



Lent is the liturgical observance of repentance, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving prior to Easter. It echoes the 40 days that Jesus Himself fasted. Most often, folks think of Lent as our time to "give something up," but truly it is our opportunity to add the right things on. While we may fast from a type of food, a distraction, or something else; our real observance of this season is found in the reprioritization of our faith.

During these 40 days, we invite you to join El Paso First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to journey with us. This devotional is a guide with a weekly theme for you, your family, and/or friends to explore scriptures, reflect on your life and society, and to challenge yourself in your faith.



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Adapted by jjs/nk for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) El Paso, 2026.

## February 18, 2026 - Ash Wednesday - Return to Me

Ash Wednesday is a reminder of our own mortality, our limitedness, that we are wholly dependent on God in every moment. It is an intentional inward shift away from our own lives and concerns, and towards the broader calls God has placed upon. As 2 Corinthians 7:10 reminds us, it is a time for “Godly sorrow” that brings about repentance and leads to salvation and further sanctification.

Watch for updates about Ash Wednesday Service on the church website. At home this Wednesday through Saturday, read any or all of the following scriptures with reflection activities and prayers.

**Scripture:** “Create in me a clean heart, O God.”  
—Psalm 51:10

**Reflection:** *Recite the scripture aloud. Repeat the words slowly and deliberately.*

**Prayer:** Merciful God, I confess the ways I have fallen short. Wash me clean and help me begin again. Amen.

**Scripture:** “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” —John 1:5

**Reflection:** *Light a candle. Say the names of those people or communities who you are worried about. Pause between each name.*

**Prayer:** Lord, shine your light upon those I name before you. Bring healing, peace, and hope where it is most needed. Amen.

**Scripture:** “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” —Genesis 3:19

**Reflection:** *Take time to clean mirrors or windows in your house. Recite the scripture as you wipe the dust and spots away.*

**Prayer:** Eternal God, teach me to number my days, that I may gain a heart of wisdom. Draw me close to You. Amen.

**Scripture:** “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him, and He will act.”  
—Psalm 37:5

**Reflection:** *Write or type a letter to yourself. What do you want God to shape or grow in you?*

**Prayer:** God, I give you this intention as a sign of my desire to walk with you. Shape me in these coming days. Amen.

**Scripture:** “Be still, and know that I am God.”  
—Psalm 46:10

**Reflection:** *Pause. Sit. Breathe deeply. In and out.*

**Prayer:** Speak, Lord. I am listening. Help me carry your peace and presence into the world. Amen.

## Week 1 - *Driven into the Wilderness* February 22-28, 2026 (Sunday – Saturday)

**Theme:** What drives us into the wilderness?

**Focus:** In the silence that follows the voice from heaven, Jesus enters the wilderness—not as punishment, but as preparation. Stripped of affirmation, comfort, and companions, he learns to trust God beyond feeling or certainty, allowing his calling to be clarified in the dark. This week’s scripture passages invite us to honor the wilderness as holy ground, where absence is not abandonment and where God quietly shapes faith strong enough to carry us forward into what comes next.

*Jesus often needed quiet time to recharge and think about important parts of his life.*



*Christ in the Wilderness | Ivan Kramskoi*

**Weekly Connection:** Each week we will have a 30-minute mid-week online connection.

Join us by ZOOM on **Wednesday, February 25, 2026 @ 6 pm.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84415486213?pwd=VSsrVm5kUGdyN1dOZ1ZlVDNCNlErZz09>

Meeting ID: 844 1548 6213 | Passcode: 788521

**Community Exploration - Saturday, February 28 (morning to lunch).** *Please check the church weekly e-mail for more specific information and to RSVP to plan for travel and meeting places.*

Join the congregation to explore a part of the history of El Paso County—historic San Elizario and the Mission Trail. What do we learn about the history, the faith, the resilience of this community as it first started in the “wilderness”? How do we understand and appreciate the current context of this community as part of El Paso? How does learning about our community’s early start help us to understand who we are today?

If you cannot join this event in person, pray for this special and historic part of El Paso county.

