

**Lent 2019:
Our Journey
through Lent...
TOGETHER**

An invitation to walk alongside
Jesus and each other

Introduction

In the last year, we've put renewed emphasis on what it means to live into our roots as a congregation. First and foremost, our roots rest in **Jesus**. But there's another theme that has continued to come up time and time again that define us as a congregation: **relationships**.

At our annual meeting, you heard from our Visioning Task Force about the retreat that was held in Nov. 2018. You heard about how relationships were formed and deepened—both with each other and with God. It's great to be able to "go away" on a retreat once and awhile. But this is real life. And we can't always "get away." So, **what would it look like to go on a retreat in daily life this Lent with your family at Shepherd?** What would it look like to...

- intentionally walk alongside Jesus on his journey to the cross—growing in your relationship with your God,
- and intentionally walking alongside each other in our journeys of faith—growing in our relationships with each other?

This Lent, we invite you to consider going on a journey with Jesus and with each other. So often, Lent can become an individual journey as we decide if we're going to "give something up" for the season. But what would it be like to journey together? That is, all of us— as the family of Shepherd—intentionally dedicating ourselves to various spiritual practices intended to foster growth in our relationship with God and with each other?

But what kind of practices are you talking about? Well, since the early church, Christians have been encouraged to take up the three disciplines of Lent: prayer, fasting, and giving. On Ash Wednesday, we'll hear Jesus instruct his newly called disciples in these practices as they began their journey of discipleship.

So how might we engage in these age-old practices, even today, as we journey together this season? Well, take a look at the next page. Some of the opportunities might seem relatively accessible to where you're at on your journey of faith. Other opportunities might seem like a stretch. Challenge yourself to take a new step.

The Discipline of Prayer

1. *Sunday morning worship, education, and fellowship*

Our prayer begins on Sunday mornings as we gather together in worship, fellowship, and education. Our entire morning together is an act of prayer!

2. *Prayerful reading of Scripture*

But to dive even deeper, consider taking up the practice of prayerful reading of Scripture. Though prayer is often thought of as things that we “say” to God, prayer is simply dwelling in relationship with God. So, what might it look like for you to spend some time with God each day by reading the upcoming Sunday readings? This booklet includes Scriptures for each week,

along with a few guiding questions to focus your reading, and a prayer of the week. If it’s helpful, use the journaling space provided to record your thoughts.

3. *Midweek conversations*

The practice of prayerful reading on its own can be powerful. But we’re not on this journey alone! So join us on Wednesdays (beginning March 13) for a midweek meal and conversation. Those interested are asked to sign up in advance so that we can create consistent small groups. Youth 4th grade and up are also invited to sign up; youth 3rd grade and below will remain with the large group for much of the evening, but will have their own time with an adult each week.

The Discipline of Fasting

There is no need to stop feasting altogether during Lent just because it’s a season of sacrifice. But, what would it be like to intentionally create space for us to receive God’s feast anew? Consider this: following breakfast on Wednesdays, fast for the remainder of the day. Then, as you join your group

for midweek conversations, break your fast as we feast together: literally, on food, and also on each other’s presence. Discussion about how your fast is going (or perhaps, how it isn’t going some days!) could also inform your midweek conversations.

The Discipline of Giving

If you’d like to give to others in need this season, consider contributing to a diaper drive. Did you know that if parents do not have the resources to send their child to daycare with adequate diapers that, after a “grace period,” parents may not be able to continue day care? Diapers are expensive. And day care centers simply cannot absorb the cost

of diapers. Unfortunately, that sometimes results in parents needing to stay home from work. This quickly spirals into financial instability and risk of losing employment. But you can help. Consider donating either diapers or money which will then be distributed to day care centers.

Wednesday Midweek Schedule

6:00-6:30 p.m. Meal and Fellowship

6:30-6:45 p.m. Break into small groups

Share highs and lows

6:45-7:00 p.m. Opening icebreaker question for groups

7:00-7:45 p.m. Scripture, questions, and conversation

Children, 3rd grade and younger, will be dismissed during this time for their own conversation and an activity. An adult will lead each week.

7:45-8:00 p.m. Prayer and blessing in small groups

Small groups are invited to linger as long as conversation goes. However, to be mindful of family bedtimes, we will aim to wrapped up by 8:00 p.m. The sanctuary will be open and dimly lit for any who would like to remain after small group conversation for individual prayer and meditation.

Holy Week Schedule

Our journey through Lent will lead us to Holy Week. But the journey doesn't stop once we hit Palm Sunday. Make an effort to join us each step of the way 'til we hear the news that Christ is ALIVE!

Palm Sunday

April 14, 9:00 a.m.

Worship with procession of palms

Maundy Thursday

April 18, 6:00 p.m.

Worship around the Table

Good Friday

April 19, 7:00 p.m.

