

LENT 2026

SPRING VALLEY PRESBYTERIAN

WONDER AND WANDER



Life is a Journey.

Examining those who have wondered and wandered in scripture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

- 2/18- ASH WEDNESDAY- Lent Begins- Job- Wandering and wondering in suffering (Job 42:5-6)
- 2/19- Adam and Eve- Cast Out of the Garden (Gen. 3:23)
- 2/20- Cain- Wandering east of Eden (Gen. 4:12-17)
- 2/21- Noah- wondering what God will do in the flood (Gen. 6:8)
- 2/22- Babel- The People Wandered from Each Other in Language (Gen. 11:4-8)
- 2/23- Abraham the Nomad Wondered and Wandered- the Father of our Faith (Gen. 12:1,2; Heb. 11:8-12)
- 2/24- Lot Wandered into the Trap of Uncomfortable Comfort (Gen. 13:8-12)
- 2/25- The Covenant of Wonder- Circumcision- Genesis 17- The Covenant Promise Gives Direction
- 2/26- Isaac Wondered Where He Could Prosper- But Found Prosperity in His Wandering (Gen. 26)
- 2/27- Jacob (Israel) Wanders away to Aram and Back (Gen. 31:3)
- 2/28- Joseph's Wondrous Wanderings (Gen. 50:19,20)
- 3/1- Moses- The Nile, the Bush, the Wonders of the Plague, the Parting of the Sea (Ex. 14:13,14)
- 3/2- The People Wander in the desert (Deut. 8:2-5)
- 3/3- The Promise of the Law Giving Direction in Wandering (Ex. 20; Dt. 5)
- 3/4- Joshua says, "March Forth!" (through the Jordan, through Jericho's Walls) (Josh. 1:7)
- 3/5- Deborah Wanders with Barak-(Judges 4:9,5)
- 3/6- Gideon Wanders in his weakness and Finds Wonder (Judges 6:12-16-8)
- 3/7- Samson Wanders into Sin and Shows the Wonder of the Power of God- (Judges 13-16 esp 16:28-30)
- 3/8- Samuel the Wandering Prophet of Wonders (1 Samuel 8:1-7)
- 3/9- Ruth Wanders with her Mother-In-Law and Finds Wonder (Ruth 1:16-17; 2:11-12)
- 3/10- David the Boy Wonders into the Camp (1 Samuel 17)
- 3/11- David Running from Saul (Psalm 34, 63)
- 3/12- David Wanders Away- But comes Back- Psalm 51
- 3/13- The Wonders of Solomon who Wanders away from them (1 Kings 3:5, 9; 11:4,9)
- 3/14- The Wandering and Wondering Elijah (1 Kings 17:1-9)
- 3/15- The Wandering and Wondering Elishah (2 Kings 6:15-19)
- 3/16- The Wonders of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-8)

- 3/17- The Wandering and Weeping of Jeremiah (Lamentations 3:18-25)
- 3/18- Hosea's Wife Wanders Away to show the Wondrous Grace of God (Hosea 1:2,3)
- 3/19- The Locusts and Joel Call us Back (1:4; 2:12-13)
- 3/20- Ezra Invite the People to Repent (Ezra 9:4-11)
- 3/21- Nehemiah- Invites the Wandering to Settle Down and Build Up (1:3,4; 2:4; 6:3)
- 3/22- The Wise Men Wandered in Wonder (Matthew 2:1-5)
- 3/23- John the Baptist's Wild Wandering (John 1:39-40)
- 3/24- Jesus Wandered in the Desert- (Matthew 4:1-4)
- 3/25- Jesus Heals the Storm in Wonder (Matthew 8:23-27)
- 3/26- Jesus sends the 12 Out to Wander with Wonders (Matthew 10:5-12)
- 3/27- Jesus Gives Rest in the Midst of Wandering (Matthew 11:25-30)
- 3/28- Jesus Wonders Away from Family- (Matthew 12:46-50)
- 3/29- Palm Sunday- Jesus Wandering into Jerusalem on a Donkey (Matthew 21:7-11)
- 3/30- The Little Children Wonder and Wander (Matthew 18:1-9; 19:13-15)
- 3/31- The Greatest Commandment is a Wonder- (Matthew 22:34-40)
- 4/1- The Wandering Until the End Comes (Matthew 24:3-14)
- 4/2- The Wonder of the Supper and the Wandering of Betrayal/Denial (Matthew 26:17-35)
- 4/3- The Wonder of the Crucifixion- Wandering into Death (Matthew 27:45-54)
- 4/4- Wandering Down into Death and Hades (Matthew 27:57-61)
- 4/5- Easter- The Wonder of the Resurrection- Gives us Direction in our Wandering (Matt. 28:1-10)

The people of God are called several times "Strangers and pilgrims." The Jewish people were to repeat "My father was a wandering Aramean." While our comfort and our home are not necessarily found here, we are all called to wonder at the awe and majesty of God all around us. That is the theme for 2026 at SVPC, the theme of Montreat Conferences this year, and the theme of this Lenten devotional.

The gospel lessons focus on Matthew's gospel, which connects strongly with the Old Testament.

I Wonder as I Wander- lyrics to Christmas hymn

I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus the Saviour did come for to die,
For poor on'ry people like you and like I;
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a cow's stall,
With wise men and farmers and shepherds and all;
But high from God's heaven, a star's light did fall,
And the promise of ages it then did recall.

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing,
A star in the sky or a bird on the wing,
Or all of God's Angels in heaven to sing,
He surely could have it, 'cause he was the King.

I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus the Saviour did come for to die,
For poor on'ry people like you and like I;
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

*Written John Jacob Niles in 1933, based on an Appalachian folk song he heard sung by
Annie Morgan in Murphy, North Carolina.*

This booklet is dedicated to the faithful and dedicated church members of Spring Valley Presbyterian Church and to my sister-in-law Carol Ostendorff (and children Anna, Emily, Rachel) and brother Dendy Sloan (and children Trey and John Mark). You have been through great and steady times and many transitions as well. May you not only know that God holds your hand, but may you be aware of the greatness, wisdom and power of God. He will be faithful to you, and He calls you to find hope and peace.

Lent is the forty days before Easter. It is designed to be a time of repentance, reflection, and renewal. In the early church and later it was the period where potential members learned of the faith to be baptized on Holy Week. While it is not found in the Bible, certainly the forty day repentance idea (the flood- Gen. 7:4; Moses-Ex. 24:18; and Jesus Mt. 4:2) is found. The spies spent 40 days exploring (Nbs. 13:25); Elijah traveled 40 days to Horeb/Sinai (1 Kgs 19:8); Goliath taunted Israel for 40 days (1 Sam. 17:16); Israel

wandered in the wilderness for 40 years (Dt. 8:2-5). Lent is a tool that we can use- I hope you'll use it this year. This book examines those who have wondered and wandered in Scripture.

2/18- ASH WEDNESDAY- Lent Begins- Job- Wandering and wondering in suffering

"I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5-6)

Lent is a time of repentance and Job teaches us not just about suffering, but how to handle it and how repentance is tied to it. Suffering is not always a result of our bad actions (though indeed sometimes we reap what we sew). It is a call to sympathize with those grieving, and to still wonder at the God who created this amazing universe and cares for us.

The story of Job, one of the oldest stories in the Bible, begins with Job's comfort and God's pleasure. "In the land of Uz there lives a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man of all the people of the East." (Job 1:1-3).

If I were to choose a life for my children and grandchildren it would be Job at the beginning. But things



did not stay stable. He lost everything- his houses, his livestock, his children, reputation, support of his family and health. This world is not our home- and no amount of insurance or layers of stuff can insulate ourselves from that. Job wished that God had not let him be born. But he never cursed God.

When God came to Him face to face in the midst of his suffering, Job said, "I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." When we experience the holy

presence of God, we repent. Isaiah similarly said, "Woe to me for I am a person of unclean lips." Our unholiness that we excused becomes a burden. In the end, God had to tell the three friends of Job to repent- for they were too self-righteous and not sympathetic enough.

Job's journey of wandering through the valley of the shadow of death- the valley of suffering, is one from which we can learn. But the answer to Job from God was not to line out God's plan (which we will never fully understand). The answer found in chapters 38-41 is a reminder of how powerless Job is and how wise and powerful God is- and to stand in awe. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation (38:4)? Have you ever given orders to the morning (vs 12)? Have you been to the ice caps or to hell (vs. 17, 22)? Do you send lightning bolts and give wisdom (35,36)? Chapter 39 is about the wonders of the animal kingdom as the handprint of God's wisdom. Chapter 41 is about the strength and power of God. All of this is just a reminder to Job to wonder as He wanders- to stand in awe. Job 42:3 Job replies "Surely I spoke of things I did not know- too wonderful to understand." This call in Lent, is to do that. In the midst of our uncertainty, worry, or even suffering- to still find wonder in God and as Job did- trust and hold onto Him.

Prayer: Lord, help me to wonder as I wander. Let me remember you are on the throne and before you I stand convicted.

2/19- Adam and Eve- Cast Out of the Garden “So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.” (Gen. 3:24)

God created the world good and at peace. Human beings were at one time innocent, but that is no more. We are all tainted. We all mess up. Adam and Eve is the theological story of how all that began for human beings. The parent who assumes their child never makes a mistake- blinded by love- needs to remember we are not innocent. We need repentance more than we need excuses. Excuses teach us our wrong doesn't matter. Repentance is a recognition that what we do matters to others and ultimately to God. Adam and Eve were told they could have everything in the garden but one thing. That is the one thing they focused on. They did not believe God's warning, and questioned God's motive for them (believing God was protecting Himself rather than them by this command).

