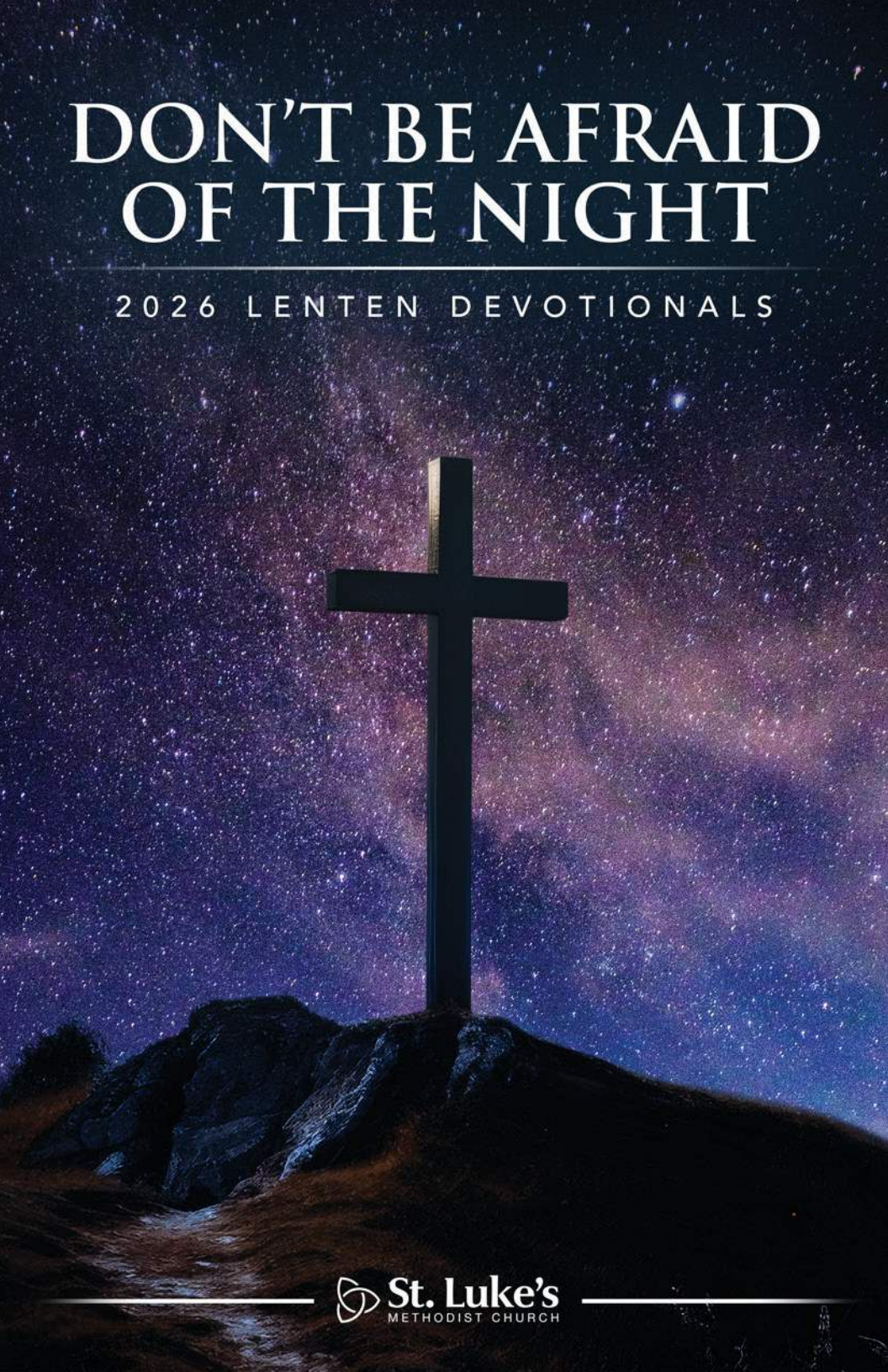
DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE NIGHT

2026 LENTEN DEVOTIONALS



St. Luke's
METHODIST CHURCH

EASTER OFFERING

Lent is the 40 days (not including Sundays) before Easter and serves as a time of preparation for the celebration of the Resurrection. In the early church, Easter Sunday was the time for anyone entering the church to be baptized, so Lent became a time for baptismal prospects to fast and pray to prepare themselves for their Easter baptism.

Lent remains the holy season of preparation wherein people practice spiritual disciplines to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the love Jesus displayed through the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

This everlasting love of Christ offers us the gift of salvation; salvation is life lived with God here and now and forevermore. We have so much for which to give thanks and celebrate. One of the ways we express our gratitude to God is through our gifts to the church to support the missions and ministries of St. Luke's. For more than 30 years, St. Luke's has taken up an additional offering during Lent, called the Easter Offering, as an act of thanksgiving for the love that Jesus has given to the world through the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Since this is a gift that is completely for missions, we hope each and every person and family can make this a second-mile gift beyond their gifts for the operations and ministries of the church. When we all do something, it becomes larger than any one of us can do alone.

100% of the Easter Offering goes to support the missions of St. Luke's and the many different missional programs we support. When we support the Easter Offering, we become a part of all of these incredible ministries. If each of us will do what we can, it will be a gift to God and transform lives through the many mission programs.

To learn more, scan the QR Code with your smartphone or visit **stlukesokc.org/EasterOffering.**

Wednesday, February 18

The title of the 2026 Lenten sermon series is "Don't be Afraid of the Night." How often do you and I wake up at night with our minds racing? We find ourselves feeling afraid and unable to sleep. I find that when the sun comes up in the morning, my problems always look different in the light. And that is the gift of God's faithfulness; that a light always shines in the dark. "*The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."* (John 1:5)

However, in the Bible, things often happen at night and what is being referred to is not just a time of the day, but a metaphor for our spiritual condition. When things happen at night, it may be referring to a person's spiritual blindness. It is because we don't understand what is happening or may happen in the future that we are afraid. In John 3:1-17, we have the story of Nicodemus going to Jesus at night. It was referring to the time of day because Nicodemus wanted to go when it was dark so that people would not see him. He was afraid of being seen in the company of Jesus. But John also has Nicodemus going at night to show that he was confused; he was spiritually blind as to who Jesus was and the message he was trying to convey. Usually, when we find ourselves in the dark and we are afraid, it is because we are in the night, and we do not understand.

It is interesting how many stories of Jesus happen at night when it is dark. When people do not understand, they find themselves afraid.

This Lenten season, we will discover again that we don't have to be afraid in the night for we trust in the promise of God's light.

As Og Mandino says, "I will love the light for it shows me the way, yet I will endure the darkness for it shows me the stars."

Don't be afraid of the night.

Dr. Robert Long, *Senior Pastor*

Thursday, February 19

I've been thinking about our theme for the year, "Be a Light," and I started thinking about what brings light into my life and what dims it. The thing that stood out the most for me is my phone and social media. It's not just a way to keep up with people I love. It's the thing I reach for when I'm bored, anxious, or just trying to avoid my own thoughts. It fills every empty moment, and instead of sitting with God or even just sitting with myself, I scroll.

In Matthew 6:22-23, Jesus says, *"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness?"* What we choose to focus on starts showing up in our life. The more we fall into distractions, the more darkness we allow to build. But the opposite is also true. When we intentionally choose what we look at, we can begin to bring more light into our hearts.

Social media isn't wrong. But it wasn't meant to be the place we go for comfort, validation, or escape. And I've realized how often it becomes that for me. The more I scroll, the more I feel numb. The more I compare myself, the less joy I have. And the more noise I fill my brain with, the harder it is to hear God's voice.

So, this year, for Lent, I'm giving up social media. Not because I'm trying to be perfect, but because I want to make space for the things that actually matter. Instead of reaching for my phone when I feel bored or anxious, I want to reach for God. I want to be present with the people in my life, not just present on a screen.

Being a light doesn't mean we have to solve every problem in the world or have all the answers. It means showing up. It means listening. It means choosing what we focus on so our lives reflect the light of Christ. And I truly believe that when we clear the noise and distractions out of the way, we can shine brighter for the people right in front of us.

Madison Woods, *Edmond Campus Director of Welcoming Ministries*

Friday, February 20

During the season of Lent, fasting is a common discipline to help people remember the sacrifice of Christ and connect to God through this practice of self-denial. One of the things that we might experience during a time of fasting is more awareness. It's when we give up something, often a distraction or habit, that we are able to focus on God and tune in more to ourselves and to others.

