

# Daily Devotional Guide

*Lenten Daily Prayer*



*Ask*

a Lenten series  
for Year A

# ASK: A DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

## FOR LENT YEAR A 2023

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# INTRODUCTION

This Lent's scripture gives us stories full of back-and-forth conversation with God. These conversations are filled with questions. People use questions to interrogate or to express their confusion or doubt. Questions express the longings of the heart and the puzzles of the mind. A question shows the distance between me and you. A question can also bring us closer. At times, people swallow their wonderings and fail to ask their question at all. God often asks questions to draw more near.

In this guide, you'll find many ways to engage questions—questions from scripture and questions of your own. Each entry guides you through a few steps:

- **Read:** Each day zooms in on one question—just a couple of verses—from scripture. Often you will explore a single passage and its many questions over the course of the week.
- **Reflect:** An additional question or two is provided for your own reflection. There's no wrong way to use these questions. Let them prompt journaling throughout the season. Talk about them with your family or roommates at the kitchen counter. Read a question in the morning, and ponder it in a quiet moment later that day.
- **Pray:** A brief prayer is provided in the form of a question from you to God. Find a way to pray these questions that feels genuine. At times that may mean rephrasing the questions or asking something different that's on your heart. Leave room for answers. So often, our prayers to God are one-sided. Leave silence in your prayers this season. How might God speak to you—or not—in the silence?
- **Practice:** Although our Read, Reflect, and Pray sections are best suited for those in their teenage years on up through adulthood, each day also includes a practice that can be done with all ages. You may engage these as an individual, a family, or a community of friends. Most of these are something that fits in the natural course of a day, so you might read our Daily Devotional Guide in the morning to give yourself the opportunity to engage your practice throughout the day. If you read it in the evening, you might save the practice for the following day.
- **Question jar:** We encourage you to create and keep a question jar (or bowl, or bucket, whatever is handy!) throughout the season. Begin on Ash Wednesday by writing down at least two or three questions per household member on individual slips of paper, folding them, and putting them in the jar. These questions may be faith related—something you've always wondered about God, or the Bible, or what your church believes—but they don't need to be. They could be questions about black holes, jazz, basketball, or slugs.

Though we are confident that deep questions will emerge over the course of the season, the questions you write don't all have to be existential. Children do not live with the same

separation between the holy and the ordinary, the sacred and the secular, that most adults do. To them, all topics are worthy of divine attention (this is why it seems like kids bring up the most unusual topics during the children's message portion of a service). Channel that playfulness and lack of distinction into your question jar. Though you may get to ponder some deep mysteries, the point is more to cultivate your curiosity, to wonder, to ask questions, to ponder them with others, and to seek answers when it's appropriate. Questions help us grow in faith and in life and often lead us into deeper relationship. Your question jar questions can and should be provided by household members of all ages!

Throughout the week, keep the jar in a prominent place so you can add questions as they occur to you. On Sunday, rather than your usual devotion, spend some time with your question jar. Draw one question out of the jar. Is this a question you can answer on your own? If not, consider watching a documentary, going to the library, or getting lost in Wikipedia! Is it a question you need someone's expertise on? Call your pastor, ask your doctor, reach out to a local educator. Is it a question that would be well pondered with others? Bring it to your Bible study group, discuss it with others in your household, make a coffee date with a friend to talk more. Each Sunday, refresh your jar with some new questions.

Give yourself some grace as you progress through the season. We have entries for every day, but if you miss one, don't give up. Perhaps you want to sit down and read several entries at once. Maybe your family needs to read the entries separately and can only reflect on the week together each Sunday night. Do what works for you and your people.

Let these questions—those others ask of God, and those you have carried yourself—draw you closer into conversation with God and with others this Lenten season.

# WEEK ONE

FEBRUARY 22 - FEBRUARY 25

Wednesday, February 22, 2023

*Ash Wednesday*

**Read:** “Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” (Isaiah 58:3, the people to God)

**Reflect:** The scripture we read in church on Ash Wednesday, including Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 6:1, cautions us against “practicing our piety before others.” What kinds of faith practices strike you as particularly showy? What do you think you have done in the past to try to get God’s attention? Has it ever worked? On the other hand, when have you been too shy to exercise your faith in public?

