

CONNECTIONAL MINISTRIES

UNITED METHODISTS
OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

Lenten Devotions 2020

Feb 26 | *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.* Ephesians 2: 8-9

A few years ago, Pastor June Tamburro and I stood in six-degree frigid weather to distribute ashes at the Bridgewater train station from 6 a.m.-7:30 am. We only served about five people that morning, but we had a good chance to chat with people about the church, about Ash Wednesday and about their lives (in between our shivering).

One man was a member of our church who didn't come very often. In fact, he didn't recognize us, and I didn't immediately recognize him (That could have something to do with the fact that we were all bundled up!). But as we talked, I remembered him and talked with him about his children, etc. Soon the train came, and not too long after that June and I decided we were too frozen to continue to stand outside any longer. As we debriefed on our experience that day, we weren't really sure that we had made any impact on people. In fact, we were a bit discouraged.

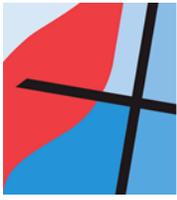
Months later the man from the train station began to attend worship again. At first, he came alone. Then some family members joined him. It turned out that right around the time Pastor June and I were at the train station, this man was diagnosed with a serious disease.

Our being there that freezing cold morning reminded him that he was not alone; that God was seeking him out; that God was already working in his life to offer grace and relationship, love and strength for the journey on which this illness would take him.

God seeks us all because God is a seeking God. Author Tom Berlin puts it this way: "Christ is called Savior because he comes to us when we least expect him and most need him. This is why many people, when describing their faith journey, will say that a conversation with someone happened at just the right time. Or they were driving past a church on a Sunday, felt moved to go inside, and heard just the sermon they needed to hear. People routinely experience the good timing of God's grace."

That's because God's grace goes before us. As Wesleyan Christians, we understand that to be God's prevenient, or preventing grace that is there before we even know it. It reminds us again of Michelangelo's painting *The Creation of Adam* where God is depicted as reaching toward Adam, even though Adam is only reaching half-heartedly back toward God. And yet, God keeps reaching, keeps seeking us out because God loves us and wants to be in relationship with us all. Rev Vicki Miller Brendler, Retired Elder

Prayer: God of Grace and Glory, help us focus on you more so that we might know you and see the unfolding of your grace. Keep us from the distractions that so often prevent us from noticing your work in the world. Keep us mindful of the prodding of your Holy Spirit, that you might use us to be a word of strength for someone else. In Christ we pray, Amen.



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Feb 27 | *(Jesus) said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

Matthew 22:37-40

Prayer: Purposeful God, loving Savior, empowering Spirit, we are inspired yet challenged by the command to love. Help us to see people through your eyes of love. Remind us that love is not easy, but essential. Move us into the world to embrace all whom we encounter with love. Amen.

Feb 28 | *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Gal 5: 14*

Prayer: Dear Lord, open our eyes to the ways in which we can reflect your kind heart to the world. Help us show consideration to one another, to be thoughtful in our speech, to be benevolent in our gifting, and to be helpful to the stranger. We do all this in your name, through your strength. Amen

Feb 29 | *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

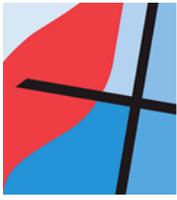
Prayer: Dear God, we come to you today to offer ourselves and our lives to you in prayer. We confess that we become distracted from the praying continuously. Alert our hearts and minds when we become sidetracked and stray. Help us honor you by doing all we do in a way that reflects your love. In Jesus name, Amen.

March 1 | *May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17*

Prayer: Lord, teach us to encourage one another, so that all may experience your transformational love. Give us generous hearts to provide opportunities for other to encounter you, help us to create spaces that lead others to you. Amen.

March 2 | *Called to Abundant Life | Therefore, Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. John 10:7-11*

Has anyone ever called you a “perfectionist?” Have you been accused of spending too much time on minor details? It’s an impulse we all face at some point: the desire to “Do Things Right and Be Correct”. When I was 15, I was asked to be the editor of my small high school’s newspaper. Little did they know what change would occur in my little teenaged heart when that first red pen met my eager hand. I was a



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taught a coded language of how to properly notate and mark up other people's work and set loose on unsuspecting kids whose beloved writing was returned to them soaked in bright red ink. It was a lot of fun for me.

What's that? A run-on sentence? Cross it out! Look at that, a sentence ending in a preposition? Not on my watch! Not good! No! It was my first taste of power. It was great, until this unexpected thing happened: everyone stopped writing. I was left with inches of empty column and nothing fit to print. I thought fixing everything wrong with this gift I'd been handed would lead to growth. Instead, my best efforts hurt others and lead to a smaller, less interesting paper.

Sometimes we forget that Jesus calls us as the current residents of this broken world into abundant life. Sometimes we fall for deceptive voices, both from outside and even from within ourselves. These are the voices that tell us that the problem with us is simply everyone else. If we can just correct what is wrong in those other people, we can finally experience the good life. Yet here comes Jesus once again, reminding us that abundance is the reality of our world. Furthermore, this abundance is experienced not in fixing what is wrong with others but in seeing them in all their messiness and loving them (and ourselves) anyway. We experience abundance in loving others (and ourselves) enough to realize it's in giving away everything we have to give that the fullest life is experienced.

