

# OH, LOVE, HOW DEEP



## Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322)

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| <p>1 O, love, how deep, how broad, how high,<br/>beyond all thought and fantasy,<br/>that God, the Son of God, should take<br/>our mortal form for mortals' sake!</p> <p>2 God sent no angel to our race,<br/>of higher or of lower place,<br/>but wore the robe of human frame,<br/>in Christ our Lord to this world came.</p> <p>3 For us baptized, for us he bore<br/>his holy fast and hungered sore;<br/>for us temptation sharp he knew;<br/>for us the tempter overthrew.</p> <p>4 For us he prayed; for us he taught;<br/>for us his daily works he wrought,<br/>by words and signs and actions thus<br/>still seeking not himself, but us.</p> | <p>5 For us by wickedness betrayed,<br/>for us, in crown of thorns arrayed,<br/>he bore the shameful cross and death;<br/>for us gave his dying breath.</p> <p>6 For us he rose from death again;<br/>for us he went on high to reign;<br/>for us he sent his Spirit here<br/>to guide, to strengthen, and to cheer.</p> <p>7 All glory to our Lord and God<br/>for love so deep, so high, so broad:<br/>the Trinity whom we adore<br/>forever and forevermore.</p> |
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## Wednesday, February 18

Ash Wednesday

### Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

As we begin the season of Lent, Matthew 6 reaches deep into the center of our lives. Jesus invites us not into rules, but into a way of being, an ethic of living with God at the heart of all we do. Many of us pray both in the quiet of our rooms and in the open moments when someone's pain or our pain calls us to intercede. For some of us, especially where faith is woven into culture, our first instinct is not to reach for a phone, but for God. We give, we pray, we fast, not for recognition, but because goodness naturally rises when we walk with God.

Lent is not about performance. It is about returning to the truth that life with God is a way of life. When our practices flow from love rather than obligation, we are freed from burdens and drawn into deeper relationship.

*Lord, shape our hearts to seek you quietly, sincerely, and joyfully. Amen.*

## Thursday, February 19

### Romans 5:12–19

Sin entered the world like a constant that always led to loss: sin minus the law brought death, and sin plus the law still resulted in death. But in Christ, the equation changes forever. Jesus steps into the center of our brokenness and becomes the One who overturns sin's power, replacing death with abundant life. Through his redeeming sacrifice, we are not only forgiven—we are lifted to the place of God's beloved children, invited to reign with a dignity we did not earn but freely received.

I know what it means to be rescued from the edge of hopelessness into the fullness of life. If you find yourself at rock bottom this Lenten season, Christ is inviting you into that same transformation. Where sin condemns and destroys, Jesus restores and gives life in overflowing abundance. In him, death is defeated, and a new kingdom reality begins even now.

*Gracious Redeemer, lift us from the weight of our sin into the freedom of your grace. Where death once ruled, let your life overflow in us. Heal what is broken, restore what is lost, and lead us into the abundance only you can give. Hold close all who feel unworthy today, and let your hope rise within them. Amen.*

## Friday, February 20

### Matthew 4:1–11

When I was in sixth grade, a friend asked me to climb a mango tree to pluck a ripe fruit she could not reach. Eager to help, I climbed without noticing that the branch beneath me was weak. In a moment, I fell, broke my arm, and learned a lesson that has followed me through life: not every invitation is worth accepting.

In Matthew 4:1–11, Jesus faces temptations that appeal to his real human needs—hunger, power, and identity. Satan offers what looks “good,” yet each offer hides destruction. Jesus responds with wisdom rooted in God’s Word, showing us that anything which satisfies the flesh for a moment but endangers the soul is not worth pursuing.

Lent invites us to pause, weigh our desires, and choose the path that leads to life rather than harm.

*Lord, give us wisdom to recognize false invitations, strength to resist fleeting cravings, and hearts anchored in your Word. Amen.*

## Saturday, February 21

### Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322)

As we enter the Lenten season, the hymn “Oh, Love, How Deep” invites us to reflect on a love that transcends every culture. Growing up in Nigeria, love for me was often shown through responsibility—an older sibling stepping in to protect or rescue the younger ones, not because they had to, but because family bonds demanded it. That image helps me understand God’s love in Christ.

Some say the cross does not clearly show love. Yet it is felt, as the Father entrusted him to embody that love—as many of us know from our families, such as when an older brother steps forward to rescue his younger siblings because he can. Jesus bore our burdens, entered our struggles, and lifted us from what we could not escape on our own. In his resurrection, the whole world is offered new life.

*Lord Jesus, draw us deeper into your saving love. Help us see the cross as the ultimate family rescue. Amen.*

## Sunday, February 22

### First Sunday in Lent

#### Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322, Verse 1)

"Oh, love, how deep, how broad, how high" ... this ancient hymn draws us into a mystery beyond human imagination. How can we fully grasp a love so vast that the Son of God would take on our fragile humanity for our sake? At times, I wonder if I could trust a God who did not understand my fears or my feelings. But in Jesus, God stepped into our story, into dust, hunger, tears, and weariness so that none of us would ever walk alone.