**Pray:** God, do you hear me today? Do you see me? How will I know?

**Practice:** If you attend Ash Wednesday services today, you will likely need to wash a smudge off your face at some point. When the time comes, or when you wash your face as usual, take a moment to draw the cross on your head again with a little water. Remember your baptism as a time when God drew near to you and as a sign that God continues to do so each day.

Thursday, February 23, 2023

**Read:** “Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself?  
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,  
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?  
Will you call this a fast,  
a day acceptable to the Lord?”

(Isaiah 58:5, God to the people)

**Reflect:** Often in Lent, people try some kind of discipline to focus their spirituality. However, in Isaiah God warns that our ideas of spiritual discipline may not match what God actually wants for our lives. Was there a time when a spiritual discipline did *not* encourage your faith?

**Pray:** Holy Jesus, what can I do for you today?

**Practice:** Find one thing you can do for someone outside your household in the coming week. Can you volunteer with a soup kitchen or food pantry at your church or a nearby church? Can you drop

off some school supplies for students or treats for teachers to a local school? Can you be an extra set of hands in Sunday School or with a family in worship on Sunday morning?

## Friday, February 24, 2023

**Read:** “Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
...to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”  
(Isaiah 58:6-7, God to the people)

**Reflect:** The prophets called people to look carefully at their own relationships, to examine their society’s habits, and to adjust their attitudes to match God’s. How do you feel God calling you to lead people to freedom? Or to help the poor? Or to be more available to your family?

Alternatively, perhaps you feel trapped and you want to be freed. Where are you seeking more freedom? What are you hungry for? What do you need from your family?

In either case, what stands in your way?

**Pray:** God, can you show me the hidden ways I am chained by this world? Where can I find the path to freedom?

**Practice:** Do something that reminds you that you are totally and completely free. Turn up the music and dance with wild abandon. Go to a remote place and just yell. Sing at the top of your lungs in the car or the shower.

## Saturday, February 25, 2023

**Question jar:** Take time—as an individual or with others in your household—to draw and explore at least one question from your question jar today. Refresh your jar with some new questions.

# WEEK TWO

FEBRUARY 26 - MARCH 4

**This week's reading:** Genesis 1:24-27; 3:1-13

## Sunday, February 26, 2023

**Read:** “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1, the serpent to Eve)

**Reflect:** When trying to tempt Eve, the serpent twists God’s commandment into a question. It is the first question in the Bible, and it is used to deceive and to drive a wedge between people and God. How have you seen people use questions to disrupt a relationship or to drive a wedge between people?

**Pray:** God, why do I find myself drawn to what you forbid when you have given me so much freedom?

**Practice:** Play! Play can be restful, rejuvenating, and a reminder of the good things God gives us. Take time to play today, alone or with others. Play kickball at the park or a game of tag in the yard. Play with your pet. Build with blocks, color a picture, or make a craft just for fun.

## Monday, February 27, 2023

**Read:** “Where are you?”(Genesis 3:8, God to Adam)

**Reflect:** The serpent used a question to create division. God uses this question to draw closer to Adam and Eve. How do you hide from God? And what does God use to draw you back into relationship?

**Pray:** God, how many ways have you helped me today? Where can I look to notice what you have done?

**Practice:** Talk through your day with your household or take a moment to jot it down on your own. What happened? Whom did you meet? What joys and challenges did you experience? As you reflect, notice those moments that shimmer. Where do you think God was active?

## Tuesday, February 28, 2023

**Read:** “Who told you that you were naked?” (Genesis 3:11, God to Adam)

**Reflect:** God notices Adam and Eve’s fear and shame, but noticing isn’t enough for God. God also asks them *who* made them feel this way. What is a temptation you face, or something that makes you ashamed? Is there a person in your life who often makes you feel ashamed? What do *we* do to make others feel ashamed?

