



February 2021



Book of Worship #320

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word lencten, which means "spring." The season is a preparation for celebrating Easter. Historically, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by converts and then became a time for penance by all Christians. The First Sunday describes Jesus' temptation by Satan; and the Sixth Sunday (Passion/Palm Sunday), Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his subsequent passion and death. Because Sundays are always little Easters, the penitential spirit of Lent should be tempered with joyful expectation of the Resurrection.

The Great Three Days - sometimes called the Triduum or Pasch - from sunset Holy Thursday through sunset Easter Day are the climax of Lent (and of the whole Christian year) and a bridge into the Easter Season. These days proclaim the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. During these days, the community journeys with Jesus from the upper room, to the cross, to the tomb, and to the garden. They should be seen as a great unified service beginning with a service of Holy Communion on Holy Thursday and concluding with the services of Easter Day. These services may be connected with a prayer vigil lasting from Holy Thursday evening (or Good Friday) until the first service of Easter and may be accompanied by fasting.

Gleanings

If the purpose of a journey is to travel from one place to another, what is our destination when we travel through any time of disruption? Disasters, both those created by human action (or lack thereof) and those of natural origin, have the effect of forcing those affected into making decisions and taking actions that few are prepared for. One problem with surviving any disaster is we begin to think that we can make it through anything only to have to relearn that we are neither all powerful nor all knowing.

We have been on a journey since COVID-19 grew to afflict much of the world. The impact of this virus upon the people of the world has created panic, fear, uncertainty, rumor, speculation, misinformation, and a frantic search for anything to help us fight against its effect. Given that we have never experienced this strain of novel coronavirus, we have scrambled to find anything that would offer a cure, relief from the suffering, and a way to prevent it from infecting more people. We have also struggled with how we can protect ourselves against infection.

Where are we now after a year on this journey? Some are grieving the sudden death of one or more loved ones who succumbed to the effect of COVID-19 upon their systems. Some have survived with varying conditions on their health both physical and mental. Some remain isolated hoping to lessen the chances that they will become infected. And some by choice or necessity are taking their chances – some availing themselves of the best practices for limiting exposure and some not – and going out into society to do what they feel is essential for themselves and their families however they are constituted.

Though there are now vaccines available, there is considerable distress over the limited amounts, various schedules for administering available doses, and unanswered questions of effectiveness, length of protection, and any long-term effects. Added to these unknowns are the assertions of some that all of this was manufactured to further some unidentified purpose or agenda by parties unknown. In other words, some are spreading far more fear than help resulting in some being afraid to do anything. Who should we believe when there are so many sources of information and limited means for verification?

While I do not have answers to these questions, I do have hope. As I write this article, the sky is grey, the temperature is in the thirties, and the wind makes being outdoors very uncomfortable. Yet, the bare and lifeless appearing trees and plants are preparing for spring, and the sun continues to shine above the clouds and warm the earth. Birds found some of the bread that I broke up and threw into the back yard and carried it to a





protected perch for eating. Our Father continues to watch over all of creation and, I am assured, will continue to do so.

As followers of Jesus, we have the responsibility to love our neighbor as we would ask that we be loved. Having received that love, we can understand the needs of those around us. With the calm assurance that the Spirit gives us, we can relieve the anxieties of those who are struggling to find help in these trying times. The brokenness that shows itself in our fear of being worthy of God's care can be healed by the knowledge of God's persistent efforts to show us compassion, consolation, mercy, and forgiveness. These are often expressed through the loving presence of another who has traveled that same road.

Thus, we have hope. All that can beset us is no match for the overwhelming love of God. We are never alone. We are never forgotten. We are not cut off from God's presence. We are never denied God's love because of who we are, where we came from, what we look like, or how we came to be. This journey is but the latest iteration of travels from one place to another that have been part of every person's life throughout history.

I pray, as we all do, that this journey will soon come to an end so that we can move past the chaos of these days. My hope is that we will all find strength in our faith to persist in doing what offers help, hope, and healing to all. May God's love guide our efforts to care for those around us. May our lives proclaim peace.

Pastor Braxton ><>

Dear members of the Grace family,

One of the changes brought on by the pandemic has proven to be fairly popular with a number of the people in our congregations. What started out as a response to the need to meet for business purposes has become an effective way of involving more people in one of the basic benefits of being part of a church. I am, of course, speaking of using online video resources to host a Bible or book study.

Looking at the resources available and the church year that stretches before us, I have picked six studies that I pray will help us to grow in our faith by improving our understanding of The Bible. Some will be for specific seasons in the church year (Advent and Lent) while the rest will fit under the umbrella of Ordinary (name comes from the use of ordinals to number the weeks that are not covered by specific seasons).

I am presenting this list for the upcoming year in hopes that you will see the range of topics and make plans to participate as your schedules will permit. Each study will involve purchasing a book that we will order collectively so that we can avoid sales tax and use free shipping. Orders will need to be complete three weeks before the classes start so that there will be enough time to get the books distributed.

Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent is this month so I ask that you let me know quickly if you would like to participate in this study (see below). Some of these studies will have a video component and all will require a computer or smart phone that can host a Zoom session. Please let me know your questions regarding how we use this format. I also welcome your suggestions for future studies that you would like to be part of.

We have a number of skilled teachers and facilitators among our members and I would like you to consider hosting a class, too. Please let me know if you would be willing to host a study.

Here are the studies projected for 2021 and early 2022.

- Seven Words – Listening to Christ From the Cross; Susan Robb; six weeks (This will be our study for Lent beginning Feb. 24)
- The New Testament Challenge - An Eight-Week Journey Through the Story of Jesus, His Church, and His Return; Jeff Manion (after Easter, beginning April 7; we will read the New Testament)



Jacky Reavley
Sue Henderson
Verna Anderson

Owen Kehrer
Our Church
Our Country



- Sermon on the Mount - A Beginner's Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven; Amy-Jill Levine; six weeks (beginning June 16)
- Questions God Asks; Dale Larson; nine weeks (beginning August 4)
- Reading the Old Testament Through Jewish Eyes - A Study of the Scriptures Jesus Read; Rabbi Evan Moffic; six weeks (beginning October 13)
- As yet unselected Advent Study to start on December 1
- Called: Hearing and Responding to God's Voice; Susan Robb; six weeks (beginning January 12)

This list is not set in stone so there may be changes to titles and dates if necessary. Please let me know of your desire to participate in one or more studies by sending me an email (abracot.bc@gmail.com), a text, or a phone call (423-580-3387 - leave a message if I don't answer). If you want to tell me at church, please write it down for me as I am more focused in that time on worship and will not remember. Do not be concerned if you must miss one or more sessions in a series; I will get the material to you if you want it.

Again, if you have any questions or suggestions, please let me know. Thank you and may God bless us and keep us.
Pastor Braxton ><



Start a new practice in the new year - visit UpperRoomBooks.com and discover New Every Morning, a free email resource featuring daily words of wisdom and faith from Upper Room Books.

Like *The Upper Room* daily devotional guide and other ministries of The Upper Room, New Every Morning invites people to create daily time with God. Whether as a companion to other daily devotional resources or as a stand-alone practice, New Every Morning introduces readers to inspirational and thought-provoking quotes from Upper Room Books authors.



February - Ken & Vikki Shumake, Lindsey Burgess

The Sanctuary area will be sanitized every Sunday evening.

If you are willing to help keep our church cleaned and sanitized, please contact Sharon Loftis.