at their expense. The shared part of the experience is that all of those around - family, friends, caregivers, and medical professionals - everyone is impacted in some way. The caregivers especially take on as much as they can carry responsibilities, sometimes more than they can endure, in order to help the one they love through the process.

During a recent surgery and hospital stay for my sister, I was reminded of that shared experience. I watched her husband care for her, looking out for her every need, listening to the doctors, and being her advocate, forgoing his personal needs to take care of her. Through it all, I also witnessed his unwavering faith in God. As we sat in the waiting room, my brother-in-law talked about that faith and how there were many things he did not know for certain and many things that he had to take on trust - there was one thing he knew for sure - then he paraphrased the Bible verse John 3:16. "For God so loved the World that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

That, perhaps, is the good thing that comes from a health crisis - we are reminded of our own vulnerability and where our comfort and peace comes from. And if you're like my brother-in-law, you are happy to talk about it and offer that peace to others. Truthfully, we don't have to be in a crisis to know God's peace and love for us. Reminding ourselves daily - reading the Bible and holding fast to God's word will give us that peace during easy and challenging times. Then, when we have a crisis or we share that experience with a loved one or friend, we can be a source of comfort for them, too.

Lori Hall, Executive Director of Missions



During the season of Lent, giving something up is a common practice, but I generally like to add something into my life to help me become more focused on God. This year, I've decided to add something simple, but I think it will help me to stay focused on the purpose of this practice, and that is the love that Jesus has for me.

I am not the best at time management, so I'm setting myself up for success by setting an alarm for the same time each day until Easter to remind me to pause in whatever I'm doing and pray The Lord's Prayer. I know it might not seem like much, but some of the people I look up to most in life have repeated to me time and time again, "If you don't know what to pray, pray the Lord's Prayer." I know God just wants to hear from me and by focusing a little portion of my day by adding in an extra prayer I know that it will help me to keep my eyes set on Him.

You may think that this prayer is only for a church service or to be said in a large group of people, but Jesus gave us these words to help us grow closer to God. I say this prayer every week in Chapel with a group of kids ages 2 - 5 years old. Not too long ago, I asked if everyone was ready to pray and gave the cue to put their hands together, but before I could get started, a 2-year-old boy belted out, "Our Fodder who art in heaven," and was stopped only by giggles all around. It was the sincerest start to a prayer I'd ever heard. It doesn't matter how old you are or how long your prayer is, God wants to hear from us! I pray this Lenten Season, we can all grow closer to God, our Fodder.

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. - Amen.

Taylor Easttom, Downtown Campus Director of Children's Ministries



Thursday, February 22

After working in childcare for the last 18 years, I often get questions from parents and caregivers about discipline and how to help their children. Oftentimes, it's along the lines of my child wanting to do X, but I know as a parent that isn't the right choice for them, i.e., a child not wanting to sit in their car seat or wanting them to wear a jacket when it is cold outside. The first thing we usually talk about is how, as a parent, it is our job to keep our children out of harm's way, help them learn, and how we best do that for each child. Sometimes, like sitting in a car seat, these are non-negotiable choices, and the child must sit in one to be safe. Then there are things like wearing a jacket when it's cold that I like to advise parents that this an excellent opportunity to practice Natural Consequences.

Natural Consequences are those things that happen in response to your child's behavior without parental involvement. The consequences can be incredibly effective, and my favorite example of Natural Consequences includes my oldest daughter, Cate. When she was three years old, there was a huge snowstorm that blew through Oklahoma City. Now, Cate, being three years old, had some rather strong opinions on her clothing like most three-year-olds do. We were trying to get to school on this specific day, and I advised her on which shoes to wear. Cate was determined to wear her sandals, so in true Natural Consequence fashion, I allowed her to wear them. We arrived at St. Luke's and walked across the street and into the building, during which Cate got incredibly upset at how cold her feet were. I reminded her about our earlier conversation that her feet would likely get cold because there was snow on the ground but that she insisted on wearing them and that next time it snows, she might want to wear the warm boots to keep this from happening. Cate is now 8 years old and reminds me of the time she wore sandals in the snow and what she learned from doing that.

I liken the discipline and love we show our children to the love that God shows us. Sometimes, we must love our children enough to allow them the space to make mistakes that can't hurt them severely but allow them to learn and be there to love them unconditionally through it. God gave us the Bible to use as our guide and advisor.

Mandi Coleman, Director of St. Luke's Downtown Campus Childcare Center



The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. - Lamentations 3:22-23

Music is central to my faith journey. Music has a way of drawing me into the presence of God. When I'm struggling with life, when my faith journey isn't what I know it should or could be, the first two places I turn are to scripture and music. They have a way of grounding me in ways that are unexplainable. I have many favorite hymns; however, number one on my top ten list is *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*. Like scripture, I find that knowing the context, or the story behind the hymn helps me to better understand and appreciate the gift of music.

Thomas Obediah Chisholm, who sometimes described himself as "just an old shoe," was born in a Kentucky log cabin in 1866. Chisholm's health was unstable throughout his life, and he alternated between bouts of illness and gainful employment. At the age of 36, a bishop in Kentucky gave him the opportunity to serve a church and he became a pastor but had to give it up only one year later due to poor health. Through all the ups and downs in his life, Thomas discovered new blessings from God every morning. The third chapter of Lamentations 3 became precious to him: It became his song, his melody, his story.

I served under the leadership of Bishop Robert Hayes as a cabinet member. If you know Bishop Hayes, you know he can preach a hymn! Knowing that this was his favorite hymn, I asked him one day: "Why is this hymn one of your favorites?" With great passion and animation, he began to tell me the story behind the hymn and reminded me that the hymn was written using Lamentations 3. He said, "Lamentations...a book of laments, a book about sorrow and loss, rejection and despair. And yet Thomas Chisholm, in spite of the difficulty of his life, found a way to focus on God's goodness and faithfulness. Such a paradox."

"This is a hymn of deep faith. One that had to grow out of trust and from a deep relationship to God. Chisholm didn't just write a hymn, didn't just put words on a piece of paper...didn't just talk about God's faithfulness, didn't just believe in God's faithfulness; He LIVED it!" In a very reflective voice Bishop said: "You know, everybody's got a song, everybody's got a melody, everybody's got a story."