Our Women of Faith Bible Study is currently reading the book *A Million Little Miracles* by Mark Batterson. From the very start of reading the book, I was encouraged by a few things the author wrote in the prologue and how it could help us in our Lenten journey. This book challenges us to have a holy curiosity about the many miracles all around us, from the vastness of the galaxy to the intricate details of the human body. There are millions of miracles in every moment.

It was Albert Einstein, the great and revolutionary physicist, who shared this term of holy curiosity when he said, "Never lose a holy curiosity." He also said, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as if nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is." If we take a moment to look around, getting curious about the world, we will see the hand of God all around us. God is doing miraculous things in each moment, every sunrise as the earth takes its daily spin, and each breath that sustains our life and helps our body to function.

As we prepare for Easter, we also are preparing to celebrate a one-of-a-kind redemptive miracle: the resurrection. This kind of miracle was the exception to the rule, and we are eternally grateful for the way that the sacrifice of Jesus gives us new life because of the victory over sin and death.

During this Lenten season, as you try to remove the distractions, let this idea of holy curiosity help you to rediscover a faith and connection to our amazing God. Give praise and thanks to Him for all the miracles, from the resurrection to your very own heartbeat. God is good, God is close, and God is bigger than you can imagine.

Amy Givens, *Director of Discipleship and Youth Ministry*

Be Still My Soul

by Katharina von Schlegel

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on your side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
leave to your God to order and provide;
in every change God faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: your best, your heavenly friend
through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul: your God will undertake
to guide the future, as in ages past.
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake;
all now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know
the Christ who ruled them while he dwelt below.

Be still, my soul: the hour is hastening on
when we shall be forever with the Lord,
when disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past,
all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

Psalm 46:1-4

God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

Monday, February 23

I love snow at Christmas. Of course, we rarely see snow before Christmas in Oklahoma. So, when winter storm Fern plowed across our state at the end of January, I had an idea. We had not taken our outside Christmas lights down yet, and I suggested to my wife, "Let's turn the lights back on and go outside and take a picture of ourselves in the snow, and we can use it on a Christmas card next year." She thought it was a brilliant idea, so we did.

Now, if you're asking, "Has he had his Christmas lights on all this time?" the answer is no. We turned them off right after New Year's Eve. I must admit though, I do hate turning the lights off. I love seeing all the lights in our neighborhood each year, including our own. Every year, we get into a guessing game to see which home will be the last one to turn their lights off. There have been years when someone in the neighborhood didn't turn their lights off until almost Valentine's Day! We started wondering if those folks were okay, or maybe they had died, and no one had noticed yet. They were fine, and eventually, the neighborhood went dark again.

Why is it some folks just refuse to turn off their Christmas lights? I think it has something to do with the fact that winter can be such a dark and cold period of the year. We want… we need the light to illuminate the darkness of the night. My oldest daughter lives in Iceland, which is so far north that for several weeks every year they live in almost total darkness. Right before Christmas, there are only three or four hours of light each day. I actually love the night, but I'm not sure I could live with just three or four hours of light for days in a row.

When I was a young child, I can remember being afraid of the darkness. I would sometimes sneak a flashlight into my bed and then pull the covers over me and turn that light on. These days, I'm not afraid of the darkness anymore… at least not afraid in the sense that I was as a kid. Now, I worry about getting up in the middle of the night and tripping over something in the dark. That's why I have my Apple phone near the bed, and I can turn on the flashlight in my phone to guide me in the dark.

Our faith informs us that Jesus is the light of the world. In a world so often filled with darkness, we can rest assured that Jesus will guide and strengthen us. We don't have to be afraid of the darkness. Our task, as Christians, is to confront the evil that lurks in the dark corners of the world. When we do that, we become part of the light that illuminates the love of Christ in a hurting world.

Rev. Dave Poteet, *Pastor of Congregational Care*

Tuesday, February 24

When I was young, I can remember spending so much of my time worrying about things. It would often start out as something small, but I would then sit and think about it for so long that it would balloon into this massive catastrophe in my head. I remember allowing it to overcome me most of the time. Thankfully, I had a mother that knew how to instantly put my worrying to rest with just a few calm words of wisdom.

Unfortunately, the worrying trait plagued me for many years as I grew up. Then, as I became an adult, worrying turned into legitimate fear. In true "adulthood" fashion, I was fearful of so many things that could go wrong; issues with work, losing relationships, finances, car problems, being a homeowner, not to mention all the fear that comes with being a mother. If it wasn't for faith, the weight of everything would paralyze me.

I wish I could say there was one incident that helped me instantly overcome this issue with fear, but honestly, it's been many years of growing in my faith, learning about my Savior, reading His word, and regularly spending time in prayer with Him that has brought me to the point where fear and worry can no longer take me down. That doesn't mean I don't feel them creeping up often or even daily, but I've learned that stopping those thoughts dead in their tracks and bringing them to the One that is in control of it all, through continuous prayer and petition, can bring instant peace to any situation (Philippians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

I can recall several instances where God has seen me through a very fearful time in my life and, just as He usually does, brought me to something so much better than I could have even asked for (John 15:7). If it wasn't for trusting Him in those times, I probably would have taken the reins and wound up in a much worse situation than I was already in; which is what fear does to us. It is these specific instances in our lives where God has seen us through something that we must cling to, especially when we find ourselves up against something that is truly difficult and fearful. We must remember those times in our lives when He saw us through the trial, brought us to something better on the other side, and made us stronger and more perseverant because of it. That is certainly not something to fear but to be thankful for (James 1:2-4). We are blessed to have a Savior that takes the bad from any situation and uses it for good.

Jessie Parker, *Director of Childcare Administration*

Wednesday, February 25

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. - Isaiah 43:1-3

One of the more intimidating moments of life is when we face change. An unknown future can produce a great amount of fear. When part of our life is changing, anxiety and worry easily take hold. Just the feeling of being a bit out of control makes our hearts beat boldly in our chests. We embrace the possibility of the worst possible future. It is challenging to navigate the unknown, but the good news is that we never go alone. In these scary moments of life, the confidence that God is with us brings hope.

Bob Dufford understands the overwhelming emotions that come with navigating a life change. Bob was a person of deep faith. At the age of 18, he decided to explore ministry in the Catholic Church. Some years later, as he was about to finalize the process of becoming a Jesuit Priest, Bob experienced a great amount of fear. A mentor encouraged him to pray with the stories of scripture in mind. Moments where we are told "Be not afraid." This is exactly what Bob did, and he found the strength and wisdom to carry on.

Bob Dufford is also an accomplished musician. He is known as a composer of wonderful modern hymns. Out of his experience, Bob wrote the hymn *Be Not Afraid.* This hymn has been translated into multiple foreign languages and is found in hymnals of almost every denomination. Worry and doubt are not isolated to just one group of people. We all experience fear. Thankfully, the hope of God is for all.

The lyrics of his powerful hymn have brought hope and peace in many circumstances. It has been sung in worship, performed at funerals, and was the hymn President Bill Clinton chose to have sung at worship before his inauguration. It has helped to remind people of faith of the peace of God that is for all as we face the unknown. Our God is a light in the dark and a bringer of peace beyond our understanding.

Be not Afraid, I go before you always,
Come follow Me, And I shall give you rest.

"...and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." - Matthew 28:20

Rev. Keith King, *Pastor of Worship*

Thursday, February 26

Lent is a season of slowing down. It invites us to pause and notice what is truly going on in our hearts: our habits, our worries, and yes, our fears. Fear often doesn't arrive loudly. It slips in quietly as we worry about the future, our families, our health, our mistakes, or whether things will ever truly get better. Lent calls us to lay those fears down and walk closely with Jesus instead of carrying them alone.

Jesus speaks directly to anxious hearts. "Do not worry about your life," He says in Matthew 6:25. This is not Jesus dismissing our struggles. It is Jesus reminding us of who is holding us. He points us to the Father who feeds the birds and waters the flowers, then gently reminds us, "You are worth more than they are" (Matthew 6:26). Fear tells us we are forgotten. Jesus tells us we are seen, known, and deeply loved.

Lent also leads us to the cross. Jesus was no stranger to suffering, betrayal, or deep sorrow. He understands fear from the inside. Yet He trusted God completely. Because of His death and resurrection, fear no longer has the final word. The cross reminds us that even in the darkest moments, God is still at work, bringing life out of death.

Personally, I have been blessed not to experience some of the deepest fears many people face. Still, I have walked closely with those who have. I have watched a friend battle cancer and overcome it. I have known a mother who lost a child. I have seen families lay parents and partners to rest, endure painful custody battles, and navigate life with abusive relationships. I have watched a mother and grandmother struggle with a severe health condition, becoming a frequent visitor to the hospital. I have seen loved ones diagnosed with crippling diseases. The list goes on.

