



## *Lent Devotional 2021*

The season of Lent is a time of prayer, fasting and self-examination in preparation for the celebration of the resurrection of the Lord at Easter. It is a period of 40 days — like the flood of Genesis, Moses' sojourn at Mount Sinai, Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb, Jonah's call to Ninevah to repent and Jesus' time of testing in the wilderness. (The Sundays in Lent are not counted in this reckoning of the time between Ash Wednesday and Easter, as every Lord's Day is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.)

In the early church, Lent was a time of preparation for the celebration of baptism at the Easter Vigil. In many communities of faith it remains a time to equip and nurture candidates for baptism and confirmation and to reflect deeply on the theme of baptismal discipleship.

*"I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." — Mark 1:8*

*Taken from the PCUSA Website*

## Lenten Series 2021

During Lent, we have decided to do a series of sermons and meditations based on several Psalms. The Psalms are a prayer book for God's people. Through the medium of poetry, the Psalms open the human heart in God's presence. The full range of human emotion is found in the Psalms.

Lent is a season of preparation and repentance during which we anticipate Good Friday and the day of Resurrection. Lent invites us to make ourselves ready for contemplating the depths of Christ's sacrifice and to celebrate the victory of the Resurrection. The 40 days of Lent begin on Ash Wednesday and continue through Holy Week. Our purpose in choosing the various Psalms for preaching and meditations is to deepen our relationship and union to Christ.

Starting with Ash Wednesday and continuing on Sundays through Lent, we have chosen a series of Psalms that highlight various themes and seek to focus our attention to a beautiful aspect of our relationship to the Lord.

The following is a list of the Psalms we will use for worship for Ash Wednesday and Sunday worship and the theme of focus we will explore.

We invite you to read and reflect on the Psalm for each Sunday in preparation for worship.

**Ash Wednesday – February 17 – Psalm 51** “Against you, you only have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight.”

### **Confession**

**February 21 – Psalm 130** - “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be revered.”

### **Forgiveness**

**February 28 – Psalm 139** - “O Lord, you have searched me and known me.”

### **Providence**

**March 7 – Communion - Psalm 42** - “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.”

### **Hope**

**March 14 – Psalm 103** – “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.”

### **Peace**

**March 21 – Psalm 84** – “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts.”

### **Home**

**March 28 - Palm Sunday Psalm 24** “Lift your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in.”

In addition to the Psalms for worship, Rev. Ruth Roberts and Rev. Dr. Jack Heinsohn have prepared brief meditations on a series of well-loved Psalms. We offer our thoughts and reflections in hopes that they will help you in your preparation through Lent. We invite you to read the Psalm, reflect and meditate and pray through its thoughts and images, and allow the Holy Spirit to minister to your soul.

### **Rev. Dr. Jack Heinsohn - Psalm 1**

Psalm 1 describes two different paths for life. One path ends up “blessed.” Blessed is a rich word in Scripture. It carries meanings of ‘how joyful, how happy, how rewarding, how to be envied.’ The other path ends up barren and lifeless. The joyful life is described first by what it is not.

We can see the path clearly. First the person is ‘walking’ in the

counsel of the wicked. Then the person is 'standing' in the way of sinners. Then the person is 'sitting' in the seat of scoffers. Notice the progression of the life moving away from God. This life ends up immobile. There is no movement forward. Life apart from God finally all comes to a stop.

The happy person is described in another kind of picture. This one 'delights in the law of the Lord.'" The 'law' is more than just the written statutes, but the revelation of God's will, God's desires. The blessed one 'meditates' on the law 'day and night.' 'Meditates' is an interesting word. It carried the meaning of the sound a lion makes as it devours its prey. It also could mean the moaning of a dove in distress. In times of strength or weakness, in times of joy or sorrow, in times of light or darkness, God's will, God's desires become our source of strength and hope.