I can say with a grateful heart that this is my song, my melody, my story. "All I have needed; His hand has provided." As we enter the season of Lent, a season of reflection, and a time to fix our eyes and hearts on God's great gift of love and grace, this hymn reminds me of God's great faithfulness in the gift of Jesus.

Rev. Linda Harker, Online Campus Pastor



Saturday and Sunday, February 24 & 25

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



For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. -1 Corinthians 2:2

I was sprinting out of the auditorium that had been screening the *Passion of the Christ* at the church camp my foster family had sent me to as a last-ditch effort to give me some direction. It could have been the pain I saw on Jesus' face while He carried the cross, or the unbelievable rage people had for Him, or the way He called out to God exclaiming, "why have you forsaken me?" that caused the flight response. But soon I landed myself in a nearby field and screamed as loud as I could so God could hear me.

I was so angry with Him that He would take my mom from me and change my life into what felt like a nightmare. In that moment and in so many moments before it, I felt completely and utterly alone. It was then that I had an encounter with the living God. I felt Him take my heart and heard Him say, "I love you. Your mom is with me. And if you follow me, your life will be more than you could ever imagine. Trust me and follow me." I felt this warmth that came from a sun that wasn't physically present; I felt held with nothing physically touching me; I could hear God with no sound. I had never understood faith until that instant.

I have clung to the love I felt God had for me in that field every day since then. I cling to the truth that He will neither leave me nor forsake me because I am His.

During Lent, we come back to the resurrection because that is the miracle and the hope that our faith resides in, but when we feel we have heard this story before and it starts to lose its luster, remember this: God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it through Him. I am saved, and I am loved because of Jesus.

Kelsey Paul, LifeLight Worship Leader and Director of Arts Education



Tuesday, February 27

Jesus and His disciples had been together for almost three years. In their travels, they changed the world. Matthew records that *Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.* (Matthew 4:23) The disciples witnessed miracles and life-altering moments of teaching. They also had many quiet moments with Jesus. In their travels, Jesus and His disciples would experience many wonderful things.

Those three years of ministry would come to an end on the night that Jesus was betrayed. The disciples knew things were changing. The dinner they had that night was unlike anything they had experienced. While celebrating the Passover, Jesus would openly talk about being betrayed, about no longer being with His disciples, and about dying. The mood was one of fear, anxiety, and even panic. Jesus spoke words of comfort to His followers, but even Jesus knew the next few days were going to be difficult for all.

Matthew records that *When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.* (Matthew 26:30) They traveled from that room in Jerusalem, across the valley, to a place of comfort, seclusion, and prayer. It is here that Jesus shows us that in the darkest of times, we have a gift. There is no struggle so challenging, no problem so big, no future so frightening that we cannot go to God in prayer.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus shows us the importance of taking time to pray. Over and over again, Jesus retreats from the work of the day to spend time alone with God. It is in prayer that we find peace, rejuvenation, and a renewed focus on God, our source for strength and hope. As we move towards Easter, let us be reminded that God is not far off. We have the gift of prayer. We can go to God with all our hopes and worries. When we spend our time in prayer, we will find the One who is there to lift us beyond the challenges of today.

Rev. Keith King, Pastor of Worship



When I think of someone in my life who has displayed the love of Christ, I am blessed to be able to say there are many that come to mind. But none so clearly as my grandmother; we called her Granny. Growing up I remember my Granny coming to stay with us occasionally for a week at a time and would be available to help my stay-at-home mother of six with certain household projects and other day-to-day responsibilities. In addition to helping, she would always make sure to spend quality time with us kids, playing card games and board games or watching us play outside.

One thing my Granny did that was so special was she would carry around a little pocket-sized notebook with different tidbits of information written inside that she found interesting or important enough to write down. Some of her notes were random and fun, like what are the names of the seven dwarfs, listing the Greek alphabet in order, or (my personal favorite) what are the eight vegetables in V8 Juice. But most of her notes were excerpts from scripture that she wanted to always remember and carry with her. For fun, she would playfully quiz us on these topics asking if any of us could list all the fruits of the spirit, or could we recite the Beatitudes and Ten Commandments.

As a child, I remember not always being too impressed with these little games and would usually leave it to one of my older siblings to play along while I slipped away and tended to something that I deemed more fun. However, as an adult, I find myself looking back with a grateful heart on these moments with my Granny. Her desire for knowing these scriptures and taking the time to share them with us in a very loving and playful way really did help plant the seeds for my faith.

She was also one of the best examples in my life, displaying Christ's love through her joyful spirit, which was always so kind and gracious to those around her. As we enter the Lenten season and reflect on God's love, I give thanks to God for the people He has placed in my life who have gently guided me toward Him and shown His love in special little ways – like a pocket-sized notebook full of little nuggets of knowledge.

In case you were wondering, here are the eight vegetables in V8 Juice: beets, carrots, celery, lettuce, parsley, spinach, tomatoes, and watercress.

Jessie Parker, Director of Childcare Administration



Thursday, February 29

The season of Lent is an invitation to embark on a journey of the heart, where the transformative love of God marks the landscape. This journey commences not with the weight of guilt or the echo of condemnation but with the resounding declaration of John 3:16, a verse that captures the essence of our faith – the sacrificial love of our Creator.

When reflecting on that kind of love, my mind takes me back to the day God put a call on my heart to go into ministry. I was entering my second year as a youth intern at Ardmore First. It was our first camp of the summer, Disciple 2019. I had felt a stirring in my heart for months, but I did not know what it was exactly. I was terrified of my future as I was entering my senior year as a sports management major at Oklahoma State. There, during worship at a middle school camp, I found myself surrounded by individuals united by one purpose: to love others as Christ has loved them first. These were people who selflessly prioritized the needs of others, loving Jesus with unwavering devotion.

The speaker began his sermon on the story of Jonah. I sat there, surrounded by middle school students, bawling my eyes out. I realized all along that I had been running from God's calling on my life. That stirring on my heart was God pushing me. I had feared I could not live up to this calling, but all the fear melted away at that moment. All I could feel was the pure sacrificial love of our Savior. In that moment, I knew God was calling me to youth ministry.

Eight months later, COVID swept across our country. I was graduating as a sports management major, and sports activities came to a halt. In hindsight, I can see God's protection and love strongly at work in my life during that challenging time. Despite the uncertainty, God had already guided me towards the decision to finish school and head on a path as a youth director. His protection shielded me from potential heartbreak and revealed that His love was enough for all my needs. It became a reminder that He had a plan for me all along.

