

# A Lenten Devotional Journey

## Using Hymns of Our Faith



Dedicated to the Glory of God  
and

The Choirs of Washington Street:

The "BIG" choir (the congregation) & the Dedicated Members of the Sanctuary Choir

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*Using Hymns from the United Methodist Hymnal and The Faith We Sing Hymnal Supplement*

*Bonus Section: Thoughts and Reflections on John Rutter's Requiem*

Please use this booklet for your personal use and/or join us for one of two small  
group discussions, which will be held

Wednesdays beginning March 5th from 1:15 - 2:00 pm or

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To register email Rev. Alston at [aflippert@umcsc.org](mailto:aflippert@umcsc.org).

## A Lenten Journey through Hymns of Our Faith

**When I came to the spring today, I said, LORD, God of my master Abraham, if you will, please grant success to the journey on which I have come. (Genesis 24:42)i**

This devotional resource is presented for the congregation of Washington Street and is designed both as an introduction for those who have never undertaken any practice of Lent, or as a new resource for those who have practiced Lent for years. Hymns express our faith through music, and their texts contain images and Scripture references that provide opportunity for personal reflection as well as enhancing our worship together when we gather to sing them.

This hymn devotional can either enhance other studies you may be doing or, perhaps, give you a place to start if you have not previously taken part in a study or in a Lenten practice of any kind. Some of the suggestions for Lenten practice may be activities you have been doing for years or maybe activities that you have never done. Whether you are a seasoned observer of Lent or this is your first Lenten journey, may you find encouragement, insights and most importantly may you “grow in the knowledge and love of the only wise God, through Jesus Christ to whom be the glory forever.” (Rom. 16:27). Before we move to the hymns, let us explore some of the history of Lent, and its implications for us today.

### Lent—What and Why?

What is Lent? In our United Methodist context, the period of Lent totals forty days, beginning with Ash Wednesday, and ending on the first Sunday of Eastertide. The Sundays during Lent do not count in the forty days (we call them “little Easters”). Therefore, the number of days we observe, beginning Ash Wednesday and ending on the first Sunday of Eastertide total forty. How did the season and practice of a journey involving a forty-day period of time before Easter evolve? Certainly, the Bible does not tell us specifically to “observe forty days in the practice of penance, self-reflection and self-denial.” There exists a labyrinthine history behind the season of Lent. Two books that explore the issue in depth are listed in the resources at the end of this devotional.

One aspect of Lent that has been an important emphasis through the development of Lent is modeled after the scriptural account of Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness and his willingness to surrender to human suffering without succumbing to temptation. Another emphasis in the development of present-day Lent is that a period of time emerged into a time of preparation for catechumens (those in training to be baptized). There exists a scriptural basis for relating baptism to Lent. All three Synoptic gospels, i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke (with varying amounts of detail) contain a significant commonality: Jesus’ time in the wilderness directly follows his baptism. Many of us have been baptized, and Lent is an opportunity to, as Martin Luther declares, “Live in repentance, as you walk in Baptism. Baptism not only illustrates such a new life, but also produces, begins, and exercises it.”<sup>ii</sup> Robert Webber embraces and expresses the idea of remembering and living our baptism as:

The putting off of the old life and the putting on of the new . . . a continuous action--a constant turning away from sin toward God, throughout one's entire life. Lent orders our spirituality back to its beginnings, back to the basics of repentance and faith. To do this means to be continually renewed by the commitment of our original spiritual experience.<sup>iii</sup>

Consider the words used each time any person is baptized in our church (see page 34 in our hymnal). The person being baptized (or the people responsible for a child) is asked a series of questions. During this liturgy, congregants are called to remember their own baptism and renew the covenant made then. The practice of Lent provides a means to enter into a time of baptismal spirituality. Webber relates the concept of remembering our baptism with repentance through the image of turning: “We review our vows and enter into a fresh conversion experience with Jesus Christ by an act of *metanoia* (turning) from sin to Christ . . . Lent calls us to **fast, pray and give alms** [in today’s language the latter is sometimes referred to as “works of service”]. The nature of these actions . . . helps us to embody what it means to turn from sin and put our trust in Jesus.”<sup>iv</sup> Webber also reminds us that the three activities of Lent are not a simple matter of following a formula of self-denial and sacrifice alone: “Our Lenten spirituality not only calls on us to *turn away* from a sin that holds us in its power but to *turn toward* a virtue that replaces our sin.”<sup>v</sup> [emphasis added].

### Throughout These Forty Days—Lent and the Idea of Time

**Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)**

I strongly believe that we are people who yearn for a structure of time as a way of creating boundaries and a certain grounding. Scripture expresses to us that this yearning is Spirit-breathed. “And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night and let them serve as signs to mark sacred **times**, and days and years.’” (Genesis 1:14)

One important concept to note is that in the Hebrew language, the term for “forty days” is idiomatic and meant to express “more than a few” rather than the specific number. Thus, the mention of “forty days” that appears in many places throughout Scripture is rooted in a more general meaning. I believe our present-day literal view of forty days expresses a beautiful example of the way Scripture can provide contemporary meaning for us and our current culture. In the concrete understanding of “forty days” we find grounding. The history of Lent, along with many other Christian observances, reveals a desire for tradition, for custom, and a longing for biblical meaning. Thus, the scriptural, historical, and current day understanding of forty days combine to infuse this specific time period with meaning. In an uncertain world, we find comfort in the structure of being ruled by the clock and the calendar. God enters our calendar/clock ordered sense of time (Greek word *chronos*) and calls us to a deeper concept that is God’s time (Greek word *Kairos*). Structure within a spiritual framework reminds us that ultimately, even if this world is not our home, God meets us here and gives continuous guidance on our earthly journey.

### The Personal Practice of Lent—Some Specifics and Suggestions

Before we begin to look at each hymn used for the devotional, let us explore briefly the three concepts mentioned earlier in the Webber quote: Fasting, Prayer and Alms-Giving.

## Fasting

The concept of fasting appears throughout Scripture and has been a vital part of spiritual practice in general, as well as Lenten practice. There are many approaches to fasting, and one of many reading sources concerning fasting from food is mentioned at the end of this booklet. Bobby Gross offers the *expansion* of the word *fast* with a description of our choice to take on “a posture of humility and undertake practices that sharpen our spiritual awareness.”<sup>vi</sup> If you are not moved to use food fasting in your Lenten practice, ask yourself this question: what activities or habits in my life are keeping me from feasting on the Word of God? Whatever the impediment is, fast from it for this Lenten season. Examples other than food: social media, alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, television shows, etc. Spend some time between Sunday, February 28, and Ash Wednesday, March 1, considering this question and praying that God leads you in the direction of fasting from whatever it is that causes you to create a wall between you and God.

If we associate the word *fast* with the other two words *prayer* and *alms-giving*, we may begin to understand the ways we create barriers to hearing God’s word through prayer and thus fail to be obedient messengers of the Gospel through the giving of alms. As you pray and prepare to fast, do not stop there--frame a personal statement of fasting and expand it to include these words: I will *fast* on \_\_\_\_\_ and I will *feast* on \_\_\_\_\_.

Whatever you choose in terms of fasting – resist the urge to trivialize it by giving up something maybe inconsequential (as an example, if you don’t like cake that much, and that is what you give up, it doesn’t create a space for spiritual growth the way the sacrifice of some other thing that you deeply enjoy might). Also, resist the urge to tell others about it. I have often been guilty of talking about what I’m giving up, making a big deal of my sacrifice, even to the point of whining. Remember the words of Scripture: “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:16-18).

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## Prayer and Devotional Time

Do you have a regular time of devotion each day? Consider the words of theologian and modern day martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “. . . every day in which I do not penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of God’s Word in Holy Scripture is a lost day for me.”<sup>vii</sup> If you have not developed a daily practice, use this devotion or other materials and make a promise to God that you will give God a portion of your day. Here are some suggestions that, through trial and error, have aided me in my own daily practice.