The result of their sin was they hid from each other (Gen. 3:7-10)- realizing they were naked. They hid from God's voice in shame and guilt. Sin separates us from each other, from God, and even from the blessing of God. When God confronted them, they blamed each other (3:11-13) and gave excuses. God



punished them with exile from the prosperity of the garden of God. They (and we) cannot go back to that time of true natural peace with each other and God. Adam and Eve were told to leave the garden (3:23-24). Ever since this event, we are in a life of wandering and uncertainty. As Joni Mitchell wrote (sung by CSN&Y-“Woodstock”) “we’ve got to

get ourselves back to the garden.” Apart from the vine (God- Jn. 15), we cannot get back. We are like broken branches- and apart from God we are nothing. We wander in life. The feeling was described by the Existential thinkers as “Angst” or anxiety. There are ways we can make our life more comfortable- but all know that we head toward death in this life. But God, in pity and mercy, did provide a way out.

Jesus, described as the “second Adam” (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22,45), provides a way back. He was the innocent one that paid for our non-innocence. He engrafts us back into the vine of God's love so we may go to our true home with God. This home is beyond the brokenness of this life. In this life we are all “strangers and pilgrims” but especially those who know that this world is not our home. In this life we are broken, sick, grieving, hurt, left out. Even the most wealthy, the smartest, the prettiest of us do not escape. Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, got pancreatic cancer and died bemoaning that he was not closer with his family. Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor (and many others)- were abused, used and manipulated for their beauty. We will have to leave our stuff, our brains, our beauty behind us. There is no doubt that this life is not a bed of roses- we are not in the garden any more. Yet when we put our trust in God through Jesus, we find more peace. We find a way of meaning and purpose. Our work is not just temporary but can glorify God. Love is a blessing and God helps and motivates us to love one another.

We are all wandering. But some of us are called to wonder at the majesty and purpose of God that is leading us home.

Prayer: Lord, help me to find my peace and purpose in you.

2/20- Cain- Wandering east of Eden

“The Lord said to Cain, ‘When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.’ Cain said to the Lord, ‘My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.’ But the Lord said to him, ‘Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.’ Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden...and built a city naming it after his son, Enoch.” (Genesis 4:12-17)

Cain was the firstborn. But he was jealous of his brother, Abel. He let his jealousy control him and killed Abel. Cain could no longer grow crops easily and was driven out as a “wanderer.” Interestingly, Cain was the first to build a city (4:17). We can easily skim over this, but we might want to think deeper. Cain was called a “wanderer.” Yet Cain did not wander far- just east of Eden. He did not live a nomadic, wandering life- he built a city to stay in. Perhaps the lesson is that you can be cursed with wandering and still be in the city full of people and busyness. Cain also did not repent. Famously, when asked by God, “Where is your brother Abel”, Cain lied and said, “I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper.” Jesus, in contrast said that we are called to love our neighbor- and usually the closest neighbors in our lives are family members. We are called to love our neighbor (and family) as ourselves. Instead of repenting, Cain complained about and exaggerated his punishment- “It is too much for me to bear... whoever finds me will kill me.”

Spring Valley is technically not in the city- yet it is considered part of the city. Usually, violence happens more commonly in the city. But in the last few years, violence has occurred around our area. In that sense, we are wanderers.

The Hebrew word for wanderer is “wanad” It is also the same root word as sympathy (Job 2:11, 42:11; Ps. 11:1). The reason why is that the Hebrew links the noun (wanderer) with a response to the noun (sympathy). So when you find a homeless person, deep down it elicits sympathy. Homelessness and sympathy are linked together in the Bible! So, this Lent, if you see someone wandering around without a home, be sympathetic to them. Put something in your car to give them- maybe a hygiene kit (toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, a snack). To have a home is a gift of God. Yet all of us, in a sense are longing for our real home- heaven. Til then we are wanderers, strangers, pilgrims.

Prayer: Lord, Have sympathy on me, a wanderer. Help me to have sympathy on those who have questions, on those who have not found a home in you, on those who are without a physical home here.

2/21- Noah- wondering what God will do in the flood

“Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” (Gen. 6:8)

Kay pointed out to me the other day that the ark has no wheel, no rudder, no way to steer it. It just floats and is pushed around by the currents and waves. Yet the ark saved humanity. The Hebrew word for ark (tevah) is the same word used for the basket Moses was placed in when his mother put him in the Nile River. Yet that little basket- ark saved Moses too- and that helped save the people of Israel.



Noah lived in evil times. Despite what some say, there is no biblical record of Noah complaining about all the evil around him. He just faithfully went about his business and God saw him and cared for him. God told him of the flood, provided a plan, and Noah had to trust and act on what God had said.

The big flood came. No doubt there was a lot of wonder among Noah and his family. What God had forecast happened- more wonder. The animals were aboard- more wonder. Water everywhere with no sign of land- wonder. The bird came back with an olive branch- relief but wonder.

Yet the whole flood thing is mass chaos. When Hurricane Helene hit the mountains of NC, no one could tell where the water would hit. Everyone was surprised that the water rose 30 feet so rapidly in Swannanoa. All were surprised that the mudslides slid over the interstate in several places. All were surprised at the chaos. But all were also surprised at the outpouring of love from churches and even new charitable groups like “Love Asheville” or “Hammer and Heart.”

In some sense, we are all like Noah. There is evil around us. But there is also God at work. The world was fragile, but God was still at work. The name “Noah” means “rest.” God puts us in a ship with no rudder or steering wheel and asks us to trust Him. But in the end there is rest- peace.

As I write this, a winter storm of ice is forecast to come upon Columbia. We are not going to hold worship Sunday in respect to the forecast and the government’s call to a state of emergency and caution. Weather- its ice storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, rogue waves, earthquakes, all elicit wonder. I have watched more weather channel apps than I care to admit. Yet the real wonder of it all is the One who makes the lightning, and made the earth with its wind and atmosphere. We wander into His arms in the midst of the storm remembering He calmed the storm with a word.

Lord, help me to find the wonder of you as I wander through the floods and storms of life.

2/22- Babel- The People Wandered from Each Other in Language

“Come let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the earth...The Lord said, “Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other. So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.” (Genesis 11:4-8)

The Tower of Babel was the ultimate sign of human pride and self-unity that ended up in division and confusion. The point of doing this was to “make a name for ourselves”- human pride. They hoped it would unite them and they would not be scattered. But unity without God will end up with disillusionment. Their plan to not scatter ended up scattering them. If we do not have respect and wonder at the person of God- and want the world to respect and wonder at our great skill and being, then we will end up defeating our own cause. We cannot leave God out.

Sometimes wandering does not mean we are lost. But in this case- their being scattered was a sign of their true lostness without God. They wanted to again, “Be like God” with a tower reaching up to the heavens. Pride scatters us; humility before God unites us.

Prayer: Lord, let my pride not get in the way of my love and respect for you.



The Tower of Babel- Peter Bruegel 1553

2/23- Abraham the Nomad Wondered and Wandered- the Father of our Faith

“My father was a wandering Aramean” (Deuteronomy 26:5- said at each Passover).

“The Lord said to Abram, leave your country, your people and your father’s house and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you- and all peoples will be blessed through you. So Abram left...and set out for the land of Canaan. (Genesis 12)

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:8-12)

Abraham is considered by both Christians and Jews “the father of our faith” (Rom. 4:11,12; Gal. 3:7). Part of it was he walked by faith rather than by sight. God called Abraham to leave the comforts of the city of Ur (which had running water and bathrooms) to live a nomadic life. Abraham left even though he did not know where he was going. He lived in tents as a stranger, looking forward to an eternal city and dwelling place.

One of the hardest things to do is trust God- and walk by faith rather than sight. Yet it is also one of the most amazing and wonderful things in life. To walk by faith involves both wandering and wondering. It involves holding onto this life lightly. It involves letting go.

As of 2024 the median tenure for someone holding a job was 3.9 years- the lowest since 2002. Nearly half of American workers have been at their job for less than a year. In addition, two thirds of American workers work in different places- and are more mobile with zoom, teams, and facetime. In other words, we are nomads! The average American moves 11-12 times in their lifetime. Now this is a change from my parents’ and grandparents’ generations. My father worked at the same company for 45 years- changing offices twice with each promotion. IThey lives in Columbia in the same house for 45 years. My grandparents lived in Walhalla for 65 years in the same house. Perhaps the nomadic life we live is a good fit for the life of faith. This world is not our home- we are pilgrims on a journey. As we wander- like Abraham- let us also find the wonder he had. Let us remember out true home- wherever we are lies with God.

Prayer: Lord, let me never forget you are my strength and help. \\\

2/24- Lot Wandered into the Trap of Uncomfortable Comfort

Abram said to Lot...Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left. Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord... so Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan.

(Gen. 13:8-12)

Lot was Abraham's nephew. Abraham did his father and grandfather a favor by taking Lot with him. Lot also shared the faith and general morals of Abraham. When Abraham and Lot had been blessed so much they needed to separate, Abraham let Lot choose which direction he would take- and Abraham took the other direction. Lot chose the green pasture lands around Sodom and Gomorrah and sought to live in their luxurious and wealthy cities. There was no indication that Lot prayed about where he should go. There is every indication that he let his eyes lead him- it looked like "the garden of the Lord." But later the Sodomites went to war and lost- and Lot was captured. Abram rescued his nephew and the Sodomites (Gen. 14). Then the people of Sodom and Gomorrah grew more wicked- and God said he would destroy it. God sent two angels to rescue Lot and his family, and all Lot had, including his wife, was ruined in that process (Gen. 19).