As we journey toward Easter, let God's sacrificial love guide us. In my own journey, I see the threads of God's love woven into every moment, leading me to a calling that I initially feared led to a job here at St. Luke's serving students and a church that I love wholeheartedly. I pray we will surrender to God's love so he can fulfill His purpose for our lives.

Schuyler Henderson, Edmond Campus Youth Director



I am a mother to two beautiful children. My son, Lincoln, is almost five, and my daughter, Corrie, is eight months as I write this. My children bring me such joy, but as anyone who has raised a toddler or young child knows, I am often faced with challenging moments. In my time so far as a parent, I have frequently sought the advice of experts in the field of child development and behavior to guide me. One such expert whom I have gleaned much knowledge from is Dr. Becky Kennedy.

In her book *Good Inside*, Dr. Kennedy writes about the idea of the “most generous interpretation.” This concept requires us to shift our mindset about why certain behaviors occur. For example, instead of thinking that a child who throws a toy is a “bad” kid who will never respect the value of his or her things, we should use the most generous interpretation of the situation to think about how it can be difficult to share toys and frustrating when things don’t work out like we want them to. When we do so, it allows us to build empathy for the person who made a mistake rather than shaming or seeing them as “bad.” We tend to jump to negative conclusions when we see our children misbehave. However, Dr. Kennedy encourages us to shift that mindset to “How can I interpret this misbehavior through the most generous lens?”

This Lenten season, we are focusing on the message of John 3:16 and 17. In verse 16, we are told of God’s love for us. Then, verse 17 gives us a beautiful promise of God’s mercy. Knowing that God did not send his Son to condemn us but to save us gives me such hope. God sees all of the mistakes we make daily, and He meets us with grace. To me, this is the ultimate generous interpretation. As Romans 5:8 says, *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

As we move toward Easter Sunday, I would encourage you to see those in your own lives through the lens of the most generous interpretation. Whether it’s a child, a parent, a coworker, a spouse, or a friend, whenever someone close to you makes a mistake, try reminding yourself that they are a good person who is having a difficult moment. And when you inevitably make a mistake, find hope in knowing that we are not condemned but saved through God’s grace.

Morgan Jones, Associate Director of Meals on Wheels OKC



Saturday and Sunday, March 2 & 3

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)*



For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

- John 3:16-17

I can remember the exact moment John 3:16-17 struck me as more than a nice verse to memorize, but as something that speaks to the fundamental truth of who God is. It was one of those rare moments of clarity we experience through music that changed something deep within me.

Going into college, my faith took a back seat. I didn't necessarily lose faith, I just didn't make time for it. I prioritized other things. Late in my sophomore year, I started feeling a deep desire to be in the church again, accompanied by guilt for neglecting my relationship with Christ. That summer, a friend helped me get a music internship at St. Thomas More, the Catholic church serving the OU campus. It was such a joy to sing Mass with fellow music students and friends and to be in a house of God consistently once again.

In truth, though, I still felt separated. It felt like I was looking for God, and He just wasn't there anymore. There was a part of me that was certain I had wandered too far away, for too long. That I had lost a connection to God, and I would never be able to reclaim it. I still felt shame and guilt, the same as I had when I wasn't going to Church. The moment that changed was on Good Friday, my junior year. At the end of the service, we sang *God So Loved The World*, a choral work by John Stainer. We had been rehearsing it for weeks. I had sung it countless times, but that was really the first time I heard it. I wept. Truly, I couldn't sing a single note. I was overtaken with the reality I had been ignoring. "God so loved the world... God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved."

God had never condemned me; I was condemning myself. Tears streamed down my face. God had been right in front of me all along, and I was just too lost in shame to see Him. The revelation of His love in that moment shook me free. I have a habit of trying to make God's love for me conditional. A pattern of feeling I'm not good enough and then inflating it to Godly proportion. In the moments where my own condemning voice gets so loud that I've drowned out God's, I'm going to return to this verse. I hope you take a moment to be still and listen to Stainer's piece today. God loves you. Know that He does not want you to live in guilt or shame, so let it go.

George Soter; Director of The Table - Young Adult Ministries



Tuesday, March 5

In 2016, Suzanne and I were blessed to be a part of the St. Luke's team that went to Jerusalem to see firsthand the locations of the Bible. We were able to stand on the Temple steps in Jerusalem, sail on the Sea of Galilee, step into the Jordan River, and experience the Via Dolorosa.

The Via Dolorosa is the route that they believe the Roman Soldiers forced Jesus to walk on the way to His crucifixion. There are various stops along the route where specific things that happened to Jesus were supposed to have occurred.

While I enjoyed the walk and seeing the specific locations, it was different than what I expected. Many of the sites around Jerusalem had sacred areas roped off or areas that were blocked off, and we couldn't be too close. This was not the case for the Via Dolorosa. There were signs on the walls of the small streets designating the locations of the Via Dolorosa, but was just like other areas of the Old City with stores lining the streets.

The shop keepers we passed didn't pay attention to those of us walking the route other than trying to sell us souvenirs. They didn't see it as a holy place the way I anticipated it would be. They were simply working their jobs, trying to make a living. Maybe if we had been there during Holy Week, they would have paid more attention to the holiness of the street, but I doubt it.

During Lent and especially during Holy Week, we probably pay more attention to the things of God that we take for granted during the rest of the year. Maybe we read more devotionals or attend worship every week. But God is with us every day. Many times, we are like the shop owners in Jerusalem. We may be walking where Jesus walked and not even realize how close He is.

The Bible says in Isaiah that God is always with us. He is there whether we acknowledge Him or not. Make a decision today to take time each day of the year to be connected with God the same way you are during Lent.

Brent Manning, Director of Communications



I remember playing with neighborhood friends many years ago during summer break, and our mothers would take turns making lunch for us. One of the mothers would always watch a soap opera called “As the World Turns.” It began with a picture of the world spinning against a dark background. That image stuck with me as I entered 3rd grade and noticed a rather large globe sitting on a table at the front of the classroom. I remember being fascinated with the visual of seeing the various continents and vast bodies of water. The realization set in that I was but one tiny speck on this massive planet Earth.

