



Standing on the Promises

Lent 2024
International Council of
Community Churches

Standing on the Promises

*40 Days of Reflection
for Lent, 2024*

A Devotion and Prayer Booklet
produced by the
International Council of Community Churches

“Standing on the Promise” is produced by
Informational Services and Outreach
of the International Council of Community Churches.
Rev. Bob Fread, Editor
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Included in this booklet is a prayer list given as the “**Prayer for Today**” at the end of each day. We hope that you will remember this church/center/ministry in your prayers that day. Every effort has been made to include all current members of the ICCC. We apologize for any exclusions.



International Council of Community Churches

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Standing on the Promises

“Standing, standing, standing on the promises of God, my Savior;
Standing, standing, I’m standing on the promises of God.”

Kelso Carter

This refrain from the popular hymn “*Standing on the Promises*” reminds us of the faithfulness of God. Truly God’s promises are sure and unfailing, and this year we will consider the many promises of God as a means of reminding us of God’s never-ending faithfulness and love for us.

This is the third year the International Council of Community Churches is offering a Lenten devotional resource to our churches and centers. Like previous years the daily Scripture readings come from the *Revised Common Lectionary* readings for the following Sunday, yet this resource is valuable even if your congregation does not use the lectionary. The key is that as a Community churches family we read and reflect on Scripture together and lift each other up in prayer during the season of Lent.

This year one of the lectionary readings for each Sunday focuses on one of God’s covenants. Over the weeks we will see covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and finally the coming of a new covenant. So what is a covenant? It is a contract, an agreement, or might we say- **a promise from God**. So during the next 40 days as we read about God’s covenants- may we find ourselves **standing on the promises of God!**

How Churches Might Use this Resource

ICCC churches and centers are free to use the resources of this book as they choose. Some churches may wish to print this book to distribute to their congregation. Others use this resource electronically and either provide the PDF version to their members so they may read it on their electronic devices or some churches email each devotion to their members daily. Whatever way you chose to share this book, we pray your congregation will have a holy Lent.

What is the International Council of Community Churches?

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the number of Community, Union, Federated, People's, Independent and Ecumenical churches grew in our country. As these churches sought fellowship and needed resources, they worked to form a couple of organizations. In 1923 the Community Church Workers of the USA was formed by mainly Caucasian churches, while the Biennial Council of Community Churches of mainly African-American churches was formed the same year. Financial problems later forced the Community Church Workers out of existence, but in 1946 the National Council of Community Churches was created by many of the same churches.

In 1950, the National Council and the Biennial Council merged to form the current International Council of Community Churches (ICCC), the most racially diverse religious body of its time. Since its inception, the ICCC has worked tirelessly for racial justice and reconciliation, and for Christian unity among churches.

Currently, the Council includes about 50 churches/ministries in the United States plus affiliates in 3 other nations. The ICCC is headquartered in Longmont, Colorado, and maintains a minimal staff of an Executive Director and Office Administrator. The Council is governed throughout the year by a Board of Directors and a Board of Trustees. It maintains relationships with the World Council of Churches, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Churches Uniting in Christ and Christian Churches Together.

Each year ICCC member churches/centers/ministries are invited to the ICCC Annual Conference. The 2024 Annual Conference will be July 16-19, 2024, in Kansas City, MO. The conference is not just a business meeting but is a "family reunion" of clergy and laity from our member units around the country. Annual Conference involves times of fellowship, worship, Bible study, workshops, common mission and business, while making new friends and renewing old relationships. ***We hope you will consider joining us this summer!***

For more information on the International Council of Community Churches, please contact P.O. Box 846, Longmont, CO 80502, Phone 815-464-5690, icccnow@sbcglobal.net.



A Prayer for Our 40 Day Journey

Source of All Life,
our human road is long and hard.
Hatred, prejudice, division,
have left us in the shadow of death.

God bring life!

Journey with us as we travel these 40 days together,
that through our common devotion, reflection, prayer and giving,
we may be both living witnesses
to the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
and servants of reconciliation and healing,
that the whole world may know your life and love.

Amen.

Rev. Bob Fread

Day 1 – Wednesday, February 14

Read Joel 2:1,2,12-17

“Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.” Joel 2:13

I inherited many characteristics from my father. One characteristic is my appearance. I heard throughout my life how much I look like my father. Another is my hair which is thick and full like his. Unfortunately, another characteristic is a quick temper. When a problem arises, I become impatient and anxious, and am **quick to anger**.

Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten season. In many churches people are invited to reflect upon their lives and their failure to love both God and others. As part of their confession to God of these wrongs, the people receive ashes on their foreheads as a sign of their repentance. Finally, the people are reassured of God’s forgiveness, for truly as the prophet Joel wrote, God is “gracious and merciful, **slow to anger**, abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:13).

I’m sure we consistently stress God, and God becomes quite impatient with us. Yet today we remember, even in our of our sin and failures, God shows grace and mercy, and unlike myself, is **slow to anger**. Thanks be to God!

(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach of the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC. He currently serves as pastor of a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in Cedar Falls, IA.)

Prayer for Today: Bethel Independent Methodist Church, Birmingham, AL
Metropolitan Community Church, Birmingham, AL

Day 2 – Thursday, February 15

Read Genesis 9:8-17

“God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you.” Genesis 9:12

“Sign, sign everywhere a sign.” The popular song speaks a truth about our lives. We are always looking for signs. Signs that direct us. Signs that inform us. Signs that express our feelings. Signs that give us confidence in our decisions, etc. As the world began again, after the Flood, God gave Noah and his sons a sign, promising never to destroy the earth by means of a flood again. The sign given was a rainbow. The rainbow says several things about God:

- God knows how to bring beauty out of difficult, destructive events, like a flood, a crucifixion, and the difficulty you face at this moment.
- God knows how to “go big” when necessary. Rainbows painted in the sky are never limited to the sight of just a few people, and the last rainbow you saw is never the last rainbow.
- God knows how to connect signs and promises that remind God and all creation of their interdependence. The rainbow is a sign to both of what each means to the other.

As the season of Lent moves forward, may the sign of the rainbow remind us of just how important our connection to God is, as seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ our Lord!

(Rev. R. Tim Meadows is pastor of the Protestant Community Church in Medford Lakes, NJ, and serves as Treasurer of the ICCC.)

Prayer for Today: Shepherd of the Hills Church, Pheonix, AZ
The Church at Litchfield Park, Litchfield Park, AZ

Day 3 – Friday, February 16

Read I Peter 3:18-22

“For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.” I Peter 3:18

I’ve heard stories of people sacrificing their lives to save another person’s life. A person who shoves a child out of the way of an incoming motor vehicle only to be killed himself. Or a soldier laying his body on a grenade to save the lives of his fellow combatants. Firefighters going into a burning house risking their lives to save a person, if not for someone’s pet.