There is a false wandering and wondering- and Lot is a warning of it. Lot wandered until he thought he found a home here. His wife held onto it for dear life. Lot was enthralled with the way things looked in this life, than desiring God's will for him. We can all hold onto our home as if it were heaven. We can all be enthralled and hypnotized by the beauty of the world and its goods.

Prayer: Lord, help me to love what you love and see what you see. Give me a heart to love your will for me more than how things appear on the outside.



Abram offers Lot to decide where he will go.

2/25- The Covenant of Wonder- Circumcision- Genesis 17- The Covenant Promise Gives Direction

God said to Abram, “this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations. I will establish an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants for generations to come. I will be your God, and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan. Where you live now as an alien, I will give you as an everlasting possession and I will be their God. And you must keep your covenant- you and your descendants after you for generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: every male among you is to be circumcised. (Gen. 17)

Thoughts: God went to Abraham and made a covenant- with concurrent promises to him. Abraham did not ask for this. God was choosing one family to reach all the nations- a family of priests. The sign of their being God’s people was circumcision of males. Abraham was still a nomad. He was still wandering, but the God of wonder came to him.

John Calvin equated Passover of the Old Testament to the Lord’s Supper/communion. He also equated the covenant of circumcision with the covenant of baptism. Both circumcision and baptism were signs of being initiated into the people of God. Normally they were done of children (circumcision was 8 days old), but adults could have them done when they entered into the faith of the people. Both were cleansing rites. Both had promises of growing in faith and adhering to God. Both are indelible (they can’t be undone). Both give direction in life- to follow the ways of God- to listen to Him. Often they go with naming- so Abram’s name was changed to Abraham, and Sarai’s name was changed to Sarah. Some traditions call baptisms “Christening” because they would wait (to make sure the child survived- in a time when infant mortality was high), before naming the child at baptism. In that sense, baptism was a celebration that life had come and survived.

Colossians 2:11 says, “In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by human hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism. Both baptism and circumcision represent forgiveness of sins, and being a part of the people of God. Baptism is done for men and women. Interestingly, when someone converted to Judaism in the Old Testament times they were circumcised if they were male. But in the intertestamental period men were circumcised when they were converted; and women were baptized when they were converted. But in the New Testament- as Paul said, there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free for we are all one in Christ Jesus. The symbol of our oneness- and our covenant with God is baptism.

Prayer: Lord, the world would separate and divide us. Help us to see there is a oneness that comes in our baptism. Help us to love unity over divisiveness, love over separation. Thank you that you make a covenant with us- and you graciously make promises of blessing to us who follow you.

2/26- Isaac Wondered Where He could Prosper- But Found Prosperity in His Wandering

Isaac had so many flocks and herds that the Philistines envied him. So all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistine stopped up, filling them with earth. Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, "The water is ours!" Then he dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also. He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it... and he said, "Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land." (Gen. 26)

Thoughts: Isaac was a smart herdsman who was very successful. People were jealous of his success and so he had to keep moving on. They literally would steal the wells that his own servants dug. Instead of fighting them, Isaac just moved on. Sometimes believers wander because of injustice or persecution. I heard many in a refugee camp in Kenya claim that the Islamic government of Sudan (now changing) would allow Muslims to force Christians out of their houses and take them. In the brutal war between Sudan and South Sudan food was used as a weapon. Some Christian families were told that they would feed their children if they would convert to Islam. In this passage Isaac experienced some of that kind of treatment. We can believe that God closes some doors to lead us to the right spot. But if we persevere and hold on, God can lead us to a place of peace- through the valley of the shadow of death into His presence. God guides us in our wandering.

One of my favorite verses is Proverbs 3:5,6- "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths." This verse was handed down to me from ancestors going all the way back to Zurich Switzerland in the 1500s. The first Protestants were persecuted and forced to move off of their land and give up everything they had. Today we are blessed with peace and freedom of religion. One of the reasons we have freedom of religion is that many came to America to escape persecution. For those who are persecuted and are wandering, our hearts go out to them. But we also know the hope of those who have peace and the hope of those who are being persecuted is the same- it is the God of peace.

Prayer: Lord, let me patient when injustice is done against me as you were. We pray for our brothers and sisters who are persecuted and ask that you would give them peace.

2/27- Jacob (Israel) Wanders away to Aram and Back

“Then the Lord said to Jacob, go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.” (Gen. 31:3).

“Jacob” means “deceiver or wrestler.” He did deceive his brother Esau getting his birthright for a bowl of stew when Esau was famished. He also deceived his blind father, Isaac, who thought Jacob was Esau- getting Esau’s blessing (as the oldest) for himself. His mother, Rebekah, heard that Esau was threatening to kill Jacob, so she sent him off to her brother Laban in Aram. Jacob stopped at Bethel and had a dream in which he saw a stairway to heaven and heard the voice of God promising to bless him and bring him back. Jacob promised that if God will keep him and bring him back that Jacob will make the Lord his God and give him a tenth of all that the Lord blesses him with. Six years later, Jacob comes back with Leah, Rachel, a mess of children, sheep, and cattle. He sleeps by the River Jabbok at Peniel- probably near where he slept before in Bethel. This night before he was to meet Esau, he wrestled with God. God changed his name to Israel- “Prince of God.” Both times Jacob was worried and wandering when he experienced God’s presence in the night.

Thomas Wolfe said, “You can never go home again.” But Jacob proved him wrong. He had wandered for six years and had established his wealth during that time. God had indeed blessed him and brought him back to the home of his ancestors. Jacob later went back to Bethel and built an altar of thanksgiving (Gen. 35). God promised to make a nation out of him and to give him the lands promised to Abraham and Isaac and to be his God. Sometimes when we wander, we are called to remember how far God has led us and to give Him thanks. It is important to see God’s hand. Calvin said each night we should reflect on the day and give thanks for how God has led us. It is important to wonder at the power and leading of God in our wanderings.



2/28- Joseph's Wondrous Wanderings

Joseph said to his brothers, "Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, But God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." (Gen. 50:19,20)

Joseph had a wondrous wandering. His life was full of peaks and valleys. His attitude in it all was superb. Joseph was favored by his father because he was Rachel (not Leah's) son. Jacob got Joseph a fancy, many colored coat. Joseph was not sensitive to his prestigious place and the jealousy he was causing. Joseph at first was to be killed, then put in a pit, then sold into Egypt. There he was elevated to serve Potiphar's household. He was falsely accused- though he kept his integrity. He rose in jail to a place of influence and helped the cupbearer get restored through a dream. That cupbearer remembered Joseph in prison and Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream. Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of the grain. Joseph's brother's came to Egypt in a famine, and Joseph saved them. Joseph could have complained about how his brothers treated him, how Potiphar's wife treated him, how the cupbearer forgot him. But instead, he saw God's hand guiding him through all of this. After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers thought he would get his revenge. But Joseph wisely was gracious. He rose above their jealousy and meanness to rescue them and establish the family.

In our day, people look for others to blame for why things went in a less comfortable way. Jacob didn't blame his brothers. Rather he believed God used even their ill intent for a greater good. That is a wonder! That is walking by faith and not by sight. God may be leading you through many ups and downs in your life. My own life has been a rollercoaster of ups and downs. Yet looking back, God was faithful through it all.

Prayer: Lord, help me to trust in you in the good and bad times of life. Let me remember your sovereign hand sees me through.



3/1- Moses- The Nile, the Bush, the Wonders of the Plague, the Parting of the Sea

“Do not be afraid, stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you, you need only to be still.” (Ex. 14:13,14)

The Israelites were stuck in a bad spot. The Pharaoh who liked Joseph died. Some say another group of people took over the throne in Egypt at this time (Hyksos?). They did not appreciate Joseph who was part of the previous administration, and they saw the people of Israel (who kept their identity) as a threat. So they enslaved them- for almost 400 years. The people longed for a better home where they could be free. The Pharaoh was nervous about the abundant population of the Israelites, so he made a decree that every male baby should be killed. The people of Israel tried to find a way around this of course. Moses' mother, Jochebed (6:20), put Moses in a basket or chest (the same Hebrew word as “ark”) she made and floated him down the Nile. The Princess of Egypt was at the Nile and she found Moses and adopted him into her home. So Moses received a great education. Moses still remembered who he was and when he saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite he fought and killed him. He exiled himself to the desert for 40 years. In the desert Moses saw a burning bush (that was not consumed by the flame) and got spoke to him revealing himself and telling him he was chosen to release the people. Moses went back to Pharaoh- and the nine plagues to soften Pharaoh's heart began. Moses' control (prediction, start, and stop of each plague) showed that he was a man of God. The Passover was the highlight of this- where the Israelites put blood of a lamb on their doorpost so that the angel of death would pass over their houses but would affect just the first born of each Egyptian household. Pharaoh agreed to let the Israelites go- but then changed his mind. The Israelites started out- not knowing exactly where they were going- but stopped at the edge of the Red Sea. The Israelites found themselves trapped with the Red Sea in front of them and the army of Egypt behind them. The Israelites were stuck in a bad spot again. Yet, God protected them from the army with a pillar of fire. The people panicked but Moses asked them to basically believe and watch: “The Lord will fight for you, you need only to be still.” He lifted his staff, the waters parted and the people of God walked through. When they were done, the Egyptians tried to follow, but Moses (following God's command) stretched out his hand and the waters went back, covering the Egyptian army.