And yet, through all of it, I have witnessed something sacred. Again and again, I have seen these people place their lives in God's hands. Watching those you love struggle is incredibly hard but watching them walk through fear with faith is a profound honor. Their lives are quiet testimonies of trust in God, even when the road is painful.

This Lent, when worry starts to take over, pause and pray. Place the fears you've been holding tightly into Jesus' hands. Let this season be one where fear loosens its grip and trust, slowly and quietly, begins to grow.

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

Friday, February 27

If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. - Psalm 139:11-12

We can all remember that feeling as a child of waking up in the middle of the night from a nightmare. It is that terrifying feeling of wondering whether the dream was real or not and trying to figure out what is actually true.

When our girls have a nightmare, they run to our room to wake us up to tell us about it. Why? Because they're looking for a sense of safety and comfort. They want to know what is real and what is not. They trust that we will protect them and take care of them. They know that we will tell them if there is really something to be afraid of, or if it's just their imagination playing a trick on them and there really is no threat.

Unfortunately, this feeling doesn't go away when we grow up. It may not always be nightmares, but we all face times of darkness where life feels uncertain and overwhelming. We aren't sure if there is really something to be afraid of, or if it's just our imaginations running wild.

In those moments, I am reminded of Psalm 139, where the psalmist reminds us that for God, there is no darkness. God is that source of light that has overcome the darkness. We know that when we are having those feelings, we can run to God just as our girls run to us and trust that God will be there to provide a sense of comfort and truth.

As we go through the season of Lent, we know that we will have to go through Good Friday. Like many things in life, it just isn't possible to avoid the dark and difficult days. However, it is our faith that reminds us of what lies on the other side. We serve a God who overcomes the darkness and offers us new life.

Rev. Josh Attaway, *Edmond Campus Pastor and CFO*

Where Charity and Love Prevail

by Omer Westendorf, tr. *Ubi Caritas*

Where charity and love prevail,
there God is ever found;
Brought here together by Christ's love,
by love are we thus bound.

With grateful joy and holy fear
His charity we learn;
Let us with heart and mind and soul
now love him in return.

Forgive we now each other's faults
as we our faults confess;
And let us love each other well
in Christian holiness.

Let strife among us be unknown,
let all contention cease;
Be His the glory that we seek,
be ours His holy peace.

Let us recall that in our midst
dwells God's begotten Son;
As members of His body joined,
we are in Him made one.

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1 John 4:16

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

Monday, March 2

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul reminds us that we are new creations in Christ. The old has passed away and everything has become new.

During the years when we lived in Ohio, Easter came early several times. That often-meant snow, jackets, scarves, and gloves. The delay of spring always seemed disappointing in those years. As many had told me when we moved there, *"Be prepared, winter is long!"* You never really understand this phrase until you've lived it for several years.

There are many things that I love about Easter in the South. I enjoy the colors, the Easter egg hunts, the candy (I love candy), and finally, the invitation of spring that seems to be part of the day. It's always fun to see what everyone wears for Easter: the new clothes, jackets, ties, dresses, and the hats. I love the hats. When Katie and I lived in Nashville, many of the ladies would wear spring hats for Easter. It was always fun to see them.

Yet one of the things I enjoy most about Easter now is the birth of spring. While it isn't always true, Easter seems to often usher in spring. I love the tulips, the grass turning green, the trees starting to bud, the sun shining through earlier in the morning, the warmth of the sun throughout the day, and all of life taking on a new look and feel.

The sun shining bright always makes life better for me.

Little did the disciples and others realize just how different their lives would be when the sun burst forth that first Easter morning. I'm confident they had no idea just how much their lives would change as the stone rolled away from the tomb and light sprung forth into the grave. In that moment light would once again shine in the darkness, and no one could quite understand the change that was opening for all the world.

To me, each Easter is an invitation to watch the old pass away and the newness of life spring forth. It is an invitation for all the light to once again shine in the darkness of death. It is a gentle reminder that change is more than part of the seasons; it is a way of life. It is a chance for me to do more than watch. It is a chance for me to see my heart, life, attitude, and world change. I can be a part of not only seeing my life change but also bringing change to the world around me.

Dr. Scott Peterson, *Pastor of Facility and Stewardship*

Tuesday, March 3

In the quiet, early hours of the morning, before the sun has even started to claim the sky, our house is completely still. After making a cup of coffee, I head toward the study to wake up Maizie, our eight-month-old Goldendoodle. Even before I touch the kennel door, I can hear the rhythmic "thump-thump-thump" of her tail against the bedding. It is a heartbeat of pure anticipation. We head outside together to let the fresh air and morning dew wake us both up, but the most beautiful part of the whole routine happens the moment we step back inside.

Maizie doesn't dash for her food bowl or scratch on Wendy's bathroom door, asking to be let in. Instead, she makes a beeline straight back to her kennel. She reaches into the shadows of her bed and emerges with her favorite stuffed dog, the same companion she snuggles with every night. She isn't looking for a game of tug-of-war, and she isn't interested in treating it like a chew toy. She simply wants that companion out of the kennel and by her side as she starts her day.

To Maizie, that kennel represents the "night." It's a place of safety, sure, but it's also a place of solitude. When she carries that stuffed dog into the living room, she's essentially bringing a piece of her comfort out of the dark and into the light of the rest of the house.

It reminds me of what Jesus says in Matthew 5 about being the light of the world. He mentions that nobody lights a lamp just to hide it under a bowl; you put it on a stand so it can help people see. Being a "light" isn't just a performance for when things are going great. It's really about what we choose to carry from our private, quiet moments into the public spaces of our lives.

Just like Maizie refuses to leave her comfort behind in her crate, we are called to carry the peace of Christ from our "quiet places," those morning prayers or moments of reflection, into the rest of our messy, loud day. We shouldn't leave our joy sitting on the desk in the study or keep our peace tucked away in the dark. The strength we find when we're alone with God is meant to be shared.

Maizie reminds us that what sustains us in the dark is meant to be seen in the light. When we bring that God-given comfort into our offices, carpool lanes, or kitchens, we are being a light. Today, as you head out, think of Maizie. What are you carrying with you? Let's grab hold of the peace God provides and bring it out where everyone can see it.

Chris Lambert, *Director, Meals on Wheels Oklahoma City*

Wednesday, March 4

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. - Ephesians 4:32

For the past 4 years, I have had the privilege of educating and deepening our young children's understanding of the Christian faith at St. Luke's Edmond. I enjoy every aspect of teaching kids, but I especially love it when they grasp a new concept. If you have ever been able to bless a child's life with new information and see their sweet, figurative light bulb go off, you understand what I mean.

Lent is a reflective time when we prepare ourselves for God's ultimate sacrifice: His only Son, our Lord, dying for our sins. As an adult who guides and shepherds the future of our church, it can be hard to express and impart the evident love God has for us and His Son, Jesus. For children, knowing that Jesus died for us can be hard to understand and a bit confusing.

For some adults, Lent is observed by fasting and giving up something. Children, on the other hand, may see this act as cruelty or a punishment. During this season of Lent, I encourage you to do as many of the following as possible especially with your child(ren) in an age appropriate way:

- Attend the special worship services during Lent with your child(ren) and spend time explaining the differences and reasons for each service.
- Read Christian Easter books with your child. Discuss the different stages of Lent that are expressed throughout the book. If your child is older, have them read the Easter story from their Bible to you. Have your child express their feelings about what they read and their comprehension of the passage(s).
- Encourage your child to pray, and you pray openly with them. There are several great resources that offer a wonderful list of things your child can focus their prayers on.
- Make it a priority to attend church and Sunday School. Show your child(ren) that this is an important aspect of your Christian life. Be a role model and lead by example.

In today's fast-paced world, we get bogged down in all the negativity that swirls around us. Our children can sense that and feed off our anxieties and fears. Show the young people of our church that we can be kind, compassionate, and forgive others. We don't have to be afraid of the dark because He is the light.

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

Thursday, March 5

I didn't grow up observing Lent. I had a general understanding of what it was and chalked it up to being a part of Easter. Over the years, I've given up certain material things during the Lenten season, but I never really took the time to dive deeper. Maybe you're like me and don't know a whole lot about Lent. Well, I decided it was a good time to learn more, so here are some things about Lent you might not know:

First, Lent is not a biblical command. It's a historical period the church adopted to help Christians prepare their hearts and minds for Easter. I did not know that!