When have you caught yourself fixing others rather than experiencing people as evidence of God's abundant blessings? *Rev Ben Lee, pastor Flemington UMC*

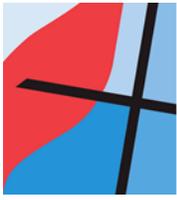
Prayer: Jesus, we long for a full and meaningful life, help us to see how we might be detracting from all that you have in store for us. We also hope for those around us to be blessed with the fullness of life you have promised to them. Keep us from being an obstacle to your love, help us to encourage and support each other. Amen.

March 3 | *I pray that you and all of God's people will understand what is called wide or long or high or deep. I want you to know all about Christ's love, although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives will be filled with all that God is.* Ephesians 3:18-19

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for your loving presence each and every time we come to you in prayer. Help us to turn to you with our struggles, rather than taking action on our own. We trust in your guidance and direction. Amen.

March 4 | *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.* Psalm 42: 1

Prayer: Dear God, we admit that we too allow our time to be occupied in ways that have not led to communion with you. We try but have fallen short of our desires to faithfully connect to you. We offer ourselves and our lives to be channels of your love. Fill us with your Spirit. Amen



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March 5 | Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.
1 Peter 5:6

Prayer: Gracious Creator, we pray as a community invested in the people we serve, each other, and you. Turn our hearts toward humbleness and humility. We pray expectantly, believing that through our prayers we will be changed. Amen.

March 6 | *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?* Psalm 42:2

Prayer: Dear God, we ask that we become more aware of your presence and keep our focus on you. We ask you to be the center of our lives. And use all things for Your glory and for our good. Amen.

March 7 | *The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.* Lamentations 3:25

Prayer: Spirit of the Lord, give us ears to hear You and recognize Your voice. Reveal yourself to us and show us your way. Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening. Amen.

March 8 | *Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore, he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!* Isaiah 30:18

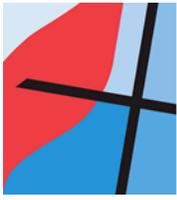
Prayer: Lord we bring before you all those suffering. Give us wisdom and boldness to step out courageously in solidarity to be advocates for justice. Give us love to stand wait alongside our brothers and sisters. Amen

March 9 | *Light in the Darkness I But if we live in the light, as God does, we share in life with each other. And the blood of his Son Jesus washes all our sins away.* 1 John 1:7

When I was a child no matter what I was doing, 10 p.m. was bedtime; at which point, my father would tuck me in the bed, and every night I would say, "Dad, make sure the nightlight is on!" And he would respond, "No problem, son!" It was amazing that this small nightlight would illuminate the hallway in the midst of all the darkness.

In a world where this is so much pain, agony and distress, we need a nightlight to illuminate our life, our church and our world. In a world where there seems to be a proliferation of darkness, full of division and a lack of common sense of dignity, we need light. In a world where there is political divide, we need light.

Yet, the Good News is if we face our troubles and step out of the darkness into the light, we will walk in true fellowship with God and with one another. Together, we walk in that light and hold each other up with true honesty, accountability, and relationship with God and each other.



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One might ask the question, “Where does this light come from?” I contend that this light comes from God and it is through God that our light shines throughout the darkness. Therefore, during this Season of Lent, as we remember the life of Christ - Christ birth, Christ suffering, Christ resurrection, and stand in anticipation of Christ’ return - let us continue to be light in the midst of darkness. Shine in the hallway! Shine in your church! And most of all, shine in all the world! Rev. *William D. Carter, III, pastor, Pemberton UMC*

Prayer: Amazing God, illuminate our way, guide our footsteps, light up the darkness. Help us to see the ways that we fail to shine your light. Challenge us to hold each other up, especially on the days filled with despair. Strengthen us to live in a way that leads to new life. Amen.

The Prayer

I pray you'll be our eyes
And watch us where we go
And help us to be wise
In times when we don't know

Let this be our prayer
When we lose our way
Lead us to a place
Guide us with your grace
To a place where we'll be safe

I pray we'll find your light
I pray we'll find your light

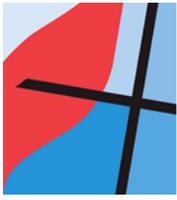
And hold it in our hearts
And stars go out each night
Remind us where you are
Let this be our prayer
When shadows fill our day

A world where pain and sorrow will be ended
And every heart that's broken will be mended
And we'll remember we are all God's children
Reaching out to touch you
Reaching to the sky

Songwriter: Yolanda Adams

Performed by Yolanda Adams, Donnie McClurkin

https://open.spotify.com/track/3TsePjh3T53RVUh5RntmvO?si=VlcPR4FATc6H4WW_Z2_dMA



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March 10 | *Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.* Psalm 25:4-5

Prayer: Dear God, we come to You knowing that a life of faith means never knowing where we're being led, we have confidence to trust the one who is leading. Lead us in ways of hope, and truth. Amen.