- Use a writing journal. The act of physically writing our thoughts is valuable. There are studies that would suggest that writing long-hand improves and helps us retain cognitive skills, helps us keep focused and increases creativity. If you are resistant to the idea of a journal, a fill-in-the-blank book-mark style worksheet may be found below, easily torn out and copied .
- Make yourself a time and a chosen place. Pick a spot where you are comfortable. Make sure you enjoy your surroundings and the view, such as through a window. Have a place to store pens, reading glasses, Bible, journal, etc. This suggestion may seem to be a no-brainer, but many of us are so busy, we don’t think about small things that help us with our time management. You could easily spend ten valuable minutes trying to find your materials. Had they been already near your special place, you could have taken more time with your devotional. Regarding the issue of having time, I heard on the radio the other day: “If you say you are too busy to spend time with God every day, then you are too busy!” Decide what works and commit. Whether you “feel” like it or not, go to your designated place when the time comes and sit down and begin. If you find yourself resisting, then simply sit down. Often taking that first step will launch you into the next step and then the next step, etc. Tell your family that this is your time and to allow you some space and quiet. If you are a parent, especially a stay-at-home mom, consider what example you are setting for your children by taking this time and space. (If your children are very young, then there is always nap time!) The point is, to commit consistently and prayerfully for these next forty days. Watch what God will do for you, for your spiritual development, and the effect this commitment will have on your outlook on life.
- Much of the music mentioned in this devotional material has provided YouTube links so you can listen as you study. If you have time, you can always search for different representations of the hymns listed. Below are three different hymn choruses our choir often uses for a call to worship on Sunday mornings. Begin by reading the words to one of those hymn choruses.

### ***May the Words of My Mouth (Psalm 19:14)***

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart  
be acceptable to you, my Strength and my Redeemer.

Lovely anthem by Elaine Hagenberg:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3j9BclzI0k>



OR

**Open Our Eyes, Lord (John 12:21; Eph. 1:18-18)**

*The Faith We Sing* #2086 Text by Bob Cull, 1976

Open our eyes Lord  
We want to see Jesus,  
To reach out and touch Him  
And say that we love Him.

Open our ears Lord  
And help us to listen,  
Open our eyes Lord  
We want to see Jesus.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CInsSxXvpfs>



OR

**Surely the Presence (Psalm 16:11; Isaiah 6:1-8)**

Surely the Presence of the Lord is in this place;

I can feel His mighty power and His grace!

I can hear the brush of angels' wings,

I see glory on each face.

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hD9-1ZQctV4>



- Write, every day, in your journal or on your worksheet **three blessings**. Be specific and time sensitive. Try to find things in your recent daily life to be grateful for, rather than just say generally "thank you for my family, job, home, etc." Obviously, you are grateful for those things, but if you make your thanks specific, you will begin to notice more and more of God's daily blessings in your life. Example – "I am grateful that I was able to have breakfast with my parents yesterday" or "I am grateful that \_\_\_\_ called me and thanked me for \_\_\_\_." This little system will help you to see God's goodness in everyday life, despite the many trials and worries that some days bring.
- Include three things you need to **confess**. As with the **three blessings**, be specific and time sensitive. As much as it hurts to admit things we have done wrong, this additional activity is truly transformative. It is so cleansing and freeing to admit when we have not been at our best, even as God's word assures us that we are forgiven as far as the east is from the west. (Psalm 103:12) There is an old cliché that says, "confession is good for the soul". This statement proclaims a truth and is far from being cliché. Unlike the **three blessings**, the **three confessions** can be, and usually are, variations of similar habits and traits we all possess as imperfect humans. It is helpful to look for trends in our confessions to begin to effect change. As United Methodists we are urged by our founder, John Wesley, to "strive toward perfection!"
- Write names of those for whom you are praying. *Start* with those people who have hurt you, made you angry, or disappointed you, no matter what they have done. (Ref. Matthew 5:44) Next, write the names of those in your life who have specific needs and issues. The writing of the names gives focus as well as the opportunity to go back and re-read some of the previous days' prayer concerns. Thus, when you say to someone "you are in my prayers" it is NOT a cliché, but a reality.
- Spend the last few minutes of your time to review the hymn material included in this booklet. These hymns are just a small example of ways we sing our faith, pray our faith and live our faith. My prayer for you is that through the process of using the hymns contained in this study, you will develop a deeper understanding of the importance of hymns in our worship. Each hymn contains a short devotional which seeks to deepen your understanding of the hymn itself. Once you have read the week's hymn devotional, each day afterwards read the text to yourself again in preparation for corporate singing on the following Sunday.

## Alms-giving (Works of Service)

The word alms is defined as money or goods given to those in need as an act of charity and is used many times in the King James Version of the Bible. It comes from the Old English word *ælmesse* and ultimately from a Greek word meaning "pity, mercy." In its original sense, when you give alms, you are dispensing mercy. When considering the Greek origin and its meaning, almsgiving can be money, it can be time (such a precious commodity for many of us!) or it can be some kind of service of mercy that represents answering a great need by a sacrifice on your part. Prior to Ash Wednesday and throughout this Lenten journey, pray for God to show you ways that you may "give alms" in the way that Scripture tells us.(viii)

More scriptural examples include Prov. 14:30, 19:17; 21:13, and 29:7; John 12:6; Galatians 2:10; Acts 9:36; Matthew 6:1-4; Luke 11:40-42, 12:32 and Acts 3.

Fast, Pray, and Give Alms. Rest in the knowledge that the journey is your goal. Go deep in your personal journey! Live these forty days in the knowledge and joy that you will be blessed beyond measure.

### **Daily Worksheet (tear here and copy, if desired)**

#### Three Blessings:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#### Three Confessions:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#### Prayer Concerns:

## Hymn Study

In embarking on this journey through the days of Lent, we must note that this journey is most private and personal. As a result, the hymns used as devotions will strike each of us differently, holding deeply personal meanings and inspiration.

For those doing this devotional with the online version, there are Youtube links provided at the end of each hymn. If you want to further study different arrangements, in many cases there is quite a selection of available recordings. Enjoy comparing them.

Below are some thoughts and suggestions for reading a hymn as text:

- Who is the hymn addressing? An “up” arrow means you are addressing God. A “down” arrow is God addressing you. An arrow pointing horizontally expresses an exhortation, meaning an emphatic urging for someone to do something. Exhortation is derived from a Greek word meaning “a calling near or for” (as an advocate or helper who should appeal on one’s behalf). Many hymns serve as inspiring songs of exhortation to fellow worshipers. The Apostle Paul urges us to sing to one another (Col. 3; Eph. 5:19). Dr. Constance Cherry states eloquently the concept of exhortation within a good hymn text:

An exhortative hymn does not remove God from the process – it points us to God and ways we can encourage a relationship with God through the text. Sometimes these hymns are sung to others for encouragement or edification. Sometimes they are sung to oneself for the purpose of encouragement. Sometimes they are meant for non-believers, to plead for the lost.<sup>ix</sup>

Ponder the texts of the hymns in relation to whom it addresses.

Note also that in reading Psalms, the Bible’s “hymnal,” the arrow application previously described often helps clarify the text and increases understanding. Many Psalms as well as other scripture contain passages wherein there is a shift between who is the speaker and who is the listener. The arrow up/down/sideways can clarify certain Scripture as well as the hymns we will address.

- Look for scriptural references. Finding the biblical basis for the hymn text helps us to ground ourselves in the learning and absorbing of God’s word. Some references are provided; there are often many more contained in the various stanzas of the hymns. If a Scripture comes to mind that you find relevant to the hymn, you are not wrong! Grasping the concept that when we sing hymns, we are singing Scripture is the main point. Often the text is born from the images and concepts of the Scripture rather than direct quotes. As Scripture reflects our faith, then in singing hymns based on Scripture, we are exemplifying the title of our supplemental hymnal *The Faith We Sing*.
- Look for imagery in the poetry and ask why the author of the text may have expressed him/herself in that imagery. For instance, the hymn text “Onward Christian Soldiers” was written during the Civil War. Knowledge of that fact increases understanding of its inclusion in our hymnal despite its war-infused metaphor. Bobby Gross emphasizes the “power of image and the strength of metaphor, especially in the hands of the Spirit.”<sup>x</sup> The metaphor and imagery of our hymns as they reflect Scripture hold the type of power about which Gross writes.
- During Lent, it is our custom at Washington Street, to avoid singing “Alleluia” in our hymns, anthems and responses, although for us, it is not an absolute, as in some denominations and traditions. Even though each Sunday is a “little Easter,” we do observe the custom of not singing “Alleluia” at Washington Street as a way of a verbal fast in remembrance that we are in the midst of our Lenten journey, even as we always remember and celebrate the Risen Lord. The omission of the “Alleluia” during worship heightens our anticipation of, and proclamation of the word in celebration on Easter morning.