God made a way when there seemed to be no way. They were stuck in slavery- God lifted them out. They were stuck with a bad leader who had a hard heart toward them- God softened his heart. They were stuck between a rock and a hard place at the sea- but God made it right.

When you are stuck, when you are in a tight spot, when the ones over you do not treat you fairly, remember to trust in God. God can do more than we can ask or imagine.

Prayer: Lord, help me to trust in you- even when my eyes tell me there is no hope.

3/2- The People Wander in the desert (Deuteronomy 8:2-5)

² And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not. ³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothing did not wear out upon you, and your foot did not swell, these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.

One of the most miserable times in the history of Israel was their wandering in the desert. Here they didn't have fancy food. But here they learned to depend upon God for daily bread. The Manna (literally "what is it") they received each day is a reminder that we are to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." Here they did not have visible gods. They tried to make one from the plunder of the Egyptians- a golden calf-god. But Moses would have none of it and ground it up and made them drink their golden calf! The wilderness is a time of learning. They weren't ready for the prosperity of the promised land. In the wilderness the water was sometimes bitter. They had to learn God can turn bitter water sweet. In the wilderness they received the Law and began to learn the importance of order, obedience, sacrifice, listening. They wandered in the wilderness for forty years because they were afraid. They were on the edge of the promised land. They had sent 12 spies in who returned the tales of great prosperity- but also giants in the land. Truth is, they were more scared of the giants than they were of displeasing God. When Moses died, and they crossed the Jordan, God appeared to Joshua and said to not be afraid but to be courageous at least three times. He asked Joshua to read and adhere to the Book of the Law Moses had given him. Joshua, who was one of the 12 spies, refused to let fear rule him. Many times we wallow and stay in our wildernesses out of fear or guilt.

Prayer: Lord, in times of transition, in times of suffering, in times of waiting- help me to put my trust in you.



3/3- The Promise of the Law Giving Direction in Wandering Ex. 20; Dt. 5

Hear O Israel the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them. The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb [Sinai]. It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today...and he said, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me...the Lord said, ‘Oh that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever. (Deut. 5:1-6,29)

Thoughts: God gave the Ten Commandments- and unlike the other commandments these were written in stone by the hand of God (Dt. 5:22). Many believe these words are a moral code that transcends culture and time. Many have attacked these commands by pointing out extreme exceptions and ethical quagmires. Yet the basic ethos of them remains. The first half are about our relation to God, and the second half about our relation to human beings. Not many argue that in general we should not murder, lie, steal, commit adultery, or lust/covet.

Luther said the law was to convict us of sin but could not save us- which is true. He also said it is a guide to authorities to keep order. Calvin added that the law also can be a useful guide. For example, if we are asking God to guide us about whether we should make a new business deal- even though we would have to deceive the other partner, there is no need to ask. Our first step in asking God to guide us is to listen to what He has already said. But there is another reason to keep the Ten Commandments. There is a blessing that comes from doing God’s will. It is made into the fabric of life. It is a blessing to be faithful to your spouse- and to therefore be a faithful parent and grandparent- if you have children. You will sleep better at night knowing you have kept your integrity. There is a peace within, a peace with others and a peace with God when we are in sync with Him. Moses said it like this- “that it might go with them and their children.”

Prayer: Lord, thank you that you care about how we live, and have given us directions to help us. Give us grace beyond our ability to keep your Law.



Cecil B Demill's Moses

3/4- Joshua says, “March Forth!” (through the Jordan, through Jericho’s Walls)

And he ordered the people, “March forth! March around the city with the armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord.” (Joshua 1:7).

Today is March fourth. How appropriate to study Joshua. Joshua was constantly telling the people to not be discouraged or afraid- but to be courageous and go forward. Joshua told them to march forth into the Jordan believing it would dry up before them- and it did. Joshua told them to march forth around Jericho seven times- then blow the trumpets and march into the city- whose walls crumbled. Joshua led the people in battle until they had basically conquered the gist of the promised land. Joshua could have just wandered aimlessly around avoiding conflict. But he wandered with a purpose- to establish a home for his people.

God calls us to not live a life of fear. The words to Joshua- “Do not be discouraged and do not be afraid- I will be with you” are words for all of us as we go on our life adventure. We have more reasons to not be afraid. We have the example of Jesus who faced the cross bravely. We have the assurance of our own resurrection because of His. We know we will win heaven in the end, so we do not need to be afraid here. In fact, if you live by faith, you have every reason to risk yourself for a higher love- a higher purpose.

I once knew a church called “The Christian Fortress.” There are some who see all the evil around us and circle the wagons- and put up high fences to not be influenced by evil. But Paul said, “Do not be overcome with evil- but overcome evil with good.” Be salt. Be light. March forth- do not be afraid. The twelve scared disciples who had been locked in a room after the crucifixion for fear of the Romans, saw Jesus. Everything changed and they went to the ends of the earth and all but John died a martyrs’ death for their faith. To follow Christ doesn’t mean just to be a nice person (though nice helps). It means to be willing to die to self to live for God. It means to “March Forth” and not be afraid.

Prayer: Lord, you call me to leave my fear behind and be bold for you. Help me to do that- however you call me to serve you.



Jericho- James Tissot

3/5- Deborah Wanders with Barak-Judges 4,5

Deborah said to Barak: “Go take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army. With his chariots and troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.” Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.” “Very well” Deborah said, “I will go with you . But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours. For the Lord will hand Sisera over to a woman.”

The people of Israel were being oppressed by the Canaanites who had resurged with 900 iron chariots. The Canaanites cruelly oppressed the people of Israel for 20 years. The people cried out for relief in their hard time. Deborah was a prophetess. She spoke forth the word of God. For those who say women should not speak in church, they need to remember Deborah. The people of God were working for their oppressors- almost like slaves. Deborah was told by God to call forth Barak from Naphtali to rescue the people. He refused to go without Deborah, and so she said a woman would get the glory that day. But it was not what you might think- it was not Deborah who won. Jael was the wife of Heber, an ally of Sisera. But she killed him.

Sometimes our wandering has surprises, and help comes from unexpected places. In Harry Potter Dumbledore told Harry at a nerve-wracking moment: “Help will always be given to those who ask for it.” We should not be afraid to ask for help in difficult times. When the Israelites fought those with much superior weapons and soldiers- it was all hands on deck. It wasn’t just the Naphtalites or the people of Zebulun- but the whole of Israel that needs to fight and their allies as well. In a time of transition at Spring Valley Presbyterian, we need to work together to make our light shine for Christ. Together we can do great things. One famous missionary (William Carey) said, “Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.” Barak and Deborah could have been complacent and it would be safer and easier just to accept the status quo. But Deborah expected great things from God and Barak attempted great things for God. Together we can glorify God best.

Prayer: Lord help me to expect more than the status quo from you in my life. Help me to honor you with who I am and work together with the church for you.



3/6- Gideon Wanders in his weakness and Finds Wonder Judges 6-8

The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.” But sir, Gideon replied, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about ? ...How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” The Lord answered, “I will be with you and you will strike down the Midianites together.

The Midianites swarmed over the land like locusts and they had tall camels. The people of Israel had started worshiping Baal because it seemed God was silent. Gideon believed, but even Gideon was afraid and felt like God had stopped helping his people- and stopped performing “wonders.” Perhaps you remember the stories here. Gideon put out two fleeces to make sure God was calling him. Then he had a small army of 22,000 Israelites against hundreds of thousands of Midianites. God told him to only take 300 so that the glory would go not to any one person but to the Lord. The 300 surrounded the army on the hills and broke jars with torches in them and scared the Midianites to death causing them to stampede against each other. Gideon thought he was the smallest of the small. He also thought God only did small things. He also thought he needed a bigger army. But God showed him that He can do wonders when we trust in Him.

Perhaps you feel small. Gideon did too. Perhaps you feel you do not have enough resources to do what you want- or to make a difference. But God can take two fish and a few loaves and feed 5,000. He can do more than all we think, ask, or imagine.

Prayer: Lord, take me as I am and use me for your glory. Make a difference with my small life for your great glory. Let me play my part and to be the piece your puzzle needs to be complete.



3/7- Samson Wanders into Sin and Shows the Wonder of the Power of God- Judges 13-16

“Then Samson prayed to the Lord, “O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.”...then he pushed with all his might and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed more when he died than while he lived.” (Judges 16:28,30)

Thoughts: Samson used to be one of my favorite stories as a child. But then when I looked into it as an adult I could see a lot of his weaknesses. He was impatient. He didn't listen to his parents- especially about women. He was strong- but he seemed to even relish in temptation. God used him, however, despite his sins and problems. He never lost his faith- though he certainly didn't live out his faith well. He was a hero in the sense that he was flawed but persevered. The Spirit would “come on” Samson mightily and he would have super-human strength. He knew it was from God (as many athletes today give thanks to God for their ability- an even unusual ability). He betrayed who he was- his identity as a Nazirite- his faith- his secret to Delilah who was only out to betray him for money. But in the end, Samson came back to God and was used mightily to bring relief to his people from the oppression of the Philistines.

Samson was a wonder- with super-human strength and ability. He fought a whole army and won. He tied 300 foxes together and set fire to the Philistine crops. He caused a whole temple to fall down. But he wandered away from following God- often. But he always came back.