**Pray:** If you have shown me nothing but love, God, why do I feel ashamed?

**Practice:** Share an embarrassing story. Write it down, take turns swapping stories with your friends or family, or even consider sharing it on social media if it’s a situation you are totally past. Who showed you kindness or comforted you in that situation? Can you thank them?

## Wednesday, March 1, 2023

**Read:** “Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Genesis 3:11, God to Adam)

**Reflect:** It is easy for us to imagine God’s disappointment with Adam and Eve. What disappoints you about the behavior of others? In what ways do you think you disappoint others?

**Pray:** God, what should I have done differently today?

**Practice:** Take a different route. Find a new way to walk or drive to work or school. Walk your favorite trail backward.

## Thursday, March 2, 2023

**Read:** “What is this that you have done?” (Genesis 3:13, God to Eve)

**Reflect:** When God asked Eve this question, her first instinct was to blame someone else for her behavior. In what situations are you likely to blame someone else—or to take on too much responsibility for something someone else has done?

**Pray:** Oh, Holy One, what harm have I caused when I pointed the finger?

**Practice:** Use your fingers for something good today—as a reminder to pray for others, rather than as pointing blame to someone else. Hold up your hand and put down one finger as your pray for each of the following:

- Thumb: those closest to you
- Pointer: those who point you in the right direction, like teachers, pastors, doctors, and mentors
- Middle: wisdom and guidance for those who lead us in our community, nation, and world
- Ring: those who are in trouble or don’t have what they need to get by
- Pinkie: yourself and your own needs



Have you followed up on last Thursday's practice to serve someone outside your household? If you haven't yet, take today to make a plan!

### Friday, March 3, 2023

**Read:** "What is this that you have done?" (Genesis 3:13, God to Eve)

**Reflect:** It is easy to read God's question to Eve as an accusation. (This might be how Eve understood it.) Is there a way that God could have been asking this question *without* accusing Eve?

**Pray:** Sometimes I am so terrified of judgment, God, that I do not listen for a way to make amends. Do I hide from your love because I am afraid of your judgment?

**Practice:** Practice apologizing. It's hard to admit when you've done something wrong. What makes a good apology? Role-play it with others in your household or write it out on your own. Is there someone whose forgiveness you need to seek?

### Saturday, March 4, 2023

**Question jar:** Take time as an individual or with others in your household to draw and explore at least one question from your question jar today. Refresh your jar with some new questions.

# WEEK THREE

MARCH 5 - MARCH 11

**This week's reading:** John 2:23-3:17

## Sunday, March 5, 2023

**Read:** “How can these things be?” (John 3:9, Nicodemus to Jesus)

**Reflect:** Nicodemus, a teacher and priest, comes to Jesus laden with questions. What confuses you about faith, church, or the Bible?

**Pray:** Jesus, why do I struggle to understand what you seem to make so simple?

**Practice:** Do something you're already good at. Are you great at math or reading? Do you love to discuss politics, cars, or food? Find a way to do what you do well today.

## Monday, March 6, 2023

**Read:** “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?” (John 3:10, Jesus to Nicodemus)

**Reflect:** In his conversation with Jesus, Nicodemus has connected *understanding* and *belief*. But the two do not need to go together. For your Christian faith, what mysteries need no more explanation?

**Pray:** God, which of my beliefs prevent me from discovering a deeper relationship with you?

**Practice:** Look for signs of something you know exists but that you can't see: gravity, wind, microorganisms.

## Tuesday, March 7, 2023

**Read:** “How can anyone be born after having grown old?” (John 3:4, Nicodemus to Jesus)

**Reflect:** Can you think of a time when you or someone you know has experienced renewal, found new purpose, or rediscovered an old passion—a time when someone has “been born after having grown old”?

**Pray:** Jesus, how have you made me new today?

**Practice:** Take a walk outside and look for signs of new life: buds on branches, green shoots or bulbs peeping up, new nests.