The Psalmist expands the picture of the happy person. This one "is like a tree planted by streams of water." This tree yields fruit, has healthy leaves, and does not wither. The tree is fulfilling beautifully the purpose for which it was planted. Perhaps one of the main reasons for discontent in people is that they don't think they are fulfilling any real purpose. When our lives are planted in the life and love of God, then we produce the kind of life that brings joy.

We see this most clearly and perfectly in Jesus' life. He told his disciples that "I am the vine, you are the branches." When we are grafted into his life, then our lives begin to produce the fruit of His Spirit. Paul described these in Galatians: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control. This sounds like a great and fulfilling life to me. This life is not only good for the individual, but becomes a blessing to others, as Christ is a blessing to others.

The Psalm opens our mind to all sorts of possibilities with

God. If we consider ourselves and our lives, and find that we identify more with the chaff than the tree, then this Psalm opens up a whole new picture of what our life can be. Let us choose to be blessed, and be in turn a blessing to our world.

## **Rev. Ruth Roberts - Psalm 8**

Psalm 8 is a Psalm of Praise written by King David. It affirms the absolute majesty and sovereignty of God. But it also lifts human beings up, crowns us with glory and gives us dominion over all creation.

On or about December 20 of this past Christmas season, I walked out in my backyard to attempt to view the near confluence of two planets—the event the media dubbed the “Christmas Star.” Jupiter and Saturn were to come closer than they had in the last 800 years, so I had read. It was a dark, clear night and though I had only binoculars I thought it just might be possible to see this majestic sight. And to my delight I actually could see well enough to appreciate this near meeting of planets. I was alone but I broke into smiles as I watched through those binoculars. Even in this limited way I could see the awe-inspiring image.

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”

Indeed, what are we that the sovereign God, creator of the universe, cares about you or me?

The Psalmist says this God of the universe, majestic and creating, does indeed care about us—more than care, God has raised us up only a little lower than God almighty.

Really, in the middle of all we have been through recently I find myself thinking where are you Lord and do you actually care?

This Psalm speaks to us of relationship – God to us and we to one another. God chooses – chooses us as stewards of all that God has created. God bestows upon all of us dignity and value and requires nothing of us in return. Asking only that we offer to God our love and devotion and service to this world. Asking only that we see one another as God in Christ sees us. Worthy. Worthy of respect. Worthy of dignity. Worthy of carrying the light of God that is Christ into the dark spaces.

The creator of all – the giver of life in Christ reaches out to us, longing to know our love and devotion.

### **Rev. Dr. Jack Heinsohn - Psalm 13**

Psalm 13 is a Psalm of David. The Psalm starts as a lament. The song starts with the Psalmist singing the blues. The plaintive cry is “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” He feels as if God has hidden his face. He has deep sorrow in his heart. He has enemies who mean to harm him. We probably all have sung this song at one time, haven’t we?

But in the face of trouble and adversaries his final words are, “But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart will rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has dealt bountifully with me.” His song of blues turns into a song of praise.

I have been inspired through the years by people who praised God through difficult times, trusting in God’s mercy and providence. The truth is that God is with us even when we don’t think God is there. Jesus has shared in our experience. The prophet Isaiah wrote of the Christ, “He was despised and

rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ... surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.”

Since we all have probably experienced troubles as the Psalmist, our mutual love in Christ enables us to reach out to others in difficult times. Paul wrote in Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” We find Jesus’ law in John 15:12, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” We reach out in mercy and God works through us.

I read a story about a four-year-old boy who went next door to visit an elderly man who had recently lost his wife. He climbed into the neighbor’s lap on the porch. His mother asked him what he said to him. He said, “Nothing, I just helped him cry.” Sometimes that’s what we do for each other. We help each other cry.

The Psalmist cried out, “How long, O Lord?” The answer for us is Jesus. He said, “Lo, I am with you always.” In a time of trouble, remember this Psalm. Pray through it, and sing through it. Look for God’s presence in your midst. Sometimes when we are in trouble a way out begins when we look for someone else in trouble and try and help them. A quote I came upon a few years ago has stuck with me. “Be kind, because everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.”