March 11 | *For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.* Psalm 62:5

Prayer: Jesus, rest for our souls, may we think not so highly of ourselves that we fail to stop and spend time with you. Lead us in carving out time to renew our minds, bodies and souls, not with the intention that we may do more, but so that we may be more for You. Amen.

March 12 | *For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.* Psalm 62:5

Prayer: Jesus, silence our minds, quiet our souls, still our bodies. You are our God. You are our strength and our hope. We pray today for the courage to wait on you, to follow your ways that lead to new life. Amen.

March 13 | *Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.* Jeremiah 29:12

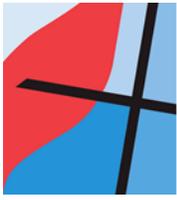
Prayer: God of grace and glory, help us focus on you more so that we might know you and see the unfolding of your grace. Keep us from the distractions that so often prevent us from noticing your work in the world. Keep us mindful of the prodding of your Holy Spirit, that you might use us to be a word of strength for someone else. In Christ we pray, Amen.

March 14 | *For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.* Galatians 5:5

Prayer: Lord, we come before you knowing that we did not do anything to achieve the gift of grace you've poured out on us. May we now exhibit that gift in who we are, working out what You have already worked inside of us. We boast in your faithfulness and Your strength, and it's upon those things that we rest. Be with us this day, bless our work, and grant us peace. Amen.

March 15 | *I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.* Philippians 3:10-11

Prayer: God of life and renewed life; lift us up and renew us out of the destruction and death that often surrounds us and fills us. Breathe your life-giving breath into us so we may know you and the life abundant you intend for us. Amen



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March 16 | *You Are Not Your Sin* | *Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."* John 8:10-11

I let out a loud sigh as my phone kept dingling and the text messages kept flowing in. My partner asked me what was wrong. "It's my friend. She just keeps talking about the same thing. I feel like she is attention-seeking. She just wants me to agree with her," I replied.

This was not the first time my partner and I had had this conversation. The frustration was an ongoing one on my part. This person, this friend, with whom I have been very close for years, has been a sounding board in my darkest times, a companion in laughter in happy times and always loyal. I like to think I have been the same for her. And yet, as she went on about the same issue that she'd been talking about for months, I stopped seeing my friend. All I found myself doing was blaming her for my annoyance and zooming in on what I perceived to be a flaw in her character.

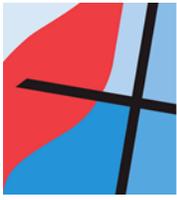
It is not a pretty side of me and frankly, not one that I like to admit having.

The irony about my response to my friend's text messages is that as she kept seeking attention and validation about the same issue, I kept responding in the same way too. Most of the time, I would tell her what I thought she wanted to hear. I thought I was being a good friend by doing this but in reality, I was just feeding into a pattern that made me angry and reactive on the inside and disengaged but sounding "nice" on the outside. I was content to place the blame on my friend for harping on the same issue but did not take a moment to recognize the way I was contributing to the problem. It took a conversation with my partner to help me realize that.

Now that I have taken stock of my own responsibility for the way things have been going with my friend lately, I realize that at the core, she is still the same loyal, funny, and empathetic friend I have always had. Her current hang-up does not define who she is. Likewise, I am not defined by the less than pretty side of me that was annoyed on the inside and nice on the outside. Now that I have faced it, I can work on being more up front and honest in my communication with my friend.

This realization does not come naturally in a culture that so frequently reduces people to labels and behaviors. It's easy to forget who others are and who I am. But as a follower of Jesus, I am always called back to find my true self in the relentless forgiveness that God extends to me. Every Sunday morning my home church begins the worship service by reminding the congregation that "You are loved. And you are enough." With these words, I remember that it is God's forgiveness, God's patient and bottomless love that defines who I am, not my sinful behaviors and habits.

In Jesus, God has reached out to us with the message that we are not condemned. But we are called to "go and sin no more." This message never gets old. As often as we mess up, we are met with forgiveness and hope for a changed future. Likewise, let us be patient with one another, slow to condemn, and quick



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to forgive. Just as we are all flawed, we are all so much more than our flaws in Christ who redeems us.
Emily Wilton, Breakthrough Coordinator GNJ

Prayer: Jesus, reveal yourself to us today so we may know your heart and your character. Lead us outside of ourselves and our comfort zones so we may see others through your loving eyes. Amen.

Just As I Am

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee
O Lamb of God, I come! I come

Just as I am, and waiting not
to rid my soul of one dark blot
to thee whose blood can cleanse each spot
O Lamb of God, I come, I come

I come broken to be mended
I come wounded to be healed
I come desperate to be rescued
I come empty to be filled
I come guilty to be pardoned
By the blood of Christ the Lamb
And I'm welcomed with open arms
Praise God, just as I am

Songwriters: Sue C. Smith / Travis Cottrell / David E. Moffitt

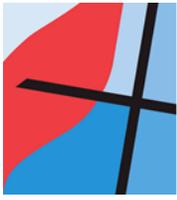
Performed by Travis Cottrell

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March 17 | *He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.*
Micah 5:4

Prayer: As I sit and dwell on you God, and all of the blessings you have poured out for me, help me to be grateful and to live my life for you. Help me Lord to remember to care for myself as you care for me. In the name Christ who died so I could live, Amen.