We are all flawed. Some of my heroes have had their skeletons in their closet paraded out for all to see. With cameras everywhere and social media, and tracking devices recording our every move and click- our sins will be made manifest. Luke 12:3: “What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in private rooms will be proclaimed from the housetops.” Lip stick on a pig still covers a pig. Makeup and the finest of clothes and perfumes and PR cannot hide our sins. But a real hero perseveres despite their sins, coming back to God in the end. God forgives, and is more gracious than we know. In our day people seem to love criticism over grace, pointing out the sins of others rather than quietly turning back to God. Samson was a hero- but not just because of his strength. He was a hero because he didn't let his great flaws or his popularity (or lack thereof) get in the way of his coming back to God.

Prayer: Lord, you give me strength to live. Help me to use my strength mentally and spiritually to come back to you always. Forgive me and use me today to make a difference for you in this dark world.



3/8- Samuel the Wandering Prophet of Wonders

When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. But his sons did not walk in his ways...The people said, "Give us a king to lead us such as all the other nations have..."The Lord told Samuel, "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king." (1 Samuel 8)

Samuel was the last of the judges who anointed two kings- Saul and David. It was a wonder that he was born to Hannah- so he was raised in the house of the Lord in Shiloh and could experience God unlike many others. He grew up in a time of religious decay. Eli knew the things of God, but he (nor his wife) did not discipline his sons. These sons were in fact stealing from the Lord. Samuel would be considered almost adopted by God. His parents gave him up at a young age to work and live in the Tabernacle and its surrounding houses. Samuel was an anomaly. When he showed up people got nervous- even Saul the king. He had few friends and was on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah but always went back to Ramah (1 Sam. 7:16,17). Such a life is a lonely one. Samuel had sons but they did not follow in the ways of the Lord-accepting bribes, and the people did not want them to succeed him (8:3). God told Samuel that the people weren't rejecting Samuel by wanting a king. Rather, the people were rejecting God as king. There is a bittersweetness to this transition, and to Samuel's ministry and life. Yet wherever he went, he stayed faithful to God and never lost his ability to believe in God's help.

Prayer: Lord, when I wander in my life, I am tempted to not feel worthwhile. Help me to remember that I am loved by you and that wherever I go while seeking your will- you send me and you are there with me.



3/9- Ruth Wanders with her Mother-In-Law and Finds Wonder

Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, “Return home, my daughters. But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me...

Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for you mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” (Ruth 1:16,17; 2:11,12)

Thoughts: Naomi went to Moab with her husband and two sons who married Moabite women. All three men died in a famine. Naomi had nothing to give her daughter-in-laws, but Ruth refused to leave her. Ruth’s faith encouraged her to care for her mother-in-law. Naomi and Ruth went back to Israel as beggars- gleaning from the leftovers of the wheat harvest. What a horrible-grief filled life. It seemed they were wandering homeless with no food nor protection. But Ruth’s faithfulness did not go unnoticed. Boaz, a relative of Naomi’s was watching, and he and Ruth fell in love. Eventually they married and had a son the great-grandfather of King David and ancestor of Jesus.

There may be times when you feel like you are going nowhere. Maybe you are without a home or without a job or you are sick, hurting, hopeless. Ruth’s story is a reminder that God sees and cares.

Prayer: Lord, when I have nothing- I always have you. When all my relations are gone, you are still my Father. May I place and find my hope in you.



Ruth promises she won't leave Naomi

3/10- David the Boy Wonders into the Camp

Jesse said to his son David, Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. They are in the Valley of Elah fighting the Philistines. [Each day Goliath would defy the armies of Israel,, asking for a champion. David heard him]. David said to King Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will so and fight him...The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.” [David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone].

Providence is found everywhere in the Bible and it is also found everywhere in life. The timing and placement of us at just the right spot and moment are pointers to God’s sovereignty. So David was told to wander into the Israelite camp to give his brothers bread and grain, but this became an opportunity for him to become a hero- and the first step to becoming king. David went to serve his father and family but ended up serving God and his country. In his wondering, he trusted in God and was not afraid. Perhaps that is the difference between him and the others in the army. He was not afraid to come forward. Perhaps others thought that if the boy was defeated it would be no real loss. Yet David’s speed and agility matched Goliath’s slow moving height and strength. David’s brothers criticized him. Saul’s advisors said he wouldn’t last without armor. But David won. A combination of purpose, faithfulness to God and courage can make a huge difference.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be faithful, strong, and courageous for you wherever you lead me and place me.



David and Goliath- James Tissot

3/11- David running from Saul

PSALM 34: I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

² My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and be glad.

³ O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!

⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.

⁵ Look to him, and be radiant; so your^[a] faces shall never be ashamed.

⁶ This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

⁸ O taste and see that the LORD is good! Happy is the man who takes refuge in him!

PSALM 63: O God, thou art my God, I seek thee,

my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is.

² So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary, beholding thy power and glory.

³ Because thy steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise thee.

⁴ So I will bless thee as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on thy name.

David went from being a popular successful general to someone King Saul tried to kill. David wrote five Psalms in his time “in the wilderness.” Psalm 34, 54, 57, 59, 63. Two of my favorite Psalms are 34 and 63. Psalm 34 was written in a cave, reflecting how God protects those who seek him when he feigned madness in front of the king of the Philistines.

David twice tried to prove to Saul that he wasn’t trying to kill him. He could have killed Saul in the cave when he went into the cave to relieve himself. Later he went down and stole Saul’s spear but did not hurt him. But still Saul was jealous and tried to kill David until the day he died. David was treated unfairly. And these Psalms reflect a faithful trust in God in the midst of unfairness. If you are ever weary, felt treated unfairly, want to find God in a tight spot, these Psalm will ring true for you.

Prayer: Lord, we seek you believing you will hear us and deliver us from all our fears. When we are in a tight spot, our soul especially thirsts for you. Be not far from us. Deliver me- deliver us.



David and Saul in the cave

3/12- David Wanders Away- But comes Back- Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love;

according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

⁴ Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight,

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right^b spirit within me.

¹¹ Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Thoughts: There are many powerful people who cannot seem to have enough self control toward others. John F. Kennedy, Bill Clinton, John Edwards, Prince Andrew, Julius Caesar (called "The bald adulterer") are examples of people of power who crossed a line. David was a person of power. He was perhaps the greatest king in Israel's history before or after. David saw Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite bathing on the roof. He could have and should have walked away. Instead he called for one of his servants to bring her to him. They had an affair. She became pregnant. David tried to hide it with Uriah but could not, and he set Uriah up to be killed. One of David's court, Nathan the prophet, told David that he was like someone who stole another's only sheep even though he had many sheep. David did not make an excuse or kill Nathan. Rather he repented. Psalm 51 is a record of his repentant thoughts. They ring true for all of us.

David went from being close to God, blessed by God, in a palace with God, to one cursed by God for his sin. Later his daughter would be raped, his son rebel, he would be kicked out of his own palace by his son's rebellion. Yet David never stopped believing and relying on God to help him.

If you have been hurt by someone in power, or if you are someone in power who has hurt another—there is grace offered through Jesus Christ. Our call (contrary to what the world thinks) is not to condemn. However it is complicated by a call to continue to protect any innocent who might be hurt in the future. David- the greatest king- is a lesson that we all need forgiveness and grace. David and Bathsheba ended up having Solomon- the wise king. Bathsheba was an ancestor of Jesus. There is always grace- and we need to come back to it. We also need to believe we CAN come back.



Prayer: Lord, I am a sinner. Help me to understand with you there is grace- and I need it. Help me to have grace toward others too.

Spring Valley Presbyterian in the snow- 2/1/26
"Wash me and I will be whiter than snow."

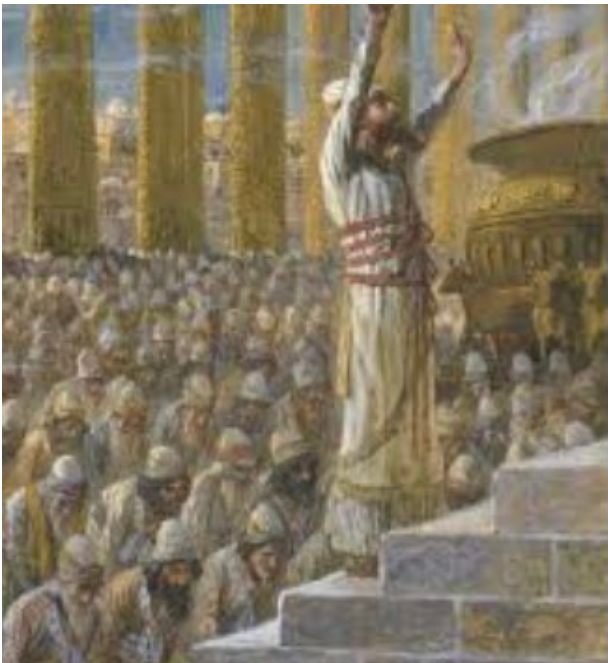
3/13- The Wonders of Solomon who Wanders away from them

At Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream , and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”...”I do not know how to carry out my duties...So give your servant discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?...As Solomon grew old his wives turned his heart after others gods and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. The Lord became angry, and said, “I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates.” 1 Kings

Even the one described as “the wisest king” made terrible mistakes. He began his reign wonderfully- asking for wisdom from God. Then he built the Temple and God appeared to him and blessed him. He received one of the greatest promises in the Bible...”If my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face- and turn from their wicked ways- then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14)

But even after these very two private but well-known appearances, Solomon still allowed his foreign wives (he had 1,000 wives and concubines) to entangle him in idol worship. If the wisest man could mess up- a man who had seen God twice- we can know we may mess up. Solomon, unlike David, did not repent.

