

A Gift of Faith, Hope, and Love



Lenten Devotions 2025
Messiah Lutheran Church & School

WORSHIP AT MESSIAH DURING LENT

Sundays, 8:30 & 11:00 am, with Holy Communion
Early service is livestreamed and later service is recorded for our website.



LENTEN SERVICES, 2025

March 5, Noon & 7:00 pm, Ash Wednesday Liturgy
Distribution of Ashes

Wednesdays in Lent (Mar. 12, 19, 26, Apr. 2 & 9)

5:30 pm Soup Supper

7:00 pm Lenten Evening Prayer

Family Night March & April happen during Soup Supper
Wednesday March 19 & April 9



HOLY WEEK SERVICES, 2025

8:30 & 11:00 am Palm Sunday, April 13—
Contemporary service at 5:30 pm Saturday, April 12

7:00 pm Maundy Thursday, April 17—
Communion; stripping of the altar

Good Friday, April 18—
Noon Good Friday Liturgy
8:30 pm Tenebrae

Saturday Easter Vigil, April 19—
8:00 pm

Easter Sunday, April 20—
6:30 am Sunrise Service (Bain Park Picnic Pavilion)
9:00 & 11:00 am Festival Eucharist



Visit messiahfairview.org for more information or to register for services.

Greetings Siblings in Christ:

You hold in your hands a gift of saints. A gift of faith, hope and love.

The devotions in this book were written by the communion of saints from Messiah; some gone to the Church Triumphant, some moved on to other cities, some still long-time participants, and some newly joined disciples. Each author has three things in common:

1. The hope of the resurrection to new life shown and promised to them by our Lord and Savior Jesus.
2. The faith in God's compassion that they share with the saints that have gone before us for nearly 2000 years.
3. The love of God that was theirs from before they were born. Their Christian love for each one of you that hold this book.

It has been four years since Messiah last published a Lenten Devotion and this booklet is the fifth in the series which began in 2009.

This book is a gift from each of the 50 authors, and the office team that pulled it all together; Darlene Waugh, Diane Ward, Karen Wolf, Lisa Daley, and Sarah Heinsbergen. Thanks be to God for them.

Each day in Lent as you make time to use this book, start by preparing yourself to encounter God. Say a prayer that the Holy Spirit will open your heart and mind, and then read the words of your fellow siblings in Christ.

Our prayer is that you will be changed by reading this year's devotions. We pray that the Holy Spirit will fill you to the brim with God's love for you and for God's world. We pray that your Lenten journey will lead you closer to this God who knew you in the womb, who loves you beyond measure, and who desires the best for you.

God bless you on your journey.

Graciously, Pastor William Weidenbach Jr.

A LITTLE GUIDE FOR FAMILY DEVOTIONS

Devotions?

That means a daily prayer time for everyone in the home. Where this happens families are strengthened and blessed, the children in particular.

How do we get this started?

Parents need to agree on a time—after breakfast or supper, perhaps, or just before the children go to bed. It will not take long for this to feel usual and comfortable.

How do we approach it?

- Gather around the kitchen table, or in the family room. In the beginning, adults should serve as leader. Later an older, confident child may do this too.
- Start by saying **“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”** As you say this you may make the sign of the cross, a reminder that you are a baptized child of God who has the right to speak with God as a dear child does to a loving father.
- Then lead a brief prayer. You may say this from your heart, or read a prayer appropriate to the day.
- Read the devotion for the day – or invite one of the older children to do this. Start with the Bible passage and conclude with the prayer at the end of the devotion.
- Add any other prayers that occur to you—prayers for the family, for example, or for friends and neighbors or people in difficult circumstances that family members are aware of. Say these from the heart, and end your prayer by saying **“through Jesus Christ our Lord,”** or **“in Jesus’ name.”**
- Then let all pray the Lord’s Prayer. At the end an adult may say: **“The Lord Almighty bless us now and always. Amen.”**
- You can conclude with a song or hymn (one that your child learned in Sunday School, perhaps). Or else simply go on your way.

Ash Wednesday

March 5

*O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things.
His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him the victory!*

—Psalm 98:1

God won. Or rather, our God won. That's the point the Psalmist makes with his word "Lord" in capital letters, a little cover-up for the Name he'd rather not say lest he take it in vain.

Our God won. Theirs didn't. All those other gods that people worship—Money, Health, Celebrity, Talent, Achievement, Raw Power. Ethnic Origin or National Identity. People let such things define who they are, and who they are not. They bow to their decrees on whether a person counts for something or is simply another bit of disposable human flesh, to be used and ignored today and tossed in the trash tomorrow. These are the gods that ganged up to trash God's Jesus, with the might of their own masters, Sin, Death, and the Devil, backing them up.

Came Easter and its huge surprise. Our God won! He did so in the Name of Names that every knee will one day bow to. In that day the heavens will rock with the thunderous anthem of Jesus Christ, the Lord and God who ransacked the garbage dump and invested every person he found there with everlasting worth. He sees fit to know us all as sons and daughters of God, precious to him beyond all reason.

The thunderous anthem to come is the Easter song we sing today. I will add my voice to it every time I treat another human being as someone Jesus died for. What else can matter more about this person? About me, for that matter? Nothing. Our God won.

Will you join the singing too?

Lead us, Holy Spirit, to sing the praise of Christ Triumphant in the way we face the future and lead our lives this very day. Amen!

Rev. Jerome Burce
Pastor Emeritus Burce served Messiah for 28 years before
his retirement in 2022.

Thursday

March 6

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

—Psalm 51:10

When my children were young, and I suspected they did something, but wouldn't admit it, I would ask for them to "come clean." I wanted them to simply own up to whatever they were keeping secret.

I believe that's what Jesus longs to have us do. The Psalmist gives us these words with which we can approach our loving Savior and admit our failures, weaknesses or age-old shadows that seem to lie deep within ourselves.

As we begin another Lenten journey, let us pray to be trusting enough to ask for God's help to confidently walk into the presence of God, our Father and to "come clean." Jesus presents our Father as a deeply loving one who always gives people another chance. Our God is one who understands the human heart, who picks us up and dusts us off when we fall into the ashes of weakness. God refreshes, renews, heals, blesses, makes whole, cleanses, recovers where we have gone astray and restores what has died within us.

Lord, God, you are the giver of life. Help us to connect with you in these next forty days in a fresh way. In our Lenten journey, help us to "come clean" so we will know, again, your consoling and forgiving ways that help us to begin again in faith toward you. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

Deaconess Jeanette Rebeck

Deaconess Jeanette concluded a career of church ministry by serving as Pastoral Associate at Messiah from 2014 to 2017. She continues in retirement as a member of the congregation.

Friday

March 7

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

—Romans 12:9

At the end of a sermon, we were asked to turn to page 48 in the Lutheran Book of Worship and follow the pastor's reading of the prayer attributed to Saint Francis. I was so happy that this was the sermon I'd chosen to take to five of Messiah's shut-ins, as their Eucharistic Minister. As we prayed it together, it seemed to have an even deeper meaning. Thinking of Lent, we now have six weeks of following in the steps of Jesus and of following that prayer. Think how often and how long Jesus prayed to His heavenly father. He showed love. May we show love. He showed forgiveness. May we show forgiveness. On the cross, He showed us hope as He commended His spirit in the hands of His father. There was darkness at Gethsemane, but Jesus was the Light. May we be light in our own area of the world. May we bring joy when there is sadness by reaching out the hand of friendship and love, by offering consolation and understanding to those in need. As the prayer of Saint Francis says, it is in giving that we receive. That's the Good News of Lent. Jesus gave His life, and we receive His gift of eternal life.

Lord make me an instrument of Your peace, where there is hatred let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy. O Divine master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console. To be understood, as to understand. To be loved, as to love. For it's in giving that we receive and it's in pardoning that we are pardoned. And it's in dying that we are born...to eternal life. Amen.

+ Harriet Kraemer

Harriet was a vigorous member of Messiah for over 50 years, and a particular friend to the congregation's homebound members. She entered the Church Triumphant in 2017.

Saturday

March 8

I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

—*Psalm 16:8*

David is speaking in this Psalm, and he sets the Lord before him always. God is leading him and because God is close by, his faith is strong. I wish I had that kind of faith. There are so many thoughts, words, and actions in my daily life where I do not keep God before me or act the way He wants me to. I usually think of Him in times of distress, when I'm troubled or worried, and don't know which way to turn or what to do. That is when I seek God (*'keep Him before me'*). When I do that, He is with me (*'at my right hand'*), and that's when my faith is strongest (*'when I cannot be moved'*).

It is at those difficult times when I come to God in prayer, that He shows me the way. He helps me work through my problems, and He guides me to make the right decisions. Because I lay my cares on Him, He fills my heart with peace. And He is *always* there for me. Even when I forget about Him, He never forgets about me. He forgives my weaknesses and strengthens my soul. He sent His Son to die on the cross for my sins and promises me life forever in heaven and I am eternally grateful.