Thereafter, globes would appear in the Sunday School classroom and one on my bedroom desk. Through various Sunday School lessons and activities, the creation story in the book of Genesis would be studied and how the power of God formed and created everything we live and breathe on this glorious planet and universe. Physically, the world is something so big and vast no one could ever see the whole of it, but I like the song that shows the world is small, after all:

*It's a world of laughter, a world of tears.
It's a world of hopes and a world of fears.
There's so much that we share that it's time we're aware
it's a small world after all.
There is just one moon and one golden sun
and a smile means friendship to everyone.
Though the mountains divide and the oceans are wide,
it's a small world after all.*

I accepted Christ as my Savior at the age of 11 and permanently ingrained in my mind and heart was John 3:16; *For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* (The Living Bible)

Like the song above, my Christian journey has been filled with laughter, tears, hopes, and fears. And also many smiles, which evolved into friendships. Even though mountains and oceans divide us from our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world, we were still made by the one true Living God who loves us all. I hope this Lenten season and beyond, you will join me in praying for all God's children no matter where in the world they are. It's small after all.

Robert Fasol, Organist/Choirmaster



Thursday, March 7

In 2009, Ralph and I experienced for the first time the joy of becoming a grandparent. We were both so excited, and while we did not live close to our daughter at the time, we looked forward to babysitting and experiencing all the firsts. During our daughter's pregnancy, I wrote a daily prayer journal; when we learned that she was expecting a baby boy, I began to personalize the prayers. Writing a prayer each day allowed me to be a part of her pregnancy journey in a special way.

I always heard that when you become a grandparent that it is like nothing you have ever experienced. I thought, "Well, I'm not going to be one of 'those' grandparents." I mean, I was excited, but I didn't fully understand what "those other grandparents" were saying. Well, all that changed one morning when I was asked to watch Dutch, the name given to our first grandson. I drove from Muskogee to Oklahoma City and spent the night with our daughter. She left the next morning for a meeting, and I had the house and Dutch all to myself.

I could hardly wait for him to wake up from his morning nap. When he awoke, I did all the things you do, like changing his diaper, speaking "goo-goo" words to him, feeding him a bottle. After all those things were done, I decided I would just hold him in my lap so I could get a good look at him. That's when it happened. I will never be able to adequately explain what I experienced in those moments. As I gazed upon him, my heart did a flip-flop, and right then, I fell in love with this child; it was an unconditional love.

Well, that was a significant moment, but what came next was one of the holiest moments of my life. The light was shining through a window on his face, and then the precious voice of the Holy Spirit spoke: "Linda, I know how deep your love is for this child; imagine how much I love you. I love you with a deeper and greater love than you can possibly imagine." Now, since I was a young child, I knew God loved me, but in that moment, while holding my grandson in my arms, it was an even deeper revelation of the depth of God's love for me.

During Lent, I pray you have an experience that assures you of God's deep love, where you know beyond a shadow of a doubt, that God's love for you is deep and wide and unconditional. God so loved the world... and that means you!

Rev. Linda Harker, Online Campus Pastor



For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

- John 3:16-17

I adore my grandchildren! I see the goodness in them; I love them even when they make poor choices, I forgive them over and over, and I delight in them! There's nothing they can do to make me not love them. Because of my relationship with my grandchildren and others, I can understand God's great love for me. He sees the good in me. He forgives me time and again. He delights in me!

Unfortunately, we aren't always kind to one another. If you've ever been personally attacked and "condemned" for something you've done or have been accused of doing, you know it's awful. I don't know anyone who enjoys being told they have wrong thinking or that their actions have been wrong. But I think the worst type of condemnation is self-condemnation. When another person gets on my case, I can usually get away from them, but when I condemn myself, I can't get away from me! In fact, I can spend a lot of time with "what ifs" going around in my brain. I say things I wish I could take back. I do things I wish I could undo. I think things that aren't nice. Can you relate?

And yet, John 3:17 clearly tells us that Jesus didn't come to condemn us. So why do we condemn one another and ourselves? What can we do when bad choices are made? The answer is in Jesus. We make bad choices; we sin. God made a clear path for us to receive forgiveness for our poor decisions when He sent Jesus.

I hope you know that God delights in YOU. He loves you unconditionally; He forgives you even when you repeat mistakes, and He delights in you! Soak that in. God, the creator of the universe, delights in you. Not the perfect you, but the you who makes bad choices, the you who isn't always kind, the you who sometimes doubts. He loves YOU!

When we concentrate on God's love for us, our thinking changes from "What if" to "What now." Because God loves me, how will I approach each day? Because God loves me, what can He help me accomplish? Because God loves me, how will I treat others? Because God loves me, how can I share His love and bring hope to the world?

Susan Meharg, Executive Assistant to the Executive Team



Saturday and Sunday, March 9 & 10

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



Traditions among family and friends can be really meaningful. When we come together, we are able to remind ourselves of important people or important moments. These celebrations often come with something we do every time - maybe a birthday banner that has been taped up throughout the years, a favorite food dish that is always prepared, or a story that is told again and again. While some things may change throughout the years, we cling on to the traditions.

It was during the time we now call Holy Week that Jesus and His friends were also gathering for an important traditional meal called Passover. The disciples had yet to know what would happen throughout the night, but Jesus knew what was coming. It was during this time Jesus took the old traditions and did something new. Each moment pointed to the love of God.

The Passover meal was the most important Jewish holiday because of the significance to remember God's rescue of the Israelite people during their time of slavery in Egypt. During this meal, Jesus changed the tradition, adding new language pointing to the promise of a new covenant. The disciples would not yet understand that this new covenant was telling about God's greatest rescue of His people, not only the people of Israel but with the whole world. The cross would become an important symbol of God's love because of this ultimate sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins and a promise of eternal life.

John's gospel tells us another part of the story as they gathered for this meal. When it was time for supper, Jesus began to wash the disciples' feet. This was not the custom practice because Jesus was the teacher and leader. Jesus changed the tradition and set an example of love and servant leadership, and also called His disciples to follow this way.

"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." - John 13:34-35

When we interact with others around us, we have continual opportunities to show the love of Christ. The cross becomes a symbol and reminder for us that this love is for anyone and for everyone. Telling others about Jesus is important, but this love is not only something we should talk about, but it's a love we should live out to those around us through our acts of service and kindness. Keep your heart open to the ways God may be calling you to show this love to others in new ways.