Prayer: Lord, I am not enough. I need you. Direct me with my wisdom as a gift from you, ad direct me by your wise hand.



Solomon dedicating the Temple

3/14- The Wandering and Wondering Elijah

¹Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe ^a in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”²Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: ³“Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. ⁴You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there.”⁵So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. ⁶The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.⁷Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. ⁸Then the word of the LORD came to him: ⁹“Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.”

Thoughts: Elijah was a “settler” in Tishbi in Gilead. But after he became a prophet, he lived an unsettled life. He spent a few years in the wilderness being fed by ravens. He stayed with a poor widow and her son miraculously providing for them. He then came out of hiding to confront the prophets of Baal and win in a spiritual contest. But then he had to run 100 miles from Mt. Carmel to Mt. Sinai to escape the death sentence of Queen Jezebel. He sometimes stayed with a seminary of prophets, but mostly stayed in the wilderness. John the Baptist modeled his style of living after Elijah. Elijah lived so simply no one could accuse him of taking bribes or living as a hypocrite. Yet in his wanderings, Elijah was the quintessential prophet. Despite being exhausted to the point of depression, Elijah was faithful to God. He believed he was the only one of true faith left, but God told him he was not alone to encourage him (7,000 had not bowed the knee to Baal).

In our world we are taught that more and more stuff is the best way to live. Elijah teaches us something different. In our world we are called not to be unusual but to seek to fit in. Elijah never fit in—he thought he was the only one faithful. We can learn from Elijah’s simplicity and faithfulness. As he wandered in the wilderness, God provided for him and also used him for His glory.

Prayer: Lord, let me value simple faithfulness to you. Keep me in your care though all may fall away.



3/15- The Wandering and Wondering Elishah

[15](#)When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked.[16](#)"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." [17](#)And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.[18](#)As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike this army with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked. [19](#)Elisha told them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria.

Thoughts: Elisha asked that he inherit a double portion of Elijah. He did more miracles than Elijah. However, he did not rebuke and prophesy against the kings like Elijah did. This is a passage to remind us that there is an invisible world that is around us. The enemy soldiers surrounded Elisha and his servant. The servant was afraid at first until he saw what Elisha saw- the chariots and horsemen of Israel- the angels surrounding the army. This Lent, we may need to remember that we walk by faith not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). God can do more than we can ask or imagine. But we have to try to walk by faith this Lent.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see as you see. Give me courage to know of your care and power all around me.



3/16- The Wonders of Isaiah

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." ⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Thoughts Isaiah lived after Samaria fell in 722 but before Jerusalem fell in 586. He predicted the southern kingdom of Judah would escape the wrath of the Babylonians unlike the northern kingdom of Israel. Isaiah lived near the Temple in the city. He did not wander physically. But he had a clear experience of God who asked for someone to go and tell of the impending doom of Jerusalem. It was not a popular message. Strong tradition says that he was sawn into by the evil king Manasseh. When someone is about to drown they bob up and down usually. This is what the kingdom did. It had a high point in Uzziah, then a low in Ahaz- who locked the Temple up and worshiped idols. Then it had a revival under Hezekiah, then a low under Manasseh. Isaiah knew his task was not easy- still he sought to serve the Lord in it.

We are called to serve God in the ups and downs of our culture. We are not to live in the melancholy of the past or the hope of a better future. Rather, we are called to be servants of God this day.

Prayer: Lord, help me to serve and listen to you this day. Give me a heart for you as Isaiah had.



Isaiah- Michelangelo (Sistine Chapel- Last Judgment)

3/17- The Wandering and Weeping of Jeremiah

[18](#) So I say, "My splendor is gone
and all that I had hoped from the LORD."
[19](#) I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.
[20](#) I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.
[21](#) Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:
[22](#) Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
[23](#) They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
[24](#) I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."
[25](#) The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him; (Lamentations 3:18-25)

Thoughts: Jeremiah was a wealthy and wise man. But he had seen all he had destroyed, and his nation hurting. Yet he still found a way to hope in God. We do not believe in God because everything is going great. Rather we believe in God because He is God. When we do that, we will see His steadfast love, and mercy. Jeremiah was the one who said, "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, or the strong person boast in their strength, or the rich person boast in their wealth. But if anyone wants to boast, let them boast of this- that they understand and know me- the only true God." Jeremiah also wrote about a new covenant when the Messiah comes in 31:31-33. These were words Jesus thought about when he instituted the Lord's Supper. Jeremiah saw everything that he loved destroyed. He was severely persecuted- left to die in a cistern- sinking in the mud. Yet he found hope in God. This is the kind of faith we should want. The weak faith is the faith that runs away when things go wrong. But the strong faith still sees God's love- even in the sadness of life. This Lent, strengthen your faith.

Prayer: Lord, give me the perseverance of JEREMIAH.



3/18- Hosea's Wife Wanders Away to show the Wondrous Grace of God

2When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD." 3So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

Thoughts: Hosea's wife, Gomer, had wandered away into immorality. Hosea called her back to be his wife. This was a living allegory that the people of God had wandered away and were being called back by God who loves them. The church often wanders away- because people wander away. The leadership of the church can stop believing or wander down the wrong rabbit hole. The ministers, the people in the pews/chairs can as well. The really great news is that God calls us back. The parable of the Prodigal Son is about God the Father looking for us to come back, calling for us to come back, and welcoming and accepting us back to. Him. Do not think God does not welcome you back- despite your failures (and mine). Invite a friend who may have wandered off, to come back today. Maybe even someone who has quit coming to Spring Valley Presbyterian, or maybe quit going to a different church. 82% say they would come to church if someone invited them. Sadly, only about 5% have received an invitation to come back (according to Lifeway research).

Prayer: Lord, thank you that you are a gracious, forgiving God. Thank you that you always give us more chances than we deserve. Help me to invite others back to you.

3/19- The Locusts and Joel Call us Back

[4](#)What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten;
what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten;
what the young locusts have left other locusts [a](#) have eaten. (Joel 1:4)
Even now, return to me with all your heart, says the Lord with fasting, and weeping, and mourning.
Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God for He is gracious and
compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. (2:12,13)

In Joel's day the calamity was a locust swarm and a drought that destroyed food. It was like the dustbowl of the Great Depression in the USA. For adults in their 30s and 40s they grew up with the 911 terror attack in 2001, the following Afghan and Iraq wars, the housing and economic crisis of 2008, the fentanyl crisis (that kills 100,000 Americans/year), the Covid crisis, and now an immigration crisis that is tearing us apart as a nation. In the history of the United States (and biblical history), whenever crisis comes, there is a call for repentance from our leaders (both political and ministerial). Today, not many are calling us to repent. We see such things as totally apart from God. In the book of Revelation- plague after plague occurs but the people refuse to repent or humble themselves before God (Revelation 2:21; 9:20,21; 16:9,11). Calling to God for help and also turning back to God (which is what repentance is) are important parts of the Christian life. God becomes irrelevant subjectively if we think we do not need to call on Him or turn to Him. But God objectively is able to be our refuge and strength in trouble (Ps. 46:1,2), but also the One who blesses us- and heals us.

Prayer: Lord, we have wandered from you. We turn to you asking for your mercy, your help, and your grace. Lord have mercy upon us!



Locust swarm in Africa

3/20- Ezra Invite the People to Repent

[4](#)Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.[5](#)Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God [6](#)and prayed: “I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to you, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. [7](#)From the days of our ancestors until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today.

[8](#)“But now, for a brief moment, the LORD our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place [a](#) in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage. [9](#)Though we are slaves, our God has not forsaken us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.[10](#)“But now, our God, what can we say after this? For we have forsaken the commands [11](#)you gave through your servants the prophets when you said: ‘The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other.

Thoughts: Ezra teaches us how to repent. He personally had not done any wrong, but the people had. Yet he repented for them. Similarly Daniel prayed a great prayer of repentance in Daniel 9: “O Lord...we have sinned and done wrong; we have been wicked and rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws...we are covered in shame...”. Daniel had not done anything wrong- but he prays a prayer for his people. Similarly, especially during Lent, we are called to repent and pray such prayers. Ezra and Daniel as those who had experienced exile, knew that even if they as individuals did right, they would be caught up in the wrong of the people. They didn’t wear signs that said, “Repent

the end is near!" Rather they prayed such great prayers, and God heard them. In both instances God restored the people spiritually first then physically later.

Prayer: We have sinned, O Lord. We have not listened to you- but have gone our own way. We have been uncaring and apathetic toward you- making other things our gods. Forgive us, restore us and make us new.

3/21- Nehemiah- Invites the Wandering to Settle Down and Build Up

Those in Jerusalem are in great trouble and disgrace. The walls of Jerusalem have been broken down and its gates destroyed by fire. When I hear these things I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. (1:3,4); [I was the cupbearer to the King, Artaxerxes] I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so I may rebuild it." [when the people around them tried to discourage, distract, or defeat them Nehemiah said]: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down to you. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?"

