

If there is no February 29 this year, read this passage with March 1.

February 29 **1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

The message about the cross is nonsense to those who are being lost but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

* Where is the one who is wise?
Where is the scribe?
Where is the debater of this age?
Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

Since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe.

Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom,
but we proclaim Christ crucified,
a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

But for those who are being called, both Jews and Gentiles,
this message is Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom,
and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

*What is the wisdom of God that we are called to proclaim? How is God's weakness on the cross stronger than human strength?

God of wisdom, enter our foolish hearts that we who make nonsense our goal, may know and trust you. Forgive us, direct us, teach us that we who are weak in our own misunderstandings, our own version of the truth, our own misguided pursuits may be made wise and strong by the power of Christ's cross alone. Amen.

March 1 **1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters;
not many of you were wise by human standards,
not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise;
God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;
God chose what is low and despised in the world,
to invalidate what the world thinks is important,
so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

* Consider your own baptismal call. How do you sometimes minimize your own gifts? Your own background? How is God ready to call and use you no matter human standards?

* Reflect on stories of Christian faith and life you have witnessed or about which you have heard. Ponder when Christ's love became known through those whom the world saw as weak and lowly and even despised.

O God, you are the source of our lives in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. We thank and bless your holy name. Amen.

Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

March 2 **1 Corinthians 2:1-8**

When I came to you, brothers and sisters,
I did not proclaim the mystery of God in lofty words or wisdom.
I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ,
and him crucified.

I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.
My speech and proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom,
but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power
so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom
but on the power of God.

Yet among the mature we speak wisdom,
though it is not a wisdom of this age.
We speak God's wisdom, sacred and hidden,
which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

None of the rulers of this age understood this;
if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

* We strive to speak clearly and plausibly. That's helpful. How do we do that while also depending upon God's Spirit rather than our own words?

* How are we called to speak using different words and phrases appropriate to different people to whom we speak? That's useful. Even so, how do we speak God's wisdom which is distinguishable from the world's measure of wisdom?

God of all wisdom, fill us with the power of your Holy Spirit that we, knowing our own weaknesses, may speak your truth, distinct from the world's knowledge, to each person. May we know nothing except Jesus Christ crucified and raised from the dead, in whose name we pray. Amen.

March 3 **1 Corinthians 2:9-16**

It is written,
"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love the Lord"-- (Isaiah 64:4)
these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit;
for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

What person knows what is human
except the Spirit of humanity in that person?
In the same way, no one knows all about God except God.
We have received not the spirit of the world,
but the Spirit that is from God,
so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

We do not speak in human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit,
as we explain spiritual truths to those who have the Spirit.
The unspiritual cannot understand the gifts of God;
they are foolishness to them.
Those who are spiritual discern all things,
and are subject to no one else's scrutiny.

"For who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct God?" (Isaiah 40:13)
But we have the mind of Christ.

* We cannot comprehend God at work in us and through us in the world. What does that mean to you and for your ministry among God's gifted people?

* How has "the mind of Christ" surprised, humbled and empowered you?

O Living Spirit, who searches even the depths of God, open our hearts and minds to know you as we are able, to love you beyond all reason, and to receive your gifts that we might serve you for the sake of the world. In Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

March 4 **1 Corinthians 3:1-9**

Brothers and sisters, I fed you with milk, not solid food,
for you were not ready for solid food.
Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh.
For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you,
are you not behaving according to human inclinations?

* When is the time to feed people on milk rather than solid food? How do you do that? But Paul's assessment is that the Corinthians *should* now be further along in their Christian faith. How do you help a community mature?

When one says, "I belong to Paul," and another "I belong to Apollos,"
are you not merely human? What is Apollos? What is Paul?
Servants through whom you came to believe.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.
The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose,
and each will receive wages according to the labor of each.
We are God's servants, working together.
You are God's field. God's building.