Amy Givens, Director of Youth Ministries and Discipleship



Tuesday, March 12

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? - Psalm 13:1-2

In 2016, I had the opportunity to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with Rev. Wendy Lambert and a group of about 40 people from St. Luke's. We went to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, see the places our scriptures talk about, and grow in our faith. It was an incredible, life-changing trip. I always tell people you never read scripture the same way after seeing with your own eyes the places we read about in the Bible.

One of the places we went was the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu. It is also known as the House of Caiaphas. You may remember Caiaphas was the High Priest at the time Jesus was arrested and placed on trial before the Sanhedrin. After being betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane by Judas, Jesus would have been taken as a prisoner to Caiaphas's house, where He would be put on trial. After being convicted by the High Priest, He would be held captive there until the next morning when they could take Him before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate.

At the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu there are some ancient cisterns that go down several stories below the ground and date back to the time of Jesus. Many archaeologists believe that those cisterns would have been used as prison-holding cells when they weren't holding water. The tradition of the early Church said it was in the deepest cistern that Jesus was likely held as a prisoner that night while he was waiting to be taken to Pilate.

We got to go down in that cistern as a group. It was cold, surrounded by hard rock, and when the lights were turned off, you found yourself in complete darkness. We read from Psalm 13 and took time to reflect on the very real human emotions that Jesus must have felt in that cold, dark moment. But, if you continue reading Psalm 13 it closes by saying, *"But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me."*

It reminded us that even in the coldest and darkest moments of life, God's love is still constant and present. As John 3:17 reminds us, God is not seeking to condemn and punish us. Instead, God's love seeks to rescue us from the pit and remind us that we are never alone. If we simply trust in God's steadfast love, we find our hearts can rejoice in God's salvation.

Rev. Josh Attaway, Edmond Campus Pastor, CFO

Wednesday, March 13



Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! - 2 Corinthians 9:15

Jeff and I have been married for 15 years and together for 18 years. Between us, we have six children and eight grandchildren. Our oldest grandchild will be 16 this year, which is hard to believe because I still remember how excited I was the day he was born. I would go to my oldest daughter Michelle's house during lunch as often as possible each week to see Mason. Feeding him and just getting to rock and snuggle with him was such a precious time for me.

Two years later, in 2010, Mason's brother Carson was born in March, and in October of the same year, Jacob was also born to my middle daughter Becca. Having three grandsons was a huge blessing, and I spent as much time as possible with them. They all attended St. Luke's Children's Center, so I saw them daily. I even brought and picked up Jacob daily since they lived very close to us in Edmond.

In 2015, Mandi gave birth to Cate, our first granddaughter! What an exciting time. She was the only girl with three boys as cousins. She was loved and spoiled by everyone. We loved spending time with the grandchildren, especially in the summer when we could be outside in the pool. It was always a fun day with all the laughter; watching them play together filled our hearts.

In 2020, Jeff's daughter Alex had a son, Jameson; even though they live in Illinois, it is always special when they visit during the holidays. My oldest daughter had another son, Bryson, in 2021, and Mandi had another daughter, Parker, in 2022. Our last grandchild, Harper, was born in 2023 to Jeff's son Dalton and his wife Brooklyn.

Each one of our grandchildren is loved just as much as the next, just as God loves us all equally and asks us to do the same with our children and grandchildren. I know that Jeff and I have a wonderfully large, blended family to be thankful for this Lenten season. Just as God calls us to be thankful for our families, let us also be thankful for His son, Jesus.

Gabrielle Moon, Executive Director of St. Luke's Children's Center



Thursday, March 14

Last summer, Bob and I went to Bend, Oregon, to visit Paul for several days. We planned to visit their whole family, but Christa, Olivia, and Cameron needed to come to Oklahoma City to help one of Christa's best friends and her 8-year-old quadruplets get settled in a new home as they moved back to Oklahoma from Dallas. Her friend tragically lost her husband 6 months earlier, and she was moving back home after the school year ended to be near family and friends.

Paul had taken off work and planned a day of adventure, and we loved every minute! We stopped at Sahalie Falls located along the McKenzie River in the Cascade Mountains. The falls plunge 100 feet over a natural lava dam. There is a viewing platform less than 100 feet from the parking lot, which is wheelchair accessible. That explains the van that pulled up just after us with six adults of varying abilities who were up for the adventure.

I noticed one young man standing a short distance from us who was mesmerized by the falls. The others in the group paused and moved on, but he didn't leave. The three of us stood in awe of the majestic falls, and as we were turning to head to the hiking trail, he said to me, "Lady, Lady, come look! There's a big one and a little one. They are so beautiful!" I stood with him for a few moments sharing in his joy, then left to be with my guys.

Every time I came close to the falls, he called me to come and see. We repeated this scenario four times, and we had a great time. It became evident that we had a special connection. When I went to tell him we were leaving, he showed me the falls again, hugged me, and said, "Thank you, Lady. You are so beautiful." At that moment, I knew he was not talking about physical beauty but the fact that I had noticed him, taken time for him and spent time sharing with him. God gave me eyes to see more than the beauty of the falls in the beauty of God's love for all people.

As I began the day of exploring new places, I anticipated being touched by God's creation and was indeed blessed. That afternoon, I was blessed by God's creation in another way. I felt called to show kindness to this young man, and he was so kind to me. As it turns out, the name of the falls comes from the Chinook language and the word Sahalie translates to "sky or heaven." Maybe the way we experience heaven on Earth is when we choose to be kind to one another.

Marsha Long, Director of Hospitality Ministry



I have six grandchildren, and I love them all. They are all unique in their own ways. But I was especially excited about the birth of our sixth grandchild last November. Her name is Grace Louise, and she is the little girl born to my daughter, Sarah, and her husband, Austin. Sarah is the oldest child born to my late wife, Cindy and myself. It is their first child, and her middle name carries on an old family tradition. Not only is Sarah's middle name Louise, but it also is her Mother, Cindy's middle name, and her mother and her mother. There are five generations of women named Louise from Cindy's side of the family. Even though Cindy has been gone for over 23 years now, I know how proud she would be to see that name carried forward. It seems to me that continuing a name for future generations is not only a way to honor those who have passed from our sight, but it's a way of acknowledging the love that a family passes on through the years, even as one generation after another slip away. It connects us to those we love.

When we read Matthew's opening chapter, we see Jesus' genealogy. He is connected to the greatest king of Israel, David, and before that, we learn He is a part of the patriarchs of the Hebrew faith, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God's love for us is steadfast... it is eternal. It crosses the spectrum of all ages and all humanity. We are all connected in the human family, and God's love for all is revealed there. I am reminded of that when I look at Grace Louise, and I know how much God loves this little child and her mother, Sarah, and her mother, Cindy, and so on.