Service of Darkness

Easter Sunday

April 21

Easter Breakfast, 7:30 a.m.

Egg hunt to follow breakfast

Worship Service, 9:00 a.m.

How to Use

So what does it mean to prayerfully read Scripture?

At one point or another, many of us likely received a Bible: perhaps from a family member, at a significant life experience, from a congregation, or perhaps something stirred within us to pick one off the book store shelf because “something” perked our curiosity. But what does this dusty ol’ book have to do with our day-to-day lives now?

Mid-way through the season of Epiphany, we heard a Scripture passage from Luke 4. Jesus, having come to the synagogue on the Sabbath day stood up to read for those gathered. According to Luke 4:17-19, Jesus “unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’”

If Jesus would have stopped there, perhaps it would have looked just like what we experience on Sunday mornings in worship: we hear something from the Scriptures, and then someone is expected to say something about it. But Jesus, in this passage, simply said: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

TODAY, he tells them. TODAY, this Word is changing you. Transforming you. Molding you. Shaping you. And this Word is changing the way that you see the world, see God’s promises, and see God at work in your life. TODAY, Jesus tells them, this Word of God is not dead, but is alive. And today, this Word has the power to give you hope; to give you freedom; to give you healing; to give you life;

and to give you purpose.

So often, when we start reading anything, our first inclination is to try to digest every detail of what we’re reading. We’re taught in school to read to “understand” and “comprehend” what’s written. On the whole, we read seeking to master whatever concept is being presented, or to understand what’s going on in the story, so that we can get our minds wrapped around what’s being presented and bring it under our control.

There’s something to be said about reading the Bible to “understand” what’s written: to “get” what it was like when Jesus walked the earth and to ask critical questions so as to get more information out of a given passage. **But what if, instead, we came to approach Scripture not necessarily to discover more information, and not necessarily to find an “answer” to our questions of faith, but simply to stand before God...ready and open for how the Scripture might transform us?**

It is into that method of prayerful reading that you are invited into this Lent. Rather than trying to understand every nuance of every reading, give yourself permission to simply focus on your relationship with Jesus. Allow God to come to you and reveal to you what it is that you need to hear.

In truth, this is risky stuff. What God may reveal to you in Scripture may not be what you’re expecting! And, at times, it may not be what you “want” to hear! There are several examples of people within Scripture who wrestled with this very thing. And, on the other end of the spectrum, at times, it might seem as though God is silent. We might come to Scripture ready to meet with God, open to hearing something new, and yet there is no noticeable change. It might be frustrating. And yet, that does

not mean that our communion with God is not honored. Just as it is necessary to water a plant before growth is seen, at times, in our journeys of faith, it is necessary to add a little water before growth is noticeable.

So then, what is the purpose of prayerful reading?

Simply, to focus on our relationship with Jesus, not to walk away with knowledge.

But how do I do that? Good question. Try this:

1. **Still yourself before God.** Yes, I know: there is craziness all around. If that's the case, even in the craziness, be mindful of God's presence with you.
2. **Offer this time in prayer.** Consider praying something like the following:

Lord Jesus, thank you for this time. Thank you, for coming to meet with me here. Thank you, for your presence that goes with me wherever I go. Open my ears to hear your Word. Open my eyes to see your love. And open my heart to receive your promises. In Jesus name, Amen.

3. **Read the Scripture(s).** Pay attention to what word/phrase might be standing out to you. Read through the Scripture(s) again if it is helpful. Reflect on how that word/phrase is touching your life. Finally, reflect on how God may be calling you to respond. Turn your thoughts into a prayer to God.

Sounds great, but I need a bit more structure than that. So be it. Try using the "entering the text" questions that are provided at the beginning

of each week. These questions are intentionally formed so as not to have black-and-white answers. Ready to go deeper? Consider one or more of the "diving deeper" questions. These questions will be a springboard for our conversations on Wed. nights. **So as to align your reading with our conversations and Sunday morning worship, we encourage you to begin reading the upcoming Sunday readings the Wed before you hear them in worship.** For example, begin reading Lent 1 readings (designated for Sun., March 10) on Wed., March 6. Continue reading those readings through Wed., March 13 when we discuss them together. Then, turn your attention to the next week's readings.

As you journey with Jesus and with each other this season, challenge yourself to encounter God's Word in a new way. Open yourself to what God has to say to you, to your family, to this church, and to the world. And no matter what you do, know that your time given to your journey with Jesus and each other this Lenten season is honored by God.

So in the words of ELW 326:

Bless Now, O God, the Journey, may God bless your journey - as we travel together with Christ and with each other.

Bless now, O God, the journey that all your people make, the path through noise and silence, the way of give and take.

The trail is found in desert, and winds the mountain round, then leads beside still waters, the road where faith is found.

Divine eternal lover, you meet us on the road.