Dear Lord, help me to come to you always in prayer and thanksgiving. Stay before me, Lord, and be at my right hand. Strengthen and keep me in steadfast faith today and every day. Amen.

Shirley Gmetro

Shirley has been at Messiah since 1973. Now retired from a Nursing career, she enjoys her growing family.

Sunday

March 9

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

—Psalm 27:1

I was clueless when my pastor assigned this passage as my Confirmation verse. For years I put it out of mind, puzzled as to what this word from God was saying to me.

Fear is the constant companion of every sinner. It haunts our daily lives. How many of us fear spiders or snakes or public speaking? But the truly awful fears are those that hold onto us in our core. We fear not measuring up. We fear disappointing a loved one. We fear being left completely alone. We fear becoming a failure. We fear losing control. We fear death. Our fear cripples us. It sends us deeper into ourselves. It reminds us of how powerless we actually are.

That moment came for me in the midst of a serious crisis, when I was the sole care-giver for my dementia afflicted mother. I felt frustrated, terrified, and hopeless. It was then that the words of Psalm 27:1 came to me. Jesus was reminding me that I was not the one in control. I never had been in control. The well-being of my mother had always been in His hands. Just as she had rested in His arms throughout her life, so I too was being called to do likewise. My life as a child of God was not about control; it was about trust. He indeed was the stronghold of my life. It was time to let go of the fear and trust in his constant presence.

*Jesus, my stronghold, remind me daily of your loving presence.
Release me from my fears and teach me to trust you for all I need.
Amen.*

+ Susan Westcott, AIM

Susan—Ms. Westcott to her many former students—taught at Messiah School for over 30 years, she was recognized by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as an Associate in Ministry until her death in 2018.

Monday

March 10

The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

—Acts 5: 30-31

St. Peter and the apostles were certainly brave. Because they defied orders by spreading the message of salvation through Christ's death and resurrection for forgiveness of sins, the apostles had been arrested by Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, thrown into prison, and questioned by Jewish leaders who had just shown their eagerness to put Jesus to death for challenging their religious authority. In this text from scripture, the apostles courageously told their accusers it was the personal God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who resurrected Jesus after He had been crucified by those same leaders. Because of unfathomable love for His people, God sent His own dear Son Jesus, who willingly suffered, died and then rose from the dead as victorious Savior of all.

Lessons for us are clear. It was our own sins, just as much as the sins of people who lived long ago, that made Jesus' act of salvation necessary. Therefore, like the apostles, we should thank and praise God and courageously spread the message of God's love.

Gracious God, thank you for sending Jesus to the cross to redeem us for our sins. Grant us courage to bear witness to this act of love and salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Don Braun

A retired NASA scientist, Don lives in Garfield Heights. He has served on Church Council for many years. Don helps coordinate Adult Education programs, sings in choir and serves Lenten Soup Suppers.

Tuesday

March 11

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.

—Ephesians 4:29

As each of us grow and mature, we come to understand more and more each day that our words may be used for positive or negative. Once uttered past our lips, the words cannot be deleted or burned. Thus, thinking before we speak continues to be a check point for each of us throughout our lives.

Recalling the Life of Christ, we realize that we are called to see Christ in those we meet throughout our lives as ones for whom Christ died. As each of us experience situations in our lives, we learn that we cannot assume things about those around us. As we grow, we learn to reach out and understand others who are walking down their paths of life. Often, we are called to lift up our family and friends with kind and thoughtful words that bring the light of Christ to everyone. As we continue to practice this discipline, we ourselves will grow more like Christ.

Heavenly Father, guide us each day to reach out in kindness and love with our words of hope and joy, as we build up those we meet. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Eileen Spicer

Eileen spent ten of her forty-year teaching career at Messiah teaching First grade at Messiah School. After retiring in 2008, she has continued to serve in a host of ways.

Wednesday

March 12

Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

—Psalm 86:11

In the first ten verses of Psalm 86 we hear a prayer of David when he calls upon the Lord. David praises God as one who guards his life and in whom he can put his trust, He calls on a God who is forgiving, merciful and who is God above all other gods. David then asks God to teach him, that he may be faithful in life with a clear and undivided heart.

This Psalm reminds me of the dismissal we hear at the end of the service:

Go in Peace, Serve the Lord. Or Go, walk in the way of truth.

This sounds good on Sunday morning but this walk during the week ahead can and will be difficult as we encounter a society that does not fear the Lord. A society that lifts up praises to those who are rich and powerful. A society that is harshly critical of those people who are different, poor and not one of us. And for others the week ahead will simply be a challenge to resist hearing that voice, yes, the devil, telling us that we are not good enough and that we really don't make a difference so why try. In these weekly struggles, we need to continually ask God to grant us that clarity of thought, mind and heart and to keep our attention and focus on the One whose name is Holy. We are children of a Gracious God whose goodness and mercy extends beyond our understanding to a world in need.

Lord God, during the season of Lent help us to reflect on your ways of truth and righteousness and how we carry ourselves into the world. Give us the strength to serve you as we care for our neighbor and the stranger. Grant to us your peace. "The peace of God that surpasses all understanding to keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ." Amen. (Philippians 4:6)

Paula Mickan

Paula, is a consecrated Deaconess and an Acute Care Nurse Practitioner who flies full-time as one of the providers on the Life Flight helicopter for MetroHealth Hospital.

Thursday

March 13

*From the end of the earth I call to you, when my heart is faint.
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*

—Psalm 61:2

I am human. I do some things right. Other things, not so much. I guess that is “normal” in this crazy, hectic life that most humans lead. I have experienced indescribable joys and gut-wrenching heartache. This, too, I think, is “normal.”

My faith is the one constant in my life that I probably take the most for granted. I know that my Lord is always there for me. However, when my days get busier than usual, I do, sometimes, forget to pray. Not an intentional oversight. I forget. I allow the day to spin me like a top, turning my head into a vortex. I get sucked into the cares of the day. The worries of the day. The concerns for what happens next. Things that are often not in my control.

Am I proud of this? Nope. Not at all. I am, however, grateful that my God, through His Son, will forgive me for not relying on Him the way that I should. I am thankful that He will always be willing to throw me a lifeline and draw me back. He will always look for me when I am lost.

In those times when the heartache has been almost unbearable, He has held me up. He truly HAS been my Rock. His Lifeline is always right there—waiting for me to reach out. And I do reach out, and He draws me in to His comforting presence, and I am comforted.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for being there for me in all of the ups and downs that life has brought. Thank you for being my lifeline when I let myself get carried away. Help me to trust that You are in control of every aspect of my life; I have nothing to worry about. Thank you for being my Rock and my Foundation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Pam Sugrue

Pam is retired from the lab at the Cleveland Clinic and is one of the key leaders at Messiah's Saturday evening service. Pam is also instrumental in leading our Prayer Shawl Ministry.

Friday

March 14

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praises endure forever!
—Psalm 111:10

Fearing, that is showing the utmost reverence and respect for authority and following rules, is always wise. Well, of course it is! Seldom is the time when I would find it smartest to ignore rules and scoff at authority. If you don't believe that, then by all means...

Fly by the police officer at 85 miles an hour tomorrow on the freeway.

Tell your boss that you'll see him in a couple weeks after you catch up on your favorite TV show.

And at night, suggest to your children that finishing homework is overrated.

So when it comes to God – his rules and commandments... I'll simply get myself in line and start operating my life up to His expectations, right.

Problem time. No chance of that happening. Fact of the matter is, if I'm going to take God and His requirements of me seriously, *really seriously*, then 'fearing' suddenly goes well beyond respect, and more into the traditional sense of terror. The lump in my throat and knot in my stomach instead lead to anger. I'm angry and pointing the finger at God. After all, how can He put such unrealistic expectations on me? Hard for me to echo the psalmist, suggesting "His praise endures forever."

Until I look toward the cross. There hangs Jesus, passing for me the test I was bound to fail so miserably. Me, now totally and completely reconciled with God. Believe it. Trust it. His praises endure forever!

Heavenly Father, grant me the wisdom to continue fearing and respecting your Holy Word. Thank you for sending your Son to answer for my shortcomings. Above all else, strengthen my trust in that saving message of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Chris Neumann

Chris and his family are lifelong members of Messiah. He has a keen interest in Lutheran theology and Biblical studies.

Saturday

March 15

Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

—Psalm 143:8

When I volunteered to develop a devotional reflection for Lent, I had high hopes that it would be one of those popular, stirring Psalms like 100, 118, or the most famous, 23. (Really, you should look them up!) But when I read the assigned verse, my hopes were dashed. *Now what*, I thought? So, I did what any trained researcher/information geek would do. I “Googled” it!