How many of us would sacrifice our lives for another person? We may do it for a loved one, but for someone we don’t know. Jesus sacrificed his life for ALL, the righteous and the unrighteous, so that all might have life anew with God. What a loving God we have that God would sacrifice God’s only begotten son so that we can experience life renewed with God! Praise be to God!

(Rev. Phil Tom is the Executive Director of the International Council of Community Churches.)

Prayer for Today: Fellowship of Friends, Oregon House, CA
Havenscourt Community Church, Oakland, CA

Day 4 – Saturday, February 17

Read Mark 1:9-15

“A voice came from the heavens, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Mark 1:11

The baptism of Jesus by John in Jordan is a guidepost for humanity. As priests we are called to do two mandates, spread the Gospel (the Good News) to the world, and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I have baptized hundreds of children and adults into the faith and I remind them all, especially the parents of infants, of that voice that comes from heaven – ***“You are my child, whom I love; with you God is well pleased.”***

We need more love in the world, we need that dove of the Holy Spirit to descend upon us all. We need to be gentler and kinder to each other, we need to find that voice from Heaven that is truly ever present. But, why can't so many hear that clearly? It could be our busy, hectic lives that very often don't allow us to take time for our faith to grow. *We need God to be well pleased with us.*

As progressive Catholics we mostly baptize infants in that ancient ritual of water and the anointing with sacred oil. Those symbols of our faith help to build a foundation for our future, they help us go forth into the wilderness, and I pray we can make a difference in a world that is so in need of love, grace, and hope! Look in the mirror today, and ask God, “Are you well pleased with me today?” If you think the answer is no...than try a little harder, you will get there!

(The Rev. Dr. Joseph Ciccone is the Pastor of Saint Joseph Mission ~ A Progressive Catholic Church in Cliffside Park, NJ, and is a retired Police Commander.)

Prayer for Today: Those who serve on the ICCC Board of Trustees

Sunday, February 18 – First Sunday in Lent

Sundays during Lent are traditionally not counted as one of the forty days of Lent, therefore a Scripture and reflection is not offered on Sundays. May God bless you this Lord's Day as you join your local community of faith in worship, to share Scripture, pray and be formed into the Body of Christ.

Day 5 – Monday, February 19

Read Genesis 12:1-4a

“Now the LORD said to Abram... “I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. “ Genesis 12:1a,2b

The Call

God is still calling!

God is still calling us out of the dust of despair and hopelessness

God is still calling us out of the trials and tribulations

God is still calling us out of the isms and schemes

God is still calling us out of the storms and darkness

God is calling us to announce hope to the hopeless

God is calling us to present the oil of joy in our sufferings

God is calling us to introduce the I AM to humanity

God is calling us to remind the storm we have peace and the darkness we have light!

In this we are called a royal priesthood, a holy nation... BLESSED by the one who still calls.

(Rev. Seretha Renee Pearsall is pastor of Park Road Community Church in Washington, DC.)

Prayer for Today: Palisades Community Church, Washington, DC
Park Road Community Church, Washington, DC

Day 6 – Tuesday, February 20

Read Genesis 17:1-7,15,16

“No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations.” Genesis 17:5

What is your name? Our names are given by our families with a sense of love, wonder and hope. Some of us have names that mean something in the language of our family. Like Saratu in Hausa means Princess: A truth person with good heart. Some of us have names that spark an image or a thing, like Lark or Robin. Some of us have family names passed down from generations that often come with a nickname or Jr. Some of us change our names as soon as we can.

God knows our names. God knows your name. Today as we read about Abram becoming Abraham, the father of a nation and Sarai becoming Sarah, the mother of a nation, we feel the seismic shift that happens when we are named, known, and called to put our faith into action. It sets us on a path that is different from the one we thought was ahead of us. Today, let us be open to the Spirit and follow God’s holy lead.

May this day be one of connection with our Savior who calls us by our name and guides us through our Lenten journey.

(Rev. Phoebe Kitson-Davis is pastor of Church of the Loving Shepherd in West Chester, PA.)

Prayer for Today: Christian Catholic Rite of Community Churches, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
Spiritual Science Fellowship/International Institute of Integral Human Sciences-
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Day 7 – Wednesday, February 21

Read Psalm 22:23-31

“For [God] did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me but heard when I cried to him.” Psalm 22:24

This woman was so downhearted, her husband was sick and they had several small children. Every time they went to the doctor something else was wrong with him. The woman was informed by the doctor that her husband was dying and there was nothing further they could do for him. The woman became very depressed but still had to carry on, the bills were getting behind, she didn't have anyone to help her with the children or her sick husband. The woman prayed to God asking why God was allowing this to happen to her and to please help her. “God's righteousness prevailed.” The husband was hospitalized, as a social worker was assigned to help place him in hospice. When interviewing the woman, the social worker saw how distraught and in need the family was. The social worker immediately began an intervention for the woman and her family. Thanks to the social worker's interventions the family was able to care for the husband in his last days so that he peacefully transitioned, and they were able to comfortably cope with the loss. “God always does what God says.”

(Jean Tillman is an ICCC Regional Trustee for Central Zone-Region A and is a member of ABBA Church of Renewed Faith in Chicago, IL)

Prayer for Today: ABBA Church of Renewed Faith, Chicago, IL
Bethany Union Church, Chicago, IL

Day 8 – Thursday, February 22

Read Romans 4:13-25

“For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us.” Romans 4:16

Paul makes a crucial interpretation in Romans 4:13-25: The path of righteousness is not paved by the law, but by faith. Abraham was made righteous before he was circumcised so that he could become the Father of Circumcision, and all who have the faith of Abraham are inclusive of the kingdom of God. Here we are reminded that God's promise is true, even the challenge to overcome almost the impossible, including the challenge to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead that we might have eternal salvation.

We believe in the same faith Abraham bore. Situations of childbirth do not appear to be slam dunks for us, but for God, because God always has a sacrificial lamb in the bush, especially at sacrificial time.

I had one of the worst tests of faith in God's promises October 23, 2023, when I suffered a cerebral hemorrhage while driving to a computer repair shop and fainted almost at the front door of one of the largest funeral homes in the state of Maryland, but I trusted in God's promise, revealed in the faith of Abraham, that God has the power to do exactly what he said. So I got out of my car walking steadily and talking sanely, with no serious physical, mental, or psychological problems. Shortly afterward, my Christian brother Stephen, who had undergone 11 surgeries on one foot within three months was spreading similar good news as a result of his faith.

Trust me believers: As God credited righteousness to Abraham and Stephen and me, he will do it to others who believe.

(Abraham Wright is President of the International Council of Community Churches and is a member of Park Road Community Church in Washington, D.C.)