Second, there are several special days during Lent. Ash Wednesday starts Lent and symbolizes grief and sorrow of sin. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week, which represents the final week of Jesus' life. Maundy Thursday is a reminder of the Last Supper, where Jesus had dinner with the disciples and instructions for communion. Good Friday is a reminder of the crucifixion of Jesus and His death on the cross. Then of course, Easter Sunday is the Resurrection of Jesus. Interesting fact: "Burying the Alleluia" refers to avoiding the word "Alleluia" all of Lent to emphasize the weight of grief, and it returns with great fanfare on Easter, signifying the joy of Jesus' resurrection!

Third, why 40 days? In the Bible, God shapes people through wilderness experiences and spiritual practices, like fasting and prayer. Noah spent 40 days on the ark. The Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness. Moses spent 40 days fasting. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness. These are stories of trials and transformation; events that brought people closer to God.

Sacrificing some of our "creature comforts" can be a way for us to enter our own wilderness experience. Eliminating certain distractions can allow more time to focus on God. Maybe cutting out social media or soda would help rid you of brain fog and negativity, resulting in a clearer, calmer mind. Perhaps you could write in a grateful journal every morning, mail kind letters, pick up trash on your walks.

I think it's also important for each of us to reflect on what activities help us feel closer to God. For me, being in nature has always filled my spirit and kept me open to God. Maybe you find the most meaning reading or listening to scripture. Whatever it may be, I think if we all choose to do things with the intention of getting closer to God, we'll find Him. My hope is that however you choose to spend these 40 days, it will strengthen your relationship with God for much, much longer.

Marji Shelton, *Administrative Assistant, Communications*

Friday, March 6

Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. - Psalm 73:23-26

Have you ever had those times in life when you wonder if God is really present in your life? You look around at the world, at your own life, or the lives of others, and you see things that seem unfair or unjust. You wonder how God could allow these seeming injustices to exist. You wonder why you haven't received what you think should be your reward for being faithful. That's exactly what the author of Psalm 73 was wrestling with.

When I was in seminary, I was introduced to the idea of the "already, but not yet." It came about in a conversation about hope. We were talking about some of these injustices and why they still exist in our world. If Jesus came to bring us hope, then why do we still have to face the darkness?

The truth is that our hope in Christ doesn't mean we won't experience anymore darkness. It doesn't mean that life will be easy or that everything in the world will be right the way that God intended it. Hope means that in Christ we receive a glimpse of God's will for us and our world. In Easter, we have already seen the victory and the power of God's love, but the final victory hasn't yet come. It is the "already, but not yet." We live in that in-between time where we have already seen the promise, but it has not yet been fulfilled.

That's really what the season of Lent is all about. It is a time to remember that we know the good news that God has come to be with us. Though all the promises may not have yet been fulfilled and we still have to face dark moments in life, we do so knowing that God is with us to offer us strength and the promise of Easter on the other side. Take heart and trust in that Light that still shines that the darkness has not overcome.

Rev. Josh Attaway, *Edmond Campus Pastor and CFO*

Beneath the Cross of Jesus

by Elizabeth Cecelia Clephane

Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand,
The shadow of a mighty Rock
Within a weary land;
A home within the wilderness,
A rest upon the way,
From the burning of the noontide heat,
And the burden of the day.

Oh, safe and happy shelter!
Oh, refuge tried and sweet!
Oh, trysting place where heaven's love
And heaven's justice meet.
As to the holy patriarch
That wondrous dream was given,
So is my Savior by the cross
A ladder up to heaven.

There lies beneath its shadow
But on the farther side,
The darkness of an awful grave
That gapes both deep and wide;
And there between us stands the cross,
Two arms outstretched to save,
Like a watchman set to guard the way
From that eternal grave.

Upon that cross of Jesus
Mine eye at times can see
The very dying form of One,
Who suffered there for me;
And from my smitten heart, with tears,
Two wonders I confess,
The wonders of His glorious love,
And my own worthlessness.

I take, O cross, thy shadow
For my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than
The sunshine of His face;
Content to let the world go by,
To know no gain nor loss,
My sinful self my only shame,
My glory all the cross.

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1 Peter 11:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Monday, March 9

Every day we have a different amount of daylight than the day before and the day after. As we approach the winter solstice on December 21, the days get shorter and shorter. After this date, the days with our amount of sunlight get longer and longer until we arrive at the summer solstice on June 21. Because we experience this so gradually over 6 months, we don't really notice the changes from day to day. In most of the continental United States, the day of the winter solstice will range from 8-10 hours of daylight, while the day of the summer solstice will range from 14-16 hours. This gradual growth of light or darkness makes a big difference over time! We are most aware of these changes with the change of daylight-saving time when we adjust our clocks an hour forward or back. Those first few days or weeks are noticeable, whether we like the changes or not.

We may experience darkness and light in our lives in these same gradual patterns. There are times when we fall back more drastically or leap ahead with progress. But oftentimes, fear or worry can slowly creep in. It may not seem troubling at the start, but if we don't try to conquer it, we may find ourselves in a place that we never intended to be. On the other hand, a healing journey away from darkness is often gradual as well. It's about taking one step and then another. Some days we may not be aware of our progress, but when we look at this overall over several weeks or months, we can see the incredible growth.

God walks with us through all of these seasons and all of these days, whether they are filled with more darkness or more light. But the work that God is doing for us is to bring order to our chaos and light to our darkness. We do not have to fear the dark days because the hope and promise of God's light is real and true. On the darkest day in history, when Jesus was on the cross, that darkness was not the end of the story. The light of the morning came, and the resurrected Jesus appeared to His disciples. God's redemptive work was complete, and we can live our lives each day following the light of Christ.

Amy Givens, *Director of Youth Ministry and Discipleship*

Tuesday, March 10

Fear. Fear is the constant buzzing in my ear. That annoying voice that makes my heartbeat faster and my breath shallow. It's always present, especially when change arrives.

With every change come new opportunities and variables for things to go wrong, for things to escape my control, for me to fall behind, for potential overwhelm. Change, newness, the unknown, *the dark*, it all evokes fear.

What exactly am I afraid of? I'm not sure. Everything maybe? All I know is that when change arrives, my fear lays out (in excruciatingly explicit detail) every worst case-scenario. "What if… But how will I… There's no way this will… I can't…" and the list goes on.

Something that brings me solace is finding facts and logic to stand firm on. I know change is unavoidable. I know change is often brought about by God. I know God is good and wants good for His creation. I know that God's creation is constantly changing: the seasons, the weather, the moon, the sea. I know that change is challenging, yet it is often necessary to bring forth growth and new life. I will never be able to fully prepare for change, or fully *know* what is to come, but that allows me to trust God and His hand on my life.

This makes me think of a song from *Frozen 2* called *Into the Unknown.* Elsa is hearing a voice that is calling her to change and go somewhere she doesn't quite know yet. She doesn't trust this voice. *I'm sorry, secret siren, but I'm blocking out your calls. I've had my adventure; I don't need something new. I'm afraid of what I'm risking if I follow you. Into the unknown.*

She has two voices in her head: the small, steady voice leading her somewhere new, and her constant fear (I can relate). Throughout the movie, she is internally battling with which voice to trust. She later discovers that the voice calling to her was the spirit of her mother. Someone she could trust, a guardian looking out for her best interest, calling her to abandon her fear and embark on discovering the fullness of who she is. Disney nailed it with this one!

So, when fear's buzz creeps in, remember God's steady truth. Listen for His small voice. Trust that He has good plans for you. You can trust that God's light will lead you through change, through the unknown. What if there's something *so incredible* waiting for you on the other side of fear?

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." - Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV)

Ashley Carr Soter, *Director of Young Adult Ministries*

Wednesday, March 11

Just after Christmas, my wife Suzanne and I went to Washington D.C. for some relaxation and to visit some of the Smithsonian Museums. While we were at the Air and Space Museum, we saw the Apollo 11 capsule, and there was information about Michael Collins that intrigued us.

Michael was the 1969 NASA astronaut who stayed in the capsule orbiting the moon, while Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin made history walking where no man had walked before. Each pass behind the moon's dark side cut off all radio contact with Earth, leaving him completely severed from humanity for 48 minutes at a time. He had a quote that stood out to me: "I am alone now, truly alone, and absolutely isolated from any known life. I am it. If a count were taken, the score would be three billion plus two over on the other side of the moon, and one plus God knows what on this side."

Where most would expect fear, he found something else: "awareness, anticipation, satisfaction, confidence, almost exultation." He understood that his solitary role was essential to a larger purpose of reconnecting with the lunar module and bringing home his friends.

During Lent, we journey toward another moment of profound darkness: the Garden of Gethsemane. Before His arrest, Jesus left His disciples and went just a little further into the darkness of the olive trees. While His closest friends slept, Jesus faced the weight of His mission in utter isolation. In that moment, Jesus was separated from all human comfort, carrying His fears and hopes alone.