- About The City | City of San Elizario @ [cityofsanelizario.com/about-the-city](http://cityofsanelizario.com/about-the-city)
- El Paso Mission Trail Association @ [elpasomissions.org](http://elpasomissions.org)

### At Home Reflections

- Unplug. Take some time to go for a walk or to sit in quiet.

### Connecting with Scriptures

- Read one or two of the scripture lessons provided. Underline the ACTIONS (VERBS) in the scriptures. What stands out to you about what DRIVES us into the wilderness?

**Primary Scripture.** Matthew 4:1–2 (*The Voice*) *The Spirit then led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. After this fast, He was, as you can imagine, hungry.*

## Supplemental Scriptures

Mark 1:12–13 (The Voice) <sup>12</sup>After that the Spirit compelled Him to go into the wilderness, <sup>13</sup>and there in the desert He stayed for 40 days. He was tested by Satan himself and surrounded by wild animals; but through these trials, heavenly messengers cared for Him and ministered to Him.

Exodus 13:17–22 (The Voice) <sup>17</sup>After Pharaoh sent the people out, God did not take them by the coastal road that runs through the land of the Philistines, even though that was the nearest and easiest route. Instead, God said, “For if they see battle with those contentious Philistines, they might regret their decision and then return to Egypt.” <sup>18</sup>So God chose a different, longer path that led the community of His people through the desert toward the Red Sea. The Israelites marched out of the land of Egypt like an army ready for battle.

<sup>19</sup>Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath, “God will certainly come and rescue you. Carry my bones with you when you leave this place.”

<sup>20</sup>The people of Israel departed from Succoth and set up camp in Etham at the edge of the desert. <sup>21</sup>The Eternal went on ahead to guide them during the day in a cloud shaped like a pillar; at night He appeared to them in a fire shaped like a pillar to light their way. So they were able to travel by day and by night. <sup>22</sup>The Eternal did not remove the cloud pillar or the fire pillar; by day and by night it continued to go ahead of the people.

**Key Question:** What circumstances, choices, or divine nudges have led you into your current wilderness season—and how might God be present in that journey? Or, more simply, what has brought you into the wilderness season you’re in now?  
*Each day write a few words that come into your mind and heart.*

## Songs for Meditation - Chalice Hymnal and Contemporary Links

- **How Long, O Lord, How Long?** (Psalm 13). SovereignGraceMusic @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=KdUnNiktxxI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KdUnNiktxxI)
- **Wasteland.** Needtobreathe @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Se2C3v1a7OY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Se2C3v1a7OY)

**Family Time.** Find a place that is “yours” in a corner or another location in your home. Make it a place that you can retreat to when you need to be alone. It could be a bean bag, a comfortable chair, a yoga mat, or just a special place.

**Children’s Books.** *The Quiet Book* (Deborah Underwood)

## Week 2 - Encountering God in the Wilderness

### March 1-7, 2026 (Sunday – Saturday)

**Theme:** How do we encounter God in the wilderness?

**Focus:** The wilderness provides us time and space to discover that God is present in new and unexpected ways. Jesus' response to temptation resonates with Elijah's encounter with God's small voice and Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush. We hear God in the midst of silence and longing. In the wilderness we can turn down the noise, move from distractions, and meet God where we least expect.

**God continues to surprise us by being in places we might not expect.**



New Mexico , USA (2025) | Beth A. Rupe |  
used with permission

#### At Home Reflections

- Where do you need to go to find peace?
- Visit a place that you have not been before—maybe a new park, a tea shop, a museum. What do you notice about it? Sit and quietly observe the surroundings. Silently pray for the people around you and what they may be encountering in their lives. If you are not sure what to pray, try, “*May God’s peace be with you.*”
- Connect with a friend, family member, or someone from the congregation. You could call them, write a card, or email them. Or, perhaps meet them for a meal or coffee/tea. Visit with them about where you each feel challenged or where you find peace.