Prayer for Today: Peace Community Church, Fort Myers, FL
Roser Memorial Community Church, Anna Maria, FL

Day 9 – Friday, February 23

Read Mark 8:31-38

“ [Jesus] called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If any wish to com^l after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Mark 8:34

Even in a growing secular culture I often see people wearing a cross on a necklace or chain. Sometimes I wonder what the cross means to that individual. Is it for them just a pretty object or piece of jewelry or is it a symbol of faith?

Earlier in Mark’s gospel we hear Jesus calling disciples like Peter, Andrew, James, John and Levi by simply saying “Follow me” (Mark 1:17 & 2:14). But now in Mark 8 the invitation has changed. Jesus has just shared for the first time about his death, and in light of this new information the invitation has changed from “follow me” to “take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). In other words, Jesus is saying, “Follow me so you can come die with me”. Now this invitation to be a disciple includes a cross. This cross is not a pretty, gold plated one we wear, but a cross of life-giving service and self-sacrificing love.

There is an old hymn written by Thomas Shepherd, which rarely makes it into contemporary hymnals. This hymn still challenges me:

Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
and all the world go free?
No, there’s a cross for everyone,
and there’s a cross for me.

(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach of the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC. He currently serves as pastor of a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in Cedar Falls, IA.)

Prayer for Today: Center for Expanding Consciousness, White Springs, FL
Chapel-By-The-Sea, Clearwater Beach, FL

Day 10 – Saturday, February 24

Read Mark 9:2-9

“Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Mark 9:7

This is the miracle of the Transfiguration. *“There Jesus was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white” and then once again, God speaks to the world. This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”* Wow, what a story, what an event, what a way to look at our faith. If you are like me, I wonder if you ever said to yourself, “When is God going to talk to me?” “Why can’t I get to hear God?”

During this miracle in the sky when Jesus shines bright, two other biblical beings of old appear with him, Elijah and Moses. These are the two witnesses in the book of Revelation. They are here to show us that repentance and truth of God is present. That message is just as important 2000 years later.

I believe God does still speak to the world, and each of us. Even though I am getting old and in need of a hearing aide, I wonder if most of the world could use a spiritual hearing aide. Take time today, to try to listen more closely, to go up to the mountain top, just like Jesus took Peter, James and John. Go somewhere quiet, high up (even if it’s only in your mind), and look up to the clouds, listen closely, and maybe, just maybe you can hear the voice of God... This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

(The Rev. Dr. Joseph Ciccone is the Pastor of Saint Joseph Mission ~ A Progressive Catholic Church in Cliffside Park, NJ, and is a retired Police Commander.)

Prayer for Today: Those who serve on the ICCC Board of Directors

Sunday, February 25 – Second Sunday in Lent

Sundays during Lent are traditionally not counted as one of the forty days of Lent, therefore a Scripture and reflection is not offered on Sundays. May God bless you this Lord's Day as you join your local community of faith in worship, to share Scripture, pray and be formed into the Body of Christ.

Day 11 – Monday, February 26

Read Exodus 20:1-11

"I am the LORD your God..." Exodus 20:2a

The first four of the ten commandments apply to our relationship with God. They insist that God should come first in our lives, that we should not make or bow down to any idols, that we should use the name of God with reverence and care, and that we should take the seventh day each week to rest, reflect and spend time with God, while also allowing anyone under our direction to do the same. How well do we actually do what God commands in these first four directives?

If we put God first in our lives, how would that change our priorities? Our relationships? Our care for each other? Our care for creation?

If we chose God over the idols that creep into our lives, what would we give up? How different would our life schedules look? How might the things that we value change?

If we truly considered how weighty and significant the name of God is, how might we change the ways we use God's name? Would we limit the curses we utter in the name of God? Would we limit our use of God's name to support everything we believe in? Would it cause us to reconsider our belief that God is always on our side?

If we took the Sabbath as seriously as God intended us to, how different would our lives be? How much better rested might we find ourselves? How much better might our life decisions be? How much more in tune with God and each other might we find ourselves? Wouldn't you agree with me that this is the most broken commandment in the modern world?

The first four commandments seek to order our lives with God. The last six order our human relationships with each other. God thought we would require more order in our relationships with each other than is required in our relationship with God! Isn't that interesting?????? More on that tomorrow.

(Rev. R. Tim Meadows is pastor of the Protestant Community Church in Medford Lakes, NJ, and serves as Treasurer of the ICCC.)

Prayer for Today: Speed Memorial Community Church, Speed, IN
St. Timothy Community Church, Gary, IN

Day 12 – Tuesday, February 27

Read Exodus 20:12-17

“Honor your father and your mother.” Exodus 20:12

Yesterday Tim got us thinking about the Ten Commandments. He wrote, “The first four commandments seek to order our lives with God. The last six order our human relationships with each other.” So today we focus on those last six commandments.

Those first four commandments remind us of the devotion and respect due to God. So why does God care how we act toward one another? I would offer that God wants us act toward others in a way that respects God’s presence in each of us. Our actions toward others affirm each person as one created in God’s image. Why should I honor my parents and not kill, commit adultery, steal, lie or covet? Because by respecting others I honor God’s presence in them.

There is an old Hasidic teaching that says, “Whenever two people meet each other, they should first bow to each other and greet one another by saying, ‘The image of God in me greets the image of God in you.’” How would we treat others if we always acknowledged God’s image in them?

(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach of the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC. He currently serves as pastor of a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in Cedar Falls, IA.)

Prayer for Today: CITI Ministries, Shady Side, MD
Craig Memorial Community Church, Capitol Heights, MD

Day 13 – Wednesday, February 28

Read Psalm 19:7-14

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.” Psalm 19:14

Looking over my life and reviewing the choices I have made and the knocks I have received, even still I know God’s divine love for me. He not only directed my life but all of us. I did not imagine thirty years ago being where I am today, but my life is in God’s hands as he directs my path. My thoughts have changed because I have a different perspective. More of a glass half full not focusing on the negative and seeing God’s grace as He moves on my behalf.

What a mighty God we serve; that he could be more precious than gold and his decisions for us in the paths that we take, would be so right, and perfect. No matter what situation we find ourselves in, we should be thankful for all our heavenly Father has for us. We should make sure that our words speak life, and that our hearts are pure. Our situations might seem unique to us, but our Creator is directing our independent paths. So be confident and trust God’s process for you. Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable, in his sight our Lord and our redeemer.

(Winessa Crutchfield serves as President of the Women’s Christian Fellowship of the ICCC and is a member of Seneca Community Church in Germantown, MD.)