In the garden, the silence wasn't empty; it was filled with an intense, agonizing, yet honest communion with the Father. Jesus voiced His human fears, yet in that lonely, dark space, He found the courage to pray, "Not My will, but Yours be done." His solitude was necessary. It was the place where His purpose was solidified. His death on the cross and separation from the Father would be done bringing His friends, humanity, home.

We often run from silence and darkness. We fill our quiet moments with podcasts, music, television, or scrolling on social media, afraid of what we might find if we are left alone. Solitude can be a gift. It creates a space where the noise of the world fades, and we can finally hear the "still, small voice" of God.

This Lent, don't be afraid to turn off the noises in your life. Step into the quiet. You might feel isolated, but you are never truly alone. In that darkness, you may find exactly the strength you need for the mission ahead.

Brent Manning, *Director of Communications*

Thursday, March 12

"I am the light of the world." - John 8:12

In the gospel of John chapter 8, verses 12-20, we find one of seven explicit "I AM" statements by Jesus. Jesus is teaching in the treasury of the Temple. He's challenging the Pharisees about who He is. He declares that they know neither Him nor His Father. And He tells them, "I am the light of the world." To put this in context, if you go back a few chapters, it's helpful to know that Jesus is teaching in the Temple on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. On the first day of this feast, there was a ceremony called "the illumination of the Temple" that involved the lighting of four large candelabra (sevenfold candle holders) by the priest and each person lighting their own candles. It is kind of like Christmas Eve candlelight services.

Jewish writings from that era tell us that these candles produced so much light that it pierced the darkness of the city of Jerusalem, lighting every street and home. On the last day of the feast, there were no lit candles. So, when Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" the temple was in darkness, and the city was in darkness.

As you might imagine, Jesus claiming to be *the light of the world* would raise the attention of those listening. It was one more thing which riled up the religious authorities. "Who does he think He is? What does He mean by claiming to be the light of the world? How dare He suggest that the light comes from Him." Can you envision His hearers or imagine the look of shock on their faces?

Just prior to this encounter, the chief priests and the Pharisees sent the Temple Police to arrest Jesus. But the police returned to the authorities without arresting Jesus. The Pharisees asked them, "Why did you not arrest Him?" And they reply, "Never has anyone spoken like this!"

Some scholars suggest that they were afraid to arrest Jesus. But I wonder if it might have been something else. Perhaps, awe? Maybe wonder? What if they had caught a reflection of His light, just a glimmer of the I AM, the incarnation of God, and it was enough? I like to think, or maybe it's a hopeful feeling, that it was enough to open their hearts, enough to cause them to wonder about this man, Jesus. And in wondering, they chose to let His light shine. Lent provides a great opportunity to reflect upon the life of Jesus and for each of us to ask a question, "What does it means for His light to shine through me?"

Rev. Linda Harker, *Pastor of Connections*

Friday, March 13

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. - 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

Being a single mother to three children is a journey filled with unique challenges and moments that tested my strength on a daily basis. Mine was definitely tested when I got divorced in 2005. I know it is perfectly natural to feel fear, worry, and doubt while navigating this path with an 11-, 19- and 21-year-old. Life can sometimes feel overwhelming, and the weight of responsibilities can seem extra heavy.

It's important to recognize and accept your feelings. Fear can stem from uncertainty about the future, worry about providing for your children, and doubt about your capabilities. Remember, you are not alone in these feelings. Many mothers have walked this path and felt the same way. When I was able to realize this and lean on my friends and family for support, these challenges and the worry eased.

In moments of doubt, leaning into my faith, and turning to God in prayer helped a lot. God promises to be with us every step of the way, guiding us through the storms and lifting us when we feel weak. When I brought my worries to Him through prayer and let His peace fill my heart, I felt a peace and relief from the anxiety I was feeling.

Surrounding myself with supportive friends and family, sharing my struggles lightened the load and reminded me that I have a network of love and support. Together, we can lift each other up and find encouragement.

Many times, this prayer has helped me to make it through the day:

Heavenly Father, I come to You with my fears, worries, and doubts. Please grant me the strength to face each day with courage and the wisdom to guide my children. Help me to trust in Your plan for our lives and to find peace in Your presence. Surround me with love and support and remind me that I am never alone. - Amen.

Take a moment today to reflect on the blessings in your life, even amidst the challenges. Celebrate the small victories and remember that every step you take is a testament to your resilience. You are doing an incredible job, and your love and dedication are shaping your children's lives in profound ways.

I am very blessed to have three very successful children that make me an extremely proud mom each and every day.

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

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

by Charles Wesley

Love Divine, all love excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down;
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling,
All Thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, Thou art all compassion;
Pure, unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit
Into every troubled breast;
Let us all in Thee inherit,
Let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty, to deliver,
Let us all Thy life receive;
May Thy presence e'er be with us,
Never more Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thou wouldst approve,
Pray, and praise Thee without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.

Finish, then, Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory
Till with Thee we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise.

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2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Monday, March 16

Fear, worry, and doubt have a way of living in our minds, even during fun and exciting seasons of life. Sometimes everything is going well, yet those thoughts still creep in and whisper that something bad is going to happen. We imagine worst-case scenarios, even when there's no real reason to. I've learned that fear doesn't always show up when things are falling apart. Sometimes it shows up when things are actually good.

When I moved from Ardmore to Oklahoma City, I was incredibly anxious. It was an exciting new chapter with new opportunities, and a place God was clearly leading me. But even in the excitement, fear started to sneak in. I worried about leaving what was familiar. I doubted whether I was making the right choice. I wondered, "What if something goes wrong? What if I fail? What if I'm not supposed to be here?" Nothing bad was happening, yet my mind kept preparing for something bad to happen.

The disciples also experienced fear. A specific example is when they were in the boat during the storm. The wind was strong, the waves were crashing, and they were genuinely afraid for their lives. Meanwhile, Jesus was sleeping peacefully in the boat. In their panic, they woke Him and cried out, *"Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"* When Jesus stood up, He spoke to the wind and the waves, and everything became calm. Then He asked them, *"Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"*

Jesus was with them the whole time. The storm didn't mean He had left them or stopped caring. Even when they felt overwhelmed and out of control, He was present and fully in control. Their fear came from focusing on the storm instead of remembering who was in the boat with them.

When fear and worry creep in, I focus on all the possible storms ahead instead of trusting the God who is walking with me. That's how I imagine the disciples felt too. Faith doesn't mean storms won't come, but it means we don't face them alone.

The love of God brings hope into every dark or uncertain place. Jesus came to bring peace, not a life without struggles, but a life anchored in Him. Because of His love, fear doesn't get the final say.

We share God's love by being present with people in their worries, encouraging them in doubt, and reminding them that God is in control. Even when fear, worry, and doubt try to creep in, faith reminds us that God is trustworthy, present, and always working for our good.

Schuyler Henderson, *Edmond Campus Youth Director*

Tuesday, March 17

I wish there were a special "How to Parent" handbook delivered for both of my girls on every birthday! Raising two girls is one of the hardest, yet most rewarding, jobs I strive to be the best at every day. My girls are 11 and 14, smack dab in the thick of middle school. When I say that to other parents, their response is always the same, they grit their teeth and say, "Oh, yeah… middle school and You have two girls… YIKES."

My girls are polar opposites. Cyana, my eighth grader, was born during the hottest summer on record. Alexia, my sixth grader, was born in negative five-degree weather, with snow. I think that also affected their little personalities because they couldn't be more different. I love that about them, but how I parent one child looks completely different from how I parent the other.

I would say parenting during this season of life has been the most challenging. I go to bed worrying about all the things both girls are going through with school and peers. Then, I wake up in the middle of the night worrying about things like: Did I give them the best advice today? Did I parent the wrong way on a certain topic? Should I have said this? Should I have done that?

Worrying does nothing for me other than stress me out. Lifting my worries up to God is the only way I'm able to see things in a different light. He helps guide my decisions by showing grace and love in ways that are beyond my comprehension. He answers my prayers by speaking to me through Christian songs or advice from other people. When I truly open my heart and feel my most vulnerable, is when I hear Him the loudest and clearest. I find my quiet time with God in the mornings, while driving, and before bed.

The other way I've found quiet time is during one of my favorite WNA classes. There are always so many great classes to choose from, but while my girls are at youth group, I take Madison's Paint, Crafts, and Podcasts class when it's offered. I had no idea I needed this class, but the whole class is silent while working on our favorite craft. She finds the most uplifting or meaningful podcasts. It's a wonderful chance to wind down from the stressors of the day, live in the moment, and truly just be.

