

SOUTHWOOD UNITED CHURCH DEVOTIONAL SERIES
LENT 2026 – YEAR A – HOLY WEEK

The miracle of Christ's Resurrection fuelled by God's love for humanity, living into that gracious Love with intention and Holy Spirit-led purpose.

Sunday, March 29 – Palm Sunday

Reading: Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24: A song of victory proclaiming "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it".

Thought: Today is Palm Sunday – a day of celebration! When I think of Palm Sunday, many things come to mind – children parading into church waving palm branches, adults shouting "Hosanna!", visions of the disciples walking alongside Jesus on the donkey - smiling and waving at the crowds, the bowed head of the donkey - carefully picking its way through the branches and garments spread on the street. Palm Sunday is altogether a happy and joyous day. What comes into your mind as you contemplate Palm Sunday?

Prayer: Glorious God – every morning you make a new day. Help me to rejoice and find your presence in all things.

Monday, March 30

Reading: Psalm 31:9-10, 16 Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning...Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.

Thought: Yesterday I contemplated what came to my mind on Palm Sunday. Today I am wondering what was on Jesus' mind on that day so long ago. Did he smile sadly - knowing what was coming ahead? Was he frustrated at the fickle nature of the crowd – knowing they would turn against him. Was he tempted for even one minute to jump off that donkey and disappear into the crowd? Did he purposely join in the joy of the people, knowing this would be one of the last happy events in his life? So many possibilities! What do you think was on Jesus' mind after the celebration of Palm Sunday?

Prayer: Jesus – I contemplate in wonder the story of your life. I want to know more and to carry you in my heart.

Tuesday, March 31

Reading: Jeremiah 31:3-4 The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. I will build you up again, and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt. Again you will take up your timbrels and go out to dance with the joyful.

Thought: As we walk towards the end of our Lenten journey I thought it a good thing to contemplate (once again) the great love God has for us all and the promises held within the Bible. This reading from Jeremiah speaks to my heart. What wondrous words – the prophet Jeremiah says that God tells us of his everlasting and eternal love. God tells us of his unfailing, consistent, and constant kindness. Yes, this Lenten journey is leading us to the sorrow of the cross, but after that – God's love rebuilds us and we will go out with joy. To me this is a wonder

and a joy in this season of Lent. What verses in the Bible do you find full of wonder and promise?

Prayer: Loving God – your everlasting covenant of love and kindness for me never ceases to amaze me. I am not worthy of this, yet your son has made it so – this is a wonder and a joy to my heart and soul.

Wednesday, April 1

Reading: Psalm 118:21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

Thought: Yesterday we thought about God’s love and the Bible verses that bring you wonder and promise. All these things are great gifts from God. Not only that, but we are one day closer to Easter where we will celebrate the resurrection and the great gift of our salvation. I think it is the right time for us to express our thanks for these gifts. How will you do that?

Prayer: Heavenly Father – thank you for your great gifts of love and kindness, extended not just for me, but for all creation. Friend Jesus – thank you for your sacrifice that brought me salvation and everlasting life. Holy Spirit – thank you for your presence and guidance. Blessed Trinity – thank you for all you have provided.

Thursday, April 2

Reading: Isaiah 50:4–5 The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away

Thought: I am not sure this verse describes me very well – actually, I know it doesn’t – at least a lot of the time. In all honesty, the only part of this description that fits me every day is that God wakens me morning by morning. I can only pray that each day I am awakened brings me not just the opportunity to be obedient, guiding my tongue to speak gentle wisdom, and to provide me discernment to understand what God is telling me, but to hear God so that I can do all that God wants me to do and be all that God created me to be. What are you praying for today?

Prayer: God – you know me as no other can. Help me to be all that you want me to be and to do all you want me to do.

Friday, April 3 – Good Friday

Reading: Psalm 22:1 & 19 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?... But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

Thought: Good Friday. God’s Friday. A day of blackness and mourning, grief, sadness, and lamentation. It is recorded in the Biblical account of the crucifixion that Jesus uttered the words of Psalm 22:1 while on the cross. It is known that many of the psalms at that time were sung, so it is quite possible that Jesus was singing while on the cross. I have heard that Jews entering the gas chambers in concentration camps also sang – and that the song slowly became fainter until the last person succumbed to death. These are sad stories worth remembering. I can only hope that Jesus was able to sing to verse 19, and that God gave him the strength to

sacrificially give up his breath to save us all. How do you think God answered Jesus on the cross?

Prayer: Grieving God – today is a sad day. Be with me and bring me strength to remember not only what happened to your son, but why.

Saturday, April 4 – Holy Saturday

Reading: John 20:16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

Thought: The story of Jesus’ resurrection is not only central to our spiritual life and holds within it the glorious reality of God’s power over death, it has quiet, simple, and poignant moments. Mary has gone to the tomb and seen the stone rolled away and has assumed the body of Jesus has been taken. Naturally, she is upset and crying. She fails to recognize Jesus – who simply says her name. This is our story too. Oh yes - we wander into the garden, to bear witness to the resurrection, and to have God call us by name, even when we don’t recognize him or his presence. Have you heard Jesus call you by name?