After some pretty interesting reading (Psalm 143 is chock-full of fervent mini-prayers for comfort, guidance, and deliverance); studying (this is one of seven Penitential Psalms or Psalms of Confession); and praying (Lord, what in the world am I going to write about *this?*), I zeroed in on one word in verse 8: “trust.” Eventually, it hit me that just as with David’s deliverance from his enemies in the text, we too, can totally rely upon God to always be there for us when we seek deliverance from our “enemies” of today’s world, however we choose to characterize them. For me, John 3:17 supports this and assures that “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

What’s not to like about that?

Dear Lord, as you did for David so many centuries ago, bring comfort to our weary hearts. Grant us the strength to always trust your love for us and real presence in our daily lives. Amen.

Mike Allan

Mike is happily retired from Case Western Reserve University. Mike has served Messiah in various capacities, as Council President, Communion Assistant and more.

Sunday

March 16

But I will sing of your might; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been a fortress for me and a refuge in the day of my distress.

—Psalm 59:17

I love hymnody. I love singing hymns. Every season of the church year has powerful hymns. In this season of Lent, some of my favorites are the old, “O Sacred Head,” and the new, “There In God’s Garden.” And at Easter I look forward to singing “At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing.” The tunes and texts are powerful. The closest I have ever felt to being in heaven is when I have attended Hymn Festivals by wonderful organists like Paul Manz or John Ferguson. There is nothing like singing with gusto as the organist interprets each stanza using the various colors and dynamics of the organ.

Beginning in 2013, I began noticing subtle changes in my body. When my left hand wouldn’t do what I wanted it to do while playing the organ, I became very concerned. After seeing several doctors and undergoing many tests, I was diagnosed with having a very rare neurological movement disorder. I have been told that I would eventually be unable to walk or even move. Now, my body is very weak, but I can still sing. I need to rely on God to give me the strength to carry on. For me, one way to gain strength is through worship – by singing those wonderful hymns, hearing His Word, and receiving His body and blood through Holy Communion.

When we are at our weakest, we can count on God’s strength to get us through. Although there are always highs and lows in our daily lives, and there always will be, Jesus is our continued strength. He is the grace that saves us, and the love that heals us.

Dear Lord, you had the strength to face the cross. Thank you for your strength that helps us to face the difficult times in our lives when we are at our weakest. We know that we can count on You to get us through. Thank you for being our “Mighty Fortress.” Help us to joyfully keep singing your praises. Amen.

+ Barbara Bartels

Barb was Messiah's organist for 49 years. For 40 of those years she also taught Fourth Grade at Messiah School. Barbara entered the Church Triumphant in 2017.

Monday

March 17

Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.

—*Psalm 25:5*

My life has always been surrounded by the gifts of faith and family, and at no other time have I needed them more. I have never felt so despairing about the present state of the world. We are in a time of turmoil in our country and around the world, with war, hunger and social injustice topping the news every day. During the last decades, the family structure, social norms and the acceptance of absolute truths have been steadily crumbling—and are now being further assaulted.

We know God's truth from the Bible—the gift of salvation, and the reflection of that: to love one another, feed the poor, take care of the sick, seek justice for the oppressed. I admire the people who are feeding the hungry in other parts of the world, amid the ever-increasing difficulties; the people who are seeking to uphold justice in the midst of attack; the people who are fighting for their sovereign right to exist. I sometimes feel guilty that I am not across the world working in these fields. But where I can make a difference is in my local “communities”—family, church, neighborhood, workplace.

We all have a circle of influence (lesser or greater), and God asks us to show His truth and love, and to walk in His ways in our interactions with family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances. In my experience, it's easier to feed the poor than to do the rest: show patience with loved ones, show tolerance for differences of opinions in our daily interactions, seek justice in a gentle way. But we are called to follow the Lord's leading. And God is the Rock of our Salvation, so we can trust **that** as we follow Him.

Dear Lord, We know that you are greater than we can ever imagine, and that your plan for this world encompasses much more than we can ever understand. We know that your salvation has been shown to each of us through Christ's love. Help me to trust that your love for me and for the world will prevail. And help me to be a reflection of that love and truth in my life, in my thoughts and words, and in my interactions with others. In Christ's name, Amen.

Deb Zudell-Dickey

Deb is Messiah's Choir Director and Coordinator of Music Ministry.

Tuesday

March 18

Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

—Psalm 51:6 (NIV)

In Psalm 51, King David, having confessed his transgressions with regard to his adulteress relationship with Bathsheba, acknowledges God's right to judgment, asks for God's mercy, and begs God to cleanse him from his sin and wash away his iniquity.

In verse 6, David comes to a profound realization. God is not desirous of outward virtue or penitential rituals but seeks inward purity and truth. He realizes how far he is from satisfying this demand. His own means are not capable of compliance. The gulf between his own ability and God's demand is far too great. With that realization, David understands that true wisdom, holiness and heartfelt fidelity, can only come from God. In his penitence, David understands the divine command, man's fall from grace, and the one means of purification as the "wisdom" which God will "teach" and place upon our "inmost place," the heart.

It is in the mystery of the Cross, the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we can find this peace and security. No matter how great our transgressions, no matter how grievous our sin, no matter how deep the gulf between our own condition and God's desire for truth and perfection, it is in the Cross of Christ that we are mysteriously joined with God's great love for us and find our own redemption and eternal hope, and also that of the whole world.

Heavenly Father, we ask that you reveal unto us your truth and place your wisdom in our hearts, that we also may know and understand the mystery of your love, and be joined with you in the passion of your Son to eternal life and salvation. Amen.

David Hessler

David, a retired attorney and former president of Messiah, has been a key leader for many years in the wider Lutheran community of Greater Cleveland and beyond.

Wednesday

March 19

Pray in the spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

—Ephesians 6:18

“You have cancer.” Not what I wanted to hear when waking up from a routine colonoscopy five years ago. Things move swiftly upon such a diagnosis...scans, lab work, consults, surgery. When suddenly faced with my own mortality, death was no longer a metaphor! End-of-life decisions that I was going to make “someday” had to be made *now*.

Since 2017, I’ve prayed monthly with our low-income Laundry Love guests at Leo’s Laundromat amid sloshing washing machines and tumbling dryers. When informed of my cancer, our friends at Leo’s prayed for *me*. It was truly the most humbling experience in my life. Such is the power of relational ministry!

Back when we had daily delivery of *The Plain Dealer*, I used it as a devotional, praying my way through the paper. Today my prayers are fashioned around news I receive online, including prayers for my Colon Cancer Support Group. I’m teaching my grandchildren to offer up a prayer whenever we hear a siren. Keep alert! The need for prayer is all around us.

Dear Lord, we pray all kinds of prayers in the Holy Spirit: public, private, and secret; social and solitary; joyful, solemn, and sudden. Our prayers include confessions of sin, petitions for mercy, and thanksgiving for protection and blessings received. Alert me to those in need of prayer. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Janice Snyder

Janice has been involved in Lutheran ministry for over 35 years. She considers herself a “spiritual entrepreneur” who enjoys finding new, practical ways to show people how much Jesus loves them.

Since 2016 she has served in Admissions for Messiah School.

She is thankfully cancer-free.

Thursday

March 20

But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

—Romans 8:25

Often when people hope for something, they are wishing it to happen, no matter how big or small it might be. Oftentimes, try as hard as we may, the outcome of that situation is entirely out of our hands. When we look at the context of hope within the Bible, it is a confident expectation of God keeping His promises. Does this always mean things will work out exactly as we want them? No. But this does not mean God has not heard our prayers or turned His back.

At one point or another, we have all been in a season of waiting. But during these seasons, how easy is it to wait patiently? Even when we wait on the Lord, it is not easy. Six and a half years ago was the hardest waiting period of my family's life. We had just found out our infant daughter would need a lifesaving heart transplant. This was her only means of survival. The very first day into our new journey I stopped asking God "why." Instead, I turned all my fears into prayers, because my faith was in the biggest test of its lifetime. The following 115 days were spent hoping for a phone call with good news, and those days of waiting patiently were full of emotional and physical weariness. Yet our faith did not waiver. We rested in the promise of Jesus and knew no matter what, Emerson would be ok.

If we bring it back to the Bible, we are also reminded by the story of Abraham. God tells Abram and Sarai they will have a son, and they laugh, because of their age. You know how long they had to wait patiently? 25 years! That is a long time to wait. No matter how hard (p.s. it's hard), patience is the long game.

Lent has us waiting in anticipation to celebrate Christ's resurrection and conquering of the grave. While we wait, I pray your hearts are filled with the hope only found through Christ Jesus.

Dear Jesus, as we wait with hope through this Lenten season, may we be reminded of your faithfulness. Thank you for paying the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Amen.