During this season of Lent, I hope my message encourages you to put God first in every moment. To love and be loved. To be present with God when you are blessed with quiet time.

Jamie Williamson, *Edmond Campus Director of Administration*

Wednesday, March 18

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. - Matthew 5:14-15

When I was a child, I always looked forward to our annual family vacation. We usually loaded up and headed to New Mexico, where my aunt and uncle lived. We enjoyed visiting them because they made things fun! My uncle set up a Slip N Slide in the backyard and badminton in the front yard. They took us to a beautiful park with the first spiral slide I'd ever seen! We went to a rodeo and met Ken Curtis, who played Festus Hagen on *Gunsmoke*. One summer, my dad had to head back early for work, so my mom, my siblings, and I rode the train back from New Mexico to Oklahoma. That was a great memory!

But perhaps the most memorable trip was visiting Carlsbad Caverns National Park in the Guadalupe Mountains of southeastern New Mexico. Here's what the internet says about the caverns: beneath the surface are more than 119 caves, formed when sulfuric acid dissolved limestone, leaving behind caverns of all sizes.

My uncle was extremely cautious, so before we arrived, he went over the rules with us: stay together, walk, listen to the guide, don't lean over the railing, and so on. I remember feeling a bit frightened when I saw the massive entrance to the cave. But once we started to descend into the cavern, all fear was replaced with awe. At one point, our guide turned off all the lights in the room where we were standing. He pointed out that it was impossible to see anything. Even one's hand in front of one's face couldn't be seen. We were in total darkness. It was a huge relief when he turned on the lights, and once again, we could see.

The lights in that cave enabled us to find our way through it. They enabled us to see others around us. They made it possible for us to see something we never would have witnessed otherwise. They took away our fear of the darkness!

Isn't this how people who are "lights" to us are? They help us find our way through difficult things. They enable us to see the needs of others. They make the impossible seem possible. They help take away our fear of the unknown.

Who needs your light?

Prayer: *Holy God, show me how to be a light to someone who needs it today!* - Amen

Susan Meharg, *Administrative Assistant, Executive Team*

Thursday, March 19

Jamaican reggae legend Bob Marley understood the calling to "Be a Light" with a rare, visceral clarity. In 1976, after gunmen stormed his home and left him wounded, he refused to retreat into the safety of the shadows. Instead, he stepped onto a concert stage just 48 hours later. When asked why he would risk his life to perform while still bleeding, he gave a definitive answer that challenges us all: "The people who are trying to make this world worse are not taking a day off. Why should I? Light up the darkness."

This was not just a clever remark; it was a philosophy rooted in the Bible he kept constantly by his side. Marley was not a passive reader; he was an active wrestler with the Word. On tour buses and in dressing rooms, he was known for "reasoning" sessions, intense, hours-long debates over the meaning of specific scriptures. Friends and colleagues recalled that the Bibles would come out, and the arguments would become "very heated" as the band dissected verses. Marley used these sessions to interpret the darkness of the world through the light of Scripture, finding modern relevance in ancient truths.

Whether he was echoing Psalm 52 by singing that "the goodness of God endureth forever" in the song *Small Axe* or using Psalm 118 to declare that the "stone the builders refused" would become the cornerstone, he was transmuting his study into a message of hope. To "Be a Light" is not a passive state. It is a persistent choice to carry the fire of hope into the places where others are afraid to step. In the Scriptures, we are reminded that even the darkness is not dark to God. Psalm 139 declares that the night shines as bright as the day in His presence. If we are walking with Him, we are never truly in the dark; we are simply carrying a lamp through a tunnel.

Bringing light to the darkness means being the person who speaks peace in a room full of chaos, just as Marley did when he joined the hands of political rivals on stage during a time of civil war. He proved that to "Be a Light," you must first be a student of the Light, constantly searching the scriptures for the wisdom to face the night. It means refusing to let the negativity of the world dim your internal glow.

As you navigate your own "night" seasons, remember that the stars only become visible when the sun goes away. There are revelations of God's character and depths of His peace that can only be discovered when the world is quiet and dark. Do not fear the shadows; they are merely the backdrop for your brilliance. Your purpose is to be the spark that proves the darkness does not have the final word. Today, instead of retreating from the gloom, ask how you can light up the darkness.

Chris Lambert, *Director Meals on Wheels Oklahoma City*

Friday, March 20

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. - I Corinthians 1:18

You might remember seeing this image back in 2001. A grief-exhausted excavator named Frank Silecchia found it on September 13, 2001, two days after the terrorist attacks. A few days later, he spoke to a Franciscan priest named Father Brian Jordan, who was blessing remains at Ground Zero. "Father, you want to see God's House?" He asked. "Look over there." "Oh my God," Father Brian said. "I see it." As Father Brian stared, other rescue workers gathered around him. There was a long moment of silence as he beheld what he considered to be a sign. Against seeming amazing odds, a 20-foot-long crossbeam, weighing at least two tons, was thrust at a vertical angle in the hellish wasteland.

Later, the cross was placed on a flatbed truck for the three-block trip to its new home, St. Peter's Church, which had served as a sanctuary for rescue workers after the attack. Father Brian blessed it with the prayer of St. Bonaventure: "May it ever compass Thee, seek Thee, find Thee, run to Thee… May it ever compass Thee!"

Ever since the two jets slammed into the Twin Towers on September 11, Father Brian had been asked by countless New Yorkers, "Why did God do this?" He would reply tartly, in his Brooklyn-born accent: "It had nuttin' to do with God. This was the actions of men who abused their free will." Now here was God explaining Himself. It was a revelation, proof that "God had not abandoned Ground Zero," even as the awful excavations continued.

Rich Sheirer, then New York's director of the Office of Emergency Management said: "Intellectually, you knew it's just two pieces of steel, but you saw the impact it had on so many people, and you also knew it was more than steel."

Odd, isn't it? There is a power in the cross that we can't totally understand, can't really explain. We know that within the cross we find love, forgiveness, hope. The cross, and particularly this one at Ground Zero teaches us that love is greater than evil… greater than hate. There's something about the cross that I'm always drawn to, but more so during Lent. This Lent, my prayer focus is "may the cross call us to be people of love, not hate."

Rev. Linda Harker, *Pastor of Connection*

Blessed Assurance

by Fanny J. Crosby

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine;
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Savior am happy and blest;
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.

Romans 8:16-17

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Monday, March 23

As I write this devotional, the sun is brightly shining following several days of clouds and a winter storm. Sunlight reflecting on snow-covered ground is a brilliance only our Creator could make possible. It is one of a multitude of ways we experience God's Light. The light of Christ illuminates our darkness literally, figuratively, and spiritually. What a blessing for us as believers to reflect that light as we help others who struggle in darkness.

An emotion commonly provoked by darkness is fear. Fear is a paralysis that can compound and increase darkness. People experience varying degrees of fear: flying, public speaking, going to the doctor, school exams, and the list is endless.

Every Sunday, I get to do something that most people would find terrifying. I get to sit on two benches: one is to play the 88 black and white keys of the piano, while also sometimes conducting our orchestra and choir. The other bench I occupy is one for our magnificent organ. I get to be in control of four keyboards for the hands and a keyboard for the feet. There are multiple buttons and presets to manage as well. I get to use my gifts to reflect the Light of Christ in worship by enabling our souls to exalt the Savior through music. God blessed me with the gift of musical performance not to expose my talent, but to reflect God's light. We're all given gifts and blessings from God that serve in ways to help shine radiance for those who need hope.

While playing musical instruments and conducting come naturally for me, I have an enormous respect for the gifts of brothers and sisters who perform duties I would find terrifying. For example, airline pilots and doctors. I would be terrified to sit in a cockpit and fly a plane or treat our illnesses and perform surgery.

As a Christian community, we have the blessing, privilege, and obligation to use the gifts God has given us to reflect the light of Christ and to illuminate our brothers and sisters who struggle in the darkness. Now, more than ever, we need to be like the snow on the ground and reflect the Light of the Son. It will be a radiant brilliance of joy!

Meditate on these words from an old hymn:

There's a lighthouse on the hillside that overlooks life's sea.
When I'm tossed, it sends out a light that I might see
and the light that shines in darkness now will safely lead us o'er.
If it wasn't for the lighthouse, my ship would be no more.
Jesus is the lighthouse… He has shown a light around me.

Robert Fasol, *Organist/Choirmaster*

Tuesday, March 24

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live." - John 14:18 - 19

Heinrich Hofmann was a German painter in the 1800s. His famous paintings depict some of the most dramatic moments found in the gospels. Perhaps his most well-known painting is *The Agony of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane.* The original painting by Hofman is now displayed at New York's Riverside Church. It was purchased by John D. Rockefeller for the congregation.