I also believe God helps redeem our saddest days and turns them to joy over time. One of my most difficult memories is the day Cindy died in 2000 and seeing Sarah, then seven, grieving over the loss of her Mom. I think that pain never completely goes away, but on November 4, 2023, the sting of death was replaced by the welcoming of new life. Sarah will never forget her Mom, but she will always cherish being a new mother to Grace Louise. Because God loves us so much, He takes the pain that breaks our hearts and redeems it with new life. Easter symbolizes the new life we receive when death once and for all is canceled in the empty tomb.

Rev. Dave Poteet, Pastor of Congregational Care



Saturday and Sunday, March 16 & 17

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*



When my son, Ian, was part of St. Luke's youth group many years ago, I was a chaperone for the summer Youth Force mission trip to Altus, OK. My group, or God Squad as they referred to us, was assigned a house that needed a tremendous amount of cleaning and exterior work. The youth worked incredibly hard that week in the sweltering summer temperatures.

Each evening, we would all come together to reflect and have a time of worship. And each evening the other God Squads would tell about all they accomplished. They would share how their homeowners' faces would light up when they saw their homes being repaired. One homeowner even baked cookies for their God Squad.

Our "home" was being turned into an after-school program center. We knew the program would bless lives, but that summer, it was simply an empty building. There was no one baking cookies for our God Squad. Yet our God Squad gave it their all without a homeowner telling them how much they appreciated their hard work. The youth rallied around each other. They supported one another and cheered each other on through their sweat - even playing games while getting their work done. Something beyond words happened on that job site as those teens became a family. A sense of awe washed over me.

Our youth taught me an incredible lesson that has a forever place in my heart. When we do for others out of the love that gracefully resides in our hearts, an upward spiral begins. While it is nice to have someone telling you your work is a blessing, it is unnecessary. Our deep faith in God's love is the best blessing. And when you lead with that faith, joy is often the result.

I am in awe of the perseverance and dedication our students gave to an empty house. They scraped, painted, fixed shingles, and picked up trash for kids they would never meet. I think of our time preparing that empty house to become a safe space for kids and wonder how many lives were blessed beyond ours. I imagine the answer is many.

The season of Lent prepares us for the sacred Easter celebration. Our youth, who now are wonderful adults, many with their own children, prepared the way for ministry to happen. God's gift of love and grace showered blessings on all of us that hot summer week in Altus.

As we journey through Lent toward the empty tomb of the risen Christ, may we allow our hearts to fill with awe as we experience God's unending blessings in the most unlikely of places.

Tisha Tate Garcia, Hospitality Team



Tuesday, March 19

One of the most important things in my life has been going to camp. Whether it is a summer camp or a mission trip, time away with God has always been special to me. I have found that my favorite moments are during worship, and over the years, one song has helped form my faith. The song is, *Reckless Love* by Cory Asbury. The chorus says, *O' the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless Love of God! Oh, it chases me down, fights 'till I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine.*

I've always connected to the words, but felt confused by using the term "reckless" to describe God's love. Reckless tends to be a negative term that means someone does something irrationally; someone's actions don't make sense. Some have taken offense to describing God's love as reckless because they feel that it is an insult to God. But I've come to realize that the term reckless is appropriate because God's love for us doesn't make sense in comparison to the way the world usually views love.

In my life, I've made mistakes - all of us have. We have said things that weren't kind, failed to show love when we needed to, and, at times, turned away from God. But despite the things we've done or left undone, God loves us. The world views love as something offered in response to things that are given. It seems natural to love those who are kind to you. But God has and will always love us no matter what we do. And it is in that sense of the word that it is appropriate to describe God's love as reckless. It doesn't make sense to the world that God loves us whether or not we love Him. What is more reckless than to offer unconditional love?

Each time I hear this song, it makes me incredibly emotional, because not only has God chosen to love the world, but God has chosen to love me. Lent is a season where we can reflect of the love of God. What is our response to God's faithfulness?

The final line of the chorus sums up God's love by saying, *I don't deserve it, I couldn't earn it, still, you give Yourself away.* It isn't what we do or don't do that causes God to love us. We have done nothing to merit God's love.

What is more reckless than God giving His deepest, purest love to those who will continue to fall short? It is the very same love of God that forgives us and frees us from guilt so that we might live full and meaningful lives. Take a moment today and throughout the season of Lent to reflect upon the reckless love of God for you.

Brooks Lambert, Ministry Intern



I grew up in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and Muskogee First United Methodist Church felt like a second home to me. Our youth group headed to Camp Egan in Tahlequah, Oklahoma every summer. The best part? The closing worship on the last night. We'd have awesome speakers and great music that left a lasting impression. One summer evening during closing worship, surrounded by nature's beauty in the Tabernacle, I felt God's presence in a powerful way. It was a life-changing moment when I truly felt God's love embracing me.

The music and message felt personal, like they were just for me, marking one of my earliest experiences of feeling that close to God.

After that summer, I headed off to the University of Central Oklahoma, leaving behind everything familiar – family, friends, and my church community. I prayed to find another place where I could connect with God, seeking His presence.

I started church hopping with some of my college friends. We went to some really amazing churches, but I never found one that I thought fit me and my spiritual needs. Then, I got invited to St. Luke's during the St. Luke's on Broadway series. Walking into the Edmond Campus, I immediately knew this place was different. Everyone was friendly. I was a young girl looking for a church home, and everyone opened their arms to me so easily. As soon as worship started, I immediately felt God nudging me, as if He were saying, "This is it." I remember feeling so overcome with emotion. I had the same feeling I had felt in the Tabernacle years earlier - the feeling of God's arms wrapping around me, letting me know I had made it home.

These special moments remind me that God is always with me wherever I go. God hears our prayers. He knows our wants and our needs, and with time, God will always reveal His master plan. Most times, it's better than we could've ever imagined. I hope that during this Lenten season, you get to experience the presence of God and that His love pours over you.

Madison Eckerson, Edmond Campus Director of Welcoming Ministries



Thursday, March 21

I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord; not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.