## Wednesday, March 8, 2023

**Read:** “Can anyone enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4, Nicodemus to Jesus)

**Reflect:** Nicodemus struggles to apply regular logic to the strangeness of Jesus’ teachings. What parts of Christian faith or theology have you needed time to comprehend? About which do you still have questions?

**Pray:** Holy Spirit, if I wait longer, will you help me understand? If not, can you help me live with the things beyond my understanding?

**Practice:** Explore a mystery. Watch a movie or documentary. Read a book or article. If possible, choose something that doesn’t tie up neatly, and notice what it feels like to acknowledge that uncertainty.

## Thursday, March 9, 2023

**Read:** “If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?” (John 3:10, Jesus to Nicodemus)

**Reflect:** Nicodemus was an educated, powerful man. But when he talked to Jesus he felt flummoxed, even a bit out of his depth. Can you recall a time when encountering God left you feeling incompetent, unqualified, or out of your depth?

**Pray:** Jesus, have you seen me pull away from you because I feel incompetent?

**Practice:** Try something new today, something that doesn’t come naturally to you. If you’re not much of a cook, try a simple recipe. If you’re not much of an athlete, go on a walk. Read a book about an unfamiliar topic. Try sudoku or a crossword puzzle.

## Friday, March 10, 2023

**Read:** “I lift my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?” (Psalm 121:1)

**Reflect:** Questions drove the psalmist to God, from whom the psalmist received comfort and certainty. When you bring your concerns to God, do you feel more like Nicodemus—even more confused—or more like the psalmist, who felt comforted with renewed certainty?

**Pray:** God, where can I look to find you today?

**Practice:** Listen to or play some music that reminds you of God’s presence. It doesn’t need to be church music.

**Saturday, March 11, 2023**

**Question jar:** Take time—as an individual or with others in your household—to draw and explore at least one question from your question jar today. Refresh your jar with some new questions.

# WEEK FOUR

MARCH 12 - MARCH 18

**This week's reading:** John 4:5-42

## Sunday, March 12, 2023

**Read:** “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (John 4:9, the woman at the well to Jesus)

**Reflect:** This week we read the story of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well. Some of the questions in this passage are explicit, emerging in the dialogue between Jesus and the woman. Later in the story, we read about some questions people do not have the courage to ask Jesus, or even each other. But the whole passage starts with this one question from the woman. It starts with a woman who could not understand why someone like Jesus would ask for help from—or even speak to—someone like her.

Who would never expect you to ask for help? Even more dramatically, who would never expect *you* to even *speak* to them?

**Pray:** Jesus, what do you ask of me today?

**Practice:** Enjoy a satisfying drink today while doing nothing else. A cold glass of water, a hot cup of tea, a milkshake, some warm cocoa.

## Monday, March 13, 2023

**Read:** “Where do you get that living water?” (John 4:11, the woman at the well to Jesus)

**Reflect:** Jesus tells the woman at the well that he has living water—and that she *should* have known to ask him for some of it. Can you remember a time when you asked God for one thing, and God offered you something else instead?

**Pray:** Jesus, I have asked you for so much. What were you trying to give me instead?

**Practice:** Set a timer for three minutes. Go around the dinner table and share as many things as you can think of that you are grateful for before the timer goes off. Or write down as many things as you can think of during that time. Still have more ideas? How long can you go?

## Tuesday, March 14, 2023

**Read:** “Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” (John 4:12, the woman at the well to Jesus)

**Reflect:** As Jesus offers the woman something truly satisfactory, she compares Jesus to an ancestral source of pride—a story she tells herself about her family—and for a moment, it causes her to back away from Jesus. What stories do you love to tell again and again in your family? How often are those stories connected with the practice of your faith? How much does a particular denominational identity describe your family identity? For instance, do you proudly declare yourself one denomination, but feel in exile because you worship somewhere else? Has faith ever been a point of contention or division in your family?