Prayer for Today: Douglas Memorial Community Church, Baltimore, MD
Seneca Community Church, Germantown, MD

Day 14 – Thursday, February 29

Read I Corinthians 1:18-25

“For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” I Corinthians 1:18

The cross does not make human logical sense to non-believers, and maybe even to some believers. Why would God sacrifice Jesus for humanity? Why did Jesus have to suffer and die for my sins? Why? Why? Why? I had these questions when I was wrestling with my faith journey while I was in college. I read through the Bible for the first time. The Bible answers these questions, but as Dr. Spock would say, it is not logical. It was not until I stepped out in faith that my understanding of the cross became not a mental aha moment but a spiritual aha moment! When I accepted Christ, I felt transformed, washed over by God’s power and Spirit. There are no human words to describe my spiritual transformation. It spontaneously happened one day, followed by a spirit of gratitude. It is essential to read and study the Bible, to participate in bible study, and to participate in worship to hear the preaching of the Word so that we can grow spiritually. But the Word does not become flesh by reading and hearing it; it becomes realized and embodied into our life and spirit when we step out in faith.

(Rev. Phil Tom is the Executive Director of the International Council of Community Churches.)

Prayer for Today: Greendale People’s Church, Worcester, MA

Day 15 – Friday, March 1

Read I Corinthians 1:26-31

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” I Corinthians 1:27

There is a story of a captain who was searching for a peculiar vessel. He travelled miles and miles around to find the one he had dreamt about. After spending ½ of his resources in search of this vessel, he met one of the best salesman in the country. For hours, the salesman yelled “choose this one... or this one or this one”. The appeal was always the same “this one is gold, or silver or brass and it’s shiny and bright.” The captain was uninterested.

Just as the captain decided to leave, he spotted a small, worn out, brown vessel with splinters and broken glass. The name of the vessel had almost disappeared only revealing the word “Rock”. The captain was mesmerized by the vessel. His glaze was firm as he began to walk towards what seemed to be a hideous, expended, broken craft. The salesman perplexed said “Oh, no you don’t want that thing... it is washed up, useless and weak”. The captain responded, “name your price”. To which the salesman stated, “I will only sell you this vessel if you signed a “As Is Contract”, with that there are no guarantees and no refunds”. The captain agreed.

We live in a world which is enamored by shiny objects - the rich, famous and/or intellectuals. Yet God’s love sees the marvelous handiwork of the creation made in the Divine imagine: us. It is because of God’s love for us we are called. When we consider our calling, we realized that nothing we have or create can bribe God. God is the Great Creator who wove us together and it is God who knows us... even our weakness. This leads us to a sense of gratitude for we see God chose the weak, lowly, despised things of the world to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

(Rev. Seretha Renee Pearsall is pastor of Park Road Community Church in Washington, DC.)

Prayer for Today: KIHEM Holy Throne of the Most High God on Earth Mission, Lagos, Nigeria

Day 16 – Saturday, March 2

Read John 2:13-22

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” John 2:19

As I have listened to the message that comes up many times on Sunday mornings, I have to agree with the focus. It is said: “This building we sit in to worship and have service, is not the church. You are the church. You go out daily to take Christ to the people. You are the church.”

The cleansing of the temple is one story that appears in all four gospels: Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-48 and John 2:13-22. It is always interesting to hear a story from different personalities. The most familiar quote is, “My father’s house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.” The gospels share how the chief priests and scribes wanted to destroy Jesus. When He talked about raising the temple in three days, he was talking about himself after his crucifixion. The religious leaders looked at the temple and said it took forty-six years to build, what is he talking about? But Jesus was focusing on the future, not the past.

Maybe we should focus on how clean our temple is for the future. We have to continue to cleanse ourselves according to the Word.

(Saundra Nelson is the ICCC Regional Trustee for the Western Zone- Region A and is from Los Angeles, CA.)

Prayer for Today: Bridgeport Community Church, Bridgeport, MI
People’s Community Church, Detroit, MI

Sunday, March 3 – Third Sunday in Lent

Sundays during Lent are traditionally not counted as one of the forty days of Lent, therefore a Scripture and reflection is not offered on Sundays. May God bless you this Lord’s Day as you join your local community of faith in worship, to share Scripture, pray and be formed into the Body of Christ.

Day 17 – Monday, March 4

Read Psalm 107:1-9

“O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” Psalm 107:1

We are living this today. Migrants are coming from Venezuela, and other countries to the United States because of persecution in their country. Many have traveled, some with their families, through rough terrain, harsh weather conditions, lack of food and water to a country that is unprepared to handle them. Upon arrival to the cities in the USA, when interviewed by reporters, many of them said they prayed and asked God for help in getting to this country. Many have been greeted positively by people showing Christianity and trying to help their fellow man.

(Jean Tillman is an ICCC Regional Trustee for Central Zone-Region A and is a member of ABBA Church of Renewed Faith in Chicago, IL)

Prayer for Today: Commonwealth Community Church, Chicago, IL
The Center, Palos Park, IL

Day 18 – Tuesday, March 5

Read Psalm 107:17-22

“And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.” Psalm 107:22

Many have said the old adage “The Lord takes care of babies and fools”. We grow up and decide to live our lives our way. Making fool’s decisions on a daily basis then seeking the Lord to throw out the life preserver to rescue us from the muck and miry clay we’ve placed ourselves in. Only to turn around after he has delivered us from that situation to turn and end up in another dilemma needing God to provide another way of escape. We repeat this cycle continuously knowing that God is going to rescue us.

Whether you are a baby or a fool, God’s devotion to us is boundless. “Oh, give thanks for His unending-everlasting love for his people. Render praise to our Lord and Savior for the wonderful works He has performed for us, His children”. (Psalm 107:1,8) “He inhabits the praises of his people” (Psalm 22:3). Giving God the praise, won’t make you sinless, it will enable you to sin less. Testify of God’s goodness so others will know of his marvelous works.

(Winessa Crutchfield serves as President of the Women’s Christian Fellowship of the ICCC and is a member of Seneca Community Church in Germantown, MD.)

Prayer for Today: ICCC Clergy Emeritus and those Honorably Retired

Day 19 – Wednesday, March 6

Read Numbers 4:4-9

“Pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us.” Numbers 4:7

At 25 I quit my job as a teacher and joined the Peace Corps. When you fill out the application you must agree to go wherever they send you. You are asked to prioritize where you might serve. The first thing that came to mind was not climate, language, distance, or traditions. It was snakes. I would happily serve anywhere so long as there weren’t a lot of snakes. I served 2 years in Niger as a teacher in a rural village on the border of Benin and Nigeria.

God had a sense of humor about my assignment. We had to check our shoes to make sure there weren’t scorpions in them and used military grade repellent to keep malaria carrying mosquitoes from biting us. Funny fact about that repellent? It was so strong it melted flip flops when you put them on your feet! We were told to check behind our water containers for Puff Adders, Sand Vipers and my favorite, (not!) Spitting Cobras. Each one...dangerous and deadly.

When the Israelites are wandering the desert, complaining about food, and their perception of God’s abandonment, God uses Moses and a bronze snake to calm everyone down.

We don’t need snakes to remind us that God is with us showing us unconditional love and grace. We need to remain faithful and trust God’s love for us.