* What factions, perhaps according to various present and past leaders, have you seen in Christian communities? Have we not sometimes been part of such divisions? How have you seen God giving growth, in the midst of, perhaps in spite of, divisions?

God of human community, may we who have graciously been called to be part of your church, mature in faith that we may not judge one another merely on human inclinations, but depend on you alone for growth, as individuals, and as a faith community. In Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

March 5 **1 Corinthians 3:10-15**

According to the grace of God given to me,
like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation,
and someone else is building on it.
Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.

No one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid;
that foundation is Jesus Christ.

If anyone builds on the foundation
with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—
the work of the builder will become visible,
for the day will disclose it.

It will be revealed with fire; the fire will test
what sort of work each has done.

If what is built survives, the builder will receive a reward.
If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss;
the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

* What does it mean to you that in your work in the church you are building on a foundation someone else has laid?

* What does it mean to you that the builder "will be saved, but only as through fire?"

* What do gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw represent to you?

Jesus Christ, you are our sure foundation. May each of us build with care and with wisdom. Jesus Christ, you are our sure foundation! Make us mindful of those who have built before us. And may we build, aware of those who will build on our work. In your name and for your sake we pray. Amen.

March 6

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Do you not know that you are God's temple
and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person.
God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Do not deceive yourselves.
If you think that you are wise in this age,
you should become fools so that you may become wise.

The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.
It is written, "God catches the wise in their craftiness" (Job 5:13)
"The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile" (Ps.94:11)

Let no one boast about human leaders.
For all things are yours,
whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas,
or the world or life or death or the present or the future—
all belong to you, and you belong to Christ,
and Christ belongs to God.

* Are you able to see yourself as God's temple? What does that mean for your life and for the lives of others with whom you relate? How can we not destroy one another? Who keeps you grounded, astute and wise?

* How can we more clearly care about being faithful disciples without relying upon connections with certain leaders? What stands in the way of claiming our full and constant connection with Christ?

Lord, keep us from boasting, from self-deception, from destructive living. Transform our lives daily that we might truly know that we belong to Christ and to each other in totally new ways. In his name we pray, Amen.

March 7

1 Corinthians 4:1-7

Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ
and stewards of God's mysteries.
It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

It is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself. But I am not thereby acquitted. The Lord judges me.

Do not pronounce judgment before the time the Lord comes,
who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness
and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

* When are you tempted to judge yourself? When and through what actions do you judge others? When were you judged by human measure? How does this block God's mission?

May none of you be puffed up in favor of one against another.
* For who sees anything different in you?
* What do you have that you did not receive?
* And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?

God of all truth, may we be stewards of your mysteries in being servants of Christ. We confess that more often than we would want to admit, we have judged people and succumbed to the judgment of others. Judge us only in the cross of Christ that we might receive new life as the gift which is our call to ministry. By the power of your Spirit may we be trustworthy. In Christ we pray. Amen.

March 8 **1 Corinthians 4:8-13**

Already you have all that you want!
I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all,
as though sentenced to death,
because we have become a spectacle to the world,
to angels and to mortals.
We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ.
We are weak, but you are strong.
You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.

We are hungry and thirsty,
we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless,
and we grow weary from the work of our own hands.

When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure;
when slandered, we speak kindly.
We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things.

* What is Paul doing here? Is he full of self-pity? Anger? Self-doubt? Does he write in self-defense? In admonition? In strength and confidence?

* How and when do you feel what he says is true also about you? Why would you say any of this? Why not? To whom? Or not?

Christ, you have called us to lives of discipleship and sacrifice and leadership. Give us clarity of purpose. Comfort us, challenge us, and guide us, and those to whom we speak and among whom we serve. Shape us in your cruciform image. Amen.

March 9 **1 Corinthians 4:14-21**

I am writing this not to make you ashamed,
but to admonish you as my beloved children.
You may have ten thousand guardians in Christ, but not many fathers.
In Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.
I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me.