**Pray:** Jesus, what can I do with the parts of my past that keep me from you?

**Practice:** Look around your home for a family photo. See if you can find one that was taken in church or at a life event that takes place in church (a photo from someone’s wedding, baptism, or confirmation). Who’s in the photo? How are they related to you? Do you know much about the faith lives of these folks right now? If there’s someone in the photo you haven’t seen for a while, give them a call and talk about the day the picture was taken.

## Wednesday, March 15, 2023

**Read:** “He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” (John 4:29, the woman at the well to the people in her community)

**Reflect:** It was not the woman’s certainty, but her doubt—her questions—that drove other people to seek out Jesus. What question drives you to seek out God? Has your faith ever been inspired by the questions of others?

**Pray:** Jesus, when my doubt affects our relationship, what do you want me to know?

**Practice:** Reflect on a doubt. Write something you have doubts about in steam on the bathroom mirror and then watch it disappear, or in chalk on the sidewalk and then hose it off, or in mustard on your lunchtime sandwich then eat it. When the doubt is no longer in front of you, what is left?

## Thursday, March 16, 2023

**Read:** “Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or, ‘Why are you speaking with her?’” (John 4:27)

**Reflect:** Jesus’ disciples were confused when they found Jesus speaking to the woman at the well, but they did not have the courage to ask their questions. When you encounter a situation you do not understand, do you ask questions? Or are you more likely to keep your questions to yourself?

**Pray:** Jesus, what do I do with my discomfort when you call me to love those who make me feel uneasy?

**Practice:** Put your feelings into artwork. After reading the reflection and praying today, how do you feel? Grab paper and pens, pencils, crayons or paint (or choose your own medium). Set a timer for at least three minutes. Draw how you feel, using the colors, shapes, and lines that feel right to you. Keep it abstract or make it concrete. Then step back to admire when the timer goes off. Does the artwork give you any new insights into your emotions?

## Friday, March 17, 2023

**Read:** “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” (John 4:33, the disciples, asking each other about Jesus )

**Reflect:** Here the disciples gossip about Jesus, but they do not talk to him. Why do we gossip about others? What might change if we spoke to people directly instead?

**Pray:** God, can you please give me the courage to share my honest concerns with others?

**Practice:** Play two truths and a lie with your household, with friends, or post it to social media. Tell three statements, two of which are true and one of which is made up. Can others guess which is which? Can you detect others’ truths?

## Saturday, March 18, 2023

**Question jar:** Take time as an individual or with others in your household to draw and explore at least one question from your question jar today. Refresh your jar with some new questions.

# WEEK FIVE

MARCH 19 - MARCH 25

**This week's reading:** John 9:1-41

## Sunday, March 19, 2023

**Read:** “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:8, the disciples to Jesus)

**Reflect:** The disciples ask Jesus a classic question: Why has something bad happened to this person? Is it his fault, or someone else's? Have you ever believed that an illness was a punishment from God, or the consequence of someone's sin? Is there a difference?

**Pray:** Jesus, if I am judging someone for something that is not their fault, can you show me how to love them instead?

**Practice:** Search your yard, local park, or home for something that is different than it first appears: an ugly plant with a beautiful scent, a weird-looking food that tastes really good, a tiny ball that can bounce really high.

## Monday, March 20, 2023

**Read:** “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” (John 9:8, the neighbors about the man born blind)

**Reflect:** Certainly the neighbors would have known and recognized this man who they often saw begging. When Jesus healed him, though, he changed so much as to be almost unrecognizable. Have you ever seen someone go through such a change that they were almost unrecognizable?

**Pray:** Holy Spirit, will you open my eyes today to the work you have done under my nose?

**Practice:** Say hi to someone today whom you see all the time, but rarely interact with: the bus driver, the staff in the lobby, an acquaintance at school or work, the repairperson. Learn their name if you don't know it.

## Tuesday, March 21, 2023

**Read:** “Then the Pharisees began to ask him how he had received his sight.” (John 9:15)



**Reflect:** In this story, the Pharisees use their questions to interrogate, harm, and disbelieve. They point all these accusations at the man born blind. Have you ever felt like you were the victim of an interrogation? What did it feel like?