March 18 | *Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"* Mark 1: 14



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Prayer: Today I hear your call to repent and believe. This is good news, that I am forgiven and offered a place in your kingdom. I pray that my humility and love are reflections of you to all I meet. Amen.

March 19 | *He must increase; I must decrease.* John 3:30

Prayer: God help me to be present in each moment, remembering it is in the moment where I find you, not in the next thing. Help me to be fully present in the moments you have called me to that I might be able to experience the fullness of your love in each moment. Amen.

March 20 | *And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.* Luke 6:12

Prayer: May the strength of God sustain us; may the power of God preserve us; may the hands of God protect us; may the way of God direct us; may the love of God go with us this day and night and forever. Amen.

March 21 | *As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God.* Psalm 42:2

Prayer: Creating God, thank you for life itself, and all we need to sustain that life, including physical water and spiritual “living” water. May the living water of Jesus flow into and through and out of me into the world and all its creatures. Amen.

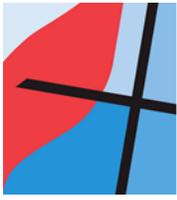
March 22 | *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’* Galatians 5:14

Prayer: Amazing God, open our eyes today to the possibilities for offering your love to another. Remind us that it is a great privilege to love freely without expectations of anything in return. Press us to move out of our comfort zones into the world. Give us the faith to trust that you will guide us in a way that leads to changed hearts and minds, especially our own. Amen

March 23 | *Very early the next morning, Jesus got up and went to a place where he could be alone and pray. Simon and the others started looking for him. And when they found him, they said, “Everyone is looking for you!” Jesus replied, “We must go to the nearby towns, so that I can tell the good news to those people. This is why I have come.”* Mark 1:35-38

I stood staring into the bathroom mirror, annoyed and dismayed. Earlier that day, as I adjusted a display, a wooden cross had fallen and hit me smack in the nose. Now a few hours later I anxiously considered how might I cover up the deep, dark bruise that was spreading across my face.

Ironically, for the first time in many months, my outside matched my inside. I have felt bruised and wounded; this has been a season of uncertainty, sadness and weariness. However, I am quite clever in



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the art of the coverup (just not the kind you do with makeup). On the outside life is just fine, but on the inside I'm bruised.

Have you ever felt this way? Like you have to put on a brave face when things are just not right. All of us have seasons where we would like a good long vacation, yet the pressures of life just won't allow.

Today I find solace in the fact that Jesus too became weary. That Jesus looked for a place to be away from it all. I will seek a quiet place to be alone with God.

I also find a renewed sense of purpose, that I am called to share the good news. I will open my ears and my mind to share hope, not out of my own strength but through the empowerment of God's spirit.

Prayer: Jesus, our flesh and our hearts may be weary, but your strength is carrying us through even the hardest of days. You are bigger than our disappointments and our desires. Today we rest in your goodness. Let it sink into our hearts. Amen.

Lift High the Cross

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.

Come, Christians, follow where the Savior trod,
our King victorious, Christ the Son of God.

Led on their way by this triumphant sign,
the hosts of God in unity combine.

Set up thy throne so earth's despair may see
beneath the shadow of its healing peace.

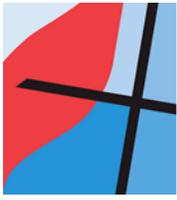
For thy blest Cross which doth for all atone
creation's praises rise before thy throne.

Songwriters: M. R. Newbolt; Author: George William Kitchin

Performed by Krista Stolars

<https://open.spotify.com/track/40otMbMqC32yF8y28fTyD5?si=hqBJyQlATO2jz83ev4aXXg>

March 24 | *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit.* Psalm 51:1-2; 10-12



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Prayer: I pray today for your grace oh Lord, for a healthy sense of uneasiness before God as I consider the effects of sin in my life, my community, and my world. Have mercy on me. Restore me. Amen.

March 25 | *Later, I will give my Spirit to everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will have dreams, and your young men will see visions. In those days I will even give my Spirit to my servants, both men and women.* Joel 2:28-29

Prayer: Spirit of God, fill us with wonder and dreams. Let us be uncomfortable, challenged, thrilled, moved. Let us continue to ask for your guidance. Let us seek greater understanding as we continue to listen. Amen.

March 26: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:16

Prayer: Take a deep breath. Become aware of the entire space around you. Imagine that the space you are sitting and everything in it, including you, is filled with God's unconditional love. You are a beloved child of God. My friends, know right now deep in your heart, that nothing can change that. Know that nothing in heaven or on earth can ever take that away. Amen

March 27 | *Put up with each other, and forgive anyone who does you wrong, just as Christ has forgiven you.* Col 3:13

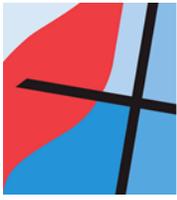
Prayer: Jesus, we believe you did not come into the world to condemn; instead you came to redeem us, so that we might not be defined by our sins but forgiven into new life. Today we ask you to teach us to do the same with one another. Amen.