- Romans 8:38-39 (CEB)

In the spring of 2023, we had a guest author, Natalee Creech, come to the Edmond Campus to read her book, *Nothing Can Separate You From God's Love!* The wonderfully illustrated book goes through various scenarios to teach young children that there isn't anything that would make God not love them.

This message is so important for young children but also for people of all ages. Deep in my core, I know that God loves me, and there isn't anything I could do that would make Him stop loving me. However, I must be honest, at times, I have had my doubts. From time to time, I have wondered if that action I made or the comment I off-handily made to others would result in Him not loving me as much. The hard truth is that His love is unconditional. Sometimes, as humans, we have a hard time understanding that concept. We base so much on circumstances and our feelings to truly understand his unwavering love.

This Lenten season, I want you to remember that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son. God's greatest gift is the love, grace, and sacrifice of His only son, Jesus Christ. His love is everlasting, and we are all worthy of His love each and every day.

"There is nothing so powerful, nothing so strong: God's love is too high and too deep and too long!"

Jocelyn Morgan, Edmond Campus Director of Children's Ministry



Almost every worship service at St. Luke's includes a sermon as part of the order of worship. The exception to that is the Good Friday service. Of course, a message is delivered, but it is proclaimed through the voiced scripture from the moments leading up to the Crucifixion. It allows me to engage with the worship at a deeper level since my focus doesn't have to be on the sermon I'm to deliver.

It always has a profound effect on me to hear the Bible story of Jesus' betrayal, ridicule, and Crucifixion in the familiar voices of our family of faith. The music that evening is always moving and it draws me close to Christ. When the "storm" is represented, I can't help but see the darkness wrestling with the light with the organ, underscoring the power and emotions in the moment. As each candle's light is extinguished, there seems to be a growing darkness - yet the Christ candle remains. And as my eyes adjust, I am reminded every single year that the light of Christ is all I need to see me through the darkness. The light of the Christ candle gives way to the light of the Narthex and then carries me to Easter morning.

I encourage you to attend the services of Holy Week. You can experience Palm Sunday, Stations of the Cross, Maundy Thursday, a Prayer Vigil, and Good Friday services. Immerse yourself in the remembrance of Jesus' last week. Be sure to set aside all the distractions of your life so that you can truly focus on the message of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Listen for the consistent and constant message of God's love, for God so loved the world that He revealed grace and mercy through the Crucifixion and eternal life through the Resurrection. We have been made in the image of God to live as God's children - free from sin and guilt - made for eternal life with Him.

*Christ the Lord is Risen!
He is risen, indeed, Alleluia!*

Dr. Bob Long, Senior Pastor



Saturday and Sunday, March 23 & 24

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)*



You'll Never Walk Alone was my great-grandmother's favorite song. I used to spend afternoons after school at her house, and she had a music box that played the tune. I would play it over and over as we played dominoes and cards for hours on end. When she passed away, I sang the song at her funeral.

This song has always been significant for me because of its comforting lyrics and the connection to my great-grandmother. The lyrics are:

When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high and don't be afraid of the dark. At the end of the storm, there's a golden sky and the sweet silver song of a lark. Walk on through the wind, walk on through the rain, though your dreams be tossed and blown. Walk on with hope in your heart, and you'll never walk alone.

I'm not the only one who has found comfort in these lyrics. *You'll Never Walk Alone* resonated with Bill Shankly, the manager of the Liverpool Football Club in the UK. He heard a rendition of the song by Gerry Marsden on the Ed Sullivan Show, and he connected deeply with the lyrics. He then decided this song had to be the anthem for the football club.

Years later, in 1989, fans were gathering for the FA Cup semi-final game between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest at Hillsborough Stadium. The game was so heavily attended that officials decided to open an extra gate to the stadium to alleviate the traffic. When they did this, so many fans flooded the stadium that they caused a crowd collapse, resulting in fans being fatally swept up under the crowd. 766 people were injured, and 95 people perished in the incident, which is now referred to as the "Hillsborough Disaster." Following the devastating event, *You'll Never Walk Alone* took on a new meaning and importance for the fans, players, and staff of the Liverpool Football Club. As Joe Prince-Wright from NBC Sports stated, "[The song] signified Liverpool's fight for justice for their fans and it lets the families and friends of those who were lost at Hillsborough know that they will never be alone." The song that Shankly had heard and adopted years ago was now a source of hope for all who were affected.

As we go through the season of Lent, we remember God's incredible sacrifice for us so we can know that we are loved. We know that we never walk alone because God walks alongside us. Through times of darkest trouble and greatest need, He has us in the palm of His hand. He invites us to hold our heads up high, even through the storms of life, because God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Dr. Candace Fish, Edmond Campus Director of Traditional Worship



Tuesday, March 26

Lent is a season of reflection for Christians as we prepare our hearts and minds to celebrate the resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday. For me, reflecting on Christ's life, love, and ultimate sacrifice causes me to look at the ever-changing seasons of nature around me. My heart can sometimes feel heavy when the Christmas festivities are over, and the weather remains cold and dreary. When I see empty fields, leafless trees, and empty gardens; I look to God for peace and comfort. It is in these moments that God speaks so clearly: "I am still working in you and through you. Even though you may not feel or see it, my Spirit is still working in your life and in those around you."

One of my favorite songs is *Every Season* by Nichole Nordeman. The song relates the seasons of nature to the seasons we go through in our relationship with Christ. Though our life and faith may go through many ups and downs, God is faithful in sustaining us and carrying us through each moment. One of the verses of Nordeman's song expresses how God is still at work in seasons of winter, even when life cannot be seen:

And everything in time and under Heaven finally falls asleep.

Wrapped in blankets white, all creation shivers underneath.

And still, I notice You when branches crack,

And in my breath on frosted glass.

Even now in death, You open doors for life to enter - You are winter.

When spring arrives, we can see all along how God carried us through the dark winter, giving birth to new life. The final verse of *Every Season* helps us see the eruption of new life in spring as a reminder of God's faithfulness to us and His desire to renew us:

And everything that's new has bravely surfaced, teaching us to breathe,

And what was frozen through is newly purposed, turning all things green.

So it is with You, and how You make me new, with every season's change.

And so it will be as You are re-creating me: Summer, autumn, winter, spring.

It is so beautiful to me that we celebrate Easter as spring arrives. After our reflective season of Lent, we celebrate Christ's victory over death as new life emerges all around us in nature, praising God alongside His people.