### **Rev. Dr. Jack Heinsohn - Psalm 23**

Psalm 23 is a Psalm of David. This is a special jewel of Scripture, indeed a special jewel of all human poetry and literature. David was the shepherd king. He did not forget the lessons he learned as a boy when he tended his father’s sheep. The Psalm is written from the perspective of a contented

sheep. The sheep knows that it is in a good place because it has a wonderful shepherd.

The sheep is content and lying down. It lies in green pastures, and still waters are nearby. The sheep is there because the shepherd brought it there. The shepherd knows the places where the sheep is best fed. Ultimately God leads us in Christ to Himself. This is the best place for all of us.

The sheep has noticed the good care of the shepherd. He leads the sheep in right paths for his “name’s sake.” A shepherd’s reputation is created by the condition of his sheep. We are those who follow Christ. Let us consider our actions as Christ’s sheep. We don’t want to do anything that would damage the reputation of the Lord.

Even in the most difficult and dark times, the sheep feels safe. The shepherd’s rod and staff comfort it. He won’t let the sheep wander off on the dangerous path. He will bring him back with his staff. Sheep had a lot of enemies. There was danger from predators and danger from pests. The shepherd used his rod to intimately inspect each sheep by a process called “going under the rod.” Here the shepherd would anoint the sheep’s head with oil. He also would apply other agents because the sheep would be pestered by flies and bugs. The anointing would help the sheep be rid of these irritants. The sheep would share the anointing when they rubbed each others faces. The care would extend through the whole flock. We pass under the rod of God’s Word. Here God applies the grace and truth and correction we need to remain healthy. And we spread that Word and grace to one another to keep each other safe in our mutual and reciprocal love.

A healthy flock is a sign of the shepherd’s tender care. The sheep leave in their wake a trail of goodness and mercy. They are good for each other, and are a blessing to the world around



them. They follow this shepherd gladly, they will follow him anywhere. They have a great reputation as a flock.

As we see this sheep's poem in honor of its shepherd, we find its fulfillment in Christ. Christ identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd, who lays down His life for us, His sheep. In His care we follow through this life, and into our heavenly home. Christ has gone before us. He has prepared a place for us. Green pastures, still waters. We will lay down in peace.

As we continue through this Lenten Season, may we find ourselves drawing ever nearer to Christ. May we find our strength, hope, health, and security in Him. May we always bring honor to our Good Shepherd. May we never forget the lessons of love we have learned in Him. May we seek to share this love with each other and the world.

### **Rev. Ruth Roberts - Psalm 46**

When I was a little girl at the Baptist church in Aiken, my parents decided I should be a member of the children's choir. I remember well Mr. Slaughter who directed this gathering – I hesitate to call it a choir. And he was also the organist and the high school band director– marching and orchestral. He was a long-suffering man.

He was also very competitive on behalf of his various musical charges. And so, it was that my choir ended up going to a Baptist choir competition. This was before I ever had anyone ask me just to mouth the words – that trauma came in college in the sorority competitions.

Back to the Baptists – the song we sang was “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” And I remember the words and the – in my eyes - ponderous cadence. It is in our Presbyterian hymnal to this day, even the latest edition “Glory to God.”

Martin Luther wrote this hymn using the 46th Psalm. He and many since have loved this Psalm, perhaps, because it steadfastly proclaims faith in God's protection and presence even while being realistic about the way things actually are in the world.

If you haven't read or sung it lately I encourage you to do so. Page 260 in our blue hymnal.

This beautiful Psalm presents God as our refuge and help. I think it's important to know that God as refuge is not a refuge or security from the troubles that come our way. Rather God is our refuge and help *IN* the world. God cannot be undone by the worst the world can bring – not by the coronavirus nor by the worst of storms. From God's faithful presence with us in the middle of our difficulty we have faith that we need not fear for nothing can undo the promises of God.

