

LENT 2023

WEEK 1 ROOM FOR GOD

What are you giving up for Lent? (to have room for God)

February 22 Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday reminds us of our mortal nature. "We are dust and to dust we shall return." The ashes placed on our foreheads remind us that without God, we are ashes - we have no life, no spirit. In an outward and visible way, we are reminded that we are dependent on God. It is time to make room for God in our lives once again.

- Reflect on what things in your life are taking most of your time and energy.
- Identify which of these things pulls you away from God - either because it may not be what God wants for you or because these things simply require so much of you that time with God just does not happen.

February 23 Thursday

One Lenten theme is fasting - going significant periods of time without eating or abstaining from certain foods or types of food. Chocolate and sweets are often popular items to "give up" for Lent as we seek to empty ourselves so that we may better focus on God. This spiritual practice has a long history in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Fasting is an act of contrition, cleansing, and preparation.

- Discern how a time of fasting may help you to make room for God in your life
 - Contrition - being remorseful and penitent
 - Cleansing - ridding oneself of things not of God
 - Preparation - seeking to invite God into your life in old and new ways

February 24 Friday

While the practice of fasting is not as prevalent as it once was for Jews and Christians, the "giving up" of certain food and drink continues to be practiced by many of the faithful during penitential seasons. Even in a much more secular world, Christians continue to seek ways to observe Lent. Fasting from those things that may not be good for the body remains one of the most common Lenten disciplines.

- Think about how fasting from a certain food or drink may help you to make room for God.
- Identify other things you may abstain from that will help you to live a more godly life.
- Commit to a Lenten discipline that will help you make room for God in your life.

WEEK 2 HEARING GOD'S VOICE

What is God saying to you? (among all the noise of our lives)

February 27 Monday

One of the most frustrating aspects of a relationship with God is that we cannot see or hear God in the same way we can see or hear our family, friends, or any other people we encounter. But do we want God to be just another human being - or do we recognize God as our creator, our supreme being, our savior and redeemer? When we acknowledge that God is God, then we understand our need to find different ways to see and hear God. Our senses are used for the material world. We need ways to access God in the spiritual world.

- Think of times when you may have experienced these feelings:
 - You were comforted or assured through a sense of peace
 - You felt a quiet confidence and felt empowered to make a decision
 - You somehow found the strength to get through something that that was very difficult
- Reflect on how God may have spoken to you through these times or other times when you may have been surprised by an inner leading.

February 28 Tuesday (no classes)

God meets us in our earthly realm and often speaks to us through earthly means. Often God speaks to us through other people. When we are on a spiritual journey long enough, we recognize those people in our lives that may be speaking for God. Through time and practice we can learn to recognize who is speaking God's truth to us.

- Name the person or people in your life who you trust to encourage and uplift you - and to also call you out when you stray.
- Name the person or people who tear you down or lead you astray.
- Discern who in your life may be speaking for God.

March 1 Wednesday

There are certain places where we feel closer to God than others - places where we not only sense God's presence, but we may even hear God speaking to us. We call these "thin places." These are places where the distance between God and us is not this wide chasm, but where we know that God is very close. Finding and knowing these thin places assures us that God is with us.

- Think of the places where you sense God's presence the most:
 - A church or synagogue
 - A favorite space out in nature
 - A space where people you love and care about are
 - A room in your home
 - A friend or relative's house
 - Another place where you know God is there

March 2 Thursday

God speaks through Holy Scripture. While the books of the Bible were written down thousands of years ago, God continues to speak to us in the scriptures. As a child, we may learn the parable of the prodigal son. This story had meaning for us then. We reread the story as teenagers and can delve deeper into where God is in the story and what God wants us to learn from it. Then as adults, we can read and reread that same story over and over again at different times and places. Each time brings new understanding and revelations. The living Word of God speaks to us each and every time we open up the Bible.