March 28: *Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.* Isaiah 42:1

Prayer: As we journey through the rest of Holy Week, help us to bear witness to the life and death of Jesus. We follow knowing that death in Christ always leads to resurrection and new life, new hope. May we wave palms, light candles and experience Holy Week traditions in a way that provides a witness to the world that death will never have the last word again. Amen.

March 29 | *"But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light."* 1 Peter 2:9

Prayer: Amazing God, today I am reminded of who you are in my life as well as your everlasting presence in this world. Help me to hold onto the goodness and light that you have place in my life. Amen.



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March 30 | The Golden Calf | *When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." ... Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'* Exodus 32:1, 7-8

Usually, this is one of the passages I point to when I want to poke a little fun at the Israelites. Look! They are so impatient, they watch God perform all these miracles and lead them out of the promised land, look what they do as soon as God takes too long to send Moses back.

Normally right about then I realize that I am, and we are, just like the Israelites. We are impatient with God's timing and oftentimes in our impatience, we turn to trust, worship and believe in other things. We put something else in the place of God, and we call it good.

I know this does not put us in the best light...we rarely want to admit when we are wrong, or when we do not live up to the fullest potential God has called us to, and we certainly do not like it when we have to admit that we may have put something in front of God. Yet, it happens all the time; we are impatient with God; God does not seem to be delivering what we want and when we want, so something slips in and takes our attention.

Sometimes it's politics, or social issues, crusades in our own lives, our work or countless other things that can take the place of God in our lives, and we glorify them and call them "good." We worship them, sometimes without realizing it, and find our identity in them.

During this Lenten season, what are you using in place of God? Who or what are you focused on, worshipping, depending on? What are you hoping for that you think God has abandoned you in your waiting?

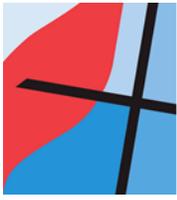
Abraham, Isaac, Israel all waited. Waited in dark times, waited for promises to be fulfilled, yet we know that God was still at work even when they could not see it. God is still at work in your life. God has not abandoned you, do not abandon God. *Rev Gabrielle Martone, pastor, Pearl River UMC.*

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us when we worry and fret over the problems of yesterday or the concerns for tomorrow. Direct our hearts, minds and actions in a way that leads to new life for ourselves and for your kingdom. Amen.

El Centro de Todo Eres Jesús

El centro de todo eres Jesús

El centro de todo eres Jesús



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Desde el principio y hasta el fin
Tú has sido y siempre serás
¡Cristo, Cristo!

Tú eres el centro
Nada importa más que tú
Todo el universo
Gira en pos de ti Jesús
De ti Jesús

El centro de mi vida sé Jesús
El centro de mi vida sé Jesús
Desde el principio y hasta el fin
Tú has sido y siempre serás
¡Cristo, Cristo!

Jesus at the center of it all
Jesus at the center of it all
From beginning to the end
It will always be, it's always been You
Christ, Christ!

You are the center
Nothing matters more than you
All the universe
Jesus is after you
Of you Jesus

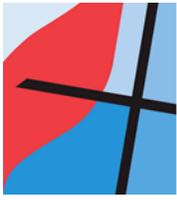
The center of my life be Jesus
The center of my life be Jesus
From the beginning to the end
You have been and always will be
Christ, Christ!

Songwriter: Darlene Zschech

Performed by Israel Houghton & New Breed

<https://open.spotify.com/track/1Nrx8iiWCJWxn6OrVuREz3?si=hE23tMvGRDG1F97w7MeJQQ>

March 31 | *Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief.* Psalm 43:1



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Prayer: Help us rely on you more fully, O Lord, that we might trust you more deeply and remember that you are with us, no matter what happens in the midst of this life. Amen.

April 1 | *I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.* John 10:10

Prayer: Lord, give me a new sense of purpose in everything that I am doing. I want you to be reminded every day that there is something really special about this life. Help me to live abundantly in the midst of what seems so ordinary. Amen.

April 2 | *Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief.* Psalm 31:9

Prayer: You, O Lord, have called us to watch and pray. Therefore, whatever may be the sin against which we pray, make us careful to watch against it, and so have reason to expect that our prayers will be answered. In order to perform this duty aright, grant us grace to preserve a sober, equal temper, and sincerity to pray for your assistance. Amen. Prayer of Susanna Wesley

April 3: *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.* John 10:27-28

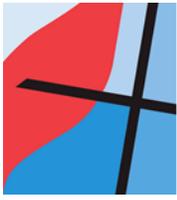
Prayer: Lord, deny it as I may, I know your voice. I can hear you calling me when I stray. Sometimes I wander off even further Lord, even though I hear your voice calling. I know you're calling me back God, but sometimes it's so hard. Lord, help me to listen for your call. Lord, help me find my way back to you Lord, help me remember you are the Good Shepherd. Amen.