## Hymn Singing in Worship

When we sing, we look 'out' to God; at the same time, God looks 'in' and joins in the song (Zeph. 3:17)."(xi)

Following personal study, on Ash Wednesday and each Sunday morning during the Lenten season, we will lift our voices together in the singing of the previous week's devotional hymn. The beauty of singing hymns in our worship is that together we are lifting up our faith as we sing the poetry that gave birth to the hymn itself. We breathe together, we sing the same words together, and, in the case of our devotional hymns, we are lifting our voices together with the texts we have first considered in our personal devotion time. May this practice be meaningful to you as we journey through this time of Lent, first as pilgrims alone, and then as siblings in the unity of Christ, and most especially as members of Washington Street.

Our seven hymns selected as part of this Lenten devotional are most likely familiar tunes to most of us. Their selection is based on the season of Lent, in combination with the Scripture lesson that is often used for the sermon on Ash Wednesday and each subsequent Sunday through Passion (Palm) Sunday.

In church, as you sing each hymn, are you more deeply aware of the text and its dialogical qualities? Are we speaking to God? Is God speaking to us? Are we praising God together, or are we exhorting one another?

In terms of likes and dislikes of certain hymns, Scripture offers us a way to approach our corporate singing: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." (Philippians 2:3-4) This Scripture counters one of the most human of all faults--the tendency for us to think that just because we feel a certain way, everyone else either does or should feel the same. Here is my own true story about "likes and dislikes" of certain hymns. On September 9, 2001, my very first Sunday as director of music at another church, I went to the grocery store in the afternoon. As I entered the store, I ran into a church member who complimented and congratulated me on my first Sunday. BUT, she said to me, "Why did we sing \_\_\_\_\_? I just don't like that hymn!" Being a novice in having the responsibility of hymn selection, I made a "note to self" never to sing that hymn in church again. I proceeded with my grocery shopping and a few minutes later, I ran into someone else who, again, complimented me on my first Sunday and followed with this remark about the same hymn: "Thank you so much for choosing the hymn \_\_\_\_\_! We sang that at my grandmother's funeral and it blesses me to sing it, as I picture her in heaven." God taught me a valuable lesson about church music through these

two encounters that day. Each of us is blessed by different music, much of which has to do with our upbringing and life experience. Regardless of what blesses us, would we deny the blessing of those who we call our church family by insisting that we never sing a certain hymn because we don't like it or we don't know it? C.S. Lewis expresses this concept:

There are two music situations on which I think we can be confident that a blessing rests. One is . . . [when] a man of trained and delicate taste, humbly and charitably sacrifices his own . . . desires and gives the people humbler and coarser fare than he would wish, in a belief . . . that he can thus bring them to God. The other is where the . . . unmusical [person] humbly and patiently and above all silently, listens to music which he cannot . . . fully appreciate, in the belief that it somehow glorifies God, and that if it does not edify him this must be his own defect. To both, church music will have been a **means of grace**; not the music they have liked, but the music they have disliked. They have both offered, sacrificed, their taste in the fullest sense. (Emphasis added)(xii)

As we sing any hymn, not just the ones represented in this devotional, consider your attitude about the ones that do not move you either due to unfamiliarity or a dislike of the style. Chances are very good someone around you is enjoying the singing of that hymn. Many Sundays, you are given, as Lewis says, "a means of grace."

## Preparing for Ash Wednesday

As we consider the ways we will individually practice Lent, Ash Wednesday prompts us to dedicate the next weeks to God, and to pray for strength when we feel weak in our resolve.

### **Ash Wednesday UM Hymnal--#269 Lord, Who throughout These Forty Days**

**Scripture reference: Matthew 4:1-2 Then [following his baptism] Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.**

**Additional Scripture references: Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13**

Text from Claudia F. Hernaman, *Child's Book of Praise; A Manual of Devotion in Simple Verse* (1873)

1. Lord, Who throughout these forty days  
For us didst fast and pray,  
Teach us with Thee to mourn our sins  
And close by Thee to stay.
2. As Thou with Satan didst contend,  
And didst the victory win,  
O give us strength in Thee to fight,  
In Thee to conquer sin.
3. As Thou didst hunger bear, and thirst,  
So teach us, gracious Lord,  
To die to self, and chiefly live  
By Thy most holy Word.
4. And through these days of penitence,  
And through Thy passiontide,  
Yea, evermore in life and death,  
Jesus, with us abide.
5. Abide with us, that so, this life  
Of suffering over past,  
An Easter of unending joy  
We may attain at last!

Listening Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAGMA8NrGmU>



Isn't it fascinating that this hymn was written as a children's devotion book, considering it has such a developed concept of what these days represent? Notice that the text doesn't say "those forty days" but rather "these forty days," bringing to light that we are living Christ's forty days in the present. The hymn rehearses the story of Jesus' wilderness journey, while at the same time relating it to our present journey.

This text is a prayer, written directly to Jesus. (Up-arrow!) Consider this rehearsal of the events of Jesus' journey in the wilderness, when it is written in such a prayer form. Does God need to hear a recount of God's story? Certainly not! I believe God loves to hear us recount the narrative, so that we never forget. Consider much of the liturgy of the church, such as the baptism liturgy, and how we recount again and again the story of Creation and the continued story of God's activity throughout the entire Bible. In this hymn, the first three stanzas narrate Jesus' trials in the first phrase, as each of the second phrases for each stanza contain a prayer for us to follow Jesus' path during *our* forty days.

As you reflect on the hymn text, recall that Jesus was a man steeped in the Hebrew tradition and Scripture. The Jesus to whom we sing and pray in this hymn is one who exemplifies his willingness to become truly human. Unlike anyone else, he resists the temptations, and proves he is fully God. As you ponder the hymn text, read the detailed accounts of the wilderness time in Matthew and Luke. These accounts flesh out the line of the hymn: "as Thou with Satan didst contend." Notice in these scriptural accounts that Jesus does not engage in a debate or argument with the tempter. He quotes Scripture. Jesus provides a clear example for us in our own facing of temptations – quote Scripture!

The fourth stanza begins with focus on the present day, recounting for us what the forty days represents today, including the Passion week (Holy week). The final stanza contains the eschatological (meaning in theological terms, *concerning the final days*) theme of Life Everlasting and "an Easter of unending joy." Savor the richness of this prayer as you read the words to yourself in devotion. Sing them fully when we meet to receive the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday.

As you receive the ashes, recall the words we sang within the hymn as remembrance of what Jesus did for us during the forty days in the wilderness, beginning of his ministry on earth. Recall then his ultimate sacrifice on the cross while we were yet sinners. Sinners, yet sinners redeemed by the great love of Christ. You will hear the words "remember you are dust". Recall that though we are dust, God loves even dust. "He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap." (Psalm 113:7) Consider the Scripture references for the hymn tonight as they relate to you in a personal sense. In the more detailed accounting found in the Gospel of Matthew, we see Jesus in a weakened, hungry state as he encounters Satan. Note again, as mentioned earlier, that Jesus does not engage in lots of argument with Satan, who quotes Scripture in the second temptation. Jesus, as a person deeply grounded in Scripture, quotes it right back to the tempter. In the final temptation, Satan gives up on the Scripture and makes a grandiose promise, to which Jesus replies with Scripture. How might that impact you on your journey this Lent?