- Think of the obstacles that keep you from regularly reading the Bible:
 - Lack of time
 - Do not understand it
 - It is not relevant today
 - Do not have an interest
 - Other obstacles to reading the Bible

March 3 Friday

When we do make studying the Bible a priority, God will speak to us through the scripture. Read the following Bible verses about hearing God's voice and reflect on each verse:

- *And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. Isaiah 30:21 (ESV)*
- *My sheep hear My voice. I know them, and they follow Me. John 10:27 (NRSV)*
- *The Spirit shows what is true and will come and guide you into the full truth. The Spirit doesn't speak on his own. He will tell you only what he has heard from me, and he will let you know what is going to happen. John 16:13 (CEV)*
- *Ask me, and I will tell you things that you don't know and can't find out. Jeremiah 33:3 (CEV)*
- *We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. Hebrews 2:1 (NIV)*

Hearing God's voice can be difficult. Sometimes we need to simply, *Be still and know that I am God! Psalm 46:10a (NRSV)*

WEEK 3 “DO JUSTICE”

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice...?”

March 6 Monday

After making room for God in our lives and hearing God’s voice, our next task is to put into action what God has spoken to us. In our theme verse for this year on the Munnerlyn Campus, we hear three emphatic calls to action: do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8, New International Version). We will spend the next three weeks reflecting on each of these calls. First, we strive to **do justice** in our relationships with God and with each other.

- Define the word “justice” in your own words.
- Reflect on how you decide what is right or wrong when faced with a decision.
- Think of a time when you or someone you know did the right thing, even when it was hard.

March 7 Tuesday

Deuteronomy 6:5, part of the Jewish prayer called the Shema, calls us to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” The “vertical” dimension of justice means doing the right thing and having the right posture in our relationships with God. Sometimes it’s hard to give God our *all* of anything, and some widely respected people in the Bible even questioned and challenged God’s definition of justice. Sometimes our relationship with God gets strained over questions of God’s justice in the face of our human suffering and pain, and that’s OK. God can handle our questions and endure the struggle with us.

- Think about these attributes and how they apply to you and your relationship with God:
 - Honesty
 - Humility
 - Duty
 - Fairness
 - Respect
- Reflect on a time when you argued with God. What did you learn, or how did you discover God’s wisdom through the experience?

March 8 Wednesday

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” People are often surprised to learn that this is not one of the Ten Commandments but instead comes from the book of Leviticus, sandwiched between laws about sacrifices and what to do with produce from the harvest. Jesus, however, highlights this, together with Deuteronomy 6:5, as the greatest of the commandments. The “horizontal” dimension of justice demands that we treat others as we would want to be treated. It seems simple and basic enough, but it can be surprisingly difficult to put this into practice.

- Name someone you see as a role model in loving their neighbors.
- Think about who counts as your “neighbor”:
 - Friends and family members
 - Teachers and classmates
 - Cashiers at the grocery store
 - Who else can you add to this list?

March 9 Thursday

In the third chapter of Luke's gospel, we find John the Baptist calling people to repent of their sins and commit to leading a transformed life. Those who have two coats should give one away, tax collectors should no longer take more money than they're supposed to take, and soldiers should be satisfied with their wages instead of shaking up townspeople for extra cash. John's vision of justice is a world in which both poverty and excess are kept in check by mutual care and compassion for one's neighbors. Together with prayer and fasting, "giving alms" – that is, helping the poor – is one of the traditional practices of Lent.

- Reflect on a time when you were in need of something and someone extended a helping hand.
- What is one thing you can give away this Lent to help others?

March 10 Friday

Centuries before John the Baptist – and Jesus, for that matter – the prophet Amos declared, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Both John and Jesus took up the role of the prophet, calling people to make justice and righteousness a priority over hollow acts of worship or piety and to bring justice to those who have been victims of injustice. If we are not striving to do justice in our lives, every chance we get, like an ever-flowing stream, can we honestly claim to worship a God of justice? The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. also found inspiration in these words from the prophet Amos, pointing to a time characterized by such abundant justice as the time when he would be satisfied.