April 4 | *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.* Romans 12:12

Prayer: Dear Jesus, we thank you for the days filled with sunshine and calm. We also thank you that in the days filled with struggles and darkness that we can trust that you are with us. Help us to share words and actions that bring grace and peace into our world. Amen.

April 5: *The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee." Mat 21:9-11*

Prayer: Lord, it is so easy to get drawn into the excitement of the moment, and the draw of the crowd. Help us cut through the noise to see what is happening, to see what is at stake.



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April 6 | The Last Days | *The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.* John 13:2-5

There's a post floating around Facebook that says, "If I knew it would be my last days I would live life with good food, partying, all things that are 'bad for me.' But Jesus, Jesus knew it was his last day and he washed feet."

From the moment I saw this, I was struck with a deep sense of "oh snap."

What would you do if you knew it was your last day with your friends? With your family? With the people you cared about the most?

I think it's safe to say that a lot of us would want to complete our bucket lists, eat that food we've been avoiding for years, live each moment to the fullest in a wild and crazy ride.

But Jesus, Jesus washed feet. He washed the feet of the disciples who in just a couple hours would betray him, deny him, and leave him to face the Sanhedrin alone. Jesus, in his last moments, washed the dirty, messy, nasty feet of his disciples, humbled himself, broke bread with them and forgave them. On his last day, Jesus did a whole heck of lot more than I ever dreamed of doing with my last day.

As we walk through this Holy Week again, may we do it with something more of an ear to that this Holy Week 2,000 years ago transformed the world entirely. This Holy Week 2,000 years ago, Jesus washed feet, broke bread, drank wine, forgave the unforgivable and gave up his life in order that we, you and I, 2,000 years later, might know how deeply we are loved by the Creator of the Universe.

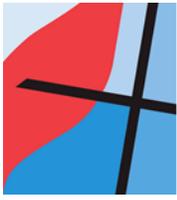
It can feel easy in this time of the year to skip from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday without walking through the Valley of the Shadow of Death because really who wants to live through the brokenness of this world?

But...I encourage you to walk through the Valley, to remember that on Jesus' last day he washed feet, fed people, forgave people, and gave up his life for us. That in the midst of our brokenness, Jesus lives, forgives and offers us new life. It is a gift, a reminder that we do not walk in brokenness alone, and that God is with us.

How can you wash feet this week? Break Bread? Forgive?

Jesus may have walked alone, but we do not. Let us be a people of washing feet, breaking bread, and forgiving others as God has forgiven us. *Rev Gabrielle Martone, pastor, Pearl River UMC.*

Prayer: Humble Savior, during this Holy Week help us to not only acknowledge your gracious attitude but help us to live in the same way. Open our eyes to the opportunities to serve one another, to offer



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forgiveness as well as ask to be forgiven. May we break bread, pray and worship this week in a way that reflects your love. Amen.

Hosanna (Praise Is Rising)

Praise is rising, eyes are turning to You, we turn to You
Hope is stirring, hearts are yearning for You, we long for You
'Cause when we see You we find strength to face the day
In Your presence all our fears are washed away, washed away

Hosanna, Hosanna
You are the God who saves us
Worthy of all our praises
Hosanna, Hosanna
Come have Your way among us
We welcome You here, Lord Jesus

Hear the sound of hearts returning to You, we turn to You
In Your Kingdom broken lives are made new, You make us new
'Cause when we see You we find strength to face the day
In Your presence all our fears are washed away, washed away

Songwriters: Paul Baloche / Brenton Brown

Performed By Paul Baloche

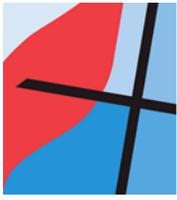
<https://open.spotify.com/track/16sN0LH7gTBcFeZYjevSkS?si=wnW40FYQSu6IVvpyGr0Bjg>

April 7 | *Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.* John 14:1-4

Prayer: Jesus comes with these words of love and comfort for his friends and family knowing their worries and fears. Jesus offers these words knowing that we too are troubled. Thank you, Jesus for this assurance that you will not leave us, that you were here yesterday, are here tomorrow and will carry us through all our tomorrows. Amen.

April 8 | *Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.* John 13:1

Prayer: Lord, I am grateful. I am grateful for what this meal means, I am grateful for your grace, I am grateful for what you have called me to do. I am humbled Lord. I am humbled. Lord, help me never take for granted this great gift you have given us. Lord, your grace is sufficient. This day and every day. Amen.



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April 9 | *Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”*

Prayer: Jesus, we know that we too often fail to keep watch. We are easily distracted. We are fully of fear. We are weary. Today we come in prayer not in our own strength but by the power of your spirit that can conquer all things, even our weakness. Amen.

April 10 | *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? Psalm 22:1*

Prayer: Jesus, there are no words that are enough, forgive us. Amen.

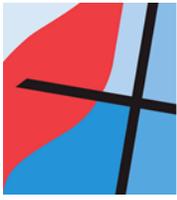
April 11 | *When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mar 27:57-60*

Prayer: We end our Lenten journey as Jesus arrives at the tomb where he was buried. Because we know the story we leave with expectant hope of his resurrection. However, take some time in quiet contemplation. “Something strange is happening – there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep.”