(Rev. Phoebe Kitson-Davis is pastor of Church of the Loving Shepherd in West Chester, PA.)

Prayer for Today: Church of the Loving Shepherd, West Chester, PA

Day 20 – Thursday, March 7

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

“God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.” Ephesians 2:4,5

One of the most informative readings I encountered this past Advent Season focused on the notion that many of us who are interested in salvation can be happy without Jesus Christ. This belief has credibility because many of us know what separates us from God/Jesus Christ, but we are unwilling to reject them because we don't believe that we are powerful enough in Christ to overcome them. What too many of us do not understand is that accepting Jesus is the way to be alive, to be dead in the ruler of the world and to accept the gift that will eventually place us on the right hand of the Father in the heavenly realm.

We forget that it is God who redeemed us through the gifts of grace and faith through Jesus Christ. If God did it for us corporately, he certainly can do it one-on-one and through counseling and coaching and loving and forgiving each other. We who are happy with Jesus at Christmas and during other seasons should encourage those who believe, that habits which separate them from Christ Jesus, too daunting to overcome, can unite themselves with Christ through obedience to God because Christ now unites us in work with Christ as the Trail Blazer who will pick us up when we occasionally fall and meet us at the end of the trail.

(Abraham Wright is President of the International Council of Community Churches and is a member of Park Road Community Church in Washington, D.C.)

Prayer for Today: Lake Superior Interfaith Community Church, Duluth, MN

Day 21 – Friday, March 8

Read John 3:14-16

“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” John 3:14

Earlier this week we read the story from Numbers of the Israelites encountering snakes in the wilderness and how God instructed Moses to place a bronze snake on a pole. Those Israelites who then looked at the bronze snake on the pole were healed. This image of a snake on a pole was used in ancient cultures as a healing symbol and we know it still today as many medical and health care providers use some form of a snake or snakes on a pole as a symbol.

Today we read how John's Gospel uses this image to explain what Jesus does not only for us, but the whole creation. Jesus lifted up heals! John uses the term “lifted up” four times in his Gospel, but this image seems not only to indicate Jesus' death, but also his glorification. His lifting up is not just about death, but also about healing and bringing life!

In the famous verse John 3:16 we hear that God so loved the “world”. In Greek the word “world” is “kosmos” meaning the “whole ordered universe” or “the whole creation”. This Jesus lifted up heals not only you and me, but brings healing, renewal, re-creation to the whole of God's now broken creation.

Each time I read this verse of Jesus being “lifted up”, think of the glorious hymn of George Kitchin:

Lift high the cross;
the love of Christ proclaim,
till all the world adores that sacred name.

(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach of the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC. He currently serves as pastor of a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in Cedar Falls, IA.)

Prayer for Today: Antioch Community Church, Kansas City, MO

Day 22 – Saturday, March 9

Read John 3:17-21

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:17

We have all sinned. Yet, Jesus came not to condemn humanity but to offer each person salvation. The gospel message isn't one of shame, guilt, condemnation. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a glorious message of hope; for Jesus died a substitutionary death. The measure of God's love for us is Jesus.

“Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (John 3:18) These are the opposites. For generations, darkness has loomed over the world and people have chosen to worship their own gods, themselves, and the things of this world.

Matthew Henry wrote, “Christ is hated because sin is loved.” Those who love darkness cannot do good works for they are in darkness. “And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.” (John 3:19,20) We must remember that darkness is death.

Yet Jesus was sent, to reveal who God really is and the act of God's love. Jesus **invites us to believe in Him, come to Him freely and choose light over darkness.**

Our salvation gifted us eternal life but we are also called by God to represent the ‘light’ to this dark world and those who walk in it.

(Rev. Seretha Renee Pearsall is pastor of Park Road Community Church in Washington, DC.)

Prayer for Today: American National Catholic Church, West Orange, NJ
Emmanuel Church, Ridgewood, NJ

Sunday, March 10 – Fourth Sunday in Lent

Sundays during Lent are traditionally not counted as one of the forty days of Lent, therefore a Scripture and reflection is not offered on Sundays. May God bless you this Lord's Day as you join your local community of faith in worship, to share Scripture, pray and be formed into the Body of Christ.

Day 23 – Monday, March 11

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34

“The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel ... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people ... For I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.” Jeremiah 31:31,33b,34b

WHEN God? When are these days coming? We are such impatient people. We live in an immediate access and even throwaway society. With technology at our fingertips, everything in the world is within our reach, or is it? I cannot help but think about the people of Israel, as that country - the Holy Land is at war, with children and so many others dying every day.

This new covenant, this promise that had the sign of a rainbow, told the world, it would never be destroyed again. But we are destroying our world in so many ways. Wars, violence and school shootings, killing our beautiful climate and natural resources. A culture of hate, distrust, a political system of lies and greed. When, Oh God, is the new covenant coming? That is going to be up to us, it is time to look up and find that rainbow again. To say to one another, “know the Lord,” and ask God to forgive our wickedness and to try with all of our hearts to “sin no more.” That is somewhere over the rainbow, and we can get there!

(The Rev. Dr. Joseph Ciccone is the Pastor of Saint Joseph Mission ~ A Progressive Catholic Church in Cliffside Park, NJ, and is a retired Police Commander.)

Prayer for Today: Saint Joseph Mission, Cliffside, NJ

Day 24 – Tuesday, March 12

Read Psalm 51:1-5

“Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” Psalm 51:1,4

Lent is a penitential season, a time of self-examination of our lives. Today’s Scripture is the first few verses of a great prayer of confession, a meaningful examination of the soul. Upon reading this Scripture, take a few moments of confession and self-examination. I offer below a prayer that is taken from the Liturgy of Ash Wednesday from the United Church of Canada:

For the times when we are too rushed to care,
when we are too tired to bother,
when we don’t really listen,
when we act from motives other than love.
For our incapacity to feel the sufferings of others,
and our tendency to live comfortably with injustice.
For our failings in community,
and our lack of understanding.
For our lack of forgiveness, openness, sensitivity.
For the self-righteousness that denies guilt,
and the self-interest that strangles compassion.

God, forgive us!

(Taken from Celebrate God’s Presence: A Book of Services for the United Church of Canada, © 2000 The United Church Publishing House, Etobicoke, Ontario)

(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach of the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC. He currently serves as pastor of a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in Cedar Falls, IA.)

Prayer for Today: Our ICCC Clergy with Special Standing

Day 25 – Wednesday, March 13

Read Psalm 51:6-12

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10

How many of us have heard someone tell us we were wrong? We can agree or disagree with them according to how we see it. Judging ourselves can be serious. It can guide us into all kinds of directions. David had sinned with Bathsheba. When Nathan the prophet pointed it out to him, David had to judge himself. He recognized the truth of Nathan and lifted himself to God and asked forgive-ness.