**Weekly Connection:** Each week we will have a 30-minute mid-week online connection.

Join us by ZOOM on **Wednesday, March 4 @ 6 pm.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84415486213?pwd=VSsrVm5kUGdyN1dOZ1ZlVDNCNlErZz09>

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#### Songs for Meditation - [Chalice Hymnal](#) and [Contemporary Links](#)

- **Here I Am, Lord** (p. 452). Catholic Christian Worship @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VG3890iLFHY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VG3890iLFHY)
- **Spirit of the Living God** (p. 259). Silo Sessions | Sounds Like Reign @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=En44FTqOifs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=En44FTqOifs)
- **Way Maker**. Leeland @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJCV\\_2H9xD0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJCV_2H9xD0)
- **Goodness of God**. Bethel Music | Jenn Johnson @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0FBb6hnnTo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0FBb6hnnTo)

#### Connecting with Scriptures

- **Underline** the PLACES mentioned in the various scripture readings. What stands out to you about WHERE we encounter God?

**Primary Scripture.** [Matthew 4:3–4](#) (The Message) **The Test.** <sup>1-3</sup>Next Jesus was taken into the wild by the Spirit for the Test. The Devil was ready to give it. Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting forty days and forty nights. That left him, of course, in a state of extreme hunger, which the Devil took advantage of in the first test: “Since you are God’s Son, speak the word that will turn these stones into loaves of bread.”

<sup>4</sup>Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: “It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God’s mouth.”

## Supplemental Scriptures (The Message)

### Psalm 63:1–8 **Comfort & Assurance in God’s Presence—A Psalm of David in the Wilderness of Judah**

- <sup>1</sup> O God, you are my God; I seek you; my soul thirsts for you;  
my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
- <sup>2</sup> So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.
- <sup>3</sup> Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.
- <sup>4</sup> So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.
- <sup>5</sup> My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips  
<sup>6</sup> when I think of you on my bed and meditate on you in the watches of the night,  
<sup>7</sup> for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
- <sup>8</sup> My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

Exodus 3:1–12 (The Message) <sup>1-2</sup> Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the west end of the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. The angel of God appeared to him in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush. He looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn’t burn up.

- <sup>3</sup> Moses said, “What’s going on here? I can’t believe this! Amazing! Why doesn’t the bush burn up?”
- <sup>4</sup> God saw that he had stopped to look. God called to him from out of the bush, “Moses! Moses!”  
He said, “Yes? I’m right here!”
- <sup>5</sup> God said, “Don’t come any closer. Remove your sandals from your feet. You’re standing on holy ground.”<sup>6</sup> Then he said, “I am the God of your father: The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.”
- Moses hid his face, afraid to look at God.

<sup>7-8</sup> God said, “I’ve taken a good, long look at the affliction of my people in Egypt. I’ve heard their cries for deliverance from their slave masters; I know all about their pain. And now I have come down to help them, pry them loose from the grip of Egypt, get them out of that country and bring them to a good land with wide-open spaces, a land lush with milk and honey, the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite.

<sup>9-10</sup> “The Israelite cry for help has come to me, and I’ve seen for myself how cruelly they’re being treated by the Egyptians. It’s time for you to go back: I’m sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the People of Israel, out of Egypt.”

<sup>11</sup> Moses answered God, “But why me? What makes you think that I could ever go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

<sup>12</sup> “I’ll be with you,” God said. “And this will be the proof that I am the one who sent you: When you have brought my people out of Egypt, you will worship God right here at this very mountain.”

**Key Question:** What voices or distractions in your life need to be quieted so you can more clearly hear God’s word to you in the wilderness?  
Each day write a few words that come into your mind and heart.

**Family Time.** Take time during a meal to talk about something that surprises you. Why does it surprise you? How does God surprise us?

**Children’s Books.** *Malala’s Magic Pencil* (Malala Yousafzai)

## Week 3 - Lessons from the Wilderness

### March 8-14, 2026 (Sunday – Saturday)

**Theme:** What does the wilderness teach us?



#### **Dead Hedge at Walter Scott Camp & Learning Center:**

*A dead hedge is a fence-like structure made from woven woody cuttings and vertical stakes that provides shelter and food for wildlife. It can be built gradually over time using prunings from hedges, fruit trees, ornamental shrubs, and other organic materials.*

**Focus:** Wilderness seasons offer opportunities to discover new perspectives, to reimagine what is possible, and to reaffirm our individual and collective identities – expressions of authentic faith rather than performative spectacle.