### **Rev. Dr. Jack Heinsohn - Psalm 91**

Psalm 91 is a powerful reflection on God as our protector and defender in the hardest of times. The last two verses are a benediction in God's voice over us.

We all deal with fear and we do things to manage our fears. We anticipate trouble and act proactively. We buy insurance. We do estate planning. We exercise and seek to eat healthily. We buy warranties. People who jump out of airplanes wear parachutes. All these actions and others seek to minimize harm and reduce our fear.

I find that fear diminishes when I am not alone. The presence of the strong person lessens fear. It is amazing that there are people who actually make a living by putting themselves in harm's way in order to protect people who are perfect strangers to them.

Psalm 91 is a song of great comfort. Ironically as we read the Psalm it is filled with images that evoke great fear: snares, pestilence, darkness, night terror, arrows by day, destruction at noon, lions, serpents, and falls from great heights. Through these various poetic images we can all put a face on our fears. The Psalmist doesn't say that our fears do not exist, or that they are imaginary; we have real fears. But the Psalmist has discovered in God his fears will not overcome him or destroy him. There is nothing he fears that is greater than God. Maybe one way to deal with our fears is to put a name on them, then put them next to Christ. There is nothing greater than Him.

The Psalmist writes a beautiful ending. In answer to his song, God speaks. The Psalmist shows us a God who listens, who speaks, who is relational and personal. God is the strong one who is always present. God meets us in our fears.

In all our fears we find that Christ is with us. Christ is God in our flesh. Didn't Christ experience all the things the Psalmist listed? Jesus heard the voice of evil tempting Him to sin. Jesus had bitter enemies who hated him and plotted and carried out his death. Even Christ's friends turned away and left him alone in the moment of truth. He heard the taunts of his enemies ringing in His ears and he slowly and painfully died. Didn't Jesus experience all of our fears?

But Jesus rose from the dead. In His triumph we are assured of His presence with us. He stands between us and that which we fear. When all our fears are over, Christ still stands.

If we have been struggling with our fears, then this Psalm is for us. It's not a whitewash. It isn't telling us that we are crazy for being afraid. Fear is a part of our human experience. But beyond our fears is God who continually comes to us in Christ. God in Christ is greater than that which we fear in this world, and as in the Psalm, He has the final word.

A place in Scripture where Jesus speaks directly to our fears is John chapters 14-16. In the final hours of His earthly life he took great care to assure his fearful followers. At the end of chapter 16 he said; “I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

## **Rev. Ruth Roberts - Psalm 98**

God Reigns. Let the trumpets sound and the people sing out.  
God Reigns.

This wondrous hymn of praise and glory gives us reason both past and future to sing out with joy.

It begins by celebrating what God has done for Israel. The people sing with a new song for God’s steadfast love and faithfulness. God has brought salvation to the people. And now they are an example to all the nations of God’s amazing love and power. Nations stand in awe before what this God has done for the people.

The Psalmist then turns outward to the whole world. Exhorting praise and music and celebration for what God has done with Israel is the image of what God is doing in all the world. What more appropriate response could there be than to burst out in song, to play the lyre, the trumpet and the drums in the joyful noise of hope and promise!

But the Psalmist has not reached the limits of the call to celebration. Not just this world but all the worlds, all creation – the entire universe is called to create this symphony of utter joy and praise to the God of all.

The entire universe joins in the symphony of praise for God’s love and goodness. The instruments, the songs, all combine in one magnificent harmony of the spheres.

When I read this hymn of joy and thanksgiving with its imperative to express our praise in a wonderful abandonment, with no reservation, I hear the music – it swirls around me and lifts me with it. I hear the drums tap out the rhythm and the cymbals clash and the harmony of all that God has spoken into being.

And I too must sing out God Reigns – God reigns now and forever. Amen.