As we travel through this world today, we will have our ups and downs. We may find ourselves leaning to the left or right according to who we are close to. Many times we don't want to be alone in our thoughts or actions. But are we always in the right? This is what we need to focus on. Scripture can help us know the truth about ourselves. As true believers, we need to reach out to God and seek the truth. We need to ask forgiveness and guidance to go forward.

Let us all pray for God's guidance, strength and direction to be the leaders He would have us to be.

(Saundra Nelson is the ICCC Regional Trustee for the Western Zone- Region A and is from Los Angeles, CA.)

Prayer for Today: Community Church of East Williston, East Williston, NY
First Church of Evans, Evans, NY

Day 26 – Thursday, March 14

Read Psalm 119:9-16

“I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you.” Psalm 119:11

Psalm means a sacred song or poem used in worship. “Law” translates to “torah”. More rules are found in Deuteronomy, which means “second law”.

In Hebrew, each eight-line stanza of Psalm 119 begins with the same letter. Verses 9 – 16 each begins with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet and so forth. This kind of patterning supports the author's claim that God's Law applies to everything.

Psalm 119:11 challenges us to live according to God's Word. We need to be lifelong students of the Scriptures. Obeying God's Word leads us to avoid sin.

(Linda Hopkins is the ICCC Regional Trustee for the Central Zone- Region B and is a member of the Second Community Church in Columbus, OH.)

Prayer for Today: Second Community Church, Columbus, OH
New Covenant Community Church, Aaron, OH

Day 27 – Friday, March 15

Read Hebrew 5:5-10

“So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest.” Hebrews 5:5

Little is known about the priestly order of Melchizedek. However, if God declared Jesus a priest of that order, then the order must be important. The reasons cited for Jesus’ qualification to the order were his prayers, pleadings, tears, and obedience learned through suffering.

Interestingly, the things that qualified Jesus as a perfect high priest are mostly things we try our best to avoid in life. Do you think that might be part of our disconnect with God?

What if we chose to walk like Jesus walked through the things the writer of Hebrews describes? What then might God declare about us? Maybe a part of our task in this season of Lent is to limit our avoidance of the things described in this text and seek to build our endurance as Jesus did? What then might God declare about us? What might we learn about ourselves? How might we become better “priests to each other?”

(Rev. R. Tim Meadows is pastor of the Protestant Community Church in Medford Lakes, NJ, and serves as Treasurer of the ICCC.)

Prayer for Today: Protestant Community Church, Medford Lakes, NJ
Wilson Memorial Union Church, Watchung, NJ

Day 28 – Saturday, March 16

Read John 12:20-33

“Jesus said to them, “The light is in you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” John 12:35,36

It seems lately that the news is full of nothing but bad news and that the world has become darker because of wars, mass shootings, rising hunger and homelessness, and migrants fleeing for their safety only to face more dangers. It would be easy to shut out the world and focus on oneself and loved ones. As God’s people of hope, we cannot step back and hide from the world. Jesus proclaims in John 12 that we are children of light. Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus proclaims, “You are the light of the world, to illuminate and to shatter the darkness. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before all, that they may see your good works and glorify your God in heaven.” I close with these words from Rumi, “If everything around seems dark, look again, you may be the light.” Be God’s light and shatter the darkness!

(Rev. Phil Tom is the Executive Director of the International Council of Community Churches.)

Prayer for Today: Imagine Church of the Carolinas, Charlotte, NC

Sunday, March 17 – Fifth Sunday in Lent

Sundays during Lent are traditionally not counted as one of the forty days of Lent, therefore a Scripture and reflection is not offered on Sundays. May God bless you this Lord’s Day as you join your local community of faith in worship, to share Scripture, pray and be formed into the Body of Christ.

Day 29 – Monday, March 18

Read Psalm 31:9-16

“Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress.” Psalm 31:9

As I read this section of Psalm 31, my spirit aches with each verse. Verse by verse you seemingly find a person more shattered.

Distress,
grief,
spent,
misery,
wasted away,
scorned,
horror,
dread,
broken.

One might think that a person this torn apart would have given up all faith and hope. That saving and deliverance might not be possible. That God is too distant or uncaring. But by the end of this section in verses 14 to 16 this broken person is still speaking of trust and deliverance at the hands of a God of steadfast love. We even hear the great proclamation from this person, “You are my God” (v. 14). The words of the old hymn by Cleland McAfee come to mind: “There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God’.

(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach of the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC. He currently serves as pastor of a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in Cedar Falls, IA.)

Prayer for Today: Open Episcopal Church, Welling, England

Day 30 – Tuesday, March 19

Read Philippians 2:1-11

“Make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” Philippians 2:2

Things happen and you wonder, “Am I hearing God’s voice? Yes, He speaks to you everyday.

Paul gives the example of Christian life to follow in God’s steps. Christian experience is in you! The Gospel makes us partners.

Paul was asked for help in Macedonia. He established the first church in Macedonia. Partnership is instructive to the Christian church today. The Philippian church was not plagued by doctrinal controversy, leadership, or internal conflict. Love and appreciation set the tone. The Holy Spirit inspired instruction about Christian joy.

Speak His name and you will find strength and peace. Don’t ask for a different outlook, but trust enough to see His purpose.

(Linda Hopkins is the ICCC Regional Trustee for the Central Zone- Region B and is a member of the Second Community Church in Columbus, OH.)

Prayer for Today: People’s Community Church, Berea, OH
The Church in Aurora, Aurora, OH

Day 31 – Wednesday, March 20

Read Isaiah 42:1-4

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.” Isaiah 42:1

The Servant of the Lord: Jesus, will bring forth justice... set things right. He will establish things as they ought to be because God granted Him strength; He is the chosen one, who delights God and because He possesses the Spirit of God. Jesus – the atonement – brought forth justice for humanity by redemption and restoration.

The word redeem means “to buy back.” Redemption is the price, not through the teachings of Jesus, but through the redemptive work of the cross. Christ purchased our freedom, and we are no longer in bondage to sin. As the song goes, “He paid a debt, He did not owe.” Even the death of Jesus was not the result of any sin He committed but rather a gracious act of love.

Jesus patiently and lovingly walks with us through life by salvation and guiding us to the newness of life. When we sin, we have the privilege to repent and accept God’s forgiveness. And in that forgiveness, we are encouraged and empowered to live a life abundantly in Christ. We live in the restoration as the children of God.

As children of God, we are called to be light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind and release those in captivity. This call is to be a blessing to one another and a reminder of the precious gift of Divine love. We are called to follow the example of Christ, be submissive to the will of God without looking for the applause of man, yet benevolently minister to our brothers and sisters.

(Rev. Seretha Renee Pearsall is pastor of Park Road Community Church in Washington, DC.)