I cannot fathom the full measure of this love, but I know its rescue. It lifted me when I felt unworthy, and it still searches for the lost, the least, and the lowly. During Lent, we remember that Christ's love does not give up. It keeps seeking until it finds us.

*Lord Jesus, let your boundless love reach us anew this Lent. Find us, heal us, and draw us close. Amen.*

## Monday, February 23

### Genesis 12:1–4a

Abram heard a voice calling to him. It said he should go to a land about which he knew nothing. There he would become the father of a great nation. So, he goes into the unknown. His obedience to the voice is astonishing. Who of us would have the courage and faith to make such a journey into the unknown? He knows that he and Sarai are past the age of childbearing and yet he believes enough to take the first step and then the second. Suddenly he is in the new land the voice has promised him. It is strange and difficult. Faith is always a leap into the unknown, but we can do so because we trust our God is with us.

*O God, we thank you for the witness of Abraham and Sarah. Give us the faith to go forth into the future with confidence in your guiding light. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## Tuesday, February 24

### Psalm 121

This psalm for travel gives us words which many say as they begin a journey. "Keep" is the word repeated over and over. God is our keeper, who will not slumber, who keeps us from all evil, who keeps our life, and our going out and coming in. All of us need to hear this daily. It tells us that our God is one who is with us, Immanuel, never at a distance, even if it may feel like it. And not just for now, but forevermore. That belief in things eternal gives us confidence and hope and should put a spring in our step even as we walk into the darkest valley.

*O God, our comforter, who keeps watch over us wherever we go, we thank you for your love and care. Keep us always on the right path. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## Wednesday, February 25

### Romans 4:1–5; 13–17

Those who believe in Jesus as their savior are heirs of the promise to Abraham, not of his flesh, but his faith in the promise. It was Abraham's faith, Paul argues passionately, that saved him—not his tribal identity or following of the law, however good that was. Paul believed that all he had learned in his training in Jerusalem with Gamaliel ended in Christ. He was the one who was promised from the beginning. And it was the resurrection that proved Jesus was the Messiah. We are not Christians because our parents or grandparents were. Each of us must encounter God's promises to us. When we do we become one with Christ and all who believe in him. A new family, and life! What joy!

*Dear Lord and Savior, we thank you for the faith to believe that it was your death and resurrection that gave us the power to become one with you. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## Thursday, February 26

### John 3:1–17

Nicodemus has come by night to talk with Jesus. He is aware that Jesus is saying something that draws him out of the darkness toward him. He has seen Jesus' miracles and knows that only someone come from God could do them. Artists often picture this scene as two worlds—Jesus points up, Nicodemus looks down. What Jesus is saying goes against all worldly knowledge, which Nicodemus protests—how can a man be born again? He knows only one reality and cannot hear of another. Jesus says he is the only person who has seen both realities. Nicodemus cannot hear the testimony of Christ and so he goes back into the darkness until another day. One day soon he will be surprised!

*Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending us your Son to bring us into the light. Lead us into that light each day. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

## Friday, February 27

### John 3:1–17

Jesus' reference to himself as being like the serpent in the wilderness is shocking. Can he, who is love, be compared to the poisonous serpent who was killing the Israelites, and who, on being lifted up, saved them when they looked on him? He says so. There is a wonderful phrase in French, "coup de grâce." It can be translated as death blow or mercy killing. Jesus has come to give the death blow to death, sin, and the devil. And in our baptism, his mercy kills the death in us, so we can be saved. On the cross he wins the victory over his enemies. And so, as John has it, this is where he is made king over all the powers.

*Dear Lord of all, we are filled with awe at your mercies that rescue us from eternal death. Teach us to look to you for life. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## Saturday, February 28

### Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322)

Hearing the tune for this hymn brings back a memory of seeing Shakespeare's "Henry V." The English troops have defeated the French at the battle of Agincourt. They celebrate their victory by singing this tune. When I saw it, King Henry appeared in red and gold on a gleaming white stage. The cast shone as did the faces of the audience. And yet, we know such victories are never permanent. Earthly kings all die, and their regimes perish. As the hymn teaches us, Christ came as one who was humble and poor. He wore "the robe of human frame" to bring us the kingdom. Now that's something to sing about with trumpets. An eternal king, gentle and kind!

*Lord God, ruler over all the heavens and earth, we thank you that your reign will never end. We praise you for your great love to us and kindly rule. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## Sunday, March 1

### Second Sunday in Lent

### Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322)

Thomas à Kempis wrote the classic "The Imitation of Christ" that has endured down to the present day. A member of the pre-Reformation Brethren of the Common Life, Thomas á Kempis lived what he taught. I have heard people say, when talking about faith, that it isn't about us, but about God. Actually, as we are told in this hymn, everything God did was for us. It was "into this lost world he came" to give us eternal life. Everything he did was out of love for us. "For us he prayed, for us he taught ... For us he rose from death." Knowing that gives us reason to sing and pray with shouts of thanksgiving and praise.

*Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your love and the lavish way you spent it so we might live with you forever in love and praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



## Monday, March 2

### Exodus 17:1–7

The people of Israel are wandering in the wilderness and they are thirsty. They take to grumbling. They cry out against the hardships of their life, convinced that this is where they have come to die. This story, however, immediately follows the Exodus from Egypt at the hand of God, as well as the provision of food in the form of manna. And, once again, God provided. Moses picked up his staff, struck the rock, and out flowed water. The cries for provision, made in despair and desperation, were answered. I feel more compassion for the people of Israel this year than I have in years past, as I see how deeply we need the season and practice of Lent. The question of the Israelites—"Is the Lord among us or not?"—may haunt our own feelings of desperation or abandonment. Still, we remember that God is present in our times of wilderness and God's provision is at work.

*God of gracious provision, remind us of your work in the world, even as we grumble. Turn our eyes to your presence among us as we walk through the wilderness. Amen.*

## Tuesday, March 3

### Psalm 95

Worship and memory go hand in hand in this psalm. We can imagine the praises and exaltations that flow from the people as water flowed from the rock struck by Moses. The Lord is great! The Lord provides! Let us sing to the Lord! But the psalmist turns to a new tone in verse eight with a stark reminder of that community in Exodus, those who stood at Meribah and Massah and grumbled together, convinced they were about to die of thirst. There they stood, only willing to see the provision of God in the immediacy of the moment. God's people forgot what God had done. Today still, we enter into worship as a reminder to one another. We remind each other that even in absence and sorrow, in deprivation and in pain, we wait with expectation for Easter. And as we wait, God's presence and provision meet us.

*In the midst of this season of absence, may we prepare ourselves to enter into your rest, God. Though we walk through the wilderness, we know you are with us. Remind us of what you have done as you provide us with what we need. Amen.*

## Wednesday, March 4

### Romans 5:1–11

In this reading from Romans we are finally given a sense of peace. From our thirst in the wilderness, to the sorrow of forgotten memory and failure to see God's provision for what it is, we are brought to peace. Paul declares our peace comes because we are justified through the Lord Jesus Christ and we now stand in grace. As we stand in grace, the hope and glory of God shine through us and peace reigns forth. This is a beautiful image. And then we keep reading only to see that true peace goes hand in hand with suffering. Peace is not the absence of affliction but resting in the justification and grace of God in the midst of our suffering. As we go through our own times of sorrow and pain we can know that Christ is close. The way of Christ, and the reconciling work of God, invites us to step into the heartaches and pains of the world and know that in those places God is at work.

*God, make us a people who draw near to those who are hurting. Make us a people who join your reconciling spirit in our homes, neighborhoods, and cities. Teach us your ways of presence and peace. Amen.*

## Thursday, March 5

### John 4:5–42

Today's reading from John's Gospel invites us to think about the impact of God's kingdom on the most vulnerable. The outside status of this Samaritan woman, a member of a community looked at with suspicion and hatred by the Jewish community, is center stage. Jesus challenges this cultural prejudice by sitting with her and seeing her as a cherished child of God. Her marital status also raises questions as a potential marker of her sins and the depths of her weariness. She has likely lost multiple husbands, has perhaps been handed over from brother to brother as each of her husbands died, and now she is no longer under the legal protection of a man. This is indeed a precarious situation. We do not know if she has children, but it is likely. Hearing this tale I feel exhausted for her. But now this woman looks at Jesus and recognizes him for the Messiah that he is.

*Make us like the Samaritan woman, able to recognize you in our midst. May we see all of your people not as enemies, or with suspicion, fear, or hatred, but as beloved children. Teach us to be a people who bring living water to the most vulnerable among us. Amen.*

## Friday, March 6

### John 4:5–42

An important theme that is brought to our attention in this gospel reading is that of living water. As the people of Exodus cried out for water, they were given something to drink that sustained their physical bodies for a short time. But here Jesus looks at the vulnerable woman in front of him and offers her living water. The symbolism of this exchange cannot be lost on us, as it wouldn't have been lost on the early community. The kingdom of God stretches beyond the moment. It includes history and future and invites us into a sense of justice that is cosmic in scope. But this cosmic nature never fails to account for the immediate pain and needs of the communities at the margins, those most vulnerable in the story. It is they that recognize Christ for who he is, and it is to them that the message of Christ's kingdom is given and received most readily.

*Fill us with your living water. Put to right all that is wrong in this world, God. Reveal to us the members of our community that need our support; show us how to act for your justice and your righteousness in our everyday lives. Amen.*

## Saturday, March 7

### Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322)

"Oh, Love, How Deep" is a hymn of triumph. Written in the 15th century, it is likely that this hymn was composed with the spirit of militaristic victory. And what a victory and celebration it is to think of the love of God at work in the world, conquering evil and hatred, marching through a world attracted to violence and power, and overturning those structures with ease. This hymn celebrates the large scope of God's love through especially the life and person of Jesus. It goes through, piece by piece, what it looked like for God's love to take on flesh as Christ and live among us. In the history of the church, it is always necessary to remember that the kind of life that Christ lived is vital to help us understand the kind of death he died, and the power of the resurrection itself. Taken together, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is a great triumph of love.