- Have you witnessed or experienced injustice? How did you feel? How did you respond?
- In what areas do you think you, our country, or our world can work on bringing more justice?

WEEK 4 “Love Mercy”

“...and to love mercy...?”

March 13 Monday

Next, we are told to “love mercy.” That’s how the New International Version (NIV) Bible translates this phrase that was originally Hebrew. Other translations, like the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), instead say to “love kindness.” The actual Hebrew word here can refer to both ideas but also includes the ideas of “goodness” or “steadfast loyalty.” So which one is it? Perhaps we should just check “All of the above” and love mercy, kindness, goodness, and steadfast loyalty all at once. We’ll explore each of these ideas over the course of this week.

- Which of these words best reflects what you need or want this week:
 - Mercy
 - Kindness
 - Goodness
 - Loyalty
- How can you practice mercy, kindness, goodness, or loyalty this week?

March 14 Tuesday

Reflecting on his sin of adultery and his role in the murder of his own army general, King David wrote this prayer: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1). God shows mercy to us by forgiving our transgressions (that is, our sins), forgiving us for the mistakes we have made and the ways we have ignored God’s voice and presence in our lives.

- Think of a time when someone in your life forgave you for something you did. What did forgiveness feel like?
- Can you think of someone who needs your forgiveness? What would you say to that person?
- Consider this phrase: “Forgive and forget”. What does this phrase mean to you? Do you think God forgets our sins or wants us to forget our sins? Why or why not?

March 15 Wednesday

At the end of the seventh chapter of Luke’s gospel, a woman shows great kindness and love to Jesus by washing, anointing, and kissing his feet. It is, evidently, because of her gratitude for God’s forgiveness of her sins that she honors Jesus in such a powerfully humble way. When we remember the ways God has forgiven us and shown kindness and love to us, we also should forgive others and show loving-kindness to them as well, for in doing so, we honor both them and God.

- How have you experienced kindness this week?
- Do a random act of kindness for a classmate, a family member, a faculty or staff member, a coach, or even a student you don’t yet know by name:
 - Open a door for someone with their hands full
 - Write a note of thanks or encouragement for someone who needs it
 - Do a chore at home that you don’t normally do
 - Compliment someone on something you admire about them

March 16 Thursday

Genesis tells of the Creation of light, sky, seas, land, plants, animals, and human beings, and after each event, seven times during the course of this short story, we read “And God saw that it was good.” Even though the choices we make, or the choices made by others, sometimes make us question or even doubt this truth, God’s vision and purpose for our world is goodness: for us to appreciate and participate in the goodness of everything around us. To practice appreciating this goodness, follow these steps:

- 1) Look around you and find something that is good.
- 2) Say – out loud or to yourself – “And God saw that it was good.”
- 3) Reflect:
 - a) Why is this thing good?
 - b) How can I see God’s goodness in it?
 - c) How can I use this thing for good?
- 4) Pray for God’s help to see goodness in what God has made – in the world, in its resources, in yourself and in others.

March 17 Friday

“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever.” (Psalm 136:1) This verse ties together the goodness of God with the loving-kindness and mercy of God. And this steadfast love – this mercy – is for ever. Fashions go in and out of style. Friendships change with moves to a new city or a new school. Even our interests and our personalities change and develop over the course of our lives, but God remains constant and loyal. Even when we get distracted or turn away from God, God does not give up on us. If we replace God with other objects of our devotion, God remains loyal, eager to welcome us back when we are ready to return to God. And like a dog waiting patiently but longingly for their human companion, we find God rejoicing and celebrating our long-awaited return.

- So, you’re not a dog person? How have you experienced loyalty in your relationship with a different pet? A friend? A family member?
- What kinds of situations put your loyalty to God to the test?
- What things compete for your loyalty to God? Consider giving up one of these things for the rest of Lent so that you can focus on and appreciate God’s loyalty to you.