***Jesus trusted God in the wilderness, and we can trust God too.***

#### **At Home Reflections**

- What moments in your life have you felt lost or confused about a situation. As you look back, what helped you to get through that situation? What perspectives can you take into the future?
- Read a news article or watch a news clip from a newspaper or news channel that you do not usually watch. How are you challenged to see a perspective that is different than your own? In what ways do you find similarities?

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Join us by ZOOM on **Wednesday, March 11 @ 6 pm.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84415486213?pwd=VSsrVm5kUGdyN1dOZ1ZlVDNCNlErZz09>

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**Community Exploration - Saturday, March 14 (morning).** Please check the church weekly e-mail for more specific information and to RSVP to plan for travel and meeting places.

The church plans to volunteer at *Jardin de Milagro* (<http://jardindemilagos.org/>) located near Canutillo, TX. *El Jardin* provides fresh grown vegetables to the Kelly Center for Hunger Relief (<https://kellyfresh.org/>). If you are not able to volunteer in the garden, but would like to join us at the gardens for moral support, we welcome you!

#### **Connecting with Scriptures**

- As you read the scriptures, **underline** the test or challenges. For each challenge, **write** a word or task that could be the opposite or uplifting.

**Primary Text.** Matthew 4:5–7 (The Message).<sup>5-6</sup> *For the second test the Devil took him to the Holy City. He sat him on top of the Temple and said, “Since you are God’s Son, jump.” The Devil goaded him by quoting Psalm 91: “He has placed you in the care of angels. They will catch you so that you won’t so much as stub your toe on a stone.”* <sup>7</sup>Jesus countered with another citation from Deuteronomy: “Don’t you dare test the Lord your God.”

### Supporting Scriptures (The Message)

Deuteronomy 8:1–5 <sup>1-5</sup> *Keep and live out the entire commandment that I’m commanding you today so that you’ll live and prosper and enter and own the land that God promised to your ancestors. Remember every road that God led you on for those forty years in the wilderness, pushing you to your limits, testing you so that he would know what you were made of, whether you would keep his commandments or not. He put you through hard times. He made you go hungry. Then he fed you with manna, something neither you nor your parents knew anything about, so you would learn that men and women don’t live by bread only; we live by every word that comes from God’s mouth. Your clothes didn’t wear out and your feet didn’t blister those forty years. You learned deep in your heart that God disciplines you in the same ways a father disciplines his child.*

James 1:2–4 **Faith Under Pressure.** <sup>2-4</sup> *Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don’t try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.*

Hebrews 5:7–9 <sup>7-10</sup> *While he lived on earth, anticipating death, Jesus cried out in pain and wept in sorrow as he offered up priestly prayers to God. Because he honored God, God answered him. Though he was God’s Son, he learned trusting-obedience by what he suffered, just as we do. Then, having arrived at the full stature of his maturity and having been announced by God as high priest in the order of Melchizedek, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who believingly obey him.*

### Songs for Meditation - Chalice Hymnal and Contemporary Links

- **O God Our Help in Ages Past** (p. 67) Reawaken Hymns @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9USHRbF5vbw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9USHRbF5vbw)
- **How Firm A Foundation** (p. 618) The Petersens @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dx4elr4x5yo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dx4elr4x5yo)
- **I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For** by U2 @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=plEzQoD95c4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plEzQoD95c4)
- **The Mountain** by Jon Foreman @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMkkQzW1xOk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMkkQzW1xOk)

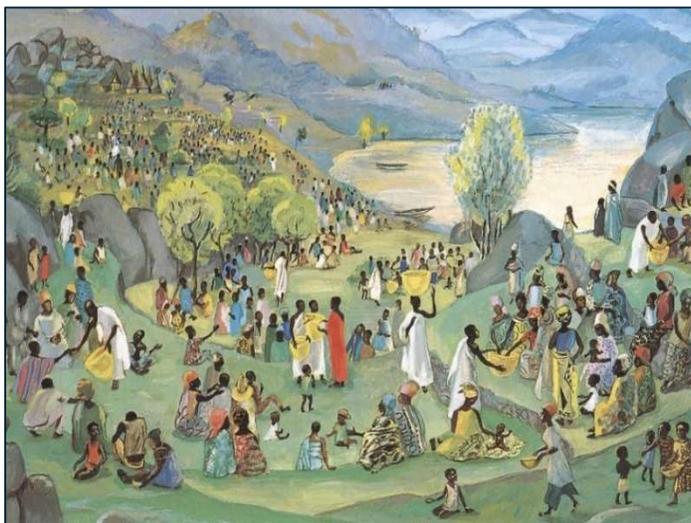
**Key Question:** What is the wilderness revealing about your heart, your trust in God, or your identity?  
*Each day write a few words that come into your mind and heart.*