**Pray:** Jesus, I can picture someone who bothers me, someone who has done me wrong. How would you respond to them?

**Practice:** Write a three-sentence letter to someone who has done you wrong. Don't deliver it.

## Wednesday, March 22, 2023

**Read:** "Where is he?" (John 9:12, the Pharisees to the man born blind)

**Reflect:** The Pharisees ask the man born blind to take them to Jesus—but not because they believe. In this day and age, what might be the *wrong* reason to come to church or look for God?

**Pray:** God, do I judge myself unfairly? How do you see me instead?

**Practice:** Take a good long look in the mirror today. Out loud, give yourself some compliments and affirmations.

## Thursday, March 23, 2023

**Read:** "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to be his disciples?" (John 9:35, the man born blind to the Pharisees)

**Reflect:** Have you ever spoken about Jesus with someone who does not believe and does not want to? What was that experience like? Alternatively, consider a time in your life when someone told *you* about God, but you could not listen.

**Pray:** Holy Spirit, show me someone who does not recognize the truth of your love. What can I say to serve them today?

**Practice:** Intentionally find a way to share God's love today in actions only. Give food to someone who is hungry or clothing to someone in need of it. Do something to show someone that you've listened to them in the past. Show up at an action for justice.

## Friday, March 24, 2023

**Read:** "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"  
"And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."  
(John 9:36, Jesus and the man born blind)

**Reflect:** Jesus seeks out the man born blind after he is kicked out of his community. Have you ever felt rejected? Who sought you out? Maybe you have seen a community, family, or neighborhood reject someone. What could you do to repair the breach?

**Pray:** Jesus, am I satisfied with you, or do I look for something new?

**Practice:** Find something broken, something you may usually throw away, and fix it.

## **Saturday, March 25, 2023**

**Question jar:** Take time as an individual or with others in your household to draw and explore at least one question from your question jar today. Refresh your jar with some new questions.

# WEEK SIX

MARCH 26 - APRIL 1

This week's reading: John 11:1-45

## Sunday, March 26, 2023

**Read:** “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and you are going there again?”  
“Are there not twelve hours of daylight?”  
(John 11:8, the disciples and Jesus, contemplating his next move in ministry)

**Reflect:** This week we see Jesus approach the grave of his friend Lazarus. On the way, he will encounter Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha, who seem certain in their faith until Jesus takes them to the tomb itself. But the scene opens with Jesus’ determination to move forward despite opposition that nearly led to his death. His disciples try to warn him off, but Jesus presses forward. What is so important that you would pursue it, even under threat of death?

**Pray:** Jesus, if today was my last day, where would you want me to go?

**Practice:** Plant something or tend to plants you already have. Put some new seeds or seedlings in the ground. Water your houseplants. Not a green thumb? Notice plants in the places you go, like in an office, classroom, or at church.

## Monday, March 27, 2023

**Read:** “I am the resurrection and the life. . . . Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-6, Jesus to Martha)

**Reflect:** When Jesus met Martha after the death of her brother, his question may have sounded like a test. But Jesus would have known that Mary believed and the extent of her belief. Here, he gave her the opportunity to put her faith into words. Can you remember a moment when *speaking* something about your faith helped make it more real?

**Pray:** Jesus, if you came to bring me resurrection, would I recognize it? Would I be ready? Are you already here?

**Practice:** Take a walk outside and look for signs of new life again: buds on branches, green shoots or bulbs peeping up, new nests. What’s changed since your last walk a few weeks ago?

## Tuesday, March 28, 2023

**Read:** “Where have you laid him?” (John 11:34, Jesus to Mary)

**Reflect:** Jesus asked Mary to take him to her brother's grave. She may not have wanted to return to that place, because her pain was so fresh, but in this way Jesus showed he would go with her to the most terrible place. Where are you afraid to go? And how can you invite Jesus to go with you there?

**Pray:** Jesus, will you come with me to the place I fear?

**Practice:** Do something scary today—not dangerous, but something that's intimidating. Introduce yourself to someone new. Try a different food. Tackle that imposing work, school, or home project.