All three narratives in the synoptic Gospels have an important commonality – the temptation story follows the baptism of Jesus, though Luke's baptismal account is followed with some genealogy before the narrative continues. Does the sequence of baptism (high point) followed by the wilderness time (low point) hold significance for you?

Below are the first words of each of the three accounts of the beginning of the forty-day wilderness journey of Jesus:

Matthew 4:1: Then was Jesus **led up** (Greek word *Anechthe*) by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Mark 1:12: And immediately the Spirit **drove** (Greek word *Ekballei*) Him into the wilderness.

Luke 4:1: And Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from the Jordan and **was led** (Greek word *Egeto*) by the Spirit into the wilderness.

Notice that Mark's account (generally agreed by scholars as the first written account of the life of Jesus) uses the verb **drove** compared to the other two accounts' use of the verb **led**. How might this difference in verbs apply to you as you begin your journey? Each year that we encounter the season of Lent is different for us, as we find ourselves in different life circumstances from years before. Are you being **led** because you feel some kind of dull ache that prompts you to take a spiritual journey for a closer connection to God? Are you feeling **driven**, due to a life changing event, such as the death of a loved one?

Read and remember what Jesus actually went through during the forty days and use the prayer that follows. He went through extreme suffering at the beginning of his ministry, a foreshadowing of the torture that was to follow as he was crucified. Give thanks to him as you remember through the words of the text.



## 1st Sunday in Lent—UM Hymnal #349 Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

Text by Helen Howarth Lemmel

Scripture reference: "After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision."  
(Acts 26:19).

See also Isaiah 45:22; Hebrews 12:1-2; Proverbs 4:24-26; Matthew 26:25-32; Matthew 11:28-30

1. O soul, are you weary and  
troubled? No light in the  
darkness you see? There's light  
for a look at the Savior, And  
life more abundant and free!

*Refrain:*

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.

2. Through death into life everlasting  
He passed, and we follow Him there;  
O'er us sin no more hath dominion—  
For more than conqu'rors we are!

3. His Word shall not fail you—He promised;  
Believe Him, and all will be well:  
Then go to a world that is dying,  
His perfect salvation to tell!



Listening link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKAPHjficlc>

This hymn has been a long-standing "theme song" of a special Sunday school class at a former church. They sing it every Sunday as they begin their time together. In most hymnals of today, including our UM hymnal, only the chorus appears. We consider the entire hymn in our devotion this week. On Sunday, we will sing the entire hymn, as a soloist leads the verses and invites the congregation to join on the chorus. If you bring this sheet with you, feel free to sing the verses, too! The hymn was written by missionary Helen Howarth Lemmel, and published in the year 1918 under the title "Heavenly Vision." Singer Alan Jackson sang the entire song at his father-in-law's funeral in 2005 and later included this complete version on a gospel album.

In reflecting on the original title of this hymn, we recall the narrative of Paul in Acts 26 as he relates his story of conversion to King Agrippa as he awaits trial. Paul's gripping story of conversion and his reference to this "heavenly vision" can bring a focus to what it means, indeed to "turn our eyes upon Jesus."

These words hold a strong metaphor for us. So many visions in this world seem to be brighter, so many voices are louder than the heavenly vision of Jesus. ( See also Colossians 3:1.)

One personal story comes to mind in my own reflection on this hymn. Our family had a dog named Barnabas, whose is named after one of Paul's companions in ministry. (Acts 4:36) Barnabas (meaning "Son of Encouragement") was *almost* a perfect dog and he was the epitome of his name: always close by, always anticipating our family's moods and trying to just "be there." He had one big fault. Whenever we were out walking and he saw another person coming, or especially another dog, he lunged and barked. We finally discovered, through many frustrating walks with him, that if we anticipates such an encounter by saying "look at me, Barnabas—keep looking at me," we often got around the undesirable encounter with the other person or dog. I wonder, as we walk through this life with its bright, earthly visions and loud sounds that do not glorify God, if God doesn't say to us "look at me—just keep looking at me." Note the edifying words spoken to others and spoken to ourselves. Sing the chorus to yourself next time you are tempted, lonely, sad or discouraged.

Also, absorb the words of exhortation in the final stanza "go to a world that is dying." Ponder the ways that you might first turn your eyes to the Savior, then look out to the world with different eyes that see where you can make a difference!



**2nd Sunday in Lent: The Faith We Sing #2149 Living for Jesus**  
**Text by Thomas O. Chisholm; Tune by C. Harold Lowden (late 1800-s to 1963)**

**Scripture reference: Romans 12:1-2**

1. Living for Jesus, a life that is true,  
Striving to please Him in all that I do;  
Yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free,  
This is the pathway of blessing for me.
  2. Living for Jesus Who died in my place,  
Bearing on Calv'ry my sin and disgrace;  
Such love constrains me to answer His call,  
Follow His leading and give Him my all.
- Refrain:*  
O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee,  
For Thou, in Thy atonement, didst give Thyself  
for me;  
I own no other Master, my heart shall be Thy  
throne;  
My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for  
Thee alone.
3. Living for Jesus, wherever I am,  
Doing each duty in his holy name;  
Willing to suffer affliction and loss,  
Deeming each trial a part of my cross.
  4. Living for Jesus through earth's little while,  
My dearest treasure, the light of His smile;  
Seeking the lost ones He died to redeem,  
Bringing the weary to find rest in Him.

Listening link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzrNMoCJhyl>



Generally, this devotional series seeks to delve deeply into the text of each hymn, with little or no emphasis on the tune, other than to seek the most well-known tunes for use in our worship services. However, it is notable that this gospel hymn tune has an unusual background in that the tune was actually written for another text around 1915, called "Sunshine Song." The composer of the tune, Mr. Lowden, was preparing a publication of hymns in 1917 and was convinced that the tune needed a stronger text. He replaced the original title "Sunshine Song" with the title "Living for Jesus" and asked Mr. Chisholm to write a new text. Mr. Chisholm was somewhat reluctant, stating that he had no idea how to write a text to pre-composed music. However, Mr. Lowden continued to insist that God had led him [Mr. Lowden] to select Mr. Chisholm to write this text. xiii It is indeed fascinating that Mr. Lowden had already given the hymn its title. Mr. Chisholm began his work on the poetry with more restrictions than a poet is accustomed to having.\*

As you are now into a full week of your Lenten practice, take the words to heart "I own no other Master" as you undoubtedly face moments of temptation regarding whatever you are sacrificing in your Lenten fast, or perhaps when you are tempted to skip your daily devotional time due to the busy-ness of life. When you sit down for your daily devotion, you are indeed "doing each duty in his holy name." Pray that everything you do be in Christ's name and be thoughts, desires and behaviors worthy of him.

As with most gospel songs, the focus of the text is entirely centered on Christ. The themes of commitment to Christ, especially in the refrain, Jesus' atonement for our sins, and his mission while on earth are the predominant themes. Although reluctant to write text to an established tune, aren't we grateful Mr. Chisholm did, as we use this hymn as a statement of affirmation of who we are and whose we are in Christ?

C.S. Lewis reminds us of an important fact – that we seek to *live* for Jesus. *Live*, not just sit around and think about it:

"For [God] seems to do nothing of himself which God can possibly delegate to God's creatures. God commands us to do slowly and blunderingly what God could do perfectly and in the twinkling of an eye . . . we are not mere recipients or spectators. We are either privileged to share in the game or compelled to collaborate in the work."(xiv)

\*Mr. Chisholm's most famous hymn text is "Great is Thy Faithfulness."

## 3rd Sunday in Lent: UM Hymnal #479 Jesus, Lover of My Soul

Text by Charles Wesley

Reference:

"But thou hast mercy upon all; for thou canst do all things, and winkest at the sins of men, because they should amend. For thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing which thou hast made: for never wouldest thou have made any thing, if thou hadst hated it. And how could any thing have endured, if it had not been thy will? or been preserved, if not called by thee? But thou sparest all: for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of souls."