We wait for lands of promise where milk and honey flow, but waiting not for places, you meet us all around.

Our covenant is written on roads, as faith is found.

Lent 1 – Sunday, March 10

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

¹When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ²you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us." ⁴When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, ⁵you shall make this response before the Lord your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and

populous. ⁶When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, ⁷we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me." You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. ¹¹Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

Psalms 91: 1-2, 9-16

¹You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
²will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."

⁹Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling-place,
¹⁰no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

¹²On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

¹³You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

¹⁴Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.

¹⁵When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them.

¹⁶With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

Romans 10:8-138

⁸But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth

and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Luke 4:1-13

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" ⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."⁸Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you', ¹¹and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

¹²Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Questions

Overall Lent Questions:

Before you read today, check yourself -

1. How do you feel about Lent?/How are feeling about this Lenten season?
2. How do you feel walking with Jesus on his journey through this time of his suffering, betrayal, and death? How do you feel walking with those around you on your Lenten journey?
3. What do you want from Jesus this Lent? Be specific.
4. What do you think Jesus wants for/from you during Lent?

Entering the Text:

1. What word/phrase stands out to you?
2. What do these texts say about who God is?
3. What do these texts say about who we are?
4. What do these texts say about our relationship - or lack thereof - with God?
5. What good news do you hear

Digging Deeper:

1. How easy do you find it to be to trust God's message of protection/refuge in the face of evil/the wilderness?
2. Where, or how, have you experienced "God's salvation," offering you refuge in the midst of trouble?
3. Where, or how, have you experienced "wilderness" in your life? Your faith?
4. Why does the Spirit lead us into wilderness?

Prayer of the Week

Jesus, I see that the evil in the world also keeps me from believing and experiencing the truth about who I am and the purposes you have for me. Guide me (or drive me, if necessary) into the desert, so that with you, I might be liberated from the distractions and temptations that bind me in darkness and keep me from becoming the person you've called me to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lent 2 – Sunday, March 17

Genesis 15:1-18

¹After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’ ²But Abram said, ‘O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ ³And Abram said, ‘You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.’ ⁴But the word of the Lord came to him, ‘This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.’ ⁵He brought him outside and said, ‘Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ ⁶And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness. ⁷Then he said to him, ‘I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.’ ⁸But he said, ‘O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?’ ⁹He said to him, ‘Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.’ ¹⁰He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the

other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹²As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. ¹³Then the LORD said to Abram, ‘Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; ¹⁴but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

¹⁷When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.

Psalm 27

¹The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

²When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.

³Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear; though war rise up
against me, yet I will be confident.

⁴One thing I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after: to live in the house of the
Lord
all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of
the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.

⁵For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

⁶Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me, and I will
offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

⁷Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸"Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"
Your face, Lord, do I seek.

⁹Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!

¹⁰If my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will take me up.

¹¹Teach me your way, O Lord,
and lead me on a level path because of my
enemies.

¹²Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me, and
they are breathing out violence.

¹³I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

¹⁴Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait
for the Lord!

Philippians 3:17-4:17

¹⁷Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is

from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. ¹Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Luke 13:31-35

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." ³²He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from

Jerusalem.' ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you to desolate. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Questions

Overall Lent Questions:

Before you read today, check yourself -

1. How do you feel about Lent?/How are feeling about this Lenten season?
2. How do you feel walking with Jesus on his journey through this time of his suffering, betrayal, and death? How do you feel walking with those around you on your Lenten journey?
3. What do you want from Jesus this Lent? Be specific.
4. What do you think Jesus wants for/from you during Lent?

Entering the Text:

1. What word/phrase stands out to you?
2. What do these texts say about who God is?
3. What do these texts say about who we are?
4. What do these texts say about our relationship - or lack thereof - with God?
5. What good news do you hear

Digging Deeper:

1. What promises of God are important to you?
2. What are the challenges Abraham faced in believing the promises given to him? What are the challenges that we face in believing the promises God has given us?
3. What do you fear?
4. Where have you experienced the faithfulness of God in your life? How has it been challenging to trust in the faithfulness of God?
5. What helps you maintain hope in God's promises? Do you feel as though you are waiting for "deliverance" in any aspect of your life?

Prayer of the Week

Jesus, in my life I have sought comfort in things that have brought despair. I have sought refuge in things and relationships that destroy. I have sought peace in things that cannot bring the peace I desire. I have sought fulfillment in things that have left me empty. But Jesus, I want to believe that my life has meaning and purpose amidst the chaos. Help me, Jesus, to trust you again with my whole life. Help me, Jesus, to find a home for my wandering heart, built on the truth of your word spoken into my heart. Help me, Jesus, to experience what it means to be loved by you; and in all this, Jesus, implant in me a desire to be your friend and companion with you in the journey of this life and the next. In Your name, we pray, Amen.