Prayer for Today: Our ICCC Endorsed Chaplains

Day 32 – Thursday, March 21

Read Isaiah 42:5-9

*“I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I have taken you by the hand and kept you.”
Isaiah 42:6*

This passage is a call to God’s chosen people, the Israelites as well as the believers of the faith of Abraham. God reaffirms, as we hopefully do daily, that he is the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is in-between them, together with that which springs from what is created from them, including Jesse, David, Jesus Christ, and us.

The emphasis is on a Servant of the Lord, a nation, a people, who gives “breath” and “life” (42:5b) to it and its people because God called us in righteousness, and God leads us in the right direction. God will make us (the children of Abraham) the leader of “all” his people, and a “light” for the Gentiles so they/we can remain engrafted into the family of the children of Abraham.

We too are challenged to be the modern leaders of righteousness led by God and his modern leaders such as Jesus Christ (from the seed of Jesse and David) and Ruth and Esther, Amos and the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. and John F. Kennedy, and others who work hard for justice and equally and prison reform and improved housing and for those who seem to call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and seem to receive little or no relief.

We are God’s children; so let us show our love to Him and his Son Jesus Christ who is the “new thing” he gives to us during this devotional season who works for universal peace and justice for all.

(Abraham Wright is President of the International Council of Community Churches and is a member of Park Road Community Church in Washington, D.C.)

Prayer for Today: CHI Interfaith Community, Beaverton, OR

Day 33 – Friday, March 22

Read Isaiah 50:4-9a

“I gave my back to those who struck me and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced;”
Isaiah 50:6,7a

In Richard Blanco’s book of poetry, *“How to Love Country,”* he writes a compelling poem titled, *“Complaint of El Rio Grande.”* When I first heard it, I was stunned into a moment of reflection and sadness. How did we get to be a country so divided on how to treat one another? When did kindness and neighborly conversations become moments of anxiousness and fear? The river becomes a metaphor for division and thoughts of “us vs them.” It’s just a river. It was never meant to be a lightning rod for bitterness and hatred. *“I wasn’t meant to drown your children or meant to be your geography. I was meant for all things to meet.”* I recommend the poem for your Lenten reading.

The Isaiah reading today is a challenging one. Many of us have faced moments of bigotry, violence, and hatred. It cuts to the bone and leaves us raw. Healing only comes when mercy, kindness, love, and grace abound. When we cry out to our Sovereign Lord our tears are wiped away with a kind word, a warm embrace, or a reassuring sign that God is by our side. Today, be the love that is needed in the world.

(Rev. Phoebe Kitson-Davis is pastor of Church of the Loving Shepherd in West Chester, PA.)

Prayer for Today: Community Church of Lake Wylie, Lake Wylie, SC

Day 34 – Saturday, March 23

Read John 12:12-16

“The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him.” John 12:12,13

My usual beginning to worship on Palm Sunday for many years had me gathering the children in the back of the sanctuary just outside the sanctuary doors. There I read the story of Jesus’ triumphal entry and blessed palm leaves to be distributed to the congregation. When the organ began to play, *“All Glory, Laud and Honor”* the children would process down the aisle waving their palm branches as the congregation sang.

One Palm Sunday following worship, one of the dear saints of the church in her early 80’s asked, “How come only the children get to process and wave their palm branches on Palm Sunday?” Good question! The next year the whole congregation gathered outside on the lawn, then paraded into the church waving their palm branches.

Tomorrow is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week as we prepare to walk with Jesus through his passion and death. In the service that I use on Palm Sunday there is a line that says, “Let us remember with great devotion this entry which began Jesus’ saving work, and follow with a lively faith. United with Christ in suffering on the cross, may we also share Christ’s resurrection and new life.” Those words “follow with a lively faith” still invites me and the whole church to enter into Christ’s saving works. As Jesus enters Jerusalem, let us **all** follow to the cross.

(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach of the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC. He currently serves as pastor of a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in Cedar Falls, IA.)

Prayer for Today: Norris Religious Fellowship, Norris, TN
Tellico Village Community Church, Loudon, TN

Sunday, March 24 – Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion

Sundays during Lent are traditionally not counted as one of the forty days of Lent, therefore a Scripture and reflection is not offered on Sundays. May God bless you this Lord's Day as you join your local community of faith in worship, to share Scripture, pray and be formed into the Body of Christ.

Day 35 – Monday, March 25

Read Mark 12:1-12

“But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’” Mark 12:7

Evil is as evil does and there is certainly evil all over this parable and its parallel version in Matthew 21:33-46. Recently, I explored the evil in that version in a sermon on entitlement. While all evil is not rooted in entitlement, a good portion certainly is, and the doers of evil in both versions of this parable exhibit a sense of entitlement.

Each version demonstrates how entitlement begins in a relationship that is soon forgotten. The evil actors in both versions took advantage of someone they knew who had trusted them.

Entitlement leads to drastic actions to maintain the beneficial situation for the entitled. The lengths to which the evil actors in both versions are willing to go are indicative of how acceptable evil actors find violence to be in maintaining what they have come to believe they are entitled to possess.

Ultimately, however, entitlement and the evil it manifests collapse under the weight of the maintenance they require to sustain themselves. In addition to these two stories, we see this truth in the biblical stories of The Rich Fool (Luke 12), The Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

Perhaps, the challenge of this Lenten season is to identify the places we feel entitled in our own lives and root them out lest they destroy us and others.

(Rev. R. Tim Meadows is pastor of the Protestant Community Church in Medford Lakes, NJ, and serves as Treasurer of the ICCC.)

Prayer for Today: upRising – a church without walls, Austin, TX

Day 36 – Tuesday, March 26

Read Mark 14:1-9

“While [Jesus] was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.” Mark 14:3

Jesus was in Bethany, reclining at the table, as a woman came with very expensive perfume. She poured the perfume on his head. Those amazing disciples of Jesus, who truly loved him, actually complained to one another. “What a waste of perfume!!!” Maybe they were thinking of the poor and trying to live out this call of Christ to help those in need, to make a difference in the world, and not focus on material things? But we get to see here another rare example of Jesus using “righteous anger.” The words of Christ, speak for themselves, “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, you will not always have me.” (v. 6,7)

Sacred oil is used in many of the sacraments. We bless children with this holy oil in Baptism, in Confirmation, when young adults become “soldiers of Christ.” My head and hands were blessed with this Oil during my ordination. I used this same oil giving last rites and the anointing of the sick to many, most memorable is anointing my own mother. Christ was right, sadly the poor will always be with us, and we need to do everything in our power to help those we can. But we can only do that, we can only give to others, when we ourselves are on this sacred journey with Christ, anointed and able to smell the sacred perfume of our faith.

(The Rev. Dr. Joseph Ciccone is the Pastor of Saint Joseph Mission ~ A Progressive Catholic Church in Cliffside Park, NJ, and is a retired Police Commander.)