### **Rev. Dr. Jack Heinsohn - Psalm 100**

This beautiful Psalm invites all people to come before the presence of the Lord. We are bid to come before God with gladness, singing, thanksgiving, praise, and blessing God's name.

Verses 3 and 4 relate why we should come before God with these attitudes and actions:

God made us and we are His. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

The Lord is good; His steadfast love endures forever and His faithfulness to all generations.

I have often used this Psalm around Thanksgiving time. But Lent is an appropriate season in which to be thankful. Being thankful is a blessing. Being around people who have a spirit of thankfulness is like feeling a welcome cool breeze on a hot and dry day. Through the years I have listened to people give speeches on receiving some kind of award. The continual themes I hear in such speeches are notes of humility and thankfulness. Even though they have reached a pinnacle of achievement and success, on reflection their words speak of those who helped them, without whose support and sacrifice they could not have made it to that stage.

Thankfulness expands one's perspective of life. We don't see the world through a selfish lens, but recognize how we are connected and interdependent on the lives of many others who set the stage for us, and made it possible for us to be able to live our lives.

Thankfulness leads us somewhere. Thankfulness has a final destination. Thankfulness finally leads us into the presence of God. God has made the arena. God has given us life. God provides a spiritual framework of love and faithfulness. God has given us a flock in which to belong. The gates into God's court are always open.

Luke 17 records the incident when Jesus healed 10 men who had the disease of leprosy. Only one came back and thanked Him. When we don't come to Christ to express our thanks, the work of Christ within us is incomplete. Without seeking Christ's presence we would simply receive the blessings of life and go our way oblivious to what we have been given. Rather than finding ourselves expanding in ways that will pass the blessings on to others, we might become resentful when problems occur and think that others or even God have not given to us what is our due. Instead of cultivating a spirit of thankfulness we would develop a growing sense of resentment. Instead of being thankful we would be upset that others didn't come to thank us.

Perhaps a spirit of thankfulness is difficult for some. Maybe there are bad memories from the past, particularly hurtful incidents that we have experienced at the hands of others, or we have felt the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Thankfulness is overwhelmed and life has left a bitter taste in our mouth. If such is the case, then Lent can provide an opportunity to rethink our lives. Repentance is an aspect of Lent. Repentance means to change one's mind, to change

one's direction. We can perpetuate within ourselves a sort of continuing cycle of negativity, or we can choose to create a new reality where we will fill the world around us with the grace and goodness of Christ. If the past has been unpleasant then we can dedicate ourselves to making the future pasts of those around us sweeter by turning to the light. We can be an agent of change. And in so doing we can be a source of thankfulness for others. We can be a welcoming breeze of the Spirit of Christ into the dry and arid lives of others. What better award and reward could we aspire to?

### **Rev. Ruth Roberts - Psalm 116**

Typically, this song is read as part of the Maundy Thursday liturgy, the service in which we remember Jesus with his disciples as they ate the Passover meal together. This is the time and place where Jesus gives to his disciples and to us the gift of the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper. From that point on we enter into the story of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. The sacrifice of his very life that we might have life. How can one repay such a debt?

In verses 3-11, we hear the anguish and heartache that have arisen in his life. He does not give the reason for his distress but he does affirm that God has delivered his soul from death, his eyes from tears and his feet from stumbling.

God has been with the writer through a terrible time and now the question –

What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me?

And so, the question for us as we walk through this season of Lent together:

Is there really anything any of us possess that can repay the sacrifice of God's own son for us? There is nothing - as we and

the Psalmist both know. God asked nothing in return for the amazing love and mercy that is ours. It is not a loan and it is not conditional.

If we truly understand what has been done for us then, like the Psalmist we can do nothing except fall to our knees and worship the one who is love. We can do nothing except utter with the writer “I love the Lord.”

Like this hymn of thanksgiving before us we too come to the table, come to the house of the courts of the Lord and worship, offering all that we have, our very selves, in response.

May it be so.

