

2 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain!

**Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near—**

² a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!

**Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them
in ages to come.**

**¹² Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;**

**¹³ rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.**

**¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain-offering and a drink-offering for the LORD, your God?**

**¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶ gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children,
even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her canopy.**

**¹⁷ Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep.
Let them say, ‘Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery,
a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples,
“Where is their God?” ’**

Many times, in Scripture, people who are in distress or who are working to humble themselves before God do a curious thing. They tear their clothing apart and put on an uncomfortable cloth. They also sometimes cover themselves with ashes.

As a reminder of this, many Christians wear ashes on Ash Wednesday, which was March 2. The ashes are a symbol and are to be a symbol only as this passage from Joel reminds us. God does not reward outward appearances or external display of piety that might garner attention from others. Tearing clothing is only meaningful if it is accompanied by a change on the inside, a change of heart. This season of Lent call us to take inventory, see where we need to change, and be willing to do that sometimes painful work.

Let us pray. God, give us courage to transform ourselves on the inside so that we can be more like the people you have called us to be Amen.

From These Days, written by Chris Warren, Murfreesboro, TN

MONDAY, MARCH 7

II Corinthians 5:20-6:10

²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us;
we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,
so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

⁶As we work together with him,
we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.

²For he says, ‘At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.’

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

³We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way,
so that no fault may be found with our ministry,

⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way:
through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings,
imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge,
patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech,
and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand
and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute.

We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known;
as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed;

¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich;
as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

One thing we can do in the season of Lent is take time to look at where we are
and where we have been. Have we separate ourselves from God in some way?
Have we become too focused on other things? Do we need to repent?

Lent offers us forty days to contemplate these things,
but we do not have to wait until the end of that period
to begin the process of atoning to God. In Christ, salvation is new every day.
We can claim that salvation today and claim it again tomorrow
for other needs we may identify. Today is always the day of salvation!

Let us pray. Lord, remind us that salvation is new every day,
and help us to experience that salvation in you. Amen.

From These Days, written by Chris Warren, Murfreesboro, TN

TUESDAY, MARCH 8

Isaiah 55:1-9

- 55**Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
- 2** Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.
- 3** Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.
- 4** See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.
- 5** See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.
- 6** Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near;
- 7** let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
- 8** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
- 9** For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Many times, in Scripture, references to food and feasts tell us something about who God is and what God wants for us. We learn about community and generosity, and we learn that the point of the life God calls us to is joy. This passage is about how repentance means turning our whole lives towards God's goodness.

In Isaiah we read that God wants us to be delighted. Is this what you think of when you hear the word *repentance*? This passage helps us to remember that repentance is a gift for our wellbeing. God's covenant is about fullness of life, and God wants to give us the food and feasts of the table and the food and feasts of the soul.

Let us pray. We rejoice that you want us to experience delight. Help us learn that we can delight in you. Amen.

From [These Days](#) by Michelle Barrel, Indianapolis, Indiana

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9

Read again Isaiah 55:1-9 from yesterday's devotion.

Do you ever feel disordered?

Are your feelings or thought sometimes "out of whack?"

Sometimes we need something outside of us to help us get "back on track" to feel like we are put together correctly. Some folks need individual quiet time, while others might find relief in singing, cooking, reading, or praying.

Sometimes we think that our sins are beyond disorder; we are so awful that we cannot be forgiven, and there is no way God can love us. What does God call us to repent? Because with God, there is no such thing as unforgivable. There is nothing so hidden or tainted about us that God cannot heal, forgive, and love us into fullness of life.

In our reading from Isaiah 55, we are reminded not only that God wants to forgive us but also that God wants to forgive us *ABUNDANTLY*.

Let us pray. Lord, we rejoice that you forgive us no matter what. Thank you for your abundant grace. Amen.

From These Days by Michelle Barrel, Indianapolis, Indiana

THURSDAY, MARCH 10

Hebrews 13:8-9

8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace.

God in Christ is always the same, does not change.

When everything around us changes, Jesus remains.

God is steadfast; the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

God in Christ is good, above and before all things.

We are held together by the love the Father has for the world that resulted in sending his only son.

Let us pray. Faithful and Loving God, by the power of the Holy Spirit help us to believe the truths of Jesus Christ and to rest in him. Amen.

Inspired by My Prayer Journal, compiled by Kathy Shutt

FRIDAY, MARCH 11

Acts 12:1-5

1 About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church.

2 He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword.

3 After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.)

4 When Herod had seized Peter, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover.

5 While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him.

We are called to have an individual prayer life and to pray as the Body of Christ. Peter was in distress. Do we pray for those in distress, especially if we feel they are at fault for the situation in which they find themselves?

John would have been grieving because of the execution of his brother, James.

We pray for those who have lost loved ones for a week or two, then we move on.

Should we pray longer as grief can last for years?

Do we notice who is not in church and lift them up in prayer?

We are beginning our third year dealing with a pandemic. Have we grown weary of praying?

Let us pray. God of solitude and community, give us the perseverance to pray continuously even when we have become weary or feel hopeless. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Inspired by My Prayer Journal, compiled by Kathy Shutt

SATURDAY, MARCH 12

Psalm 121

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?

2 My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

3 He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

4 He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

6 The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

7 The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

8 The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore.

Pray Dr. King's prayer.

Parade

"God, we thank you for the inspiration of Jesus. Grant that we will love you with all our hearts, souls, and minds, and love our neighbors as we love ourselves, even our enemy neighbors. And we ask you, God, in these days of emotional tension, when the problems of the world are gigantic in extent and chaotic in detail, to be with us in our going out and our coming in, in our rising up and in our lying down, in our moments of joy and in our moments of sorrow, until the day when there shall be no sunset and no dawn. Amen."

— Martin Luther King Jr.