I sent you Timothy to remind you of my ways in Christ
as I teach them everywhere in every church.
Some of you, thinking I am not coming, have become arrogant.
I will come soon, if the Lord wills.

The kingdom of God depends not on talk, but on power.
What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick,
or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

* What do you think is Paul's intent in writing so strongly and so directly to the Corinthian church? Why, and under what circumstances would some say, "Be an imitator of me?"

* What happens when we become arrogant?

* How do we admonish one another in the faith? What sticks are used? How does one accomplish the same thing with a spirit of powerful gentleness?

O God, you create communities of faith by the power of the Spirit. Guide us who are leaders in person and leaders from a distance. Keep us all from arrogance and shape us all in the image of the powerful, gentle Jesus. Amen.

March 10 **1 Corinthians 5:1-8**

It has been reported to me that there is sexual immorality among you,
and the kind that is not found even among pagans;
for a man is living with his father's wife.
And you are arrogant!

* Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would
have been removed from among you?

Though absent in body, I am present in spirit;
and as if present I have pronounced judgment
in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing.
When you meet together and my spirit is present with the power of Jesus,
you are to hand this man over to Satan for his body to be destroyed
so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Your boasting is not a good thing.

* Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?

Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch,
as you really are unleavened.
Our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.

*Christ Jesus, may we therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast,
the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and
truth. Amen.*

March 11 **1 Corinthians 5:9-13**

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons—
not at all meaning the immoral of this world,
or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters,
since you would then need to go out of the world.

I am writing to you not to associate with anyone
who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral
or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber.
Do not even eat with such a one.

* What have we to do with judging those outside?

* Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge?
“Drive out the wicked person from among you.” (Deut. 17:7)

* What in the world do we make of these admonitions? What in the **church** do
we make of these admonitions?

* If we take this literally, who is left in the church? How might this help us not
be too quick to judge those outside the church, thinking that we are holy and
they are not? However, how do these difficult words help us call each other to
lives of Christian living and service?

*Christ Jesus, you have called us to Christian community through your own
suffering and death on a cross. May we take one another as brothers and
sisters in the faith seriously. As resurrection people, may we call each other to
holy living and to lives of service and witness both within the church and
beyond. By the power of your Spirit, give us wisdom. Amen.*

March 12 **1 Corinthians 6:1-8**

When any of you has a grievance against another,
do you dare to take it to court,
instead of taking it before the saints?

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?
And if the world is to be judged by you,
are you incompetent to try trivial cases?

If you have ordinary cases, do you appoint as judges
those who have no standing in the church?
I say this to your shame.

Can it be that there is no one among you
wise enough to decide between one believer and another?
In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat.
Why not rather be wronged and defrauded?
But you yourselves wrong and defraud—and believers at that.

- * Today, how do faith communities decide disputes
within the church? How could procedures be improved?
- * Today, in a culture quick to sue,
how might our faith inform our attitudes and actions?
- * When should we go to court?

*God of righteousness and mercy, give us wisdom and courage to address
wrongs, settle disputes, and work for justice. In Christ we pray. Amen.*

March 13 **1 Corinthians 6:9-20**

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?
Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes,
sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will
inherit the kingdom of God. This is what some of you used to be.
You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified
in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial.
but I will not be dominated by anything.
Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,
and God will destroy both one and the other.
The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord,
and the Lord for the body.
God raised the Lord and will also raise us by God’s power.

- * Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?
Should I therefore take the members of Christ
and make them members of a prostitute? Never!
Anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication!
- * Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,
which you have from God, and that you are not your own?
You were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.
- * Note that Paul does not say we are justified by keeping from wrongdoing,
but *because* we have been washed, justified and sanctified our bodies belong
to Christ. Now that Christ is risen, and because we live in the Spirit, how do
you regard your body? How do you honor or dishonor other people’s bodies?