**Family Time.** Have each person find a couple of items in the house. Put all of the items in an empty pillowcase. Reach in and try to guess what each item is only with your hands. What items were easy to figure out and why? Which were difficult to identify and why? When we face difficult times in life what can we count on to help us through?

## Week 4 - Leaving Something Behind in the Wilderness

March 15-21, 2026 (Sunday – Saturday)

**Theme:** What do we leave in the wilderness? (And how/why do we rejoice in response?)



Jesus Multiplies the Loaves | Jesus Mafa

**Focus:** In the tradition of “Laetare Sunday”, we are invited to rejoice not because the wilderness is over, but because God’s reign is already breaking in. From the mountain of temptation to the miracle of shared bread, Jesus refuses lesser kingdoms and reveals a kin-dom shaped by abundance, justice, and communion rather than power and control. In the midst of Lent’s honesty about idolatry and temptation, this Sunday lifts our eyes toward God’s holy mountain, where the slow, faithful work of love is already transforming the world—and where we learn to rejoice as we keep walking toward Easter.

**God helps us leave what we don’t need behind.**

### At Home Reflections

- Walk outside—what are signs of life that start to peek through?

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Join us by ZOOM on **Wednesday, March 18 @ 6 pm.**

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### Connecting with Scriptures

- In the scripture readings, **circle** the words or scenes where you see hope break through!

**Primary Text.** Matthew 4:8–10 (The Message) <sup>8-9</sup> *For the third test, the Devil took him to the peak of a huge mountain. He gestured expansively, pointing out all the earth’s kingdoms, how glorious they all were. Then he said, “They’re yours—lock, stock, and barrel. Just go down on your knees and worship me, and they’re yours.”*

<sup>10</sup> *Jesus’ refusal was curt: “Beat it, Satan!” He backed his rebuke with a third quotation from Deuteronomy: “Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness.”*

### Supporting Scriptures

Matthew 14:13-21 (The Message) **Supper for Five Thousand.** *When Jesus got the news, he slipped away by boat to an out-of-the-way place by himself. But unsuccessfully—someone saw him and the word got around. Soon a lot of people from the nearby villages walked around the lake to where he was. When he saw them coming, he was overcome with pity and healed their sick.*

<sup>15</sup> *Toward evening the disciples approached him. “We’re out in the country and it’s getting late. Dismiss the people so they can go to the villages and get some supper.”*

<sup>16</sup> But Jesus said, “There is no need to dismiss them. You give them supper.”

<sup>17</sup> “All we have are five loaves of bread and two fish,” they said.

<sup>18-21</sup> Jesus said, “Bring them here.” Then he had the people sit on the grass. He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples. The disciples then gave the food to the congregation. They all ate their fill. They gathered twelve baskets of leftovers. About five thousand were fed.

Philippians 3:7–14 <sup>7-9</sup> The very credentials these people are waving around as something special, I’m tearing up and throwing out with the trash—along with everything else I used to take credit for. And why? Because of Christ. Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant—dog dung. I’ve dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him. I didn’t want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ—God’s righteousness.

<sup>10-11</sup> I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it.

<sup>12-14</sup> I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back.

Isaiah 30:15 (The Voice)

*Listen! The Lord, the Eternal, the Holy One of Israel says,*

*Eternal One: In returning and rest, you will be saved. In quietness and trust you will find strength.*

*But you refused.*

[God invites His people to lean only on Him. If they will just stop their busyness and self-reliance, God will be able to take care of them.]