*Lord of Love, may we walk through the world this week being animated by the triumph that the life of Christ is for us all. Surround us with this love and help us to march into our own battles with violence, pride, pain, hurt, and all that meets us, knowing that it is love that marches forward in triumph. Amen.*

## Sunday, March 8

### Third Sunday in Lent

#### Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322, Verse 3)

When we focus on verse three, we see highlighted one important theme that plays throughout the hymn. The hymn recounts the whole of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus by repeating that this was all for us. The phrase “for us,” repeated 13 times, especially captures our attention. Nothing in the life of Jesus is spoken of outside of this focus and intention. The love of Christ simply cannot be understood outside of the direction of that love, which was and is for us. Even amidst the temptation of the enemy, where it may have been easy to succumb to power as a mark of strength, Christ chose humility for us. By doing so we may know that true love is that which reaches out to others and overcomes the greatest evil of the world—not for power, but for us.

*Thank you for being for us. As we continue to move closer to Easter, we remember that you have provided for us all that we need. We look for your presence at work, we join in the reconciling movement of your spirit, and we stand in your peace and in your grace. Mold us evermore to be a people of love. Amen.*

## Monday, March 9

### 1 Samuel 16:1–13

Last year, in Branson, Missouri, my family and I attended a Sight & Sound show showcasing the story of David. Amid the lights, the music, and special effects, my favorite part was watching the sheep run up and down the walkways and across the stage—they were well trained little sheep! I wondered how much fanfare there was back then while David was keeping watch over his sheep. This scripture suggests that David at first wasn't the center of the show, nor was he even a side character. Oftentimes, the Lord calls those we are not aware of yet. These “shepherds” skirt around the periphery; they're not under the limelight, and they would probably prefer not to be on stage. But just as the Lord accompanied Samuel in his discerning and calling of David, so will the Lord accompany us in our callings, whether we are already “on stage” or we're on the periphery, tending to our sheep day and night.

*Lord, accompany us to the altar and open our eyes to the periphery. Enable us to accept your call and encourage others to accept it, too. Thank you for leading and guiding us. Amen.*



## Tuesday, March 10

### Psalm 23

It's March, so that means it's calving season for us and many others. Which also means we're getting up several times in the middle of the night to check on first-calf heifers (first-time momma cows) for any signs of difficulty giving birth. I don't know about you, but it's pretty spooky being outside and hearing the coyotes howl at two a.m. They feel like they're about five feet behind your right shoulder ... right behind that tree ... right over there! Psalm 23 is a well-known psalm, and for good reason. It's one I say to myself over and over as I shine the flashlight and see the reflections of eyes staring back at me (mostly the heifers giving me the stink eye and wondering why I'm disturbing their ruminating and their slumber). It's comforting to know that while I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for the Lord's rod and staff are with me. May you know that comfort and peace, too.

*Lord, thank you for providing green pastures to lie down in, still waters to walk along, and for restoring my soul, even when fear threatens to grip me. I know you are with me, even through the darkest valley. Amen.*

## Wednesday, March 11

### Ephesians 5:8–14

As we gear up for the fourth Sunday in Lent, as we hear Paul reminding the Ephesians of the transformation they have undergone, we can imagine those Ephesians asking similar questions to what we're asking ourselves today. What does it mean to live as children of light? What fruit is Paul talking about? What does that actually mean for us? Christ is the source of light, shining upon us, making us children of Christ's light. So, we are encouraged to issue forth in the fruit of the light: goodness, righteousness, and truth. It is a good reminder for each of us as we move through this season of Lent: how can we adjust ourselves into a posture of lifting our faces up and soaking in the light of Christ? What areas of our lives do we need to enlighten, so that we can bear more goodness, righteousness, and truth? Because the light of Christ has come, we have been radically transformed. May we bask in that light and share it with others through the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Lord, we give thanks to you for shining your light on each of us as your children. Embolden us to bear fruit of goodness, righteousness, and truth and share it with others. Amen.*

## Thursday, March 12

### John 9:1–41

A dear friend found out she had a very aggressive form of cancer and was given only a couple of weeks to live. As a few friends and I quickly began making plans to fly out to be with her and her husband with love and support, I was shocked and (honestly) a little hurt to hear she wasn't accepting visitors. Didn't she want my love and my prayers? I learned a very valuable lesson that day about sight: Jesus, the giver of sight, helped me see the selfishness of my actions. In my haste, I put blinders on her wishes and how she wanted to be loved.

Our scripture reading this week challenges us similarly: Where is Jesus trying to help us cover our earthly eyes with mud, so we can open them through the lens of Christ's love? To see a perspective different than our own? It takes humility and faith to do so, but once we let Jesus open our eyes, we'll realize that though we were blind, now we see.