## Wednesday, March 29, 2023

**Read:** “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” (John 11:40, Jesus to Martha)

**Reflect:** Jesus knew Martha's heart and the depth of her belief. But in a moment of grief, Jesus needed to remind her what she believed. How often do you need to hear reminders of your faith? Does that need increase during a challenging time?

**Pray:** Holy Spirit, you see the trouble I face today. What do I already know that can help me through?

**Practice:** Name five people you know you can count on when things get tough. Reach out to them to remind them that they can count on you too.

## Thursday, March 30, 2023

**Read:** “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” (John 11:37, the funeral-goers to each other)

**Reflect:** The funeral-goers ask a familiar question about Jesus, which means they ask this question about God: Was it fair that Lazarus should die when someone else received a miraculous healing? Do you think God is fair?

**Pray:** God, you could have prevented every trouble in my life, but you have not. What have I gained as a result?

**Practice:** Did you chicken out on tackling something challenging on Tuesday? Here's your chance to try again or to continue the tough task you took up. What is it like to have a second chance to try something intimidating?

## Friday, March 31, 2023

**Read:** “If you, O Lord, should mark my iniquities, Lord, who could stand?” (Psalm 130:3)

**Reflect:** The psalmist notes that nobody can live if God were keeping score or measuring perfect justice. But God is not like that! God forgives even the unforgivable. Can you share a time when you did something that seemed unforgivable but you received grace?

**Pray:** Holy Spirit, who needs a sign of your grace today?

**Practice:** Blow some bubbles! A few weeks ago you practiced apologizing. Now practice forgiveness, for yourself. Go outside. Take a moment to imagine something you have a hard time forgiving yourself for, or a past mistake that still weighs on you. Blow a bubble, and as it floats away and eventually pops, imagine your mistake going with it. If you don't have bubble solution handy, you can whip some up with dish soap and water.

## Saturday, April 1, 2023

**Question jar:** Take time as an individual or with others in your household to draw and explore at least one question from your question jar today. Refresh your jar with some new questions.

# HOLY WEEK

APRIL 2 - APRIL 8

**This week's reading:** Matthew 21:1-11

**Sunday, April 2, 2023**

*Palm / Passion Sunday*

**Read:** “Who is this man?” (Matthew 21:10, the whole city of Jerusalem)

**Reflect:** As Jesus entered the city in a parade of palms, the Gospel of Matthew tells us that the whole city gossiped about his arrival. Why? Perhaps because Jesus’ arrival threatened to change everything they knew. Could this also be the reason those same people called for his death just one week later?

As we head into Holy Week, consider: Have you ever felt like God threatened to disrupt your life—or the life of your city or town—as much as the Covid pandemic has done? As much as other notable events in your life or history?

**Pray:** Jesus, because you live in my life, what do you try to disrupt?

**Practice:** Eat dessert first today. Does a disruption to your schedule change your perspective?

**Monday, April 3, 2023**

**Read:** “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?” (Matthew 26:17, the disciples to Jesus)

**Reflect:** We begin Holy Week with one of two questions the disciples ask that set the stage for Jesus’ last week. (We will hear the other one tomorrow.) When the disciples asked Jesus how to prepare for the upcoming holiday, his answer was very different from their expectations. That evening was more important than they ever could have imagined—maybe *because* they never could have imagined it.

Recall a time when your expectation for an important day didn’t match the reality. How do you find meaning or goodness in a situation that turns out different than you expected?

**Pray:** God, where do you want me to set the table for our celebration?

**Practice:** Share a tiny meal with someone today. Not a big celebratory feast, but a cup of coffee or a snack on the run.

## Tuesday, April 4, 2023

**Read:** “What will you give me if I betray him to you?” (Matthew 27:15, Judas to the chief priests)

**Reflect:** Yesterday we considered the question the disciples asked Jesus to prepare for the Passover. This is the other question that sets the stage for Jesus’ final hours. Have you ever betrayed someone or been betrayed? If so, what do you think led to that moment?