Thoughts: Nehemiah is a great work about building up the church, and even the purpose of building. Nehemiah was in the right place at the right time- by God's providence- as the cupbearer to the mightiest king in the world. He prayed and found strength to speak up. He also took courage to take this task upon himself. When he went back he got everyone to take responsibility to build the part of the walls. He helped the poor- sometimes feeding the poor from his own salary and inviting them to his table. He invited Ezra the priest to gather all the people and they stood (gladly) listening to Ezra read the Law for six hours straight. Not only was there a physical revival with the wall built and people coming back to the land, but there was a spiritual revival as well. These often go hand in hand.

Prayer: Lord, build up Spring Valley Presbyterian again. Build up your church in America again. May your Holy Spirit continue to be at work in us again.



3/22- The Wise Men Wandered in Wonder Matthew 2

[1](#)After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi [a](#) from the east came to Jerusalem [2](#)and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” [3](#)When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. [4](#)When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. [5](#)“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied

Thoughts: The Magi (or wise men) wandered with a purpose. They followed a star about 1,000 miles from Persia to Bethlehem along the fertile crescent and the Euphrates River. They had no GPS, they had no map, they had a star- some say a comet (the Chinese reported one about this time). When the star disappeared, they went to the current king, Herod, to ask where the new king was born (probably thinking this baby was a relative). Herod was supremely jealous, and would try to kill all the babies in Bethlehem under two. This meant they had been travelling/wandering for at least a year. The star reappeared just in time and ended up pointing to the place where Jesus was now staying (in a house now instead of a stable). This seemingly chance encounter was predicted. Micah (5:2) predicted the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem; Daniel 9:25 predicted the timing; Isaiah 60:1-6 predicted that nations and kings would come to the Messiah bearing gifts of gold and incense. We forget sometimes that in our wandering, “we go nowhere by accident, and where we are going God is sending us.” God has more to do with Spring Valley Presbyterian. We have to discover what that is.

Prayer: Lord, help us to remember that you lead us and guide us when we trust in you. Show us your will for us. Help us to honor you as our King who is worthy of our worship.



3/23- John the Baptist's Wild Wandering

[29](#) The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! [30](#) This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' (John 1:39,40)

John the Baptist was born in "the hill country of Judea" (traditionally the town Ein Karem 4.7 miles from Jerusalem). He was probably born as far from the center of Jerusalem as our church is from the center of Columbia. He was of the Aaronic priestly line from both his father and mother, but he left all that to wander in the wilderness. He did not wonders other than the baptism of Jesus when the dove came down from heaven and a voice was heard confirming Jesus as the "Son" of God. John criticized the religious establishment and the ruling establishment. He was killed for rebuking Herod Antipas for wooing and marrying his brother's wife, Salome. John followed in the footsteps of Elijah who wandered in the wilderness too (see 3/14 devotion). No one could accuse John of bribery or working for money because he had nothing (eating locusts and wild honey). His call and ministry is one we all need to hear daily- repent, believe, help the needy. He said he was not worthy to untie the sandals of the Messiah- and said "He must increase but I must decrease." His humility is an amazing witness among all the ambitions of our day.

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember the simplicity of believing in you. Help me to remember who you are and to humble myself before you.



3/24- Jesus Wandered in the Desert- Matthew 4

¹Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted ^a by the devil. ²After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

After he was baptized, Jesus wandered in the desert forty days to be tempted before he began his ministry. Each temptation he faced, he resisted by quoting scripture. He learned some lessons from these temptations: 1) depend on God to provide physically; 2) not to test faith with miracles; 3) not to worship anyone other than God- even if the world and all its riches are promised. Wilderness, wandering, humility and temptation all go together. We all have our times in the wilderness. As you look back on your life can you identify any wilderness periods where you felt lost and hopeless?

Prayer: Lord, help me to see my wanderings and temptations as opportunities to be shaped by you.



Temptation- James Tissot

3/25- Jesus Heals the Storm in Wonder Matthew 8

[23](#)Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. [24](#)Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. [25](#)The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!” [26](#)He replied, “**You of little faith, why are you so afraid?**” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. [27](#)The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

Thoughts: Jesus was tired. He had been preaching and healing and it took His energy right out of Him. He was asleep in a boat with the rain falling on his face and the waves rocking the boat. Everybody else in the boat was terrified- Jesus was asleep. There is a passage that says, “Perfect love casts out fear.” That is the more we love God, the less we are afraid. I have found that to be true. If you know you are going to heaven and want to go to heaven because you love Christ, then you will be less afraid. How did the Christian martyrs face death? Who would give this life’s few years for eternity? How did the missionaries leave all the comforts of home to go tell others the good news of Christ? There is a peace inspired by love

of God. Jesus can calm any storm in the midst of your wandering. He is greater than any circumstance you face.

Prayer: Lord, help me in my storm. Help me in my wandering. Let me have your purpose, peace and rest.



Wikimedia;- Tissot

3/26- Jesus sends the 12 Out to Wander with Wonders Matthew 10

[5](#)These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. [6](#)Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. [7](#)As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ [8](#)Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, ^a drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. [9](#)“Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— [10](#)no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. [11](#)Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. [12](#)As you enter the home, give it your greeting. [13](#)If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it;

Thoughts: Jesus was asking the disciples not to have a holy huddle but a holy wandering. In fact, the word “apostle” means “sent ones.” In another place Jesus sends out 72 (Lk. 10). After the resurrection he said, “As the Father has sent me, so send I you (John 20:21). Most scholars think the modern day equivalent to an apostle is a missionary who starts a church or ministry in a new place.

But really, all of us are sent. We are all missionaries. We are all called to spread light and to be salt. We are all called to heal, help, relieve the oppressed, give freely and to depend on God. As one of the moderators of the PCUSA general assembly said (John Holt Rice), "the church is a missionary society." The church is the place where we encourage and send each other out to make a difference- to make the world a better place for the glory of God. We make the world a better place by healing, helping, giving of ourselves and what we have.

Prayer: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love, where there is injury, pardon where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. (St. Francis prayer-excerpt).

3/27- Jesus Gives Rest in the Midst of Wandering Matthew 11:25-30

[28](#)"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. [29](#)Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30](#)For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Thoughts: Jesus recognizes our weariness and tiredness and restlessness. He recognizes that sometimes we just need to rest. He recognized that the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak. Where do we find rest in our times of wandering in the wilderness, temptation, struggle? Jesus said to find rest in Him. He can give us peace. Sometimes the burden of life is too much. The idea of yoke- is a dual yoke. In a double yoke, the stronger ox does most of the pulling. The wonder is that as we come to Christ, our burdens are made lighter.

Prayer: What a friend we have in you, Jesus. Thank you for bearing our burdens and wanting us to come to you for help.



Eastminster Presbyterian's "Come Unto Me" Stained Glass window

3/28- Jesus Wonders Away from Family- Matthew 12:46-50

⁴⁶While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." ⁴⁸He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Thoughts: Family is a gift. The Psalmist says "God places the lonely in families" (Ps. 68:6). Family provides support, encouragement, and love. Family members also can feel free to rebuke and correct you more than others. In his early ministry some of Jesus' family members were not supportive. They didn't want Jesus to push himself so much. But they didn't know he only had a limited time period here (3

years). Mark 6:3 reads that Jesus had four half-brothers: James, Joseph, Judas, Simon, and two unnamed half-sisters (Mary and Salome in early tradition). Jesus was teaching here that the church is a family, and we are brothers and sisters when we follow Him- “doing God’s will.”

The church is a family. God places us together and wants us to be one and love one another. As in any family, there may be differences and even spats. But we should still come together as a family. On our journey, we are not alone. God gives us fellowship to encourage one another (Heb. 10:24,25). Let us love one another and build each other up.

Prayer: Thank you that in your grace you have given me a church family. Help me to love them and follow you with them.

3/29- Palm Sunday- Jesus Wandering into Jerusalem on a Donkey

⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna ^b to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” ^c“Hosanna ^d in the highest heaven!” ¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” ¹¹The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Thoughts: Jesus did not wander into Jerusalem. He went with a purpose. He went as the humble King. He came on a donkey because that was the symbol of Davidic royalty. Ironically, each donkey has a

cross on its back. John tells us they cut palm branches- and shouted “Hosanna” (Lord save us).

What does this mean for us today? Jesus calls us to worship Him as King. But the ironic thing is He knew He was the King coming to die. He wept over Jerusalem before the parade started, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets... how I longed to bring you under my wings like a mother hen, but you would not come” (Mt. 23:37). The ones who praised him as the Savior would be silenced at his arrest and crucifixion. But His death that silenced them would be the sacrifice that would save them. He is the humble Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. If our Lord was humble- and He had a right to be proud and demand worship- why can we not be humbled and not easily offended. If we are easily offended, our pride has kicked in. If we easily offend, our pride is elevated.

Prayer: Lord, your humility is a wonder! Give me grace to be more humble.



Tissot- Palm Sunday

3/30- The Little Children Wonder and Wander Matthew 18:1-9; 19:13-15;

¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? ²He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. ³And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. ⁶“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! ⁸If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown

into eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. (Mt. 18:1-9)

¹³Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." ¹⁵When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there. (Mt. 19:13-15)

Thoughts: Jesus was welcomed first by little, innocent children who were not aware of any Roman and Hebrew consequences to their praise. They were not hardened by lust/fear of power or skepticism. Jesus held up children as examples of humility. Children have to trust that those caring for them have their best interest at heart- they have no choice. Children have to have their hands up- asking for someone to lead them- almost like they are blind and deaf. The greatest are those who totally trust God. Jesus warns against hurting children. We may seem them as vulnerable and unprotected- but God protects them. Finally in Mt. 19 Jesus welcomes the children to come and makes time for them. Children are not an inconvenience to get under our feet but a blessing that call us to remember God. Spring Valley Presbyterian is called to sacrifice so that children will again come to Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, have mercy on the children of our land. Give us grace to care for children who cannot care for themselves.