*Heavenly Father, we are blind to our own shortsightedness, eager to accomplish our own agenda and what we believe to be right. You are the light of the world, so help us wash the mud away and align us to your mission and how we should love our neighbors through your light and love. Amen.*

## Friday, March 13

### John 9:1–41

In the beginning of this narrative of transformation, the disciples ask Jesus who sinned so that the man was born blind, highlighting a common belief in that time that one could suffer the consequences of the sins of one's parents or ancestors. Jesus doesn't specifically refute that general connection between sin and sickness, but what he does do is shift the focus away from consideration of what the man or his parents may have done to consideration of the works of God. God's work is not to condemn people to darkness. Rather, it's to bring Christ's light to them because it's only through Christ's light that we receive sight and experience truth revealed. How often have we been so focused on the wrong issue set before us that we miss out on an opportunity to share Christ with others? Where do we need to shift our focus this Lenten season?

*Lord, as the bringer of light and the revealer of truth, allow our shortcomings to be used so that God's work can be revealed in us. Help us share your light with our neighbors, both near and far. In your holy and precious name, we pray. Amen.*

## Saturday, March 14

### Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322)

In this well-loved 15th century Latin hymn (with originally 23 verses) we see a beautiful journey, centered around Christ's love. It starts with Jesus' birth and how he can identify with us since he's lived a human existence on earth, continues with his earthly ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and it finishes with a doxological final verse. When we reflect on Jesus' life, we can use this hymn to help us put our faith into words. Many people consider our faith as simply believing in Jesus; however, Scripture tells us that even demons believe in Jesus. Our faith rests on something deeper: Jesus became man, died, and rose for us. "Oh, Love, How Deep" encapsulates this faith beautifully, as it helps us remember the purpose of the season of Lent: all glory to our Lord and God, for love so deep, so high, so broad.

*Gracious God, we give thanks for the life of your son, Jesus Christ, given up for us in a love that's deep, broad, and high. Accept our prayers, spoken, whispered, and sung. Amen.*

## Sunday, March 15

### Fourth Sunday in Lent

### Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322, Verse 4)

Today we focus on verse four of "Oh, Love, How Deep." What do you see? I see a sacrificial lamb, ready for the altar; a loving God, bruised and battered; a seeking Jesus, reaching out to me and to you. We worship God, who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-capable. And yet, God is also all-loving. We are eagerly pursued by Christ, and everything he does is about us. He prays for us, he teaches us, he seeks us. Easter is three weeks away. Where in our lives do we need to stop, turn to Christ, and accept his invitation? Answer his call? Bask in his light? How can we emulate his actions—his selflessness for others? May we have the courage and love to do so: the love that is deep, broad, and high, and beyond all thought and fantasy.

*Lord, thank you for eagerly pursuing us, night and day. Thank you for praying for us, for teaching us, for reaching out to us. May all our glory go to you, Lord, the only one who deserves it. Amen.*

## Monday, March 16

### Ezekiel 37:1–14

No matter where you are in the world, my guess is that you have experienced a storm that has stopped you and forced you to seek shelter or pull over to the side of the road. I have experienced this feeling in the middle of a dust storm turned monsoon in the Arizona desert, a torrential downpour in downtown Chicago, and a bitter-cold blizzard in the middle of Minnesota. Each of them came in strong, sudden, and forceful.

I think grief is like that. Our text today brings us deep into the valley of grief with a vision that is raw and palpable. It feels that all hope is lost and the dry, brittle bones will simply blow away in the wind. Yet, this wind is breath and this breath brings life. God has bound together our bones with hope. This storm is temporary and this hope will endure forever.

*O God of hope, bind us together in your love and compassion. May each day bring us closer to you. Amen.*

## Tuesday, March 17

### Psalms 130

Our psalmist is writing to us from the deepest depths of despair and still believes that God will show up. In the midst of their darkest days they find mercy and love through God, our creator.

Our psalms are read, sung, prayed, lamented, chanted, and shouted with joy. This book of psalms contains the multitudes of our human emotions, and they continue to show us a God who shows up.

This season of Lent is one of deep spiritual reflection and human connection as we follow the journey of Christ. In this psalm our human experiences are bound together with our spiritual ones. They are not separate but rather entwined. Jesus joins us together with a God who shows up over and over and over again.

*We thank you, O God, for the ways in which you continue to show up in our lives. Sit with us in our time of need and bring us peace. Amen.*



## Wednesday, March 18

### Romans 8:6–11

The Apostle Paul's words to the Romans convict us and embolden us to live our lives with Christ. The Spirit loves to come in and change our trajectory for the better.

In my work here at the seminary, I have a lot of discernment conversations with prospective and current students. These conversations often come at a crossroads in their life; a time when their own decision-making is not enough. It is often a time when the Spirit enters in and changes course.

It is clear that we cannot be left to our devices—thank goodness! Our faith empowers us to let go of the need to control and let God be God. We are not given a detailed map of the trajectory of our lives, but we are given compassion and care and love that will sustain us and sit with us in moments of uncertainty and doubt. The Spirit loves to cause a little holy chaos—may we welcome it.

*O God of holy chaos, embolden us with your spirit and grant us peace. Amen.*

## Thursday, March 19

### John 11:1–45

The Lazarus story is unique to the Gospel of John, and in it we see the grief of an entire community poured out. Their grief is visceral and when Jesus arrives on the scene, we witness this grief laid bare.