April 12 | *On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Luke 24: 1-6 24*

Prayer: O God of Easter joy, we come before you with glad shouts of acclamation, Christ is risen. It is a new beginning. It is the dawn of a new creation. It is the day of resurrection. Help us to hold on to the promise of new life that you offer through your resurrection. Christ is risen, indeed. Amen.

April 13 | *Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. Luke 24:13-16*



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Have you ever noticed that Jesus' followers had difficulty recognizing Him when He appeared to them after His resurrection? He appeared to Mary and she thought He was a gardener. He yelled to the disciples from the shore and they did not recognize Him. He appeared, walked and talked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and they did not realize it was Him.

Why don't they recognize Him? Was it grief, disbelief or was it as Luke says that they were kept from recognizing Him?

Then there are the two followers of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Early in the morning they set out, hearts heavy. It seems that their expectations had been dashed; they had really hoped that Jesus was the Messiah, the one to free Israel, but then He was captured and was killed."

They had recognized that Jesus was prophetic; they saw that his miracles, they even repeated that there were angels proclaiming that he was alive! But for some reason they were not sticking around to see if anything else would happen.

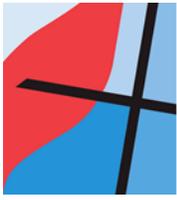
Are we sometimes like these disciples, our words do not match our actions, we have great words to share about Jesus, but we are walking away from him? He's right there in front of us and we don't recognize him. Do we allow ourselves to be changed by the risen Christ or do we return to business as usual?

We don't have to travel too many miles down the Easter road before we're caught in the hard realities of life. The storms of life sweep in and consume our attention. Dreams, ideas and expectations for life are here today and gone tomorrow. "We had hoped that he was going to be the one to redeem Israel...to redeem us."

Jesus responds, "Why can't you understand? How can you be so slow to believe all that the prophets said?" We know the story, but do we really understand? And so, we hear the story once again, we listen as Jesus tells these travelers that all this was meant to happen, it was all laid out since the beginning of time.

In our personal faith journey as well as church life the promises of resurrected life can quickly be dashed. Snowstorms in April confound the promises of spring; life struggles can be at odds with our glad refrains of *Jesus Christ Is Risen Today*. The amazing gift of Easter is that nothing can take Jesus away from us ever again. Not fear, or denial or disappointment. Not even death. Jesus will always hold that place beside us, so let us open our eyes to his presence.

Prayer: Jesus, help is to proclaim that it is true, the Lord has risen! May you recognize this truth and live fully all the promises of resurrection. Amen.



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We've A Story to Tell the Nations

We've a story to tell to the nations,
That shall turn their hearts to the right,
A story of truth and mercy,
A story of peace and light,
A story of peace and light.

For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And the dawning to noonday bright;
And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,
The kingdom of love and light.

We've a song to be sung to the nations,
That shall lift their hearts to the Lord,
A song that shall conquer evil
And shatter the spear and sword,
And shatter the spear and sword.

We've a message to give to the nations,
That the Lord who reigns up above
Has sent us His Son to save us
And show us that God is love,
And show us that God is love.

We've a Savior to show to the nations,
Who the path of sorrow has trod,
That all of the world's great peoples
Might come to the truth of God,
Might come to the truth of God.

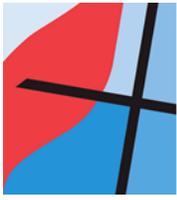
Songwriter: H. Ernest Nichol

Performed by Markers Worship

<https://open.spotify.com/track/2OxWaVV0DrP9ntbU3I9pFu?si=o6PqSMYXRmuAYjoDJXLVew>

April 14 | *Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."* Mat 28:9-10

Prayer: Resurrection shows us that death does not have the last word, that winter does end and there is spring, that seeds, dirt and water can be the start of a beautiful garden. But to see such possibilities takes faith. Still our hearts, steady our faith. Christ is Risen! Amen.



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April 15 | *All I want is to know Christ and the power that raised him to life. I want to suffer and die as he did, so that somehow I also may be raised to life.* Philippians 3:10-11

Prayer: Gracious God, open us up to claim the vision that you are able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine, for you are a God of resurrection. We ask you to enter those dead places in our lives to bring resurrection. We pray this in the name of the living Christ. Amen.

April 16 | *Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!* Isaiah 30:18

Prayer: God of all people, times and places, thank you for your unending love. Thank you for your active movement and participation in our lives and world. As we journey through this life, help us to be more like you. Transform us into a people who reflect Your Son and Your image. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

April 17 | *Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice!* Phil 4:4

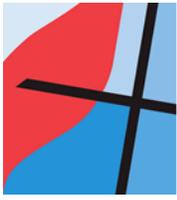
Prayer: Jesus, help me to be filled with joy that is not tied to my circumstances but instead is grounded in your love. Open my eyes to your presence in both the good and the bad days. Let my joy lead others to know you.

April 18 | *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* 1 Peter 1:3

Prayer: Jesus, help us to live our lives for you. Give us a knowing of how you have prepared us to serve and a desire to use our gifts for the building of your kingdom. Redirect our steps when necessary. Grow us in our trust and reliance on you. Keep us grounded in your love. Amen.