Let the heavens be glad, and the earth rejoice! Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise! Let the fields and their crops burst out with joy! Let the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for he is coming! - Psalm 96:11 – 13a

Dr. Hayden Coie, Music and Worship Associate



“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer...,” Jesus told his disciples. I’ve always been intrigued by the Last Supper. One of my favorite Christian songs is *Come to the Table* by Michael Card. He wrote the song in 1983, but the best version is a 1996 duet with Oklahoma City native John Michael Talbot on their album “Brother to Brother.”

*Come to the table and taste of the glory.
Savor the sorrow, He’s dying tomorrow.
The hand that is breaking the bread, soon will be broken,
and here at the table sit those who have loved Him.
One is a traitor and one will deny
though He’s lived His life for them all
and for all be crucified.*

Card, best known for writing the Amy Grant hit *El-Shaddai*, caused quite a stir when “Brother to Brother” was released. He’s devoutly Protestant and the grandson of a Baptist minister. Talbot, born into a Methodist family, converted to Catholicism in his 20s. The idea of Card teaming up and even touring with a Roman Catholic left some of his fans incredulous and angry.

The Bible doesn’t say a lot about Judas Iscariot, but I suspect he became incredulous and angry. Some say Judas was upset that Jesus wasn’t going to overthrow the hated Romans. After being hand-picked as one of the 12 disciples he’s not named again until John tells us Judas became upset when Lazarus’ sister Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with an expensive perfume. John’s obviously not a fan, adding Judas “kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.” Interestingly, Matthew and Mark indicate several disciples and followers felt the perfume should have been sold and the money given to the poor. At any rate, Judas responded by going to the high priests and agreeing to betray Jesus.

How do we react when someone doesn’t meet our expectations? I remember too many times when I’ve become incredulous and angry because someone didn’t do what I thought they should. Ephesians 4:26-27 tells us *Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.*

Christ Lambert, Director of Meals on Wheels of Oklahoma City



Thursday, March 28

Every year, I find the Good Friday worship service at St. Luke's to be one of the most powerful worship services of the entire year. If you have never been to a Good Friday worship service before, I highly encourage you to make it a point to go this year. Typically, this service is what we call a "Tenebrae" service. Tenebrae is a Latin word that means "darkness." As we go through the service, we begin to extinguish candles and lights in the room until we find ourselves in complete darkness as we remember the death of Christ on that first Good Friday.

As a young person, it always seemed strange to me that we would call this day "Good Friday." It was a day all about the death of Jesus. It seemed more appropriate to call this day "Bad Friday." I am sure, for the disciples, it was an incredibly bad day. Just a few days earlier, they had been with Jesus, making a triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as the crowds gathered to wave palm branches and praise Jesus. Now, less than a week later, He had been crucified and killed. They were left in the darkness, not knowing what was next.

It is because we live on this side of Easter that we are able to look back on the events of that Friday and call it "Good." It is not because of what the Romans did that day, beating and crucifying Jesus, was a good act. It is because of the good that God was able to bring out of that day. Out of one of the darkest, most horrific, and most brutal forms of torture the world has ever seen, God was able to bring about the greatest good.

We all face times in life that are incredibly dark, lonely, and full of fear. It is easy to become overwhelmed in those times with all the "bad," but it is important to remember that God is with us, and we are never alone. If God can turn that day of crucifixion into a "Good" Friday, then God can bring good out of our dark times as well. Sometimes we just have to hang on a couple more days to hear the good news that God is bringing. That's exactly what the disciples found on Sunday morning when they came to the tomb.

Rev. Josh Attaway, Edmond Campus Pastor, CFO



When I was in 2nd grade, I had my first occasion of spending the night at a friend's house. In fact, I got to stay with two of my best friends because they were sisters. I remember that I would spend many nights with them on Friday nights, which meant that we watched the latest episode of Full House on TV, ate our favorite snacks, and had a great time playing in the cool backyard playhouse their dad had built.

One particular Friday, we were outside playing and wanted to ride bikes. I had yet to conquer riding a bike without training wheels, but my friends' bikes didn't have training wheels. Their dad offered to help me ride. It wasn't long before he had let go (even though I had repeatedly asked him to make sure he would stay holding on). I was off riding a bike on my own without training wheels! This is a big childhood milestone and something that I remember clearly. It's also in my memory because this wasn't just any Friday night. It was Good Friday.

I thought it was really cool that I accomplished this feat on Good Friday. So, Good Friday was a good day for me! But I also remember feeling confused. Could I really be excited about this good thing for me on the day we remember that Jesus died on the cross? And really, why did we call it Good Friday anyhow? Death on a cross seems anything but good.

Good Friday is good because we know the rest of the story. What was intended to put a stop to God's plan by ending Jesus' life was actually the setup for the most incredible miracle and display of God's power. Not only was this miraculous, but the cross no longer represented only the death of Jesus, but an empty cross represents His resurrection and life. And more than that, the cross reminds us of God's incredible, amazing, and sacrificial love for all of us. Good Friday is good because God didn't hold back His love. God's love was on full display.

It's important during this time of Lent to reflect and ponder the reality of our sin and the death of Christ. But as Easter people, we know the rest of the story. We know the good news, so we can also celebrate and be full of joy. We can consider Good Friday a really good day. For God so loved...this is the greatest promise, the reason for our greatest joy because of God's greatest sacrifice, which showed us the greatest gift of all.

Amy Givens, Director of Youth Ministries and Discipleship



Saturday and Sunday, March 30 & 31

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

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 SLM Easter to 73256, or give online at stlukesokc.org/give.

Maundy Thursday Communion Services - March 28



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 the Edmond Campus at 6 p.m. and at the Downtown Campus at 6:30 p.m.

Good Friday Services - March 29



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 for Good Friday Services. The Edmond Campus service is at 6:30 p.m. and the Downtown Campus service is at 7:30 p.m.

Easter Egg Hunts - March 30



Children birth to 5th grade 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 at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. at the Edmond Campus.

EASTER SERVICES

SUNDAY, MARCH 31

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, March 30)
- 6:30 a.m. Sunrise Service
- 9 a.m. LifeLight Contemporary Service
- 11 a.m. Traditional Service

Online Campus

stlukesokc.org/live



Downtown Campus

222 NW 15th St.
Oklahoma City, OK 73103
(405) 232-1371

Edmond Campus

900 N. Sooner Rd.
Edmond, OK 73034
(405) 285-2002

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