Jesus wept. This is not only one of the shortest sentences in the Bible, but also one of the most powerful. Through each of our gospels we see the complexities of the human spirit lived out in Jesus. We see him pray, we see him get angry, we see him from a vulnerable baby to a broken human on the cross. We also witness him perform miracles, tear down the mighty, and save the world. We witness Christ both as one of us and as one who is exalted beyond what we can ever imagine. Christ who has come down and experienced our earthly pain and God who envelops us with love and compassion.

*O God, may your compassion and love continue to pour out among us through all of our days. Amen.*

## Friday, March 20

### John 11:1–45

The Gospel of John is known for the “I am” statements of Jesus proclaimed throughout the book. There are a total of seven and each of them reveals the eternal power of Christ. Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life” to this grieving community. They do not yet know the depth of Christ’s power and yet it reveals itself in this story. Death does not have the final say. We see Lazarus resurrected and a community forever changed.

We are forever changed by the life-giving power of Christ’s resurrection and the promise of eternal life. We are living witnesses to the resurrection. We see God’s love poured out for us in the story of Lazarus, in the life and witness of Christ, and in our daily lives as the community of Christ.

*God eternal, enfold us in your loving embrace of promise and hope. Amen.*

## Saturday, March 21

### Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322)

The love of God cannot be contained within the boundaries of this song, though it so eloquently tries to comprehend it. It is a love that is so deep, so high, so broad. What a beautiful gift!

This love of Christ is given to us freely with an eternal promise of grace and love. We have a God who came down to earth, knows our deepest pains and our greatest joys, and enfolds us in a love that has no bounds. It is a love that cannot be contained by words alone but rather needs a joyful noise and celebration with music and singing. In the world of musical theatre, a song is often introduced when the character can no longer contain their emotions with words. Music is the amplifier for this emotion. I believe this is also true for us in the church. “Oh, love, how deep,” indeed!

*Loving God, pour your compassion and care upon us forever and always. Amen.*

## Sunday, March 22

### Fifth Sunday in Lent

#### Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322, Verse 5)

This Lenten season we have journeyed through Christ's life and ministry here on Earth. Now, we begin to pivot towards the cross and Jesus' death. Verse five is bringing us to this place musically. We know the ending of this story. We know the suffering and pain that Christ endures for us.

We also know that this is actually not the end of the story—that Christ's ministry, life, and resurrection continue to live on in each of us, in our ministries, and in our communities. Christ's love does not end on the cross but is amplified for us. This is a depth of love and grace that we cannot fathom but are graciously given. We have a God of love, peace, compassion, and grace. This is good news for us and good news for all.

*O God of love, we thank you for the eternal love poured out through Christ. Amen.*

## Monday, March 23

### Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29

"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." The call-and-response children's song echoes through my head as I ponder the psalm that bookends Holy Week. We sing Psalm 118 to celebrate Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and then, after his arrest, torture, and death, we'll sing some of the same verses again to celebrate Christ's resurrection. As 21st century Christians, it's impossible for us to enter into Holy Week with the naivety of the disciples. Unlike those followers who sat with Jesus at the Last Supper, we know the conclusion of next week's drama before the table is set. We know that because God's steadfast love endures forever, the tomb will be empty at the end. This story—the whole story—is in our hearts and on our lips, year after year, passed down through generations. We also know the suffering that Jesus must endure before he is raised, and so we go with the disciples to the Mount of Olives, singing, "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

*Oh God, you have suffered for us, with us, and because of us. God of steadfast love, I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. Amen.*

## Tuesday, March 24

### Matthew 21:1–11

I wonder if, for those living in Jerusalem during Jesus' time, the image of their king mounted on the foal of a donkey was a bit like Monty Python's King Arthur galloping to the sound of clacking coconuts—embarrassing at best, ridiculous at worst. God deals in the ridiculous. The message of the cross is foolishness. Humble and mounted on a donkey, taking on the suffering of shame and embarrassment, Jesus rejects the presumed narrative of power and prestige and turns it on its head. Jesus is on a quest not for fame and glory in the kingdom of this world but to make a new kind of kingdom. Even his mother, Mary, knew the story before his birth as she sang of the kingdom where the lowly will be lifted up, the poor will become filled, and the rich will be sent away empty. Blessed are the fools, for the wisdom of the cross will be theirs.

*Oh God, you have suffered for us and because of us. Lord of power, help me to resist the temptations and power of this world. Amen.*

## Wednesday, March 25

### Isaiah 50:4–9a

God's word wields power. God spoke the cosmos into being. God's covenant sustained the ancient Israelites in the wilderness. God's word became flesh and dwelt among us. God's word sustains the weary. As Christians, we have a profound duty to declare God's promises of hope and new life to the world. On some days, the path to deliver our message is clear; on other days we feel blocked by those who surround us with insult and spitting. On all days, God is with us, training our tongues, waking our ears, standing with us. We remember the words of St. Patrick: "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me."