WEEK 5 - "Walk Humbly"

Walk Humbly with Your God

March 20 Monday

We begin this new week, this first day of Spring, with the theme of Walking Humbly. As we get into the middle of Lent the temptation to fall away from intentional prayer and time with God is quite normal. As we begin this fresh week, this 5th week of Lent, let's acknowledge our desire to take the perhaps "easier" route, and instead recommit to walking alongside God as we approach Easter. In Deuteronomy 5:33 we are encouraged to "walk in the way that God has commanded us, that we may live, and that it may go well with us, and that we may live long in the land we possess."

Today can we pause and reflect on:

- How am I continuing to take intentional time to "walk" with God each day of Lent? What does this actually look like for me? 5 minutes of prayer in my car? Listening to Christian music as I drive? Praying as I fall into bed at nighttime? Thanking God as I walk from class to class?
- Where am I struggling to maintain the intentionality of Lent? What things are pulling at my time and energy?

March 21 Tuesday

"Take off your shoes for you are standing on Holy Ground", Exodus 3:5. Today let's consider that right in the middle of our normal mundane Tuesday's, right in the middle of standing in line at the Buck, right in the middle of waiting for the light to turn green on Atlantic Blvd, right in the middle of your science lab, RIGHT THERE is Holy Ground. Let's consider today that if we stop and pause in the moment we are living that is always where we encounter God. Today let's ponder on the very normalcy of the day, and still see where we can meet God. Perhaps if we take off our "shoes" of knowing everything that will happen today, and allow our humility to be present, we can see that God is working in all things for our good.

- Reflect on your day so far. What moments have you had a sense of ease? A sense of surprise? A sense of joy? A deep laugh? A true unhurried conversation?

March 22- Wednesday

A prayer is written, "You will be given everything you need to accomplish what you have been asked to do." At times our ego can convince us that we are the ones running the show, the ones starring in the movie of our lives, the ones needing to do all the things or the world will simply stop. That stressed me out to even type those words, let alone think of the reality that most of us are living in day to day. What would happen if we switched the script around on that type of thinking? What if we allowed God to be God, and allowed ourselves to be human beings?

- What do you need to get done today?
- What parts of that list above can you actually control?

- Which pieces of your to-do list can you humbly ask God to support you with? Or even, if you can so boldly and humbly ask God to take control of?

March 23 -Thursday

Professor and author Joseph Campbell wrote, "People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive."

When was the last time you truly felt alive? The last time you truly marveled at something of God's creation? The last time you were in awe of life? The Hebrews author writes, "Faith is confidence in what we hope for, and assurance about what we do not see." (Heb 11:1)

Today, can you allow yourself to be in AWE? To wonder about the things of the world we do not see? To be humble enough to know what there is so much about LIFE we do not know and cannot explain?

- What was the last time you wondered about something?
- When was your last experience of feeling completely alive?

March 24- Friday

From the book, *Love Poems from God* by translator Daniel Ladinsky:

God Would Kneel Down

I think God might be a little prejudiced.

For once He asked me to join Him on a walk

through this world, and we gazed into every heart on this earth,

and I noticed He lingered a bit longer before any face that was weeping, and before any eyes that were laughing. And sometimes when we passed a soul in worship God too would kneel down. I have come to learn: God adores His creation.

On this final day of reflecting on humility we pause and reflect on the true humility required to be fully loved and to love fully. The act of kneeling requires humility. The act of making ourselves smaller to rest in awe of the bigness of God. The act of kneeling in reverence without agenda, without expectation, without a need to speak, takes humility. The act of kneeling only for the sake of loving God. And allowing ourselves to kneel in God's love for us, His creation. Today may we pause to figuratively, or perhaps even literally, kneel before God's great love for us. May we let ourselves acknowledge our Creator's love for us, simply for being us, exactly we are in this very moment.

- Reflect on God's love for you as you are. What images or words come up for you as you ponder His great love for you?