Before he would paint any scene from the scriptures, Hofmann would thoroughly study the gospels. When he painted *The Agony of Christ*, he first immersed himself in the story of Jesus in the garden. This painting is based on the story of Jesus praying in the garden on the night he was betrayed. It is in this moment that Jesus prays, *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."* (Luke 22:42) Hofmann's painting shows the passionate prayer of Jesus in His moment of agony.

Just before Heinrich began to paint his biblical scenes, he experienced a great loss. It was the death of his mother that first inspired him to paint the gospel scenes. It was the light of hope, found in the story of Jesus' life, that helped Heinrich Hofmann find peace and hope, even in the midst of death.

When you look at the now-famous painting of *The Agony of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane*, you will see just a small amount of light appearing in the dark sky. It is a heavenly light, perhaps reflected by the moon. This beautiful painting shows the powerful truth that, even in the darkest moments of life, the light of God's love will shine. It may be a small amount of light in a dark moment, but that light will shatter the darkness and bring hope to all.

The season of Lent is a journey to the cross and the empty tomb. This journey is gloomy and challenging for Jesus, who is betrayed, arrested, and faces trial, all in the dark of night. It is a night of agony but never a night without hope. The same is true for our lives. We face many difficult moments, but we never face these times without the light of hope found in Christ Jesus, our Lord. We are never alone, never forgotten, never abandoned. Even the darkest of nights are overcome by the light of God's ever-present love.

Rev. Keith King, *Pastor of Keith King*

Wednesday, March 25

The story of the Israelites' journey out of Egypt, found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, is one of the most powerful accounts of God's faithfulness. It's also one of my personal favorites. After about 215 years of captivity in Egypt, a massive group of people; around 600,000 men, plus their families and others escaped slavery in a single night.

Moses and his brother Aaron, who would become Israel's first High Priest, led the people as they began their trek toward the Promised Land. But escaping Egypt was just the first step. Their spiritual journey was just beginning, and it was often marked by deep-seated worry.

When the community grew hungry, the Lord answered their complaints. He sent down manna from the sky each morning and provided quail in the evening. This ensured every family had exactly what they needed for the day. When their thirst became overwhelming, God told Moses to strike a rock, and water gushed out to sustain them. Every time the Israelites found themselves in a "desert" of uncertainty, Moses and Aaron brought those fears to the Lord, and He always met their needs with precise provision.

I may not wander through a literal desert or worry about my next meal, but I often find myself in my own "wilderness" of worry. This story is a vital reminder for me. When I take my concerns to the Lord, He provides just enough strength and peace to get me through the day. He rarely gives a lifetime of solutions all at once, but He always provides our "daily bread."

What "manna" has God provided in your life during a time you thought you would run out?

What concerns are you hesitant to bring to the Lord right now, perhaps fearing He won't provide?

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

Thursday, March 26

When I was a very young girl, I was afraid of part of our basement. Like many other houses in Ohio, ours was a full basement. It was great for storage and shelter in storms, but on one end, there was a small opening into a crawlspace. It was an open rectangle at the top of the wall that showed the darkness of the earthen space under the house. While the basement was well lit, the crawlspace had no lighting, so the opening always appeared to be a window of darkness that frightened me. I was worried about someone or something hiding in the crawlspace watching me. My way of coping was to pretend I wasn't afraid and avoid ever looking at the crawlspace. My way of coping wasn't helpful. The more I tried to deny my fear, the more real my fear became. Trying to avoid looking at the crawlspace actually made me feel like something was really there. The only way to address my fear was to face the darkness.

I came up with a plan to shine a flashlight into the crawlspace. I did it from the staircase, which had a twofold benefit; it got me high enough to see deep into the crawlspace, and it afforded me an escape if I actually saw anything! The only thing to see was dirt. The light set me free as a little girl and taught me an important lesson. When we are afraid of the dark, it doesn't help to shut our eyes and pretend it's not there. We can face the dark with the Light.

When we face our fears, we never face them alone, for the Light of the world is with us. If there are things that we want to avoid or that cause us to worry, Christ can give us the courage we need to face them directly. Living in the Light of Christ doesn't mean we magically avoid difficult circumstances; it means that we know that we never face them alone. We have the confidence to look into the crawlspace and know that whatever it holds, it will never be enough to separate us from the Lord who loves us unconditionally.

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, 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 8:38-39

Rev. Wendy Lambert, *Senior Executive Pastor*

Friday, March 27

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? - Psalm 27:1

Most of you know that Bob and I have loved sailing for many years. We had always been what you would consider day sailors, or island hoppers, making short passages between islands that would have us safely at our destination before dark. It was such a joy and relief to be safely anchored or docked in a new place, ready to enjoy the sunset and the next adventure!

Daytime sailing offers high visibility of landmarks and hazards, easier navigation, and incredible views. Sailing at night is very different and requires specialized preparation for reduced visibility, using AIS/radar, and increased vigilance while on watch. It can be so beautiful embracing the unseen, but it also can be quite unsettling. Many less experienced sailors may fear the night.

We will never forget our first overnight passage, just the two of us! We sailed from Tortola in the British Virgin Islands to Saint Martin. We had always been told that the wind would be on our bow during the entire passage, meaning we would be bashing into the waves. Our plan was to leave a day or two later and we knew we would just have to ride it out, but Bob discovered a weather window that would make it far more favorable for us. The wind had shifted 180 degrees, so that meant the wind would be coming from behind and helping to push us along. We were ecstatic and instantly sprang into "go mode."

After we cleared customs, we were on our way. We tried to anticipate everything we would need for the night so we could have it close by. Our passage was lovely! Both of us stayed in the cockpit all night. One of us slept while the other was on watch, managing the boat and watching for other boats and obstacles in the water. Things certainly look different at night, and we were excited to finally see the lights and buildings of a city, only to discover that the city was moving! What we realized was that the city was a cruise ship heading our way, and we eventually were able to see it up close and personal.

We were proud to arrive safely in Saint Martin and found that our overnight sail was more than just a journey across the water. We felt the mystery of the sea in the stillness of the night and experienced the rhythm of the ocean. Learning to trust what we could not see taught us that the most important light, the light that can cast out all fear, is the light of Christ.

Marsha Long, *Director of Hospitality Ministry*

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

by Isaac Watts

When we survey the wondrous cross
On which the Lord of glory died,
Our richest gain we count but loss,
And pour contempt on all our pride.

Our God forbid that we should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, our Lord;
All the vain things that charm us most,
We'd sacrifice them to His blood.

There from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flowed mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying crimson, from His head
Spreads o'er His body on the tree;
To all the world then am I dead,
And all the world is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature ours,
That were an offering far too small;
Love that transcends our highest powers,
Demands our heart, our life, our all.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Monday, March 30

There are so many things in life that can make us fearful. We may worry about our health, our family's health, our jobs, or even just the state of the world. When I turned 70 last year, I found myself thinking more about the inevitable… death. It's not that I have any specific health issue that concerns me, but all the Poteet men seem to die by the time they reach 75 or 76. Around my birthday, I started to joke with my kids that my "expiration date" was rapidly approaching. They didn't see the humor in that. For me, making jokes is a mechanism that alleviates any fears I have. I can't say that I truly *worry* about my death, but it does cross my mind more often these days. I do think more about what I can do to extend my life longer than my grandfathers, my dad, and my brother.

From a theological standpoint, I believe death is a natural part of the cycle of life that God has created. We are all going to die sometime. I'd like to postpone it as long as I can. I have grandchildren I'd like to spend more time with, but I also realize I only have so much control over when I die. Only God knows the time when I will take my last breath here on earth, so why should I worry? The answer to that question, I think, is that humans are natural worriers. Some of us worry more than others and some of us just don't dwell on it.

As a pastor, I have spent much time with those who are nearing the end of their lives. I have learned much from observing these them. So many of them live their lives in a way that expresses their faith in ways I hope I can model. I visit with people who tell me they understand we are not meant to live forever here on earth. Their faith teaches them that life hereafter will be even more wonderful than what they have experienced on earth. They often tell me they are not afraid to die, and, in fact, long to be with Christ. They look forward to being reunited with loved ones.

In this Lenten season, part of what we are to think about is death. Jesus really did die on the cross and lay dead in that tomb for three days before God raised Him on Easter. I believe when we read that part of the Passion story it helps us to confront our own mortality. Of course, the hope comes on Easter morning. It reminds me of the old hymn we sometimes sing, *"Why Should I worry or Fret."* The words remind us of the hope of our faith. *"I believe… so why should I worry or fret. God holds the future in His hands. I know He is reigning and is still in control, so why should I worry or fret."*

I only have so many days here on earth, so I plan to make the most of each day. The only thing I "fret" about is not giving enough, not forgiving enough, not loving enough.