*Oh God, you have suffered for us, with us, and because of us. Give me the strength to proclaim your word to the weary world. Amen.*



## Thursday, March 26

### Psalm 31:9–16

The lament of Psalm 31 can sound exaggerated and paranoid to some. It may be difficult to imagine personal situations that would lead me to call myself an “object of dread to my acquaintances.” But the psalm’s stark, vivid images paint the very real plight of so many suffering people—whether they are living with afflictions of various kinds or navigating oppressive political systems. In whatever form it takes and whenever it comes, our suffering does not get to overwhelm us to the point of despair. Because God is always with us—in the distress, the sorrow, the misery—we cling to hope. As Julian of Norwich wrote in “Revelations of Divine Love,” “God did not say, ‘You shall not be tormented, you shall not be troubled, you shall not be grieved,’ but God said, ‘You shall not be overcome.’” As the psalmist declares, “I trust in you, O Lord.”

*Oh God, you have suffered for us, with us, and because of us. Sustain me in my suffering and remind me of the hope in your promises. Amen.*

## Friday, March 27

### Philippians 2:5–11

In this week’s reading from Matthew, Jesus quotes the prophet Zechariah in naming his humility, an un-godlike character trait that receives adoration in the Philippians “Christ hymn.” In our hymn for this week—“Oh, Love, How Deep”—we sing that God did not send an angel but that God in Christ “wore the robe of human frame.” We might dress ourselves up in armor and all kinds of protective gear, which can be helpful in the moment but is, ultimately, never enough to remove our human vulnerability and eventual death. The only thing certain in this world is death, regardless of wealth, power, beauty, or whatever else we’re chasing. This reality of decay and dying is what God chose: God became human. Immortal was made mortal. Life gave in to death. And in that exchange, we were clothed with Christ, all of us dying and dead humans redeemed to new life.

*Oh God, you have suffered for us, with us, and because of us. You chose to come into our world of decay and death as one of us, and this choice gave us new life. Give me faith each day to believe that this promise of life in you is for me. Amen.*

## Saturday, March 28

### Matthew 26:14–27:66

When I hear the story of the Last Supper, I often think of the song of the same name from “Jesus Christ Superstar.” Despite all of Jesus’ teachings about humility, his explanations of the first being last, the disciples are still dreaming about earthly glory—“Always hoped that I’d be an apostle/ Knew that I would make it if I tried/Then when we retire, we can write the Gospels/So they’ll still talk about us when we’ve died.” Are they stubborn? Obtuse? Forgetful? It’s not until the rest of the story unfolds, and they live through it together, that they seem to finally get it. Jesus has to die and rise again to get through to them, and when he comes back, he claims them. Jesus follows the plan, living into the fatal suffering of the passion—the shepherd laying down his life for the flock in order to make God’s love known.

*Oh God, you have suffered for us, with us, and because of us. Thank you for your persistent, abiding love. Thank you for always seeking us. Amen.*

## Sunday, March 29

### Sixth Sunday in Lent

### Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322, Verse 6)

The text of “Oh, Love, How Deep” recounts Jesus’ incarnation from birth to ministry to death and resurrection, but it doesn’t stop there. In stanza six, after singing the resurrection, we proclaim Jesus’ ascension, and we celebrate Pentecost—that God sent the Holy Spirit to “guide, strengthen, and cheer.” And, fortunately, for us, the Holy Spirit’s coming was not one and done. God continually sends the Holy Spirit to work among us, to remind us of all of the things that God has suffered for us: birth, hunger, temptation, betrayal, pain, death. In the seven-stanza version of this hymn, “for us” occurs 13 times. There is no doubt in the singer’s mind why Jesus came to earth. We remember Jesus’ passion not to wallow in guilt or shame, not to fixate on our unworthiness. We follow the path of Holy Week, remembering the suffering of Jesus to practice gratitude, rejoicing that we are God’s children, heirs with Christ. We give thanks that God’s steadfast love endures forever.

*Oh God, you have suffered for us, with us, and because of us. Prepare me to hear the stories of Jesus’ passion and resurrection with renewed understanding. Amen.*

## Monday, March 30

### Exodus 12:1–4, (5–10), 11–14

We begin this Holy Week with a focus on the first reading for Maundy Thursday, the institution of Passover. Located between the ninth and the tenth plagues lodged against Pharaoh for his refusal to let God's people go, Passover protects the Israelites from the death of the firstborn. Following the instructions of Moses and Aaron, the Israelites observe the first Passover ready to travel because immediately after the execution of the tenth plague, Pharaoh releases God's people (Exodus 12:31). God's people are free! And the promise God made to Moses is fulfilled, "Say therefore to the Israelites: I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians ... I will take you as my people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:6–7). This story reminds us of the very character of God—a God of liberation. God frees us from anything that might separate us from God—even death.

*Dear God, as we remember today how you freed your people, help us to trust in your promise, "I will be your God," and that not even death can separate us from you. Amen.*

## Tuesday, March 31

### Psalms 116:1–2, 12–19

The Common English Version translation of the opening verses of this psalm of thanksgiving captures well the psalmist's exclamation of affection for God. "I love you, Lord! You answered my prayers. You paid attention to me, and so I will pray to you as long as I live." We don't know the details for which the psalmist actually prays, but the psalmist feels entangled in the cords of death, "the distress of the grave found me—I came face-to-face with trouble and grief" (116:3)—and we hear the confidence of the psalmist in God's listening ear. The Lord hears our cries—all of them, listening intently and carefully. The image here is of God bending down or leaning in, maybe to hear us better when those pleas are but a whisper of despair. On this Tuesday of Holy Week, we are assured that in anything which ensnares us in anguish and sorrow, God's ear is near.