### Wisdom of Solomon 11:26 (Apocrypha)

1. Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly,  
while the nearer waters roll, while the tempest  
still is high;  
hide me, O my Savior, hide, till the storm of life  
is past; safe into the haven guide, O receive my  
soul at last!
2. Other refuge have I none; hangs my helpless soul  
on thee;  
leave, ah! leave me not alone, still support and  
comfort me.  
All my trust on thee is stayed, all my help from  
thee I bring:  
cover my defenseless head with the shadow of  
thy wing.
3. Plenteous grace with thee is found, grace to  
cover all my sin;  
let the healing streams abound; make and  
keep me pure within.  
Thou of life the fountain art; freely let me take  
of thee; spring thou up within my heart, rise to  
all eternity.

Written soon after Charles Wesley's conversion, the lyrics of this hymn hold much rich imagery so common to his hymn texts. In the very first words, we pray to Jesus as the "lover of my soul" – an image that proclaims such depth that the love Jesus has for us totally – including our very soul. There is expressed certain intimacy in the word "lover," continuing as the next words declare "let me to thy bosom fly." There are several images of being "covered;" we are covered and protected in times of trial. (Psalm 107:30) We are also covered when we present sinfulness to God in nakedness, just as when Adam and Eve first realized that they were naked, felt shame, and sought to cover themselves. (Gen. 3:7) We are covered in grace—enough to cover all our sin! As you study the words of this hymn, take note of all the references to *covering* you find. Find other images – particularly ones related to water – water as a flood of trials (Job 27:20 and Psalm 29:10 as well as many others found in Scripture) but also healing water and the image of the fountain of life. See Psalm 36:9 and many other *fountain* references.

In reflecting on these words and images, drink in the deeply personal nature of each stanza, the idea that you must uncover your deepest sin to God, even as God will provide cover, comfort, and boundless grace.

Michael Hawn highlights the differences between the pragmatist preacher, John Wesley, and his brother, Charles, the poetry-writing, literary scholar: "John Wesley failed to include the hymn at all in his greatest compilation, *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (1780). This omission has led to considerable speculation...most suggest that John Wesley 'disliked terms of endearment addressed to God.' Indeed, the hymn did not appear in the Collection until the 1797 edition, six years after John Wesley's death in 1791.

Methodist literary scholar Professor Richard Watson disagrees with John's possible thesis and states emphatically, 'It is hard to see this as a valid objection: the whole point of the hymn is the tender and loving presence of the Savior in a world where the sinner feels helpless; and Charles Wesley has not been afraid to give intense expression to that love, and to the life which it brings, so movingly described in the final verse.'<sup>xv</sup> Listening link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdcqhSAXMgE>



## 4th Sunday in Lent: UM Hymnal #206 I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

Text by Kathleen Thomerson

Scripture Reference: Ephesians 5:8-14 (today's sermon text) and 1 John 1:5-9

Additional references: Isaiah 42:6c, Malachi 4:2, Revelation 21:25b, and 22:5b

1. I want to walk as a child of the light;  
I want to follow Jesus.  
God set the stars to give light to the world;  
The star of my life is Jesus.

2. I want to see the brightness of God;  
I want to look at Jesus.  
Clear Sun of Righteousness, shine on my path  
And show me the way to the Father. [Refrain]

Refrain:  
In him there is no darkness at all;  
The night and the day are both alike.  
The Lamb is the light of the city of God.  
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

3. I'm looking for the coming of Christ;  
I want to be with Jesus.  
When we have run with patience the race,  
We shall know the joy of Jesus. [Refrain]

As is typical of a gospel hymn, the main idea is expressed in the refrain.<sup>xvi</sup> Both text and tune were written in 1966 by Kathleen Thomerson, a retired Lutheran organist from Illinois. The text of the refrain is almost verbatim the Revelation texts referenced above.

The title of the hymn itself references Matthew 18:2-4 as Jesus reminds us to be as little children. The stanzas are written in first person, as are many newer Christian songs; however, there is no hint of a somewhat common self-involved, self-directed emphasis that often seems to leave our relationship with Jesus in the background, rather than as our central focus. In the first two stanzas, each "I want" statement is followed by an image of God as Creator and Jesus as Mediator. The third stanza moves to the eschatological concept of life eternal in the full knowledge of Jesus. <sup>xvii</sup> With aforementioned up/down/sideways arrows in mind, note the refrain turns away from the "I" statements and moves out to the *edifying* and *declaration* of who God is, quoting Revelation. Finally, the last line in the refrain is a prayer: "Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus."

Hymn scholar Michael Hawn elaborates on the text as a United Methodist:

From a Wesleyan perspective, the theology of this hymn outlines sanctifying grace, the perspective of Christians as they move toward perfection in the faith, becoming transformed in the image of Christ. Each stanza adds greater luminosity to this walk. In the first stanza, 'God set[s] the stars to give light to the world.' Christ in turn becomes the 'star of my life.' References to stars support the hymn's appropriateness for Epiphany, [although the use of this hymn is not exclusive to that season]. Stanza two expresses the desire to 'see the brightness of God.' The 'Sun of Righteousness' illumines 'the way to the Father.' The final stanza extends the journey toward the 'coming of Christ,' an eschatological direction toward our future hope. (xviii)

In other seasons of the Christian year, such as Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany, the image of light carries great importance. In this Lenten journey, the image of light amidst darkness found in the 1 John reference offers exhortation such as the 1 John reference to walk in fellowship with one another as a redeemed people. In your time of confession, ask God to reveal ways you are walking in darkness so that you may remember that as God's child, you are to walk in the light "as he himself is in the light."

Listening link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ionKh1dL9o0>





**5th Sunday in Lent: UM Hymnal #383 This is the Day of New Beginnings**

**Text by Brian Wren (1978)**

**Scripture Reference: Revelation 21:5; Ephesians 1:17-19; Lamentations 3:23**

1. This is the day of new beginnings,  
Time to remember and move on,  
Time to believe what love is bringing,  
Laying to rest the pain that's gone.
2. For by the life and death of Jesus,  
God's mighty Spirit, now as then,  
Can make for us a world of difference,  
As faith and hope are born again.
3. Then let us, with the Spirit's daring,  
Step from the past and leave behind  
Our disappointment, guilt, and grieving,  
Seeking new paths, and sure to find.
4. Christ is alive, and goes before us  
To show and share what love can do.  
This is a day of new beginnings;  
Our God is making all things new.

(stanza for days when communion is celebrated)

5. In faith we'll gather round the table  
To taste and share what love can do.  
This is a day of new beginnings;  
Our God is making all things new.

As I reflect on this hymn text, I recall having a difficult personal experience years back, that ultimately became a wonderful example of this hymn text. Several years ago, a person whose spouse had recently been inurned in our columbarium stopped by and told me I needed to clean up my office, which had windows that overlooked the columbarium. She pointed out that the view into my office was cluttered and that it was difficult to concentrate as she sought solace in the prayer garden near where her husband's ashes lay. I felt shame, anger, self-righteousness and all kinds of other feelings that in no way reflected the title of this hymn. (I did clean up my office, which was a good thing!) Not long after, I saw the woman outside sitting in the columbarium. I had been working on this devotional and particularly this hymn. As she walked by my office on her way out of the church, I greeted her by name. She responded warmly and I invited her to come sit down with me in my office and have a chat. We talked about what she had done in the years after her husband's death, and she impressed me greatly with her strength in moving on with her life. The past five years, she had been growing in her faith and indeed treated each day as a day of new beginnings. As she left, she said to me "I am so sorry for the way I acted about your office before. I was angry that my husband had been taken away so suddenly and I was looking for ways to express my anger. I feel terrible about that." I replied that I appreciated her apology. She left then, and we both smiled. It was a pretty normal day in most respects, and it was a day of new beginnings.

Recall stories in your own life, such as the personal one I have related, and notice that this hymn title can give expression to similar experiences you have had. As we continue our Lenten journey, consider how this commitment to fasting, praying, and alms-giving is indeed making you new, as God is making *all things* new.