*Christ Jesus, we thank you that you have made us members of your own body.
Fill us with the Spirit to regard our bodies as yours, as God’s temple. Keep us
aware of each other in the body of Christ that we might strengthen one
another for holy living. Amen.*

March 14 **1 Corinthians 7:1-7**

It is well for a man not to touch a woman.
But because of sexual immorality each man should have his own wife
and each woman her own husband.
The husband should give his wife her conjugal rights,
and likewise the wife to her husband.
The wife does not have authority over her own body,
but the husband does;
likewise the husband does not have authority over his body,
but the wife does.

Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time,
to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again
so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.
This I say by way of concession, not of command.

I wish you were all like I am. But each has a particular gift from God.

* Through the ages how has patriarchal sexism placed women's bodies in the control of men? What has this done to women? To men? To the society and to the church?

* How in this passage are husbands and wives to serve one another with their bodies, not by command but by love? How can faith communities support such faithfulness?

Faithful God, who has created women and men for love and mutual service, give all husbands and wives, all persons in faithful relationships, understanding and ways to communicate their needs, and willingness to sacrifice, that they may grow in prayer, commitment and sustained faithfulness. In Christ Jesus who binds us all to himself. Amen.

March 15 **1 Corinthians 7:8-16**

To the unmarried and widows I say it is well to remain unmarried as I am.
But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry,
for it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.

The wife should not separate from her husband
(or if she does, remain unmarried or be reconciled).
The husband should not divorce his wife.

If any believer has an unbelieving wife, he should not divorce her.
If any woman has an unbelieving husband, she should not divorce him.
For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife,
and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband.
Otherwise your children would be unclean,
but as it is, they are holy.

But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so.

Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband.
Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife.

* In Paul's day, how do these guidelines for Christian living, (They are guidelines, not words about justification), provide for both women and men (a rare equality for that day)? How is Paul showing concern for both "believers" and "unbelievers"?

* In our day, what are the issues, your concerns, and your advice for living as unmarried or married people? How do we live in relationship as people of many faiths?

God of love and faithfulness, give each one your love and care and gifts of grace for living out vocations of personhood and relationship. May we be bound to Christ for it is to peace that God has called us. Amen.

March 16 **1 Corinthians 7:17-24**

Let each of you lead the life to which God has called you.
This is my rule in all the churches.
Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing,
but obeying the commandments of God is everything.

Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it.
Even if you can gain your freedom,
make use of your present condition now more than ever.
Whoever was called in the Lord as a slave
is a freed person belonging to the Lord,
just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ.
You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters.
In whatever condition you were called, there remain with God.

- * What are the marks of being a Christian and what are not?
- * For centuries this passage has been used to justify slavery. What does it really say?
- * Whatever our condition or status in life, how are we free from human masters to “remain with God”? What is our call to keep from becoming enslaved to others?

O God, in whom alone is freedom through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, may your people everywhere be free from enslavement and may people in their freedom know the call to be servants of Christ. Amen.

March 17 **1 Corinthians 7:25-31**

Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord,
but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.

* When Paul gives his opinion as one who is trustworthy, how do we regard these pieces of advice in these chapters? How are we to advise people today, as God’s trustworthy servants?

In view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are.
Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free.
Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife.
If you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin.
Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life,
and I would spare you that.

* What is the impending crisis? How does circumstantial advice need to be taken in context? Think about the many ways in which these verses have been taken out of context. What truth resides for us?

Brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short;
from now on let even those who have wives be as though they had none,
and those who mourn as though they were not mourning,
and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing,
and those who buy as though they had no possessions,
and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it.

O God, the present form of this world is passing away. These two thousand years later, may we continue to live fully and also “as though not.” Keep our eyes focused on the Christ. Give us not only perspective but transformed purpose. Amen.

March 18 **1 Corinthians 7:32-40**

I want you to be free from anxieties.
The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord;
but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world and his wife.
The unmarried women are anxious about the affairs of the Lord,
so that they may be holy in body and spirit
but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world
and her husband.