*Dear God, while there is so much in life that brings grief, that you hear our every cry gives such comfort and peace. Thank you, God, for always listening. Amen.*

## Wednesday, April 1

### 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

It is amid factions and divisions that Paul reminds the Corinthians of what the Lord's Supper is all about. The Corinthians have made Holy Communion a privatized affair, each to their own fill of food and drink, with those who have nothing going home hungry. A meal meant for the spiritual fullness of all has deteriorated into a display of individualism. "When you come together," says Paul, "it is not for the better but for the worse." Paul reminds the Corinthians and us that there is no seat at the table of the Lord's Supper for cliques and contentions. Jesus hosts this meal offering his entire self—his body and blood in remembrance of his death but also of his life and ministry for us and among us. Jesus' invitation to the table is both participation and proclamation. We gather with fellow disciples then nourished for testimony in our own lives of Jesus' grace and love.

*Dear God, being together as disciples of Christ gives us such strength and hope. Thank you for the gift of this shared meal that sustains and nourishes us in our belief. Amen.*

## Thursday, April 2

### Maundy Thursday

### John 13:1–17, 31b–35

In the Gospel of John, the central act of Jesus on Jesus' last night with his disciples is not the Lord's Supper but the washing of their feet, expressing his abundant love for them—to the nth degree. This love even extends to Judas, who would then betray Jesus, not with a kiss in the garden, but by walking away into the night (13:30), and to Peter, whose denial Jesus will foretell (13:36–38). It is an act of love that the disciples also are to do for one another so that they can feel Jesus's love amid all that is to come. But it is also a love Jesus himself received—from Mary. Mary anoints Jesus's own feet with a pound of perfume (12:1–8), loving Jesus into his necessary future. Jesus takes this love to his arrest, his trial, and his crucifixion, a love by which we will be known and that we are then to share with the world.

*Dear Jesus, thank you for loving us no matter what. Help us to lean on your love for the courage we need to face the hardest times of faith. Amen.*



## Friday, April 3

### Good Friday

#### John 18:1–19:42

After his last meal with the disciples, Jesus takes them to a garden, unique to the Gospel of John. Only the fourth gospel includes the setting of a garden for Jesus's arrest, burial, and resurrection. Once Jesus and his disciples arrive at the garden, the events of Good Friday will unfold, as Jesus willingly comes out of the garden, leaving his disciples safely inside, his sheep protected in the fold. The Good Shepherd lays down his life just as he promised. But before we move on to Jesus' trials before Annas and Pilate, his crucifixion, and his burial, maybe on this day we can linger in the garden for just a little bit longer. We are told that Jesus and his disciples often met there. Over the course of their three years together, can you imagine the conversations they must have had, the things they shared? Jesus brings his disciples to the garden one last time, so that they might remember—before he is taken away.

*Dear Jesus, you are our good shepherd, protecting us from all harm, and you know each of us by name. In the darkness that is to come, help us to listen for your voice, that called to Lazarus, "come out!," and will call into our tombs as well. Amen.*

## Saturday, April 4

### Oh, Love, How Deep (ELW 322, Verse 7)

So deep, so high, so broad is God's love, says verse seven of our theme hymn, "Oh, Love, How Deep." In other words, it's an all-encompassing love. Deeper, higher, and broader than we can possibly imagine. There is really nowhere that cannot be reached by God's love, as much as we might question just how far God's love will go and just how expansive God's love truly is. And on this Holy Saturday, that nowhere even includes a tomb barricaded by massive stones meant to keep love at bay. That love itself overcomes death is not only the promise of Easter morning but also the meaning of Easter living. Easter is not just a Sunday but an everyday certainty that in our acts of love, all that which leads to death can be defeated. We participate in the resurrection not only as a future promise but in our present pledge of life for all.

*Dear God, your love knows no bounds and cannot even be held back by death. Help us to love and live in ways that life abounds. Amen.*

## Sunday, April 5

### Easter Sunday

#### John 20:1–18

When Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene in the garden, she is alone, grieving, and despondent. The only thing that can break through her tears is hearing the Good Shepherd call her name, "Mary." She knows his voice, as his sheep do (John 10:4) and answers, "Rabbouni!" In her response, she recognizes Jesus, but she also realizes who she is, one of Jesus' disciples, who will then witness to the resurrection. Yet instead of returning to the disciples and saying what Jesus asks of her, she offers the testimony we are also called to proclaim once we leave church on Easter morning—"I have seen the Lord!" Jesus does not expect us to understand the many promises of his resurrection but only to invite others: "Come and see!" The good news of Easter is not a rationale for or explanation of the resurrection but the exclamation of an encounter with the risen Lord.

*Dear Lord, give us the courage to go out into the world you love and announce what we have seen and heard—that the tomb is empty! Amen.*

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