Andrea & Brandon Buskirk

Andrea (Waugh), alumni of Messiah School, and Brandon are the parents of Emerson. She received the precious gift of a heart transplant January 18, 2019, and is now a thriving kindergarten student at Messiah School.

Friday

March 21

But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high.

—Psalm 3:3

David wrote Psalm 3 while fleeing for his life from his son Absalom. Pursued and surrounded by many enemies taunting him that he had no hope of being delivered by God, verse 3 is his response, his confession of faith in God's protection. This verse can give us hope and encouragement in all kinds of threatening or seemingly hopeless situations.

No matter how extensive or fearful the circumstances we might face, the words "but you, God" reminds us to turn our focus away from fear and anxiety toward God who is our shield. That conjunction "but" changes everything just as it does in Romans 3:21 where it transitions from judgment (law) to righteousness through faith in Jesus (gospel).

As it did for David, God's shield protects us from threats around us - not just before us, but on all sides - He's got our back. God is the One who "lifts my head high," to a position of confidence, trust and restored dignity. If anxiety and fear disturb you when sleeping, upon waking or at anytime, let this verse be a reminder that God's faithful care will sustain you day or night, 24/7, whatever the need or circumstances.

Good and gracious God, thank you for the care you provide me in time of trouble. Help me to trust always in you and to lift my head high with confidence and hope in your loving mercy. In Jesus name. Amen.

+ Chuck Raquet

Chuck was a retired NASA scientist who served Messiah in many roles over the years, above all by his steadfast presence every Sunday with his wife, Sharon until his death in 2020.

Saturday

March 22

"Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say."

—Isaiah 28:23

For years this command has guided my work with church technology to help others hear what God is saying. Stepping back from those first few words you can get a different picture. Isaiah 28 is a scolding of the misbehaving leaders and priests.

Revisit childhood and imagine a time that your parent was talking with another adult for what seemed like hours on end. In the few minutes that actually passed you began to grow restless and wander around looking for something fun and exciting. The next thing you know you are snapped to your senses by your parent yelling your name for not paying attention while playing, and only then do you realize how close you were to something that would get you hurt. Your parent tells you to listen because they will only warn you once, *you need to stop playing or else you will hurt yourself*. All of the fun vanishes. Was it because you were caught? Or because your parent was right and you were scared?

We all lose our way in the many temptations and distractions of this world. Even when we want to do the right thing, our sinful nature gets in the way and starts to lead us astray. In those moments it would be helpful to have God yell our names out loud and snap us back to our senses. A part of us also likes getting caught up in these things knowing there is no one yelling our name, so we can indulge now and ask for forgiveness later. But the reality is that God's voice is out there, you just need to listen for it.

While God likely won't be talking to you through a burning bush, you may hear it through the voice of a friend who is concerned about you. You may find God's voice in one of the many amazing devotions in this booklet, the words of a song or hymn, or while in prayer. When God speaks, you are not likely to hear it with your ears or see it with your eyes but rather you'll feel it inside your heart. Tune your heart, and hear what He is saying this Lent.

Dear God, thank you for calling my name when I need to hear it. Help remind me it is not punishment, but rather Your love and protection. Help me listen and pay attention this Lenten season, hearing Your voice and feeling Your love for me in them. Amen.

Jared Waugaman

Jared does a lot, and he does it all with an appreciative heart. Time outside in God's beautiful creation with his wife Allison is the best time.

Sunday

March 23

As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.

—Psalm 103:13-14

We start out Lent remembering “that we are dust.” Dust is the theme for the season. We start out as dust. We come out of the dust of the earth, at least Adam did, and since we are descendants, I guess it’s part of our makeup. We end up as dust – “... and to dust you shall return.”

Most of us have “dust bunnies” somewhere in our houses. I understand that they are made up mostly of hair and skin that are shed by the humans in the house. If your children want to find themselves, tell them to look under the bed.

In Lent we are looking for more than ourselves, we are looking for hope and for life and for a future. As it stands, the future holds only death. But the story of God’s involvement in our lives is the story of Jesus living among us and dying for us and rising to new life and sharing that life with us. That gives us a new future, one with potential for eternal life with God. Jesus’ resurrection becomes ours because of the grace of God that comes through faith. The penitential season of Lent leads to the season of life and hope that we celebrate as Easter. Be glad in your dustiness. God uses it to create new life.

Father, I know that I am dust. But you can make something good out of nothing. Use my dust to create a child of yours and a faithful disciple of Christ. Amen.

Rev. David Kukulhan

Pastor Kukulhan spent his active years of pastoral service at Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry, Triune Lutheran Church in Broadview Heights, and St. Matthew Lutheran in Parma. Now happily retired and is a member of Messiah.

Monday

March 24

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

—Colossians 3:16

You never know when God is working through you. When I was recovering from my leg operation, I kept hearing about my influence on others and how inspiring I was. I had no idea what I was doing, but God used my circumstances to reach out to others. Their prayers returned blessings to me tenfold.

How grateful I have been for my enduring faith, for hymns, for words of encouragement from Christian friends showing me that I was never alone. I even had “manna” for four months when, unplanned by anyone, there were daily gifts of food. Many thanked me by cards and calls for “allowing” (really?) them the chance to help me.

Being able to help others in many different ways helps us to teach by example. Now that I’m back singing in the choir, my songs of praise flow with renewed zest for all that God has done for me and continues to keep me steadfast in the faith. Through Helping Hands, Bible studies, and individual friendships I can’t wait to show my gratitude.

Dear Lord, open my eyes to all the daily blessings you give. Let me sing your praises in my thoughts, words, and deeds.

+ Dorothy Lewis

Dorothy spent almost 50 years at Messiah inspiring others with her cheerful, courageous, and generous hope in Christ. She was especially committed to our choir ministry until her death in 2020.

Tuesday

March 25

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

—Psalm 73:26

It is frustrating! The unethical worker in the company gets the promotion. The traffic camera captures a one-time blunder of going 35mph in a 25mph zone, while the driver under the influence is never arrested. The modest teen seems to never attain popularity status among his or her peers. The team that lacks sportsmanship wins. It's just not fair!

The Psalmist writes about these unfair predicaments in Psalm 73. The Psalmist wants life to be fair and just. He wonders why the pure in heart struggle and have problems while the arrogant person seems to have success.

The Psalmist realizes as he considers this dilemma that mercy is better than justice. God in the end is his strength and on his side. Although life may seem unfair, it comes down to God being there to hold him close, lift him up, and finally save him.

There wasn't justice and fairness on that Friday when Jesus was treated unfairly, mocked, scorned, and nailed to a cross. His wondrous love for us led him to endure the injustice.

We know with the Psalmist that God holds us near and dear. His marvelous plans for us extend beyond this life, and nothing can surpass His mercy and grace.

God, Take away any jealousy or frustration we may be experiencing today, and remind us each day of your love, mercy, and grace. Fill our hearts with gratitude. Amen.

Joe King

Joe spent his career teaching English at Lutheran West. You'll often find him at Messiah serving as an usher, lector, communion assistant, or simply helping others.

Wednesday

March 26

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

—Psalm 145:15-16

In this psalm King David praises God for providing exactly what is needed, at the exact time it is needed. Verse 15 speaks to providing for our necessities: food, shelter, basic care. But our generous and loving God doesn't stop there. In verse 16 He is said to "satisfy the desires of every living thing." What great comfort and joy we can take from a God who loves us so much that He cares for our desires as well as our needs. If we wait on Him, He will search our hearts and provide without fail from His vast well of love for us. This does not mean we will "get everything we want." If we truly are in relationship with God, our desires are godly –not worldly– and pleasing to Him.

And let's not forget timing. God provides in His perfect timing and according to His master plan. Our job is to trust and be patient as our God always acts at the proper time. How often I have seen this fulfilled in my own life. When I have been impatient, I have still been provided with an answer from God, although it often leaves me feeling unsatisfied, like I've missed an important opportunity. When I wait on God, His creativity in His provision is more than I could have dreamed up myself. O weary hearts, praise God for His faithfulness in providing for us!

Dear Lord, you are our Heavenly Father. Please help us to wait on you with the patience and complete trust of infants waiting on their mothers. Remind us that you will provide for all our needs and the godly desires of our hearts. Let us not forget, Lord, patience in waiting for your perfect provision, and gratitude for your generous and loving ways with us. Amen.

Melanie Hessler

Melanie and her family have been with us for over thirty years as a member of the congregation and a strong contributor to the Ministry of Messiah School. Melanie serves as a Faith Mentor to Messiah's 4th grade students.

Thursday

March 27

Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

—Psalm 86:11

Jesus' life is the fulfillment of David's prayer. What better model could we have than Jesus to show us God's ways, demonstrating His love for all mankind and His mercy for sinners like me. Jesus is the guide to follow when trying to discern what God wants me to do. He has walked that path for me. He will guide me in God's ways all through my life and, because He has kept those ways perfectly for me, all the way to my final destination, heaven.