I say this for your benefit, not to put restraint upon you,
but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord.

The one who marries does well;
and the one who refrains from marriage will do better.
A wife is bound as long as her husband lives.
But if he dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord.
In my judgment she is more blessed if she remains as she is.
And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

* Paul makes his personal case for celibacy. How has the church through the centuries used this argument to refuse the priesthood and church leadership to people?

* How is celibacy a gift? How is it something that cannot be imposed?

* What truth resides in these verses for us? What problems do you see here?

God of love and community, bless those who live in marriages, as well as those called to celibacy and singleness. Bring justice to those who live in situations of oppression, and care for those in sorrow and pain. Keep us safe in the arms of our loving God. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

March 19 **1 Corinthians 8:1-6**

Concerning food sacrificed to idols:
Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.
Anyone who claims to know something does not yet,
but anyone who loves God is known by God.
Hence as to eating food offered to idols,
we know that no idol in the world really exists,
and that there is no God but one.

Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth,
yet for us there is one God, the Father,
from whom are all things and for whom we exist,
and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things
and through whom we exist.

* In every age, people claim to know all sorts of things about gods that they have thought up for themselves. What idols have crept into your own knowledge and life?

* But anyone who loves God is known by God. What does it mean for you to be known by God from whom are all things and for whom we exist?

God of all knowledge, we confess that we puff ourselves up with our own ideas of that which we consider worthy to be feared, loved and trusted above all things. Know us, God, and love us so that we, through the power of the Spirit in Jesus Christ, might fear, love and trust in you alone in order to build up others with love. Amen.

March 20 **1 Corinthians 8:7-13**

Some have become so accustomed to idols,
their conscience, being weak, is defiled.
Food will not bring us close to God.
We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow
become a stumbling block to the weak.
So if others see you eating in the temple of an idol,
might they be encouraged to eat food sacrificed to idols?

So by your knowledge those weak believers
for whom Christ died are destroyed.
When you thus sin against members of your family
and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.
Therefore if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat,
so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

* This passage, of course, is about food being offered to idols. Today, in your own setting, whom do you know who is struggling? Because of addictions? Beliefs? Life patterns? (And what are our own struggles? What are our own issues with food?)

* How do we use the freedom we have in Christ, perhaps without even thinking about it, to cause another person to stumble in their faith and life?

* What is the good news here? What is our calling for the sake of others, locally and globally?

God of all knowledge and truth, we become accustomed to our own idols. Forgive us. Free us. Give us insight and care so that we are not a stumbling block to others in their faith, but a source of your own love and encouragement in Christ Jesus. Amen.

March 21 **1 Corinthians 9:1-12a**

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?
Are you not my work in the Lord? You are the seal of my apostleship.

Do we not have the right to our food and drink?
Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife?
Who pays the expenses of doing military service?
Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit?
Who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk?
Do I say this on human authority?
Does not the law also say the same?

It is written in the Law of Moses that you should not muzzle an ox
while it is treading out the grain.
Is it for oxen that God is concerned?
Or is it not entirely for our sake?

Whoever plows should plow in hope and
whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share of the crop.

If we have sown spiritual good among you,
is it too much if we reap your material benefits?
If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more?

* How do you answer these questions? How do you ask them?

O God, you are concerned for our sake. We who are dependent on you alone pray that you care for us and our earthly needs. May we serve in the freedom of the cross and may our work in your vineyard be blessed in Christ Jesus. Amen.

March 22 **1 Corinthians 9:12b-18**

Nevertheless, we have not used this right, but endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. The Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should receive their living by the gospel.

But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this so that they may be applied in my case. Indeed I would rather die than that. If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel.

If I do this of my own will I have a reward; if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

* Herein is the dilemma: If our reward is nothing but the gospel itself, what does it mean that those who proclaim the gospel should also receive their living by the gospel?

* How are we called to be advocates for ourselves and for others who make their living through service in the church? What is fairness, justice, grace and mercy in this regard?