Prayer for Today: Catholic Apostolic Church of North America, South Burlington, VT

Day 37 – Wednesday, March 27

Read Mark 14:10,11,43-50

“Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.” Mark 14:10

One of the names of this day is Spy Wednesday, recalling the day Judas agreed to betray Jesus. The four Gospel traditions have nothing good to say about Judas, and when they mention his name the words, “the one who betrayed Jesus” usually gets added to his name.

I admit I tend to see Judas in a more sympathetic light. Did Judas really realize that his actions would end in Jesus’ death? Was he just trying to force Jesus into being the Messiah he wanted Jesus to be? Judas’ later remorse makes me think that this event spun out of control far faster and more seriously than what he calculated. I believe when God writes the final chapter of Judas’ story, it will end in forgiveness and mercy.

So why am I sympathetic to Judas? Well, I think there is a little Judas in me and in all of us. I too, get self-absorbed, self-centered, and think my way is better than God’s. Judas’ sin, is Adam & Eve’s sin in Genesis - wanting to be like God or even be our own God - and that sin is sometimes my sin. So Judas, Adam & Eve, I, and you too, all have the same problem. But God has the answer to that problem in Jesus. In Jesus, there is mercy and forgiveness for Adam & Eve, for me, for you, and I believe for Judas too.

(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach of the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC. He currently serves as pastor of a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in Cedar Falls, IA.)

Prayer for Today: Tennessee Valley Community Church, Florence, AL
The Federation of Christian Ministries, Cleveland, OH

Day 38 – Thursday, March 27

Read Mark 14:17-31

“Peter said to him, “Even though all fall away,^[h] I will not.” Mark 14:29

In this passage from Mark 14, Peter proudly proclaims that he will never fall away from Jesus. Yet, as Jesus was being crucified, Peter disowned Jesus by denying Jesus three times. But after Jesus' resurrection, Peter reclaimed his calling to follow Jesus as he began evangelizing to Jews and Gentiles. Peter founded the first community and fulfilled the proclamation that Jesus made about Peter in Matthew 16:18 that Peter is the rock that Jesus would use to build his Church.

I've talked with some folks who feel that they have failed God because they have not been able to live a Godly life. Some feel shame, some feel unworthy, and some think God will never forgive them. Despite our human shortcomings, if we faithfully seek to follow Jesus, God is always near to support, guide, and love us! As Easter people, we must hear the Good News that through God's death and resurrection, God gives us new life, a new beginning every day, to serve God and our neighbors. Rejoice in the Good News that even when we fall away from God, God will never fall away from us.

(Rev. Phil Tom is the Executive Director of the International Council of Community Churches.)

Prayer for Today: #C4YOURSELFCHURCH, Port Huron, MI
St. Timothy Community Church, San Bernardino, CA

Day 39 – Friday, March 28

Read Mark 15:20-39

“They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry [Jesus'] cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull).” Mark 15:21,22

A tradition dating back to the 1860's still happens each year on Good Friday in Cincinnati. Thousands of people gather at Holy Cross-Immaculata Roman Catholic Church to silently climb the steps of the church, praying on each step. The church was built on a hill just outside Cincinnati. This location reminded people of the place of Jesus' crucifixion, a hill just outside the city. With the church located on the top of a steep hill, 85 steps needed to be built so people could reach the church from the neighborhood below. On Good Friday, parishioners coming to worship began the tradition of praying on each of the steps as they climbed the hill to the church remembering Jesus' ascent of Golgotha. Eventually, people from around the Cincinnati area would make a pilgrimage to this church on Good Friday to climb the hill and pray on each step.

My final Good Friday living in Cincinnati, I went to climb the steps at Holy Cross-Immaculata. Even with the large crowd, the silence and devotion of those praying on each step made this a holy moment. At the top of the steps is a huge crucifix, where pilgrims kneel in prayer at the culmination of their climb.

Today we pause from our busy lives to climb a hill, carry a cross, and ponder the amazing self-sacrificial love of our God. In the words of the African-American spiritual, “what wondrous love is, this that caused the Lord of bliss, to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.”

(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach of the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC. He currently serves as pastor of a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in Cedar Falls, IA.)

Prayer for Today: Longboat Island Chapel, Longboat Key, FL

Day 40– Saturday, March 30

Read Mark 15:42-47

“Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.” Mark 15:43

Being present at the moment of someone’s death is one of the most profound experiences one can ever have. As my mother lay dying, my daughter and I were holding her hand. My two sisters were by her side. Sacred. From time immemorial moments of death have marked deep shifts in one’s experience of life and what one’s future will be.

Joseph of Arimathea showed great courage when he approached Pilate. He showed a longing for the long-awaited kingdom of God to manifest itself. He demonstrated faith, respect and devotion when he was given Christ’s body and bought all that was needed for a proper burial. He showed strength of character and body when he rolled the stone and placed our Savior’s body in the tomb.

I imagine he was kind and comforting to the Mary’s as they sat outside the tomb. Perhaps not knowing what to say but to offer a piece of cloth to wipe their tears or a blanket to cover them from the chill of the evening.

We don’t always know what to say when someone is grieving. One idea is marking your calendar for 6 months after a death and make a date with their spouse or friend, sibling or child, parent or neighbor or call or send them a note. Knowing you remember can mean everything to them.

(Rev. Phoebe Kitson-Davis is pastor of Church of the Loving Shepherd in West Chester, PA.)

Prayer for Today: Our ICCC Administrator, DeAnn Bath,

Easter Sunday– Sunday, March 31

Read Mark 16:1-8

“He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.” Mark 16:6b

Mark 16:1-8 is a solid presentation in the resurrection analog. Although the broadcast of Jesus’ miracle turned the morning talk show almost upside-down for some of Jesus’ closest friends. At the tomb to honor Jesus with a proper burial dressing, instantly they were almost shocked and feared to death with a resurrection that they should have been prepared for because Jesus had already told them and the disciples of the prediction. True, “physical fear” was in the air and on the ground surrounding and throughout the crucifixion events, but how often we, regardless of gender, forget that there is nothing too hard for God?

The close-knitted group heard the announcement of the Resurrection from an angel, the angel told them not to fear and reminded them who Jesus was and where he was. The angel then showed them that the tomb was indeed empty. Then the angel assured them that the message was from Jesus and proceed quickly to give them their assignment from Jesus: That since Jesus is not dead, he has gone ahead of you into Galilee to help prepare the second part of His and your life. Go now and tell His disciples and Peter to go meet Jesus in Galilee; there you too will see Jesus, as Jesus has already told you. However, the group, however well intended, were bewildered with fear.

But it is clear from the mouth and the appearance of Jesus that He is risen from the dead and that our response to the Resurrection is to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation, without fear.

(Abraham Wright is President of the International Council of Community Churches and is a member of Park Road Community Church in Washington, D.C.)

Prayer for Today: Our ICCC Executive Director, Rev. Phil Tom,