3/31- The Greatest Commandment is a Wonder- Matthew 22:34-40

³⁴Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' " ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' " ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Thoughts: Jesus did not emphasize taking control (like Machiavelli), or pushing for political power. He conquers the world with love. Love is more powerful than political clout. Loving God is part of the great shema that is recited at each Passover, and in some corners daily. Luther points out that the second commandment really comes from the first. If we love God, we will surely love our neighbor. Some

religions (like Islam and Buddhism) do not emphasize loving God- that would be too immanent. But Christians and Jews alike emphasize that God is to be loved. Christ shows us in his life that He is loving and lovable. Christ healed all who asked. He forgave and was merciful.

Loving neighbor- means first those God has put around you- family, church. But Jesus also told the parable of the Good Samaritan upon being asked, "Who is my neighbor?" The neighbor could be someone not like us. It surely is anyone in our path no matter who they are.

This Lent, have your eyes open to people in your path. Including the waiter, the cash out person, the landscaper, the person in line with you.

Prayer: Lord, you are love. Help me to love you more and love my neighbor more.



4/1- The Wandering Until the End Comes Matthew 24

[3](#)As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" [4](#)Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. [5](#)For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. [6](#)You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. [7](#)Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. [8](#)All these are the beginning of birth pains. [9](#)"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. [10](#)At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, [11](#)and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. [12](#)Because of the

increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ¹⁴And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Thoughts: The last prayer of the Bible is "Amen. Come Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22). The disciples were a lot more aware of the problems of this world- the hurts, the persecutions, oppressions, injustice, hunger, thirst, pain, heartache than we are. The average person lived to about 33. Many died in infancy, or in childhood diseases. There were no antibiotics, life giving surgery, sense of hygiene. It was a brutal time- where life was not that valuable- and the image of God in others was not respected. God was the main source of comfort and hope. Today many believe they can get along fine without God in this life. Christians continue to try to make this life better- for the glory of God. But we also look forward to the time when there will be no more death, mourning, pain, famine, disasters, war, or tears.

Jesus points out here that the pains of life will continue to the end- and perhaps get even more intense (wars, fear, famines, earthquakes, persecution). He also points out that the gospel will be preached to the whole world before the end comes, while at the same time many will fall away. Hatred and betrayal (and disunity) will reign even in the church. In some ways, this sounds like today. God can come back any time. In 1988 for the first time in the history of any religion- there were adherents in every nation. Some say this word "ta ethne" means every tribe/language group. Our task is to continue to spread God's love, to love each other, and to stand firm to the end. Christ comes at the end of history or at the end of our personal history. Either way, we should always be ready to meet Him- come Lord Jesus! One day our wandering will be over and we will be at home- with Him.



Prayer: Lord, in your mercy, keep me. Help me to stand firm in you to the end.

The Last Judgment- Sistine Chapel- Michelangelo

4/2- The Wonder of the Supper and the Wandering of Betrayal/Denial [Maundy Thursday]

Tonight at 6:00- SVPC will have a Seder Meal, a worship service with communion, and a Tenebrae service remembering the Passion of Christ- in Potts Hall.

¹⁷On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" ¹⁸He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.' " ¹⁹So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. ²⁰When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. ²¹And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." ²²They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" ²³Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man will

go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”²⁵ Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely you don’t mean me, Rabbi?” Jesus answered, “You have said so.”

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the ^b covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”³⁰ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³¹ Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”³² But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”³³ Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”³⁴ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”³⁵ But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same. (Matthew 26:17-35)

Thoughts: This is a long passage. Unlike Luke that emphasizes communion, or John that emphasizes service and the last words, Matthew- and the events- bracket the supper with the prediction of the betrayal and denial of Jesus. He also predicted all of them would run away. As such, it is a very sad, stressful time. Matthew emphasizes the words of Jesus that this was a “new covenant.” His refers to Jeremiah (31:31-34) who foresaw a time when the Messiah would come and the knowledge of God would spread to the world based on grace not law.

The sad thing is that all the disciples- the ones Jesus had mentored would “fall away.” This is another reason we need forgiveness and grace. Peter, the leader, would deny Jesus three times, and would be restored after the resurrection. The supper is a symbol of grace- His body and blood sacrificed for us so that we can come back and come near Him. This Lent- this Holy week- prepare in your heart to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. There will be a celebration at SVPC on Maundy Thursday 4/3 and on Easter.

Prayer: May your grace envelope and restore me to you, O Lord. Forgive me for the times I have fallen denied or even betrayed you before others.



Leonard Da Vinci's Last Supper

4/3- The Wonder of the Crucifixion- Wandering into Death- [Good Friday]
Many scholars believe Jesus died 4/3 33 AD at 3:00 in the afternoon.

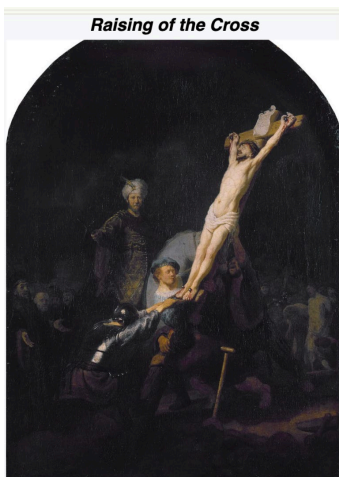
⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, ^ε lemasabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). ⁴⁷ When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹ The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”⁵⁰ And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split ⁵² and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to

life. [53](#) They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and [e](#) went into the holy city and appeared to many people. [54](#) When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

Thoughts: This is just horrible. So brutal; so horrible; so unjust; so undeserved; the height of political skin-saving; The most innocent, loving one was persecuted. Mocked even to the end by even by the thieves. They were looking to see another miracle- not that they would believe- but to mock Him. They didn't know that the last wonder Jesus would perform would indeed be the death of the eternal Son of God. That God would so clearly come down and suffer is simply amazing. Many find it too hard to believe. But the last miracle was seen by Jesus himself as a "ransom" (Mk. 10:45), as part of the new covenant (Mt. 26:35), as a sacrifice for our sins, as showing his love ("greater love has no one than this: that he gives his life for his friends").

Yet the cross means nothing if we think it is only for the world- or even those who believe- and do not see the cross is for me. Rembrandt, in his portrayal, painted himself as one of the ones crucifying Jesus- at the foot of the cross. He died in my place. If I were the only one alive, He would have paid for my sins. The cross is big enough for everyone- but small enough for me. The cross is powerful enough to cover the worst sins- but personal enough to cover my sins. It is universal- for every tribe, language, and people- yet it is particularly for me. The cross is my cross- His death took the place of my death. In that sense, this Friday is good. It is God-Friday.

Prayer: What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss, to bear the dreadful curse for my soul? You, O Lord, have given your all. You my Maker, are my Redeemer. My soul is downcast thinking of your pain, but my heart rejoices that you have set me free from hell and the rigors of death.



Rembrandt's Raising of the Cross 1633- with the artist pictured at the foot.

4/4- Wandering Down into Death and Hades

[57](#) As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. [58](#) Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. [59](#) Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, [60](#) and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. [61](#) Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

[62](#) The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. [63](#) "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' [64](#) So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his

disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.”⁶⁵“Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.”⁶⁶So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.(Mt. 27:57-66)

Thoughts: Matthew does not focus on the spiritual side of the burial and descent into hell. He focused that Jesus was indeed buried- with particular detail that other witnesses have left out. Joseph of Armathea was a rich man and member of the Sanhedrin. He was bold enough to go to Pilate to ask for the body. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus (the other Mary) witnessed where his body had been placed. Matthew adds that Pilate put a guard and seal over the tomb. In other words, Jesus’ body was not stolen from the cross- but was buried and really buried.

The burial is a reminder that Jesus really died. He was really human and his death was real. This Lent we see the details that his death was real for us, and costly.

Today you can go to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and see the empty tomb.

Prayer: Lord, thank you that you really died. The tomb was real, but we know it is empty now. Thank you that no stone- however heavy; no tomb can hold you!



The empty tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher

4/5- Easter- The Wonder of the Resurrection- Gives us Direction in our Wandering

¹After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

²There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.⁵The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was

crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Thoughts: The resurrection means we know who will win in the end. Just as I may say, "we won" when my team wins- we won when Jesus rose from the dead. It means though our hopes may be broken, and our world may be broken, nothing can stop the One who conquers death.

The greatest wonder ever is the resurrection. It made all the other wonders real and efficient and meaningful for everyone- not just the one or two helped at a time. Each healing now means Jesus can do that for me- for He is alive to do it! Each teaching of Jesus is made more meaningful for there is life-giving power behind it. His words are the words of life.

We may wander in life- but we will always come back to this point- the resurrection is where our death meets our life. It is where we are set free because the One we love and follow has been freed. Our wondering comes to an end here. Our wandering ends at our home in the life-giving resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Thank you! Thank you for coming back to life. Thank you that you are alive to hear my prayers and powerful enough to answer them! Thank you that death has lost its sting and we can claim our victory. Give us assurance in our wondering and direction in our wandering in this life now. Thank you that you are the answer! Thank you that you are our home!



Jesus and Thomas after the Resurrection:
"Put your hands here- stop doubting and believe."