### **Rev. Dr. Jack Heinsohn - Psalm 121**

This beautiful Psalm is sometimes called “The Traveler’s Psalm.” The Psalm describes a journey one pilgrim is making to Jerusalem to worship God in the Temple. As the Psalmist journeys he has to confront his fear. The hills represent what is unknown. Robbers awaited those going to Jerusalem in deserted places. But in the night perhaps the silhouette of the watchman guarding the camp reminded him of the greater care of God who never slumbers or sleeps. God keeps his life and safely guards his soul.

As he journeys along difficult paths he remembers God who will not let his foot be moved. As he journeys through desert heat he remembers God who provides shade. In those times there was a thought that if one stayed too long in the moonlight one could be moonstruck, and lose one’s reason. There was ample reason for fear. I imagine people tried to persuade the Psalmist from making such a perilous journey to Jerusalem. The Psalmist points out real causes for fear, but



superimposes over these fears the presence of God. He can see beyond the earthly fear because his eye is on the eternal God who made heaven and earth. As God is beyond both heaven and earth then through faith the Psalmist's life is also a part of God's life. He is going to Jerusalem, and no matter what may happen he knows he is always safely guarded from this time forth and forevermore.

How can we be sure? How can we know?

Lent in some ways is our journey following Christ to Jerusalem. Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem when his closest friends told him not to go. But he wasn't going to be stopped. He walked through all of our fears. He carried our fears up Calvary's hill. He faced our deepest fears and turned his crucifixion at a place called the skull into the empty tomb of the Holy Sepulcher on Resurrection morning. Because He lives, we can live also.

Faith in Christ is how we know. Faith in Christ is how we are made sure.

What is the road we are traveling? If we feel we are on a dead end, let us follow Christ, for Christ is the Way.

If we have been feeding our souls on lies and deception then let us follow Christ, for Christ is the Truth.

If we feel that life has no real meaning or purpose and that it all seems so hopeless then let us follow Christ, for Christ is the Life.

It's never too late to change directions. Jesus always brings a new day. So let us journey with Him for he is traveling that glorious road that leads to everlasting life.

## Rev. Ruth Roberts - Psalm 145

Psalm 145 is an individual hymn of praise and the last of the psalms identified as “of David.” One interesting point is that the Psalm is an acrostic poem – a series of statements arranged according to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet so that each line begins with successive letters.

In these words, the King of Israel, King David, celebrates THE KING, for all of God’s greatness, goodness, grace and glory.

The words of this Psalm ring out with proclamation. The Lord is great. I will declare who you are and bless your name.

I will tell the world. You are great. You are good. In you there is grace.

Consider the words the Psalmist uses: extol, praise, laud, declare, proclaim, celebrate, sing aloud. This is no call to a quiet faith. This is a call to continuous proclamation, to telling all creation every day who God is, what God has done, what God promises.

This is a Psalm not to be explained, but rather to be sung; not to be preached, but to be entered into, to be experienced, to be felt in the deepest part of ourselves. This is testimony .

King David is giving witness to the glory and righteousness of his God, out of his own experiences; and that is what we are called to as well. There is a great story to be told and we are called to tell it—in our own way and with our own words. And when we tell our story, our witness to God in our life, we come to the end of the telling as King David did—with a burst of joy and celebrate—with song and music. We see and know our own story caught up in God’s great story in creation and redemption. We, like David, become “lost in wonder, love and praise.”



## Lenten Calendar:

February 17, 2021	Ash Wednesday*
February 21, 2021	1st Sunday in Lent*
February 28, 2021	2nd Sunday in Lent*
March 7, 2021	3rd Sunday in Lent*
March 14, 2021	4th Sunday in Lent*
March 21, 2021	5th Sunday in Lent*
March 28, 2021	Palm Sunday*
April 1, 2021	Maundy Thursday*
April 2, 2021	Good Friday
April 4, 2021	Easter Sunday*
April 5, 2021	Easter Monday

\* in-person and livestream worship services