**Songs for Meditation** - Chalice Hymnal Hymns and contemporary links

- **Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee** (p. 2) @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=V\\_Nbl84EYeo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_Nbl84EYeo) (Disciples Chapman Choir) @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KP3XizrZHQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KP3XizrZHQ) (Sister Act 2: Tiffany Mann, Kyle Taylor Parker, David Rowen, & Melissa Victor)
- **When I Survey the Wondrous Cross** (p. 195) @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=80TpeVdW7HE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80TpeVdW7HE)
- **Rejoice** by Charity Gayle @ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VG5hMjwHfHQ>
- **Keep the Feast** by Keith & Kristyn Getty @ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxXnnHn3LFQ>

**Key Question:** What is God inviting you to lay down—an attachment, a belief, a burden—so you can move forward in freedom and faith and joy?

*Each day write a few words that come into your mind and heart.*

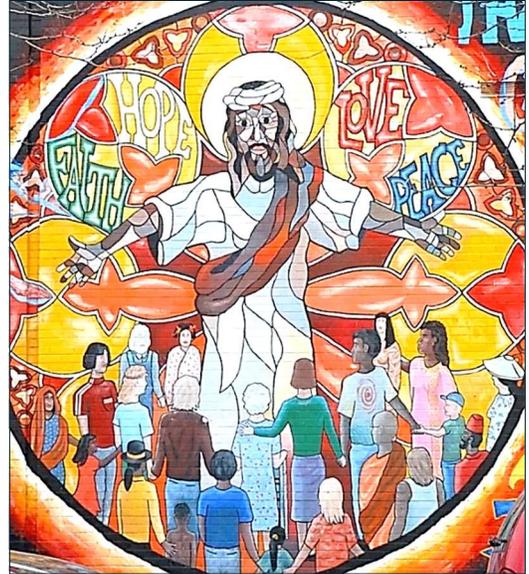
**Family Time.** Take time to prepare a meal together—maybe even a new recipe! Notice the spices and flavors that you add. What do you enjoy about the surprises of the different flavors? What would the food taste like without some of the spices and seasonings?

## Week 5 - Preparing to Leave the Wilderness March 22-28, 2026 (Sunday-Saturday)

**Theme:** How do we prepare to leave the wilderness?

**Focus:** The wilderness is not forever. It forms us, refines us, strips away what cannot serve us. And then, in God's time, the season shifts. Matthew tells us that after Jesus resisted the temptations, "the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him" (4:11). The moment is quiet but profound. Jesus doesn't leave the wilderness in triumph; he leaves tended, strengthened, and steady.

This week invites us to stand in that same threshold space. Not back in the wilderness, not yet fully stepping into the next call, but in the sacred pause where we begin to sense what God is growing within us. The wilderness has clarified something. It has prepared something. It has given shape to a new purpose. Now our work is to listen, to gather our strength, and to trust that what happens next requires what we have learned here.



Jesus Mural of Faith Hope Love and Peace |  
Chicago, IL

**Sometimes God is preparing us for something  
even when we don't see or realize it yet.**

### At Home Reflections

- Bake bread (savory or sweet!). Take a picture of the bread before putting it in the oven. As it bakes, savor the smells that fill the kitchen. As you take it out of the oven, notice how the bread has risen. Take another picture. Think about what has to happen to the bread as is baked... the ingredients, the stirring, the binding, the heating, the shaping, the final formation before it has been taken out of the oven. What do we have to do in our lives each day to prepare ourselves to be a good person, family member, friend or neighbor, co-worker, citizen?

**Weekly Connection:** Each week we will have a 30-minute mid-week online connection.

Join us by ZOOM on **Wednesday, March 25 @ 6 pm.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84415486213?pwd=VSsrVm5kUGdyN1dOZ1ZlVDNCNlErZz09>

Meeting ID: 844 1548 6213 | Passcode: 788521

### Connecting with Scriptures

- Read through the scriptures. **Circle** the words that demonstrate or give you hope!