WEEK 6 JOURNEY INWARD

Going Through, Not Around

MARCH 27 // Monday

Lent is a journey **through emptiness to fullness**. Jesus is said to have come to give “abundant” life, or life “to the full” (John 10:10). “All” we have to do is empty our hands to receive it and empty our lives of all ineffective fillers. As we learn to befriend unpleasant feelings this week, instead of trying to scoot around them, we start by noticing any emptiness, restlessness, or longing. Those are good things! They teach us that our desire for contentment (“it is well with my soul”) is deeper and stronger than the desire for mere happiness (“I have the resources I want”). This is the desert Moses and Jesus entered. If they’d never entered it, and stayed long enough to learn from it, they could have never led others through it.

PRAY: *Lord, if I come without a thing, I come with all I need.*

REFLECT: [“Empty Me Out,” Liz Vice](#)

MARCH 28 // Tuesday

Lent can take us **through loneliness to belonging**. Ironically, the antidote to loneliness is solitude. In this sense, “love your neighbor as yourself” can be expressed as “if I cannot accept and ‘just be’ with myself, I cannot accept and ‘just be’ others.” We all know you can be “around” lots of people and still feel disconnected from them, isolated. So, the Bible and Christian spirituality are all about coming home, to where you belong.

As poet Mary Oliver [writes](#), “whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting – over and over announcing your place in the family of things.”

PRAY: *Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary—for you, for my self, and for others.*

REFLECT: [Calling You, Scott Erickson](#)

MARCH 29 // Wednesday

Lent is an opportunity to journey **through rage to peace**. The first illustration of a life well lived Jesus gives in his classic sermon on Kingdom ethics is of someone who is not consumed by anger (Matt. 5:21-26). He does not say “do not show anger” but says something like “do not neglect it.” For some, it may be time to verbalize the anger instead of burying it. For some, it may be time to stop ignoring and minimizing the anger of others. For some, it may be time to realize that merely venting isn’t empowering.

If “anger covers fear, and fear covers hurt,” I will need to accept and admit that the thing I’m mad about isn’t really what I’m mad about. It’s more likely the thing (or person) that set me off unwittingly hit a sore spot. Likewise, when I encounter the anger of others, considering that it may be masking underlying fear and deep hurt may help me see them without *joining* them in their rage.

PRAY: *God, I am mad. There, I admit it.*

REFLECT: [“Wake Up, Jesus,” The Porter’s Gate](#)

MARCH 30 // Thursday

The Lenten journey is one **through grief to joy**. In the same way that faith and doubt are not opposites, grief and joy are working in tandem to bring about change. Any change is a loss. If left unfelt and un-grieved, even “good” changes—to a new school, a new role, or a healthier relationship, for example—can lead to prolonged instability. Perhaps joy is our decision to root into the sand as we allow the waves of grief to ebb and flow. It may not be an accident that being near water can calm nerves, elicit gratitude, and awaken our vision.

Lent is the season for re-incorporating spiritual practices and good listeners, which happen to be the very gifts from God that help us process grief. The goal is not to completely *understand* the past, present, or future but to *name* the mixed emotions associated with each. Grief is a *life-long* journey, so we might as well begin it and let God bring others to walk with us.

PRAY: *Lord, teach us to mourn our sin, our losses, our brokenness, our tragedies.*

REFLECT: [“How Long?” The Porter’s Gate](#)

MARCH 31 // Friday

The Christian story is about going **through death to life**. We believe Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. We believe he rose again in accordance with the scriptures. Belief itself is a

journey. Often, our old beliefs *about belief* have to die, so that the beliefs that give life can emerge.

To say we “believe” these things is to say we live them, not merely that we think they sound reasonable. From Abraham to the first disciples, the model for faith is to go, somewhere, with God: “You can make up your mind about everything later. Just follow me.”

Henri Nouwen wrote that “we do not think our way to a new kind of living; we live our way to a new kind of thinking.” There’s one more week left in Lent, but it’s not too late to start living differently.