And an undivided heart? Think of Jesus in Gethsemane, resolutely turning His face to the terrible path of suffering and death and His willingness to do His Father's will, even to go to the cross. "Not my will, but Yours be done" He prayed. With complete focus on God's plan, Jesus bows to the will of the Father. He did that for me – because I couldn't and I wouldn't. By God's grace I reap the rewards of His obedience! My prayer is that Jesus will keep my eyes on Him, guiding me, sustaining me, even carrying me through the trials that will surely come my way and lead me safely home.

Dear Jesus – I thank you for your perfect example of faithful obedience to your Father's will. Give me the faith to follow You always, wherever that may lead, always trusting in Your mercy. Bring me finally, through Your grace, into Your Heavenly Kingdom. Amen.

Kathy Neumann

Kathy taught Second Grade at Messiah School for 25 years. Since her retirement in 2017 Kathy has continued to be actively involved with Messiah Church, and is the Faith Mentor to Messiah's 1st grade class.

Friday

March 28

The Lord watches over you --

The Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

—Psalm 121:5-6

Reading over this passage, I couldn't help but picture a pastoral scene: a magnificent tree, its crown pressing upward, branches sweeping wide to cast ample shade, providing shelter and protection to any who venture into its circle. A beautiful, impressive sight that poets would be inspired to write about, artists to paint.

But here we are in this season of Lent, and we need to shift our focus a bit. *Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?* Our Lord steps in here, in person, and paints this picture in a different light. The magnificent tree has a sturdy trunk reaching heavenward, with a crown of thorns at its peak. Its strong branches -- only two -- are stretched out wide with the hands of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, nailed to the ends. Here now, is the shade we are invited to take shelter in. Here in the shadow of the cross is our protection, our refuge. Our resurrected Lord stands victorious over sin, death, and the power of all evil --His arms outstretched, keeping constant watch over us. What comfort to know that as we go about our daily lives, work and play, heartache and joy, there He is with us. He loves us so, and will guard us, that nothing may come between Him and we who abide in His shadow.

Thanks be to you, Heavenly Father, for the countless blessings you bestow upon us, and your constant watch over us. Help us to live confidently in your promise of eternal life, that we may lead others to know your mercy. Amen.

Amy Roman

Amy teaches Art at Messiah School. She has offered the Open Ceramics Studio as a winter activity for the church, school, and community for the last 12 years. The Luther Seal at our east entrance and the wonderful parking lot games are some of her many gifts to us all.

Saturday

March 29

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

– Psalm 119:105

When I feel afraid, think I've lost my way, still you're there right beside me. Nothing will I fear, as long as you are near. Please be near me to the end.

I will not forget your love for me and yet, my heart forever is wandering. Jesus be my guide, and hold me to your side, I will love you to the end. Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Are you singing the song in your head as you read these words?

God's word is the light of our lives, the guide of our existence and the direction of our journey. Just as a light leads the way in the darkness of an unknown path, God's word provides direction and purpose to our lives.

Can you imagine a day without daylight? The imagery of light is significant in the bible. Light is often associated with God's presence, truth, and purity. In Genesis 1:3, God's first act in creation is to command, "Let there be light," separating light from darkness.

During chapel at Messiah School, the students use sign language to communicate this verse. The lamp is made by mimicking a light turning on. Start with your fingers together. Then open them up like a sun shining or a flashlight being switched on. Now let your elbow rest on your other hand as your light shines. Now point to your feet.

Last year, our dear friend Trudy Gustke entered the Church Triumphant, joining her daughter Karen. Many will remember Karen's beautiful voice singing this song with Messiah's contemporary band. Trudy left written instructions for her funeral service. "Thy Word" was one of the song's she selected with the note, "clapping is preferred."

Dear Heavenly Father, Let your light shine on our personal path to show our feet the way to go. Amen.

Darlene Waugh

Darlene is Messiah's Office Manager. She is a lifelong member of the congregation. In addition, Darlene serves as the Executive Director of the Pierstorf College Fund for the past 5 years.

Sunday

March 30

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

—Philippians 4:6

I can't count the number of times this topic has come up in my life whether through a sermon, a book study, a Bible verse, or someone's comment. What topic you might ask? The topic of worrying.

I admit it. I'm a worrier. I'm not proud of that because it means that I am not trusting God with my life. I'm making my concern bigger than God and I must, once again, ask God to forgive me. He keeps forgiving me for Jesus sake and promises to be with me to strengthen my faith for the tough times.

All the help I need is in His Holy Scriptures. Philippians 4:6 directs us to talk to God and give thanks for those tough times! Yes, give God thanks for your trials. I must admit that it takes me a long time to be thankful for events that have caused me pain. But the promise God gives in verse seven is too wonderful to miss out on. *"Then God's peace, which goes beyond anything we can imagine, will guard your thoughts and emotions through Christ Jesus."* If I want peace I must give everything to my Heavenly Father and trust in His knowledge and love. Only He can make "all things good."

"Don't be troubled. Believe in God." John 14:1a

Dear Father, forgive me when I worry and deny myself Your peace. Shower me with Your love that I might remain steadfast to Your Word. Send Your Holy Spirit to help me to rely on Your strength even in the midst of tragedy. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Priscilla Hinsch

Priscilla taught Third grade at Messiah School for almost forty years. Since her retirement she continues to be active in the life of our congregation through choir and the prayer shawl ministry.

Monday

March 31

...and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.
—Romans 5:5

One of my memories in elementary school is going with my parents and sisters to visit a friend of my father's who worked on a lake freighter which worked on the Great Lakes. The boat was HUGE. Now that I am older, I know that the ship we went to visit carried iron ore across the waters of the great lakes and that the lake freighter is called a "laker" for short. I remember being on the bridge and dreaming about the possibility of steering such a vessel one day.

As I've grown older, I have come to learn that big ships are equipped with a tool called a gyroscope. Gyroscopes help keep the ship even keel when the waters are rough and storms are raging. Though the waters may rock the ship, and waves may reach tremendous proportions, the gyroscope helps stabilize the vessel and maintain equilibrium.

Is not this also true of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives? How like the gyroscope is the gift of the Holy Spirit of God ...when the preverbal storms of life break over our heads and we begin to experience the thrashing around of our lives. Our souls will be kept on even keel and remain in the peace of the Lord when the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, dwelling and abiding because of the love poured into our hearts. In this way, God's love for us is real and sure, God's love for us is true and unequivocal. God does not dish and dole out His love for humanity in tiny portions or minute measures; He "has poured" out His heart and life and very being into our hearts, our souls, our beings. How? Through the Spirit, the one and the same Spirit as on the day of Pentecost. This Spirit is dwelling in the heart of believers, yours and mine. And all the lake freighters on the Great Lakes can't contain all the goodness which God provides! These things we pray, and these things will not disappoint us! Amen.

God of Hope and God of Love, comfort us with your abiding presence. Your promises are true, and you generously pour into our lives through the Holy Spirit! Continue your pouring this day, Amen.

Pastor Seth Bridger
Associate Pastor of Messiah since 2017.

Tuesday

April 1

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

—Colossians 4:6

The Lenten season is an appropriate time to concentrate our thought on the great mercy of God. We know the one: Jesus Christ, given to die for us. By the grace of God, Christians rise with Christ to new life. Now, this new life with Christ requires a new nature, one that we are given, one that we are called to exhibit, one that takes effort and determination to develop. Yes, He gives us work to do. You see, our old nature remains, one bent on leaving God out of our life and actions. This old nature is laid aside only by putting on the new. We continually put on the new nature to give it control of our conduct.

One way our conduct reveals the new nature is in communication with others. Out of the new nature, our body language and words combine to convey to everyone the same kindness shown to us by God, the same value placed on us by God.

Dear Lord, let our speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that we may know how we ought to answer everyone. Amen.

John Hayduk

John has been a lifelong member of Messiah. He has served various ministries at Messiah by teaching Sunday School and singing in choir. And today he serves as a Faith Mentor to Messiah's 3rd grade students.

Wednesday

April 2

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

—II Corinthians 4:8, 10

It may be my sin of being judgmental, but when I come across a televangelist, I can't help but think that something is out of kilter. Almost everything, from the suave, sophisticated preacher to the well-coiffed parishioners seems so perfect; so safe and so secure.

Paul's words in the text offer a contrast to this scene. The words "afflicted," "crushed," "perplexed," and "carrying Jesus' death in our body" suggest that the Christian life is a struggle. Even for the devoted Christian, it is a struggle to make sense of the tragedies occurring in the world. It is a struggle to come to terms with our own inadequacies.

It is a struggle until the "Crucified Christ" is remembered. He knows our struggles. He has been there; He has experienced them. More importantly, He took them with Him to the cross, so that when He died, our struggles and doubts died with Him; no longer able to torment us. His death for us has provided for our life in Him.

Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes, shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies; heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee; in life in death, O Lord, abide with me. Amen.

Jim and Marilyn Edwards

Jim and Marilyn have been at Messiah for over fifty years. Both are retired. They share a passion for the church's ministry to "the least of these my brothers and sisters."

Thursday

April 3

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. For we are what He has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.
–Ephesians 2:8-9

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to accompany our middle school students to Lutheran Memorial Camp, where they participated in a challenge course activity. The course had numerous cinder blocks sunken into the soil to serve as stepping stones. The blocks formed three wide rows, too far to reach by merely hopping from stone to stone. The students were given three boards they could use to cross the treacherous “radioactive nacho cheese” – think: “hot lava” when we were kids. By manipulating the boards, the students could get across, but it was very slow going. They really had to cooperate, moving only a few students at a time. One of our new students stepped into a leadership role, providing directions, ideas and advice to other students. This new student was the first to get across to safety. Upon arrival, the camp leader declared that he now possessed a “radioactive nacho cheese-proof suit.” He could freely walk within the radioactive nacho cheese without any harm, but not permitted to touch any boards. After verifying that he could indeed enter the “nacho cheese,” this student amazed everyone by crossing back to the students waiting on the other side, picking one of them up “piggy-back” style and carrying them across. These two students, now “safe” proceeded to do the same for everyone else. What a God moment! In this student, I saw the way Jesus comes to us in the midst of our messy radioactive nacho cheese lives and carries us through the mess. We often think we have to work our way to God through our own accomplishments, sometimes feeling fairly self-satisfied with our efforts. But when we step back we recognize that Jesus steps into our mess and frees us to do the same for others. Thanks be to God!

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for your willingness to enter into my messy life each day. Help me to recognize your grace in my life. Save me from the desire to puff myself up with my own accomplishments and give me a gracious, willing spirit to be present for others you have called me to serve. Amen.

Janice Silcox

Janice is the Faith Formation Coordinator and Intervention Specialist for Messiah School.

Friday

April 4

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

—Hebrews 13:2

The fellow who entertained “angels without knowing it” was Abraham. In Genesis 18 three strangers appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre. The strangers must have been hot and dusty as Abraham leapt up to greet them, washed their feet, and sat them down in the shade to rest. I can almost feel Abraham’s excitement as he asked Sarah to make cakes quickly while he ran to the herd and slaughtered a calf to prepare a feast. The three guys turned out to be the LORD and two angels, and they prophesied that Abraham would become a “great and mighty nation.” Did Abraham suspect that he was serving dinner to such special strangers? Even though Hebrews 13 suggests that he was unaware of their identity, Abraham certainly seemed to feel privileged to have dinner guests.

When was the last time I was that excited over an act of Christian charity? I generally think, “my house is a mess; there’s nothing edible in the fridge; and I’ve already got too much to do.” Even when I do buckle down and treat my neighbor—or the stranger—as myself, it’s done begrudgingly. Do I really have to? It generally turns out to be a positive experience; but, my goodness, it’s hard to get myself motivated.

From this passage I learn that I’m not confined only to showing hospitality to strangers. Hebrews 13:1 tells me to “Let mutual love continue.” Verse 3 says to look after those in prison as well. I’m supposed to encourage all these folks in the faith by sharing the love of Christ with them. And I’m supposed to be eager to do it.

Dear Lord: please deliver me from selfishness. Help me to realize that in serving others, I’m really serving you and furthering your Kingdom. Renew in me the joy of my salvation and the desire to share that salvation with those around me.

Lisa Daley

Lisa serves Messiah church in many capacities, as the bookkeeper for Messiah Church since 2002, Business Manager for the Pierstorf College Fund and sings in choir.

Saturday

April 5

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

—1 John 4:10

God's love for us is immeasurable compared to the understanding of what humans believe it to be. Human love can be fragile. Love is great when all is good, but when trouble comes, it can be fleeting. God's love is strong, patient, eternal, undeserved, unwavering, and compassionate. His love is selfless. This is the love that He wants us to exhibit toward Him, toward one another, and to ourselves.

We are shackled by our sin. God wants us to understand that He is well aware of that fact, and He wants us to know that there is another way. God wants us to keep moving forward, using the abundant gifts He has provided, and do what He intended for us to do. He loves us and wants us to be with Him in eternity. He did this by sending His Son Jesus, to become one of us to teach and enlighten us. Ultimately, Jesus would be crucified. His death was the payment for our sin so that all those who believe in Jesus can live with God for eternity.

Dear God, thank you for sending your Son as a sacrifice for my sin and for showing me what your love is. No longer can I use sin as an excuse or stumbling block for doing your will. The price has been paid. Amen.

Krista McNamee

Krista, an expert cyclist who has ridden coast to coast. She works at Eddy's Bike Shop. Krista came to Messiah in 2008.

Sunday

April 6

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me a drink; I was a stranger and you took Me into your homes; naked, and you gave Me something to wear; sick and you looked after Me; in prison, and you visited Me.

–Matthew 25:35-36

HYMN: “Build a Longer Table,” All Creation Sings #1062

Build a longer table, not a higher wall, Feed those who hunger, making room for all. Feasting together, stranger turns to friend. Christ breaks walls to pieces, false divisions end.

Build a safer refuge, not a larger jail; Where the weak find shelter, mercy will not fail. For any place where justice is denied, Christ will breach the jail wall, freeing all inside.

Build a broader doorway, not a longer fence, Love protects all people, sparing no expense. When we embrace compassion more than fear, Christ tears down our fences; all are welcome here.

When we lived as exiles, refugees abroad, Christ became our doorway to the reign of God. So must our tables welcome those who roam. None can be excluded; all must find a home.

This hymn brings to light what we all as Lutherans should strive for, a place/seat at God’s table for everyone. As the hymn suggests, God is not in the business of building higher walls to keep others out and to separate and divide. As Lutherans, we need to ask and answer these two questions: What needs to be done to build a longer God’s table? What walls, traditions, practices, and customs need to be re-thought to promote interest and allow others to feel comfortable and welcome in our place of worship.

Jesus teaches that welcoming others is comparable to welcoming Him.

Gracious Lord, we thank You for Your wisdom and guidance as we strive to be eternal disciples of Your Word. Teach us to better construct a longer table so that we may continue to invite followers to be seated at our growing table of believers. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Bob Trapp

Bob and Martha Trapp have been members of Messiah for over 40 years.
Bob is a steadfast deacon and presently on Church Council.

Monday

April 7

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.

–Galatians 4:4

“But when the fullness of time had come...” that phrase has always delighted me, kindling such anticipation! All at once, I am one with Simeon and Anna and generation upon generation of expectant believers, eagerly watching for The Promise, the Ancient of Days, the long-awaited Messiah. The epicenter of history lies in that moment that God deemed “full.” BibleGateway.com writes “God does nothing prematurely, but, foreseeing the end from the beginning, waits till all is ripe for the execution of His purpose.”

And, incredibly, His purpose was this – to change you and to change me from slave to heir. To make me a chosen daughter of the Almighty God and to share His inheritance with me! Not that I have done anything to deserve this, mind you. Rather, I have proven myself most undeserving. Yet, through His suffering and sacrifice He removes my ugly shroud of sin and death and shares with me in His own bright white robe. This robe is our adoption certificate, making us sisters and brothers of Christ and children of a loving Father. It gives us, as the Lutheran theologian Paul Kretzman writes, “a relation of the most intimate confidence and love between the heavenly Father and His adopted children.”

Abba, Father – By your waiting for the “fullness of time,” we see your trustworthy, watchful hand throughout history. Help me, through your Spirit, to rest in your hands, knowing that they are still weaving a masterpiece in this moment of history. Send your Spirit to all of us in these Easter days so that we might begin to understand the depth of your love for us and the riches of our adoption through Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Ellen McFadden

Ellen was nine when she joined Messiah with her family. She has now seen grandchildren baptized here, who now attend Messiah School. She was very active for a time in Messiah’s Sunday School ministry. Scott and Ellen are the owners of Radiant Bride in Rocky River.

Tuesday

April 8

For in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things by making peace through the blood of his cross.

—Colossians 1:19-20

Reconciling with someone who has hurt me is never easy. Even within my own household, I am able to reconcile with my spouse or my child, but it is often done reluctantly and doubtfully. I also like to throw in a heavy and exasperated sigh. The more dramatic and audible it is, the clearer I send the message – you should be grateful that I'm showing you such mercy!

In this scripture passage from Colossians, we are reminded that God is not reluctant to reconcile with us. Instead, God is *pleased* to reconcile Himself to us through the blood of the cross. What amazing grace! There is no heavy sigh and no second guessing our worth. God sends a very clear message – you are my beloved children and through Christ Crucified, we can be reconciled forever!

Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of reconciliation through Christ. Grant me your spirit of joy and love when reconciling with others. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Sharon Ratvasky

Sharon works with refugees with the Hope Center in Cleveland. Her family coordinates lemonade on the lawn for Messiah during the summer months.

Wednesday

April 9

For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

—Romans 14:9

Died and dead. Such final, and to some, dreadful words. Living day to day as we do, we do not think so much of death, unless confronted by it, whether personally or through such other means, like the media. As I go forth in my life, I have begun to think of death not as an end, but as another journey. Knowing that Jesus is my Lord now and will be so when I embark on my final journey is a great comfort to me.

My hope and my faith help sustain me in this life, and I know that I will once again be with those I love and who have gone on their journey before me. I know God loves me unconditionally and that knowledge gives me strength to go on day by day. I do not fear death. I have no reason to.

Lord, help me live my life so that those who know me will know your love and realize how wonderful you are. Knowing you love me gives me great comfort. Amen.

Sue Frounfelker

Sue has been at Messiah for over 40 years. Her three children attended Messiah School and Lutheran West. Now a grandmother of seven.

Thursday

April 10

But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.

—Ruth 1:16-17

Lent for me has always been a time of reflection. Jesus conquered what they said was unconquerable, death and darkness. I encourage you to sit with that thought, He conquered the unconquerable. The above verse is my confirmation verse, and one I call on often. While Ruth was speaking to Naomi in this chapter, I have always put Christ in the place for her. Lent can feel like we're wandering in darkness. We can look forward to the hope of the Easter promise, but we must navigate the forty days leading up to that day. At times it can feel like we are alone in our journey, perhaps wanting to turn back to our sinful ways when it feels like there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Looking to Ruth's perseverance, she followed Naomi, no matter what it took. We can be like Ruth and follow Christ no matter what our journey looks like.

Darkness comes into our lives often when we least expect it. We might feel distant from our loved ones, or like a dark cloud is hanging over us. We might feel alone on our life journey. I argue those are the times we can feel the closest to Christ. While Christ hung on the cross, he faced the ultimate sacrifice, death, for us. In that moment, He knew what was foretold, but even then, it was pure darkness over Him. While that resurrection promise was on the horizon, He had to get through the darkness to get there.

In our moments of uncertainty, we can hold true to God's promise to never leave us. Times of darkness may plague our lives, but God promises to be a beacon. One we can turn to even when it feels like all of the light has left the world. Remember that Christ conquered the darkness, and we will too, through Him. Follow Him.

Heavenly Father remind us that you are always with us, even in our darkest moments. Shower us with your grace and peace in the moments where we feel like all the light has left the world. Remind us that you are the light of the world and through you, we too will conquer darkness. Amen.

Allison K. Younger-Waugaman

Allison is excitedly starting her legal career. You can find her volunteering at many Messiah events with her husband Jared.

Friday

April 11

Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him.

–Psalm 62:5 (NLT)

In these days of change, these days of Lent we can join the Psalmist in knowing that we wait. We wait for God. We wait quietly, not complaining. We wait where we bring all that we are into this time. It is our Hope that keeps us waiting to know (understand) more of God's presence and goodness.

Most of us know the story of our redemption. Jesus' birth, Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem on a donkey, the sharing of the bread and wine on Maundy Thursday, the execution of Jesus on a cross, and yes....the resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ three days later. This is the promise of our adoption at baptism, sins forgiven, mercy granted, eternal life and love flows freely to all people. We know that, right?

In these unknown and uncertain days of a changing world, we do know of God's saving grace for us. In that grace and mercy is hope. Our hope is in God, God's plan revealed to us. We don't have to fear what might happen in the near term, how cruelty seems to be spreading as fast as a virus. Conflict and changes in society don't change God's promises. In our hope we are secure.

Holy and Gracious God, remind us to wait for you, and your plan of salvation. We want to wait for you with all that we are, in good days and bad days. Strengthen our lives and hope in you. AMEN.

Dale and Deaconess Ruth Mortensen

Deaconess Ruth provides pastoral care visits and coordinates the Eucharistic Ministers to our homebound siblings. Dale is an engineer and Branch Manager at NASA. He plays guitar and sings at our Saturday worship service, and cantors at Sunday worship. Messiah has been their home church since 2016.

Saturday

April 12

Jesus said to the apostles "All authority in Heaven and Earth has been given to me."

—Matthew 28:18

To me this means that Jesus has the same authority as our Father in Heaven, one in the same. God gave us Jesus to put all of our trust in Him.

It also means as Christians our lives should be a reflection of our respect, honor and obedience of Jesus and what God has set before us. God gave us His only Son to show us how we should live our lives. Verse 19 continues with Jesus saying "go and make disciples of all nations." We can impact lives around us; with our communities, workplaces, where we go to school, simply by living a God centered life which is reflected in our everyday actions and the way we journey through our lives.

I have been blessed to participate in many mission trips, both youth and intergenerational trips. My favorite memory was in Milwaukee Wisconsin when a high school student witnessed that his faith was changed during our time together.

Dear Lord, Guide us to live as Jesus did. Let our words and actions honor you and encourage others to live like Jesus did.

Trish Kvasnicka

Trish has been a member of Messiah for over 30 years. She has served on Church Council and as a Deacon for many years, Mission Trips are a passion for Trish.

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle.

—Psalm 24:7-8

Again, and again, God's Word and Spirit prompt me to ask, "Who is this King of glory?" I ask this question along with the psalmist and throngs who filled the streets of Jerusalem two thousand years ago. Our King of glory, our earthly yet eternal Christ, rode into Jerusalem an unlikely Messiah, son of a simple carpenter, humble and mounted on a donkey. Hardly the warrior king His people expected.

Because Jesus, the Son of David, rode through Jerusalem toward Calvary, suffering an agonizing death to win ultimate and certain victory over death for each of us, we can walk through the challenges presented to us each day with a confidence in Christ's victory won for us. In response to this psalm, I *can* lift my head, and you can lift yours. We need not hang our heads in despair, fear, or defeat. What does a lifted head communicate? A lifted head is aware. A lifted head is certain.

During this Lenten season, we have prepared our hearts and minds for Christ's sacrifice and victory. Aware of our own shortcomings and our need for a savior, we look towards Christ's triumph. Be aware. Be lifted up. Be open to the Messiah, and trust his presence in every bright and dark moment. Who is the King of glory? Our Lord, Jesus Christ, strong, mighty, and victorious.

Lord Jesus, holy and mighty, Open my eyes and heart to your presence in my life. Grant me confidence in your victory over sin, death, and the devil, and every single one of the smaller trials and evils I face each day. I know that you are victorious over (name the trials on your heart and mind today), and I praise you for your glory, might, and love. Amen.

Principal Helen Casselberry

Mrs. Casselberry has been Principal of Messiah Lutheran School since the summer of 2011. Her leadership has been a gift from God to us all, in church and school alike.

Holy Monday

April 14

I am poured out like water; All my bones are out of joint; my heart within my breast is melting wax. My mouth is dried out like a potsherd; my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; and you have laid me in the dust of the grave.

—Psalm 22:14-15

When the sun goes down and the moon has not risen, and clouds cover our world and no light of star and man can be seen, we have no sense of direction or proportion - nothing but darkness. Alone we feel isolated and lost and can go nowhere. It is as if we have lost all our senses. We cry out for others and no response returns. We feel poured out like unwanted water and our useless bones cannot move us. We lose heart as a fired statue loses its melting wax. We are in the shadow of death that rises over us and the dust of the grave can be tasted in our mouth. When no benefit of this life can be seen or felt, even there we will declare and proclaim your name in the midst of your people and your creation.

Praise the Lord all creatures; for He does not detest those without nor does He hide His face when we cry to Him. He hears and sees, smells and feels us in our agony. For the Lord our God knows all, is all powerful and everywhere present. He comes to us and gives life. Even in the grave He pierces death and brings light as He raises us in life.

There at his cross and ours we stand, and at his grave and ours we kneel. He as the creator of life and the redeemer of life lives. And because he lives, we also live. Therefore, we are bound to thank, praise and adore the Lord of the living and the dead.

Thank you, almighty God for your presence that we have life now and forever. Amen.

+ Rev. Bruce Hathaway

Pastor Hathaway served for many years at Lutheran Church of the Master in Bedford. He and wife Kristi attended services at Messiah until his death in 2023.

Holy Tuesday

April 15

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his suffering by becoming like him in his death.

—Philippians 3:10

Paul tells us just before this passage that following the law counts for nothing. It will not join us to Christ and keeping the law only leads us to death and destruction. Everything in the world, no matter what it offers becomes a stumbling block as it draws us away from Christ. As Christians we know that there is more than obedience to the law.