April 19: *When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.* John 20:19-20

Prayer: Lord Jesus, the message of Easter is such good news that it sometimes catches us by surprise and overwhelms us! We get so caught up in what we expect to experience that we forget to see you; fail to remember what you have told us; and are afraid to tell anyone about the good news that you have given us in your resurrection power over death in whatever form it comes. Help us, Lord Jesus! May we serve you faithfully, remember your teachings and way to live, and be bold in our faith so that we can share the good news of the Gospel. Amen.



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April 20 | *Extraordinary Love*

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus^[b]), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.³ “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

When I was a little girl, I loved to try on my mom’s engagement and wedding rings. My mom wore her band during the week when she cleaned and had her ring and my grandmother’s ring in her jewelry box. I loved to go in and put them on. Even to the point that one time when I was in about 6th grade I got the ring so stuck on my finger we needed to go to the hospital to have it removed.

Dreams of having a beautiful ring someday faded away with a skepticism of how I could ever be worthy of the love that is behind a diamond. By the time I was engaged I had convinced myself that I really did not like diamonds at all they were way to gaudy and showy.

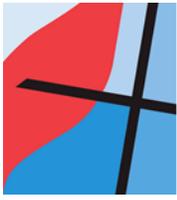
In a quest to make me happy, my husband designed a beautiful engagement ring that showcased his love and met my standards of being demure. This fit my sensible standard that there is no way our new love was worthy of a diamond. A few years ago, Stephen gifted me with a beautiful diamond ring. I was taken back; we had never talked about a ring and I was incredibly uncomfortable about this token of his love.

After what was more than 25 years of marriage, I should have seen our love as surviving the test of time, yet I was anxious. It just seemed too much. I would need to let go of the comfortable to accept the extraordinary.

Jesus is risen, he has appeared to his disciples and performed signs and miracles. So, what’s next? This was the quandary for the disciples. So these disciples, those who were among the closest to Jesus all go back to their regular lives. They have seen the risen Lord. They have seen his scars. Yet, in the face of the incredible truth that the rabbi they followed was and is the messiah, they cannot see how they fit in this picture. So, they had been fishermen, and now they are fishing again.

This problem of missing the truth in front of our faces is not just a first century phenomenon. We have heard the Easter story; for many we have heard it countless times. We heard it read from the Bible, spoken from the pulpit and sung by the choir. And yet what was Monday like for us, or the next week, etc. How has our belief changed us? Have we gone back to our old familiar, comfortable, yet distorted truths or have we been changed? There are plenty of reasons we stick with the familiar, but for too many it’s because we can’t see that we were created for more. We fail to conceive that God wired us not to settle for what was just familiar but invites us into a resurrected life.

For Peter, he once knew extraordinary love, yet today he was stuck in the ordinary because he could not stop thinking about how he had failed that love. Peter had no concept of a future as a disciple. He could



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not see beyond his betrayal. Jesus had offered him the gift of grace and yet he allowed his sense of unworthiness send him back to fishing.

Where have we climbed back into the ordinary when God has offered and planned the extraordinary? Where have we shortchanged ourselves because I don't look forward to the future with the hope that comes with faith in Jesus? Have we seen ourselves bargaining with God asking for less out of desperation---desperately believing that if I try hard enough on my own that everything will work out right?

None of us is worthy, but blessedly we are all offered redemption, a new life. I am redeemed ...you set me free Lord... Today I will love you and love your sheep... I will take on the call that is greater than I can imagine, not because of who I am but because of who you are...

A diamond is a promise, not just of the love that is present in the time of the engagement and marriage, but a symbol that in the future the love will grow and grow. We do not accept the gift because we are worthy, but it is a promise of giving ourselves completely.

Love is not to be measured or given equally; instead it is given to the unworthy ... you and me.

Prayer: Lord you are amazing. You are good beyond my imagination; you are unbelievable to me. Each time I think I know more about you Lord, you continue to surprise me again. Help me live into the beauty of the unbelievable, help me to breathe you even deeply, help me to find the awe, the grace and life you provide, especially when it seems to be unbelievable Lord. For all things are possible with you. Amen.

What Wondrous Love Is This

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!

What wondrous love is this, O my soul!

What wondrous love is this

That caused the Lord of bliss

To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,

To bear the dreadful curse for my soul!

When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down,

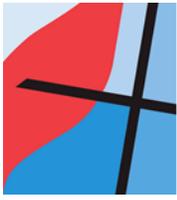
When I was sinking down, sinking down,

When I was sinking down

Beneath God's righteous frown,

Christ laid aside His crown for my soul for my soul,

Christ laid aside His crown for my soul.



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To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing;
To God and to the Lamb I will sing;
To God and to the Lamb,
Who is the great I AM,
While millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing,
While millions join the theme, I will sing.

Anonymous American folk hymn

Performed by Jars of Clay

<https://open.spotify.com/track/2KWyp0PqdrBVGI5tfGWO4J?si=b4YBK4WSQYKklj7Ge-tN9A>