Rev. Dave Poteet, *Pastor of Congregational Care*

Tuesday, March 31

Lent invites us into the shadows. It is a season where we slow down, examine our hearts, and name the fears, worries, and doubts we often try to keep hidden. We come face to face with the reality that life is not always bright, clear, or easy, and neither was the road Jesus walked to the cross.

On Good Friday at the Edmond Campus, our service reflects on the last seven phrases spoken by Jesus while He was on the cross. It is a powerful service, and I highly recommend attending this year. One of the most powerful moments of the service is at the end, when the whole Worship Center is completely dark except for one flame: the Christ Candle. As a reflective song fills the room, all eyes are drawn to that single light. It flickers quietly, holding the space, reminding us of Christ's presence even in the deepest sorrow.

And then, at the end of the song, the candle is extinguished. Suddenly, we are left sitting in total darkness.

That moment can feel uncomfortable. Heavy. Final. It mirrors the fears we carry, moments when hope feels fragile, when prayers seem unanswered, when God feels distant. The disciples knew this darkness. On Good Friday, they watched Jesus suffer, die, and be placed in a tomb. The light they thought would never go out appeared to be gone.

But Lent teaches us something important: darkness is not the end of the story.

Even when the candle is blown out, the truth of Christ is not extinguished. His love does not disappear. His grace does not fade. What looks like the absence of God is often the space where God is still working.

We do not have to fear the dark because of the light of Christ's love and grace. Even when we cannot see it, the light has already shone. The cross was not defeat; it was love poured out completely. The tomb was not the end; it was the doorway to resurrection.

As we sit in the darkness of Good Friday, Lent asks us to trust. To bring our fears, worries, and doubts into the silence. To believe, even when it feels hard, that Christ will see us through.

The light may go out for a moment, but Sunday is coming.

Brian Morgan, *AV Tech*

Wednesday, April 1

The season of Lent, by its very nature, is full of complex emotion. Reflecting on the life of Christ, His journey to the cross, His ultimate sacrifice, His death and resurrection, we are invited to sit with both sorrow and hope. We reflect on what Christ has done for us, what it means to live as His children now, and how we can honor Him through what we give up or take on for the 40 days… it's a deep and complex season! And I love it.

Each year, it hits differently depending on the season of life I am in. This year, I have been reflecting on a memory filled with both joy and sorrow, much like the complexity of Lent.

In 2017, my dad was diagnosed with Stage 4 colon cancer that had spread to his liver. My two sisters, my mom, and I were told to make the most of the time we had left with him. He was a "girl dad" through and through, even if he tried to hide it behind a rugged, sarcastic exterior. Make no mistake, he was the one who videotaped all our basketball games, took us to cheerleading and dance practices, and was my #1 pageant and theater dad. We were his everything.

My mom, sisters, and I took the following months very intentionally, trying to make the most of the family birthdays, holidays, and even trips back and forth to chemo with a sense of meaning. Talk about seasons of complex emotion! There was a sense of urgency and levity in our conversations. Knowing there would be a goodbye coming but wanting to wring out every bit of goodness possible. There were so many of God's blessings over us during that time. I'm continually grateful for the actual time we had with him, that he never experienced much pain, and for the amazing doctors and staff of nurses that loved on him and joked with him… I think he was one of their favorites. I know wholeheartedly that in the midst of heartbreak, God is there and present for us, and sometimes it's after the fact that we see where His hand was at work.

Easter of 2018, my dad made the decision to be baptized alongside our family members who had not been previously baptized. In our family home, he, my sister Liz and her children, Batten and Sloan, and my sister Sarah and her son Liam were baptized together in an intimate ceremony. My dad realized that he wanted that symbol of God's love and resurrection for his own life, and it was important to him that we knew we would see him again.

Every Easter since, I return to that memory, and to that promise. *"Because I live, you also will live."* (John 14:19) This is the hope of Lent. This is the promise of Easter.

Savannah White-Lewis, *Edmond Campus Director of LifeLight Worship*

Thursday, April 2

One of my favorite services growing up as an Orthodox Christian was the Resurrection service. The true name of the service is technically "The Great and Holy Feast of Pascha," but that's just a very long, very Greek way of saying "Easter." Our Easter service would start at 11 p.m. and conclude around 2 a.m. It was a commitment, but entirely worth the sleep deprivation. The service begins in utter darkness, in the quiet sorrow of Christ's death. The only light is the vigil candle set on the altar, which is symbolic of Christ's tomb.

Then, the priest brings the light from the tomb proclaiming, "Come ye and receive light from the unwaning light, and glorify Christ, who arose from the dead" and sets to lighting the candles held by everyone in the church. Much like our Christmas Eve service at St. Luke's, the room is quickly awash in flickering candlelight, the darkness receding into shadows. It's a moment that brings to mind John 1:5, *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

Unlike our Christmas Eve Service at St. Luke's, everyone in the church goes outside and processes around the church three times (for the three days in the tomb) singing, *"Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and to those in the tomb He has granted life."* It is a proclamation of the defeat of darkness, of The Light descending into the primordial chaos of death's domain, and rather than succumbing to it, granting life and light to all who were held captive there. This part of the service concludes when the priest, followed by the congregation, approaches the doors to the church, which symbolize those immovable and impassible gates which separate life and death, and while banging his fist upon the door he quotes the psalms saying, *"Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in."* Then, as Christ opened the gates of death and walked back into life, so too do all those who live in Christ and hold Christ's light.

As the congregation passes the threshold of the church to celebrate Jesus' resurrection, they also participate in it. The lights are all turned on, hymns are sung, bells are rung, and everyone is exchanging, "Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!" with one another.

The stillness that marks the start of this service gives way to movement, noise, and celebration. It is such a powerful thing to see joy emerge from sorrow, beauty from chaos, light from darkness. It reminds us that, even at the worst of times, there is always hope, love, and life. Even the deepest darkness is no match for the light, and we have been given Christ, the Eternal Light. Glory be to God!

George Soter, *Director of Young Adult Ministries*

Friday, April 3

If you have ever gotten up in the middle of the night, the darkness can seem to transform ordinary things into scary objects; the shadows play tricks on our minds. But it is important to realize what darkness is and isn't. Darkness is defined by the absence of light, and almost all of the time, it isn't the absence of light but the diminished presence of light. Light has properties that can be measured, such as wavelength, speed, and frequency.

We are able to interact with light to produce heat, to reflect the light to other directions, and to use a prism to create mini rainbows. Darkness has no measurable properties other than the lack of light. When we encounter darkness while driving, we turn on our headlights. Darkness in our homes is gone with the flip of the light switch. Because darkness isn't really a tangible thing, it is just a place in need of light.

When we feel darkness in our soul; from the loss of relationships, finances, or health; the darkness feels almost tangible. But while the struggles and loss are very real, the darkness isn't. Feelings of grief, anger, disappointment, and worry are real and natural in many circumstances. But when we allow our emotions to take over, they can cloud our thoughts and limit our vision. We can feel darkness creeping in. That type of darkness can mislead us by making us think we're all alone or that there is no hope. And just like every other darkness, it isn't real; it's just a reminder that we need the Light.

Christ is the Light of the world, and He is always with us, so that we are never alone. Because God is with us, it means that even in the face of the darkest times, His presence brings hope. When we are dealing with darkness, we know what can help. Spending time with our loved ones, spending time with God, and serving others; are all great ways to shine a little light into our lives. Being a light for someone else also reflects the light back to us as well. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Rev. Wendy Lambert, *Senior Executive Pastor*

Saturday and Sunday, April 4 & 5

Christ the Lord is Risen Today

by Charles Wesley

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth, reply, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once He died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!

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

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

King of glory, Soul of bliss, Alleluia!
Everlasting life is this, Alleluia!
Thee to know, Thy power to prove, Alleluia!
Thus to sing, and thus to love, Alleluia!

John 20:11-18

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rab-bo'ni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

Mary Mag'dalene went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

St. Luke's All Church

Easter Egg Hunt

Saturday APRIL 4

9 a.m. and 11 a.m.

EDMOND CAMPUS

900 N. Sooner Road, Edmond

Over 20,000 Eggs • Inflatables
Face Painting • Food Trucks
Balloon Artist • The Easter Bunny

St. Luke's
METHODIST CHURCH

EASTER SERVICES
SUNDAY, APRIL 5

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 4)
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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METHODIST CHURCH

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