Good and gracious God, who attends to our needs, may we not put an obstacle in the way of the Gospel and may we also extend your care to those who serve on behalf of the church by using fair and just and responsible practices. May we all be committed to care for the poor of the earth. In Christ, Amen.

March 23 **1 Corinthians 9:19-27**

Though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all so that I might win more of them. To the Jews, I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law so that I might win them. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law so that I might win them. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the Gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

* How do we, without losing our authenticity, “become as” to relate to other people in order to share the Gospel in ways that they might understand?

Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win the prize. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

* What does this say to you about energetic perseverance in mission and ministry?

God, give us zeal, train us well, and infuse us with empathy and creativity for mission. Amen.

March 24

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Do not be unaware, brothers and sisters,
that our ancestors were all under a cloud,
and all passed through the sea,
were baptized into Moses in the cloud and sea,
and all drank from the spiritual rock that followed them.
The rock was Christ.

Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them,
and they were struck down in the wilderness.
Do not become idolaters as some of them did.
We must not put Christ to the test,
as some of them did and were destroyed.
Do not complain as some of them did.
These things serve as an example.

If you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.
No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone.
God is faithful and will not let you be tested beyond your strength,
but with the testing will also provide the way out
so that you may be able to endure it.

* Lest we take the final words of this passage without also hearing the warnings, what examples do you have of God's people becoming idolaters? How have you at times fallen into such a trap?

* When have you been over confident in your own strength?

* How has God provided "the way out" for you? Given you endurance?

Holy God who guides us, too, through the wilderness, keep us from false hope, from complaint, from mindless self-dependence. You do not test us for your own amusement, nor are you capricious. May we take you seriously, depend upon you completely, and be comforted from the belief that your strength is sufficient. In Christ we pray, Amen.

March 25

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols.
I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.

The cup of blessing that we bless,
Is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?
The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?
Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body,
for we all partake of the one bread.

What do I imply then?
That food sacrificed to idols is anything,
or that an idol is anything?
No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice,
they sacrifice to demons and not to God.

I do not want you to be partners with demons.
You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.
You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.
Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy?
Are we stronger than God?

* When we are joined with Christ and with one another in Christ at the Lord's table, how does that both challenge and strengthen us to be centered in Christ alone?

* What does it mean for us to worship idols? How do we "partner with demons"? In so doing, how are we tempted to believe we are stronger than God?

Christ Jesus, in whom we are joined with our brothers and sisters in faith as one body, strengthen us in our faith that we may strengthen one another for our lives of mission and ministry. Keep us from idols. Amen.

March 26

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

All things are lawful but not all things are beneficial.
Not all things build up.
Do not seek your own advantage,
but that of the other.

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market
without raising any question on the ground of conscience.
For “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.” (Ps. 24.1)

If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go,
eat whatever is set before you without raising any question
on the ground of conscience.
But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,”
then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you,
and for the sake of conscience—
I mean the other’s conscience, not your own.

* Why should my liberty be subject to the judgment of someone else’s
conscience?

* If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that
for which I give thanks?

*Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, may we do everything for the
glory of God. May we give no offense to others, or to the church of God, but
try to please everyone in everything we do, not seeking our own advantage,
but that of many, so that they may be saved. May we be imitators of Christ
Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

March 27

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

I commend you because you remember me in everything
and maintain the traditions just as I handed them to you.
I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man,
and the husband is the head of his wife,
and God is the head of Christ.

Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head
disgraces his head.
But any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled
disgraces her head.

Man was not made from woman, but woman from man.
Neither was man created for the sake of woman,
but woman for the sake of man.

Nevertheless, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man
nor man independent of woman.

Just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman;
but all things come from God. Judge for yourselves:
is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled?
Does not nature itself teach that if a man wears long hair,
it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?
If anyone is disposed to be contentious—
we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

* Tradition! How has this one passage been used through the centuries, and
even today, to further and maintain male dominance? What effects has it had
in the church?