The text does not use the past tense (God made) nor future tense (God will make) but rather the text proclaims "is making" always and continuously with each passing moment. What joy we may find in that thought. Note the strong immediacy of the entire text of this hymn. In Ephesians 1:17-19 Scripture holds a similar immediacy in the final sentence "according to the working of his great power." Our God, an active one, an immediate one, is constantly weaving in and out of the Creation that God established and renews. Lamentations 3:23 tells us of God's compassion that is new every morning. The writer Brian Wren declares: "The recurrent awakening of life in nature is not a strong enough foundation for hope of real change. Yet by faith in the really new events of the Christian story, a day, or a month, or an hour can become charged with promise, and be a springboard to a changed life."

Observe that the text gives strong Trinitarian emphasis particularly in the second stanza, helping describe the mystery and relationship of the Trinity. Christ, in his life, death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit who in the writer's words gives us "daring" to "step from the past and leave behind our disappointment, guilt and grieving" and the Creator who was, is and evermore is "making all things new."



Hawn provides an interesting note about this hymn text: when the UM hymnal was in its editing phase, the committee requested that the original title of this hymn be changed from a question “is this the day of new beginnings?” to the declamatory form as it now appears. xix With the difference between question and declaration in mind, ask yourself the question “is this the day of new beginnings?” What new beginnings can you claim for yourself? Often, we resist as we say to ourselves “I can do anything but \_\_\_\_\_!” In your devotional time, start with whatever issue or person is in that blank and begin there. Ask God to help you make all things new—even with \_\_\_\_\_!

As we sing this hymn on Sunday, if we consider Revelation in the context of worship, the line of this hymn “our God is making all things new” makes a powerful declaration as we gather and proclaim these words together.

Listening link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFosHSy9pGw>



**6th Sunday in Lent: The Faith We Sing #2083 *My Song Is Love Unknown***

**Text by Samuel Crossman (1664)**

**Scripture Reference: Heb. 5:7-10; 2 Cor. 5:15-19;**

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:7-10)

1. My song is love unknown,  
my Savior's love to me,  
love to the loveless shown,  
that they might lovely be.  
O who am I, that for my sake  
my God should take frail flesh and die?

2. God left the richest throne  
salvation to bestow;  
but Christ as flesh and bone  
the world refused to know.  
But, O my Friend, my Friend indeed,  
who at my need did life expend.

3. Sometimes they threw down palms  
and sweetest praises sang.  
Hosannas and glad psalms  
through streets and markets rang.  
Then "Crucify!" is all their breath,  
for blood and death they thirst and cry.

4. What has my Sovereign done?  
What makes this rage and spite?  
Christ gave new strength to run,  
restored the gift of sight.  
Sweet injuries! Yet they at these  
themselves displease, and 'gainst Christ rise.

5. I sing my plain belief,  
one song my heart outpours:  
never was pain nor grief,  
never was love like yours.  
This is my Friend, in whose sweet praise  
I all my days could gladly spend.

This hymn's title has always intrigued me. Does it mean we don't fully comprehend God's love? Does it also insist that in no way are we capable of the pure love of God? By the second stanza, the meaning unfolds as the text reflects upon the world's refusal to know Christ as "flesh and bone." In the third stanza, the stark reality of our fickle human nature is exemplified in the narrative of the crowds in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, as they shouted "Hosanna", only to turn to the word "Crucify!" which is expressed in a most graphic way "for blood and death they thirst and cry." Further in the text, we find more questions, which I love within poetry. These questions are so powerful – "What has my Sovereign done?" and "What makes this rage and spite?" After all the signs of life and the healing Christ accomplished, we still rise against him? The words are filled with challenge in their poetic form, yet their power declares that, although we have received these gifts from Christ, we still rise against him. In the final stanza we first acknowledge and confess, that we are no different than the long ago people of Jerusalem, despite God's continuing love and goodness. Finally, we sing our "plain belief" of God's goodness and mercy. In an affirmation of faith we declare that we will spend all our days singing his praise, even while not knowing fully the depth of his love. "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Listening link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaPxA74Jq5c>



## The Journey to the Cross—Holy Week

Our Lenten journey brings us to Holy Week. The hymn devotional aspect of our Lenten journey is over, but we have another intense journey through which to travel. Its importance cannot be overstated. So often, we tend to jump from the majesty and pomp of Palm Sunday straight to the glorious celebration of Easter day and the following five Sundays that make up the season of Eastertide. Those of us planning worship have sought to declare the importance of observing the entire journey of Holy Week. We intentionally walk through it--not around it--and we take no shortcuts! Let us journey with Jesus, from the shouts of "Hosanna" through the shouts of "crucify him" to the words Jesus spoke on the cross "it is finished." You are invited and encouraged to participate in the complete worship journey by joining us on Maundy Thursday as we celebrate communion, and again on Good Friday, as we recount the events leading up to the Crucifixion. These services, as they rehearse and remember the narrative of Jesus' own journey will help you to embrace fully the entirety of the story and the need to face head-on the events that lead to the final victory. Consider the words below as printed in the last stanza of Hymn #286. We will not be singing the words, but they are provided below as further meditation:

What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest friend,  
For this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?  
O make me thine forever; and should I fainting be,  
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to thee.

Immerse yourself in this final week of journey.  
Your Easter day will be all the more meaningful and glorious!

Listening link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UgkVTtT-0xg>



## Easter Day--Hallelujah!

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. (Revelation 19:6)

*Hallelujah* is a transliteration (meaning the representation of letters or words in the corresponding characters of another alphabet). The word's origins are found in the Hebrew word meaning "praise ye YAH (Yahweh—the Hebrew name for God)." *Hallelujah* appears four times in the NIV. In the King James Version, the word used is "alleluia." Today, *hallelujah* and *alleluia* mean "praise the Lord." When we read the book of Revelation as a scriptural definition of worship, this word holds great significance entering into our worship on Easter morning.

A recently composed song "Multiplied" reflects the Revelation passage, including the image of surrender to the absolute power and authority of our Creator, leading to the spreading in heaven and on earth true worship:

"God of mercy, sweet love of mine, I have surrendered to your design;  
May this offering spread across the sky: May our 'hallelujahs' be multiplied!"xx

Listening link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGF-MGGLpB0>



One of the most current popular songs using this word is Leonard Cohen's song by the same title. Although possessing a haunting and pretty melody, it is not my favorite. Consider the words that the composer used in relation to this song: "there is a religious hallelujah, but there are many other ones. David's hallelujah was still a religious song. So I wanted to indicate that Hallelujah can come out of other things that have nothing to do with religion."xxi Now consider the origin of the word itself, and its involvement of the Hebrew name for God: Yahweh. What do you think? Can we take "religion" out of this word and maintain the integrity of its meaning?

Another perspective is grounded in the meaning of the word and in Scripture:

The word *hallelujah* in Revelation 19 is used in heaven, where a great multitude has gathered before the throne in the immediate presence of God Himself. The enemies of God have been overthrown, and the gospel has triumphed. In a victory celebration, all heaven renders praise, a song of thanksgiving uttered by all holy beings united. Reasons for this glorious outpouring of praise are God's righteous victory over His enemies. The sound of the outpouring of praise and worship is so overwhelming that the Scripture can only describe it as "like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder" (verse 6). So great is the rejoicing by God's people that *hallelujah* is the only word grand enough to express it. (xxii)

Handel's version of the great chorus in heaven, which we will sing on Easter Sunday, proclaims for us a "foreshadowing of the magnificence that will be expressed by the heavenly chorus as we stand and sing, 'Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigns!'"xxiii The tradition of standing as we sing the Hallelujah Chorus is secular in origin – at the premier of Handel's *Messiah*, the king of England was present. Upon hearing the Hallelujah Chorus, he rose to his feet. If the king stood, then everyone stood. The tradition has held since that first performance. May the reason we stand today be for the true "King of Kings!"