PRAY: *Where you lead, Lord, I will follow.*

REFLECT: [Start With The First Step. Scott Erickson](#)

WEEK 7 JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

Holy Week

APRIL 3 // Monday

On Palm Sunday, Jesus completed his long journey **to the city**, Jerusalem. His ancestors, the ancient Hebrews, wandered their way to the promised land and eventually built a capital that would become known for both beauty and violence. Countless pilgrims have made the trek since. The Biblical writers were telling a story of spiritual significance, of human nature, more than recording history or mapping geography.

Perhaps that is why, while taking in the skyline, Jesus wept. The co-mingling of celebration and suffering is a lot to contemplate. Theologically speaking, everyone’s journey—Jesus’, his ancestors’, and his followers’—coincides at the cross.

PRAY: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us, and our city.*

REFLECT: [The Sorrowful Saint, Scott Erickson](#)

APRIL 4 // Tuesday

In three of the four gospels, Jesus takes a Holy Week visit **to the temple**, where he “cleanses” it of all retail development. John’s gospel places this event much earlier in the story, although it still stirs a strong reaction. By all accounts, Jesus intentionally and angrily caused a scene. Disrupting an opportunistic economic system often does that. But this is what God’s grace looks like: startling to attention those renting out all the holy ground. There are questions here for us, too—for instance, “What is driving our relentless work?”

PRAY: *What good is it, God, if I gain the world but forfeit my soul?*

REFLECT: [“Slow Me Down,” The Porter’s Gate](#)

APRIL 5 // Wednesday

After the Last Supper, which will be commemorated tomorrow on Maundy Thursday, Jesus hiked **to the garden**. The [Garden of Gethsemane](#) was the last of many places Jesus sought out for prayerful seclusion. And, of course, garden imagery is always loaded with meaning for Bible readers. In this case, we catch a glimpse of what it means to be there for someone in anguish. Jesus asks his friends to simply tag along, sit near him, and stay for a while. Even this can be exhausting. It’s arguable, though, that there’s no higher calling.

PRAY: *You wait with us in our distress, O Lord, for however long it takes.*

REFLECT: [“Keep Watch and Pray,” The Porter’s Gate](#)

APRIL 6 // Maundy Thursday

On Holy Thursday, Jesus and his disciples journeyed **to the table**. Celebrating the Passover meal with his closest companions, Jesus gave them a “new commandment.” *Maundy* is derived from the Latin word *mandatum*—you know, like “mandate.” This fresh legislation is to “love one another,” and you’re forgiven if that doesn’t strike you as groundbreaking. It is worth getting technical about what “love one another” means.

What if our over-familiar term “community” has lost its weight and doesn’t do it justice? Is a *faith* community just one (and let’s be honest, not always the most attractive) among hundreds of groups promising interaction and amenities? What if what we offer, instead, is communion? How is that different, and why is “meal-sharing” one of its key expressions?

PRAY: *Give us this day our daily bread.*

REFLECT: [The Table, Scott Erickson](#)

APRIL 7 // Good Friday

Eventually, Jesus went **to the cross**. In typical fashion for Biblical literature and Christian theology, the cross is a paradox. It is an end, and it is a beginning. It was carried, and at the same time is carried, and will be carried. Death was somehow defeated and is still undefeated. Everyone still dies.

If death is seen less as an enemy to fear and conquer, however, and more as a mode of transformation, we can accept this day for what it is—good...and tough. On this day, of all days, we do not skip over the reality that not *all* deaths are good, and not many resurrections come quickly. We dwell on the not-good-ness and not-yet-ness of Good Friday, so that one day all people will have the opportunity to live fully and, therefore, die well. Only after diligent lingering can *Easter's* goodness be authentically expressed and its newness fully experienced.

PRAY: *It is finished, Lord, and it is beginning.*

REFLECT: ["Entrance," Liz Vice](#)