* Tradition! How should we deal with traditions, such as long or short hair,
hats or no hats? What is at stake?

* Nevertheless! How do we remember the core, that “all things come from
God” and that women and men are not independent of one another?

*God of traditions and of relationships, may we center our individuality and
our community in you alone. Free us through the death and resurrection of
Christ for renewed, Spirit-led relationships of shared power and partnership.
Amen.*

March 28

1 Corinthians 11:17-25

Now in the following instructions
I do not commend you, because when you come together
it is not for the better but for the worse.
To begin with, when you come together as a church,
I hear that there are divisions among you;
and to some extent I believe it.

When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper.
For when the time comes to eat,
each of you goes ahead with your own supper,
and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.
What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in?
Do you show contempt for the church of God
and humiliate those who have nothing?
What should I say to you?
I do not commend you!

* How do we show contempt for the church of God when we neglect the hungry, have divisions among us and care only for our own needs? How do we betray Christ?

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest and let these gifts to us be blest. Amen.

March 29

1 Corinthians 11:26-34

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
You proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord
in an unworthy manner
will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.
Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the wine.
All who eat and drink without discerning the body,
eat and drink judgment against themselves.
For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.
But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged.
When we are judged by the Lord we are disciplined
so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

* What does "to discern the body" mean in relation to yesterday's devotion verses?

*What does partaking in "an unworthy manner" mean? What does it mean to "examine yourselves"? Most important, what does this mean in relation to others?

So then, my brothers and sisters,
when you come together to eat,
wait for one another.
If you are hungry, eat at home.

What a gift you have given, Lord Jesus, in giving us your body on the cross and giving us your body and blood each time we partake of holy communion. May we receive this Eucharistic gift with thanksgiving and with humility and with care for all. Amen.

March 30 **1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

Concerning spiritual gifts, I do not want you to be uninformed.
No one speaking by the Spirit of God can ever say,
“Let Jesus be cursed!”
And no one can say “Jesus is Lord”
except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
different abilities and ways of serving,
but the same Lord is served.

The Spirit’s presence is shown in each person
for the common good.

To one the Spirit gives the gift of wisdom;
to another the gift of knowledge,
to another faith, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,
to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy,
to another discernment of spirits,
to another various kinds of tongues,
to another interpretation to explain what was said.

All these come alive by the same Spirit,
who gives each one a different gift.

* “By the same Spirit” permeates these verses. How do you see the Spirit at work in the lives of each person? What gifts surprise you? Humble you?

* Singling out people’s gift as though service were a competitive sport is not the objective. How do you see--how can you imagine--each person’s gift for the common good?

O God of our common service, let your Spirit fill us so that we might say, “Jesus Christ is Lord” and serve your church for the sake of the world each with our own gifts. Amen.

March 31 **1 Corinthians 12:12-19**

For just as the body is one and has many members, all the members, though many, are one body; so it is with Christ.
For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—
Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and made to drink of one Spirit.
Indeed the body does not consist of one member, but of many.

If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand,
I do not belong to the body,”
that would not make it any less a part of the body;

And if the ear would say,
“Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,”
that would not make it any less a part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?
If the whole body were hearing where would the sense of smell be?
God arranged each member of the body as God chose.
There are many members, yet one body.

* If all were a single member, where would the body be?

* If we are baptized into one body, how can one human enslave another?

* Paul is emphatic. All belong. How have congregations, in earlier and present times, excluded people because of race, ethnicity, economic class, and more?

* When have you felt “Because I am not...I do not belong to the body.” Who reached out to you (or not)? Who called you back (or not) to know you were part of the body?

God of all, forgive us when we neglect to cherish each member of Christ’s body as a member of our own body, baptized in Christ. As we begin again to be surprised and humbled by other’s gifts, may we drink of the one Spirit, and be the body of Christ serving in the world that you have and are creating us to be. Amen.