Listening link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBZ7AfZR9xs>





## Final Thoughts

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route  
(Matthew 2:12)

As Lent draws to a close, it may seem a bit odd to bring up the narrative about the wise men. There exists a similarity. The wise men, following God's leading, journeyed to worship the Christ child. After their visit with him, they resumed their journey, *returning to their country by another route*. The very design of our beautiful sanctuary gives us a physical example of this concept of going out by a different route than you came in. When couples marry at the church, they enter from one aisle and exit from the other one – a wonderful symbolization of what it is to mark an event such as a wedding and how that event will forever shape your future days. Now that you have spent this time on a Lenten journey, consider how you are now returning to your regular routines, released from the fasting and abstinence you resolved to observe during Lent. In what ways are you changed by the journey of Lent? How might you be returning by a different way? In what different ways are you returning to the daily life and habits you enjoyed prior to Lent? If, before the season of Lent, you were not in the habit of spending daily devotional time, consider finding good study material and continuing this practice. It is a transformative activity. Some suggested sources are listed at the end; these are just a couple out of countless ones.

## Endnotes

- <sup>i</sup> All Biblical References in This Devotional Use the NIV Translation of the Bible, Unless Otherwise Indicated.
- <sup>ii</sup> Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Large Catechism*, vol. Triglot Concordia: The Symbolic Boos of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), [https://www.creeds.net/lutheran/luther\\_large.htm](https://www.creeds.net/lutheran/luther_large.htm).
- <sup>iii</sup> Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year*, Ancient-Future Faith Series (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2004), 112.
- <sup>iv</sup> Webber, *Ancient-Future Time*, 113.
- <sup>v</sup> *ibid*, 113.
- <sup>vi</sup> Bobby Gross, *Living the Christian Year: Time to Inhabit the Story of God: An Introduction and Devotional Guide* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2009), 128.
- <sup>vii</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer and David Mcl Gracie, *Meditating on the Word*, 2nd ed (Cambridge, Mass: Cowley Publications, 2000), front cover.
- <sup>viii</sup> "What Is Almsgiving?," [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org).
- <sup>ix</sup> Constance M. Cherry, *The Music Architect: Blueprints for Engaging Worshipers in Song* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 50.
- <sup>x</sup> Gross, *Living the Christian Year*, 126.
- <sup>xi</sup> Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2010), 175
- <sup>xii</sup> C. S. Lewis, Wayne Martindale, and Jerry Root, *The Quotable Lewis* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989), ??????
- <sup>xiii</sup> Michael Hawn, "Living for Jesus," <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-living-for-jesus-pledges-full-commitment-to-christ>.
- <sup>xiv</sup> C. S Lewis, *The World's Last Night and Other Essays*, 2017th ed. (New York: HarperOne; Reissue Edition, 2017), 9.
- <sup>xv</sup> Michael Hawn, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-jesus-lover-of-my-soul>.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Michael Hawn, "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light," <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-i-want-to-walk-as-a-child-of-the-light>.
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xix</sup> Michael Hawn, "This Is the Day of New Beginnings," <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-hymn-sings-praises>.
- <sup>xx</sup> Rinehart, Bear and Rinehart, Bo, "Multiplied" (Needtobreathe Music (BMI), 2014).
- <sup>xxi</sup> "Leonard Cohen--Hallelujah and Meaning," 1988 1985, <http://www.itsallaboutall.com/leonard-cohen/hallelujah-meaning/>.
- <sup>xxii</sup> "Hallelujah," [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org).
- <sup>xxiii</sup> *Ibid*.

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- Tyrrell, Michael S. 2015. *The Sound of Healing: Unveiling the Phenomena of Wholetones*. Brandon, S.D.: Barton Publishing. (This book comes with a set of CDs that play music based on frequencies known to be sources of healing and anxiety relief - St. John's UMC, Aiken, SC has a set of these available for loan.)
- Webber, Robert, and Robert Webber. 2004. *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year*. Ancient-Future Faith Series. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books. (One of the many books by a great writer and theologian - he writes in a clear, accessible style.)

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## BONUS SECTION: RUTTER'S REQUIEM

Program Notes for the Rutter *Requiem* (to be presented April 6, 2025, at the 11 am service).

Suggested further resource: YouTube recordings of John Rutter on the "Requiem" with general commentary at this link: [https://youtu.be/WaHO72\\_mJzllinks](https://youtu.be/WaHO72_mJzllinks)



One of the most beloved composers and arrangers of 20th and 21st-century choral music is John Rutter. Hailing from England, He conducts a professional chamber choir and has long been associated with Clare College in Cambridge. Most composers of note, both past and present, are inspired to write a requiem of one kind or another and Rutter is no exception. The first performance of this work in its entirety debuted in 1995 at Lover's Lane United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas. Ever since that first performance, the work has been a beloved one.

The Latin requiem (Mass for the Dead) is a Mass of the Catholic Church and is offered for the repose of the souls of the deceased and usually was celebrated in the context of a funeral. Based on this Latin mass, many other requiems have been composed around the themes of death, dying, and mourning. Without delving too deeply into the theological differences between Catholicism and Protestantism, it is important to emphasize that Catholic theology involves a place known as purgatory, where souls go before heaven or hell. Thus, it is a practice for Catholics to pray for the departed. We see evidence of this theology within this Requiem (and many others) which as Protestants, we may find confusing or even off-putting. Our view is quite different on where one goes upon death and other than prayers of thanks for the departed, we do not pray directly for their souls. My favorite theologian, Rev. Dr. John Stapleton marks this theological difference thus: "In the Apostle's Creed, we declare 'the resurrection of the body,' affirming the restoration of the whole person in the resurrection." Do not let this basic theological difference influence your ability to relate to and find value in this work on a theological level. Rutter's *Requiem* is based on parts of the Latin Mass as well as added psalms and biblical verses in English. The text comes from The Book of Common Prayer, Psalms, and the original Requiem texts. We will present the work in its intended form, with a mixture of both in Latin and English. Rutter dedicated it to his father, who had died the year before. The composer relates that his father was a music lover but not professional. Hence, he wanted to write a work that was accessible to the average listener as opposed to something extremely sophisticated and cerebral in nature.

This Requiem represents a journey. Like the well-known five stages of grief as outlined by psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler- Ross (1926-2004) the different movements of the piece present aspects of a grief journey, often within the very movements themselves. As Kubler-Ross and others following in her footsteps would attest, the grief journey is an individual one, not following a uniform trajectory but rather often catapulting from one emotion/stage to another. As we work through the 7 movements in the Rutter Requiem, note how the text moves from prayers to God, to 3rd person, to 1st person, and to exhortation. As is the case with all music, this Requiem can meet one where one is in a particular time and space – current, raw, grief, or the memory of a difficult and place in the past.

The word "lament" applies to this kind of journey. Lament is both a verb and a noun. In either word form, in a Christian context, lament is a significant way to describe emotions and behaviors in relation to God. Would God, who created our inmost being, knitting us together in our mother's womb (Psalm 139) and knowing every hair on our head while valuing us even more than the lowly sparrow (Luke 12) have apathy or dislike for any expression of emotion? Scripture tells us to "trust in the Lord, for in the Lord, there is mercy" (Psalm 130 and part of the text for the 2nd movement in this Requiem) and that trust includes full expression of our emotions to the Lord.

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**Movement #1 "Requiem"** This movement taken from the original Catholic Mass for the Dead. Here is the English translation:

Rest eternal give to them, O Lord.  
And let perpetual light shine upon them.  
A hymn of praise is proper for thee, O God in Zion  
And to thee is a vow rendered in Jerusalem.  
Listen to and answer my prayer, for until thee all flesh shall come.  
Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy.

Some of you who were not brought up in the Catholic tradition may still have worries and anxieties about the soul of a friend or loved one. Complicated grief is real in such cases. Perhaps you may wonder if you pray for them, you could change the outcome of their place in heaven. Perhaps you long and pray for the peace of one who you knew to be troubled during his/her life. This prayer can represent a way of bargaining with God. Bargaining is one of the stages of grief. God hears and honors our honest pleas for others. May we rest in that assurance. There is reference to the light of God. The words "Zion" and "Jerusalem" within his text refer not to the earthly city in Israel but to Heaven – a place of rest and light.