Prayer: Jesus – I bear witness to your resurrection. Call me by name so I can recognize and follow you.

Sunday, April 5 – Easter Sunday

Reading: Acts 10:42-43 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name

Thought: When I first read this lectionary reading, I thought only of verse 42, but then I was directed to verse 43 as well. As Christians – those who have heard the good news of the resurrection – we are commanded to bear witness and spread the story. In this way we are all prophets. AND that is not all we are supposed to do. We are called - no, commanded – to let people know that all their sins, every wrong they have ever committed, can be forgiven. We are all sinful, all in need of forgiveness and only God can truly forgive us – this is what Jesus has done for us, and what others need to know as well. What joyous news! How will you extend that love and forgiveness that comes with this Happy Easter day?

Prayer: Jesus! You are alive! Your sacrifice has brought about forgiveness of all sins for all creation. What a gift! Thank you

This is the end of our Lenten journey of devotion. I hope you have found something to inspire you, to cling to, to give you hope and joy. Much love to you and yours – and Happy Easter! Blessings to you all - Jan

Complete Lectionary Readings for Holy Week

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

² Let Israel say:

“His love endures forever.”

The LORD is my strength and my defense^[a];
he has become my salvation.

¹⁵ Shouts of joy and victory

resound in the tents of the righteous:

“The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!

¹⁶ The LORD’s right hand is lifted high;

the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!”

¹⁷ I will not die but live,

and will proclaim what the LORD has done.

¹⁸ The LORD has chastened me severely,

but he has not given me over to death.

¹⁹ Open for me the gates of the righteous;

I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD

through which the righteous may enter.

²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me;

you have become my salvation.

²² The stone the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

²³ the LORD has done this,

and it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ The LORD has done it this very day;

let us rejoice today and be glad.

Isaiah 50:4–9a The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue,
to know the word that sustains the weary.

He wakens me morning by morning,

wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.

⁵ The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears;

I have not been rebellious,

I have not turned away.

⁶ I offered my back to those who beat me,

my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard;

I did not hide my face

from mocking and spitting.

⁷ Because the Sovereign LORD helps me,
I will not be disgraced.

Therefore have I set my face like flint,
and I know I will not be put to shame.

⁸ He who vindicates me is near.
Who then will bring charges against me?
Let us face each other!

Who is my accuser?
Let him confront me!

⁹ It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me.
Who will condemn me?
They will all wear out like a garment;
the moths will eat them up

Psalm 31:9–16 Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress;
my eyes grow weak with sorrow,
my soul and body with grief.

¹⁰ My life is consumed by anguish
and my years by groaning;
my strength fails because of my affliction,^[a]
and my bones grow weak.

¹¹ Because of all my enemies,
I am the utter contempt of my neighbors
and an object of dread to my closest friends—
those who see me on the street flee from me.

¹² I am forgotten as though I were dead;
I have become like broken pottery.

¹³ For I hear many whispering,
“Terror on every side!”

They conspire against me
and plot to take my life.

¹⁴ But I trust in you, LORD;
I say, “You are my God.”

¹⁵ My times are in your hands;
deliver me from the hands of my enemies,
from those who pursue me.

¹⁶ Let your face shine on your servant;
save me in your unfailing love.

Psalm 22 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?

² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.^[b]

³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.^[c]

⁴ In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

⁷ All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

⁸ "He trusts in the LORD," they say,
"let the LORD rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him."

⁹ Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.

¹⁰ From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.

¹¹ Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

¹² Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

¹³ Roaring lions that tear their prey
open their mouths wide against me.

¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.

¹⁵ My mouth^[d] is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁶ Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce^[e] my hands and my feet.

¹⁷ All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.

¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

¹⁹ But you, LORD, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

²⁰ Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.

21 Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.
22 I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.
23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!
24 For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.
25 From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you^[a] I will fulfill my vows.
26 The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!
27 All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
28 for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.
29 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
30 Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
31 They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

Jeremiah 31:1-6

“At that time,” declares the LORD, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people.”

² This is what the LORD says:

“The people who survive the sword
will find favor in the wilderness;
I will come to give rest to Israel.”

³ The LORD appeared to us in the past,^[a] saying:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.
⁴ I will build you up again,
and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt.
Again you will take up your timbrels
and go out to dance with the joyful.
⁵ Again you will plant vineyards
on the hills of Samaria;
the farmers will plant them
and enjoy their fruit.
⁶ There will be a day when watchmen cry out
on the hills of Ephraim,
'Come, let us go up to Zion,
to the LORD our God.'"

Colossians 3:1-4

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your^{al} life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

John 20:1-18 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that

Jesus had to rise from the dead.)¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). ¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Acts 10:34-43 ³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. ³⁹ "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name