**Pray:** Jesus, I have never traded you away for anything—have I?

**Practice:** Go for a walk outside, and find something that seems to pull you back into winter or something that doesn’t (yet) have signs of new life.

## Wednesday, April 5, 2023

**Read:** “Surely not I, Lord?” (Matthew 27:22, every disciple to Jesus)

**Reflect:** When Jesus told his friends that one of them would betray him, every single one of them asked Jesus if he was the one. Consider, for a moment, what it means if all of them felt so close to betrayal that they couldn’t trust themselves. Then, consider what it means that all of Jesus’ followers would “become deserters” that night (Matthew 26:31). Judas was not the only disciple to walk away from Jesus, he was just the most honest about his price.

Was there a moment in your life when you turned your back on Jesus (or the church) or a moment you got *close* to doing it? If so, what brought you back?

**Pray:** Jesus, what am I afraid to admit to myself—never mind to you?

**Practice:** Do something for your church today without expectation of reward or recognition. Make an anonymous donation. Ask your pastor or worship team if there’s something you can do to help prep for Easter. Drop off goodies for the staff, or pop by to say thanks.

## Thursday, April 6, 2023

### *Maunder Thursday*

**Read:** “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” (John 13:6, Peter to Jesus)

**Reflect:** With disbelief, Peter realizes that Jesus intended to serve him in the humblest way. Peter’s response was, at first, to reject this generous gift. Consider how you receive a gift. Have you ever received a gift so generous you didn’t know how to accept it? Or perhaps consider a smaller generosity. How well do you receive a compliment?

**Pray:** God, why do I find it so hard to accept a kindness?

**Practice:** Write down an affirmation, such as a thoughtful compliment, for those in your household and a few others today. If you have plastic Easter eggs lying around, stuff the affirmation in there and hand it out over this holiday weekend.

## Friday, April 7, 2023

### *Good Friday*

**Read:** “Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” (John 19:10, Pilate to Jesus)

**Reflect:** In the Gospel of Matthew, the most powerful question belongs to Jesus: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46) But in the Gospel of John, Pilate’s questions take center stage. His questions increase in tempo as he looks to escape his quandary. Pilate believes Jesus is innocent but sees no way to release him. He tries to wash his hands, but in John 19:10, he admits his culpability.

The betrayals and failures in the Passion story invite us to consider challenging questions. When have you known the right thing to do, but chose to do something else under pressure?

**Pray:** Jesus, how have I made my dilemmas larger than someone else’s suffering?

**Practice:** Write or make an Easter card (or just a “thinking of you” note) to at least one person outside of your household who is going through a hard time. Put it in the mail or give it to them this weekend.

## Saturday, April 8, 2023

### *The Vigil of Easter*

**Read:** “After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus...asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus.” (John 19:38)

**Reflect:** On Holy Saturday, this time between Christ’s death and resurrection, we can remember those who prepared his body for burial and reflect on our own experiences of death. Can you recall a significant moment from a funeral you attended?

**Pray:** God, where were you on my most terrible day?

**Practice:** Spend some time in silence today. Set a timer for one, three, five, even ten minutes, and sit with your eyes closed, breathing deeply, clearing your mind. Go for a quiet nature walk. Sit in your sanctuary in quiet for a few extra minutes before or after your Easter Vigil service.



# EASTER

Sunday, April 9, 2023

## *Easter Morning*

**Read:** “Woman, why are you weeping?” (John 19:13, angels to Mary)

**Reflect:** Before he died, Jesus repeatedly told his followers that he would rise again to new life. Why do you think they failed to understand what he meant? And for you, what part of the promise of new life seems almost too wonderful to believe?

**Pray:** God, why am I weeping?

**Practice:** Do something that reminds you of the too-wonderful-to-believe Easter JOY today! If that’s being with others, share a meal or a special dessert. If what brings you joy is quieter, take a long bath or enjoy a favorite beverage on the porch alone. Play a game, eat some chocolate, hug a loved one. Then read the Easter story again.