Today, some TV evangelists preach that God wants nothing for His children but happiness, good health, wealth, and prosperity. Paul's letter to the Philippians shows us a different reality for the lives of Christians. Paul himself was imprisoned and suffered for the sake of Christ and that his imprisonment was ultimately a gain for the early church in its growth and spread of the gospel. We also know that Christ Jesus humbled himself to take on our earthly form. Christ's road to Jerusalem was a road where He knew sufferings, pain and ultimately death on the cross.

We know that Christ meets us in baptism where our sinful selves are washed clean. He meets us in his Word and in His Holy Supper. In all of these ways we encounter the real and ever-present Christ. While we are never promised an earthly life free of suffering and pain, we know that Christ is with us and that He will never leave or forsake us.

Holy God, as we reflect on Christ's journey to the cross this Holy Week, help us on our earthly pilgrimage especially in times of suffering, to know and believe that we belong to Christ. We belong to Christ in His life, death and resurrection. Amen.

Nancy Mickan

Nancy is a consecrated Deaconess. Throughout her career, she has served as a Nurse, a Midwife, a Missionary in Papua New Guinea and as a Parish Nurse.

Holy Wednesday

April 16

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

—Luke 23:26

Simon found himself in a bad news/good news situation. A condemned man, bloody and weakened by cruel abuse, was carrying the dreaded instrument of ghastly and humiliating death without hope of escape. Suddenly Simon was forced to take his place. For him that was very bad news. Imagine what thoughts passed through Simon's mind as he lugged that heavy burden uphill in the footsteps of Jesus. He must have been thankful it was not intended for him, but for the one he followed. For Simon that was very good news.

Perhaps Simon's good news was the first glimpse of the good news revealed later to all. At the end, Simon was relieved from his position as a condemned man and became free to live again. In his place the one he followed was crucified, suffered and died on that very cross. Especially during Lent, I feel connected to Simon, as Christ crucified sets me free to live again. That is very good news indeed, for me and for you.

Lord God, in your mercy you sent your own Son to pay the dearest price for my redemption. Help me always to remember that all burdens I bear in this world shall be lifted from me, and I will be free to live again, by your grace, mercy and forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Bob Kreps

A local lawyer, Bob has played a major role in development projects both for Messiah and for Fairview Park. He received the city's Citizen of the Year award in 2015.

Maundy Thursday

April 17

*All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me,
they shake their heads; "Commit your cause to the Lord;
let him deliver---let him rescue the one in whom he delights."*

—Psalm 22:7-8

We come to the final 3 days of Lent; 3 of the most holy days in our church year. Maundy comes from the Latin "Mandatum" which means "commandment." As Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper He directed the disciples to "Do This" remembering Him. After washing the feet of the disciples he declared: "For I have set an example that you should do as I have done to you." We find comfort for sure in these actions of Jesus.

But our Psalm verses remind us of the discomfoting mocking words Jesus would receive from the soldiers in Pilate's courtyard and the crowds at Golgatha.

Early on we learned "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Taunting at the cross or in the school yard hurts! Careless or even crude use of our Lord's name and joking reference to Him in modern media and conversation mock His Divinity.

On this Maundy Thursday, may we remember both the loving life Jesus willingly surrendered to forgive us our sins as well as the life He lived to show us the way. Any mocking in His day or ours is rendered foolish. For in Him we find God's rescue, forgiveness and life.

*"May the words of my mouth be pleasing in your sight, O Lord."
Amen.*

+ Rev. John F. Uhle

Pastor Uhle joined Messiah in 2006 upon retiring from Bethany English Lutheran Church in West Park, where he was a strong advocate for Lutheran education. He contributed wonderfully at Messiah until his death in 2015.

Good Friday

April 18

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

—Philippians 2:5-7a

Whoa! Wait a minute! My Savior, Jesus—the Son of Almighty God who is Lord of Lords and King of Kings—became a “servant” (a “slave” in another translation)? Yes! He “emptied” Himself—put aside everything about His Divine Godness and became one like us!

One of the seven deadly sins is ungodly PRIDE—acting arrogant or having the feeling of being better than others. Who of us is not guilty of that sin as it creeps into our daily lives in so many ways in our relationship with others? If we are to be strong and steadfast in our faith as children of God, we must follow the example of Christ and “empty” ourselves of this sin of pride and live a life of humble service. This was the “mind” of Christ as He lived and died for every one of us. This must be our “mind” also!

Dear Jesus, Thank you for your example of true humility. Forgive my sins, especially those of pride and help me to live my life in humble service to you and those around me. Amen.

+ Ed Kirst

Ed came to Messiah as a young teacher in 1958 and became the second principal of Messiah School, esteemed and cherished. On retiring in 1995 he volunteered his service to both church and synod for many years. Ed entered the Church Triumphant in 2022.

Easter Vigil

April 19

Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.

–Psalm 22:30-31 (ESV)

The Psalms were Jesus' prayer book. When he prayed the beginning of this psalm, forsaken by God on the cross for us and for the sake of the world, he surely would not have stopped with "Why hast thou forsaken me?" He would have prayed the entire psalm, including its magnificent affirmations of faith in God for all He had done and what He trusted God would yet do for Him in raising Him from the dead. And though His disciples had nearly all forsaken Him too, He prayed in confidence that His "posterity," His disciples and His Body the Church, would serve God, telling generations to come, yet unborn, of the mighty and saving deeds of God for His beloved children.

Ours is another "generation" that has heard the story of God's amazing grace, and we are His "posterity" that serve Him now and tell of His deliverance.

Whatever weariness we suffer, Jesus has been there, IS there. What comfort to know someone knows what it is like! And He is there with us not like a bump on a log, but as a living testimony to God's victory, a sure thing. Our weariness, like death itself, will be swallowed up in victory. God has done it; God will do it. And tomorrow morning we will celebrate just that.

Deliver me, O Lord, from my afflictions and from my weariness about them. Increase my faith in your great victory and your promises of more to come. Amen.

Rev. Ronald Morgan

Pastor Morgan spent much of his career in chaplaincy at the Cleveland Clinic. On retiring, he served for ten years as Messiah's Visitation Pastor.

Resurrection of our Lord

April 20

(Mary) said to the (two angels), "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

—John 20:13b-17

Jesus said this would happen.

Over the course of three years, Jesus taught His followers to expect the unexpected. Jesus said this would happen.

Several times, Jesus raised people from the dead. He showed them God has power over death. Jesus said this would happen.

At least three times, Jesus claimed He must undergo great suffering and die, but on the third day be raised. Jesus said this would happen.

Jesus said this would happen:

- God loves the world – you, everyone, and everything
- Death does not have the last word – not anymore
- All things are possible with God – even the impossible
- God wants to be with you – so much that God came to you

So why didn't Mary know it was Jesus? Maybe Mary was like us.

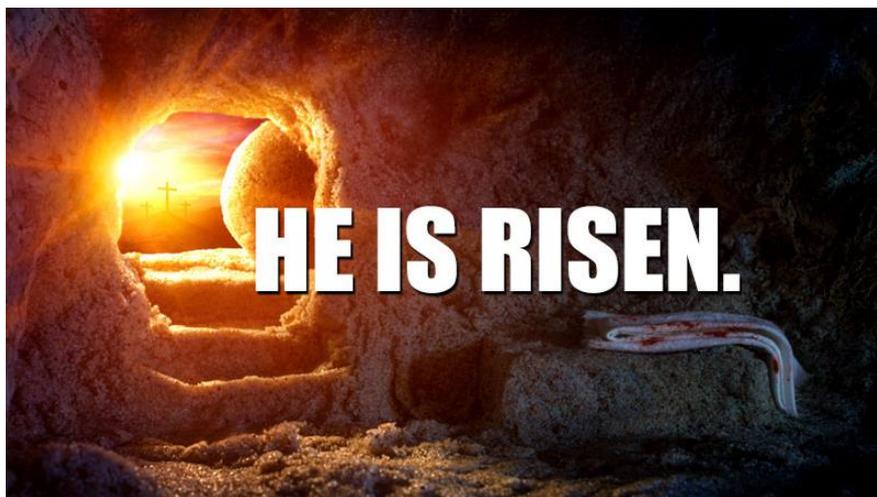
We too, get so wrapped up in our own grief, worries, and challenges that we forget we aren't in control. We too, have been so convinced of our own ability that we forget we are not in charge. We too, get so wrapped up in our will being done that we forget it is God's will that is to be done; on earth, as in heaven.

Jesus said it would happen. He is risen! It was done for you!

Lead me, guide me, along the way; for if you lead me, I cannot stray. Amen.

Pastor William Weidenbach Jr.
Pastor William began serving Christ's church at Messiah on
September 1, 2024 as our Senior Pastor.

Christ is risen,
He is risen indeed!
Alleluia!



MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH

Drawing in to Christ. Building up in Christ. Sending out for Christ.

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