Recording link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amBOUsL4-X0>



John Rutter commentary: <https://youtu.be/UQwHTblvRPk>



**Movement #2** Out of the Deep. This movement is in English and the text is:

Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord; Lord hear my voice.  
O let thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint.  
If thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it?  
For there is mercy with thee: therefore shalt thou be feared.  
I look for the Lord; my soul doth wait for him;  
And in his word is my trust.  
My soul fleeth unto the Lord before the morning watch; I say before the morning watch.  
O Israel trust in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.  
And he shall redeem Israel from all his sins.

The movement is taken from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, using the wording of Psalm 120 based on the 1535 Coverdale translation. The heading of the Psalms is *De profundis* translated as "from the profound, the depths." The depths in this case represents depths of mind and spirit, and the Psalm follows the pattern of lament. First, the Psalmist addresses God directly, then about midway through, the text makes a turn and addresses God in the third person. Finally at the end, the first part addressing God is repeated. In this movement we see a shifting of perspective as well as elements of anger and frustration, finally declaring trust in God, then a shift back to anger. Such is the way our emotions and grief can shift quickly. What does it mean when we, in this modern age, implore Israel to trust in the Lord?

Recording link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoOPG4eloPs&list=PLgjtEB9lhDA6J8CDJOSIOFkG8zG8EgOQ&index=2>



John Rutter commentary: <https://youtu.be/awe4OEEbPgQ>





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**Movement #3 Pie Jesu.** This movement is in Latin and the translation is:

Kind or merciful Lord Jesus, give them rest.  
Kind or merciful Lord Jesus, give them eternal rest.

In the full Mass this rich couplet of lines appears at the end of a long section that includes “Day of Wrath” *Dies Irae*. Rutter has chosen to omit this previous section of that part of the mass in favor of only including this gentle text. Other composers, namely Andrew Lloyd Webber and Karl Jenkins have also chosen to leave out the “day of wrath” text, which is of course is a creator’s prerogative. Although this text does center upon a prayer for the departed as in the 1st movement, there is a sense of trust in that prayer that does not seem to be present in movement 1.

Recording link:

[https://www.youtube.com/watchv=9ol8bojo\\_RQ&list=PLgjtEB9lhDA6J8CDJOSIOFkG8zG8EgOQ&index=3](https://www.youtube.com/watchv=9ol8bojo_RQ&list=PLgjtEB9lhDA6J8CDJOSIOFkG8zG8EgOQ&index=3)



John Rutter commentary: [https://youtu.be/SpTHLMh4Elg\\_](https://youtu.be/SpTHLMh4Elg_)



**Movement #4 Sanctus.** This movement is in Latin. The translation is:

Holy, Holy, Holy  
Lord God of Hosts,  
Heaven and Earth are full of thy glory,  
Hosanna in the highest  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.

Rutter calls this centrally placed movement “a moment of glory” and the pinnacle of the work. The text appears in Isaiah 6 as it describes God on his throne as the cherubim fly around him singing these words. These living beings are also described in Revelation 4. How does this fantastical imagery affect you and your ability to rejoice in the power and majesty of God? Perhaps it is somewhat difficult, especially feeling any sense of praise and wonder during a time of grief and turmoil. Yet, the very presence of this text in the middle of the work is a testament to the necessity to always give God our trust and honor. Note the repetition of “Sanctus” and other key phrases three times. Could this three-time repetition be a way of honoring the Trinity? On that subject, Rutter has nothing to say, but I choose to think so. In the mass celebration, during the “Sanctus” section, little bells are rung and Rutter follows that pattern with the use of a *glockenspiel* to present bell-like tones.

Recording link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watchv=d3s9cFaegOc&list=PLgjtEB9lhDA6J8CDJOSIOFkG8zG8EgOQ&index=4>



John Rutter commentary: [https://youtu.be/Q5j5Eib2QBo\\_](https://youtu.be/Q5j5Eib2QBo_)



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## **Movement #5 Agnus Dei** This movement is in a mixture of Latin and English

Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world, give them rest.  
Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world, give them everlasting rest.  
Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery.  
He cometh up and is cut down like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow.  
In the midst of life we are in death.

I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord:  
He that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live:  
And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

The reference to Christ as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is found in the Gospel of John 1:29. This text is found in the traditional Requiem Mass. Note in most translations of the biblical text there is exclamatory punctuation. Rutter does likewise through the music itself. As he then weaves in the English text from Job 14, there are some very dark and defeated thoughts. In the weaving of the Latin and the English, we may see evidence of that grief stage of anger, as the Job text intersects with the plea for mercy from the Lamb of God. Building layer upon layer, the music almost envelops us. As the dynamic level builds and begins to decrease, the final word "requiem" as expressed in the lower voices begins to point to light. Following that text, the flute solo invites a musical expression of hope. As Rutter called this section and the John 11:25 text that follows the "hinge point" of the entire work. Homophonic texture (chords moving together) weaving with the flute solo offers promise and hope. As we move from the Old Testament starkness of the Job passage into the promise of the John passage we have a chance to experience in a personal sense the difference between those of us living following the Resurrection and those prior. Through the Resurrection, we find Shalom – the peace only God can give – which is reflected through this sublime section of the work.

Recording link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watchv=CnwLGZxWy3Q&list=PLgjtEB9lhDA6J8CDJOSIOFkG8zG8EgOQ&index=5>



John Rutter commentary: [https://youtu.be/\\_-93AGJHL9s](https://youtu.be/_-93AGJHL9s)



## **Movement #6 The Lord is My Shepherd**

The Lord is my shepherd therefore can I lack nothing.  
He shall feed me in a green pasture and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.  
He shall convert my soul and bring me forth in paths of righteousness, for his name's sake.  
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil;  
For thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff comfort me,  
Thou shalt prepare a table for me against them that trouble me:  
Thou has anointed my head with oil and my cup shall be filled.  
But thy lovingkindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Originally written as a single anthem, Rutter later incorporated the piece into this larger work. The piece starts with an extended oboe solo, evoking a picture of serenity of a shepherd boy sitting on a hillside looking over his flock. Actually, when you look at the job of a shepherd, there is likely little serene resting and gazing. For one thing, sheep will drink any type of water, which is dangerous if it is contaminated. Thus, the shepherd must find and lead them to healthy water. Consider the analogy for us, who so often find toxic temptations in our own lives. Our trust in the Good Shepherd's leading us beside "waters of comfort" can put us right. Further, the shepherd keeps his sheep on paths providing sure footing – paths of "righteousness." This beloved text offers promise and trust for us as we journey through "the shadow of death." This declaration of assurance, fearing no evil despite this shadow of death, can extend to the death of relationship as well as a person. During this Lent, what does this shadow hold for you?

Recording link:

[https://www.youtube.com/watchv=8f\\_0NGsWzfA&list=PLgjtEB9lhDA6J8CDJOSIOFkG8zG8EgOQ&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watchv=8f_0NGsWzfA&list=PLgjtEB9lhDA6J8CDJOSIOFkG8zG8EgOQ&index=6)



John Rutter commentary: <https://youtu.be/jIZPLcqKMIE>



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## Movement #7 Lux Aeterna

I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me,  
Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord,  
For they rest from labors; even so saith the Spirit.  
Light eternal shine upon them, Lord, we pray:  
With all the holy ones in eternity,  
Those who are righteous.  
Rest eternal give to them, Lord,  
And light perpetual shine upon them.

The words are from the Book of Common Prayer Burial service, which are taken from Revelation 14:13. The biblical verse, according to most translations, uses the instructive word "write this: blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on" (NIV) which for those of us who have a concern for the departed can mean in modern terms "take this to the bank." Rutter declares that everything is resolved with light and peace at the end. After the introductory section by the soprano soloist, the choir comes in with a melodic line that begins with the same notes as the Gregorian chant from the Mass "lux Aeterna." The theme of the opening movement returns at a slower, more peaceful (less urgent?) tempo.

We have journeyed through the movements and arrived at this eternal peace.

Recording link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJ4fK7PGhWo&list=PLgjtEB9lhhDA6J8CDJOSIOFkG8zG8EgOQ&index=7>



John Rutter commentary: <https://youtu.be/mEZJ4qjdlxw>



**"NOTES AND THOUGHTS"**