**Primary Text.** Matthew 4:11 (The Message) <sup>11</sup> *The Test was over. The Devil left. And in his place, angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus' needs.*

### Supporting Scriptures (The Message)

Joshua 1:1-9 <sup>1-9</sup> *After the death of Moses the servant of God, God spoke to Joshua, Moses' assistant: "Moses my servant is dead. Get going. Cross this Jordan River, you and all the people. Cross to the country I'm giving to the People of Israel. I'm giving you every square inch of the land you set*

*your foot on—just as I promised Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon east to the Great River, the Euphrates River—all the Hittite country—and then west to the Great Sea. It’s all yours. All your life, no one will be able to hold out against you. In the same way I was with Moses, I’ll be with you. I won’t give up on you; I won’t leave you. Strength! Courage! You are going to lead this people to inherit the land that I promised to give their ancestors. Give it everything you have, heart and soul. Make sure you carry out The Revelation that Moses commanded you, every bit of it. Don’t get off track, either left or right, so as to make sure you get to where you’re going. And don’t for a minute let this Book of The Revelation be out of mind. Ponder and meditate on it day and night, making sure you practice everything written in it. Then you’ll get where you’re going; then you’ll succeed. Haven’t I commanded you? Strength! Courage! Don’t be timid; don’t get discouraged. God, your God, is with you every step you take.”*

**Isaiah 40:1–5** <sup>1-2</sup> “Comfort, oh comfort my people,” says your God.

*“Speak softly and tenderly to Jerusalem, but also make it very clear  
That she has served her sentence, that her sin is taken care of—forgiven!  
She’s been punished enough and more than enough, and now it’s over and done with.”  
<sup>3-5</sup> Thunder in the desert!*

*“Prepare for God’s arrival! Make the road straight and smooth, a highway fit for our God.  
Fill in the valleys, level off the hills, Smooth out the ruts, clear out the rocks.  
Then God’s bright glory will shine and everyone will see it... Yes. Just as God has said.”*

**Luke 4:14–21** <sup>14-15</sup> Jesus returned to Galilee powerful in the Spirit. News that he was back spread through the countryside. He taught in their meeting places to everyone’s acclaim and pleasure. <sup>16-21</sup> He came to Nazareth where he had been raised. As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place. When he stood up to read, he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written,

*God’s Spirit is on me; he’s chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor,  
Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set the burdened and battered free, to announce, “This is God’s time to shine!”*

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, & sat down. Every eye in the place was on him, intent. Then he started in, “You’ve just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place.”

**Key Question:** What new sense of purpose, calling, or clarity is beginning to take shape as your wilderness season begins to shift?

*Each day write a few words that come into your mind and heart.*

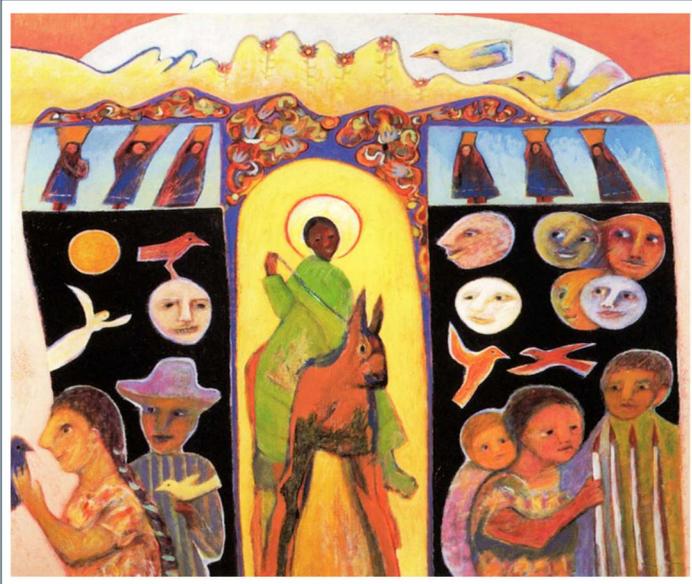
**Songs for Meditation** [Chalice Hymnal](#) and [contemporary links](#)

- **Lord, I Want to Be a Christian** (p. 589) Joy Alexander @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkG3WhsbxBY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkG3WhsbxBY)
- **Desert Song** by Hillsong @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAygSLB1DYM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAygSLB1DYM)
- **Build My Life** by Pat Barrett/Chris Tomlin @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z32HiCoFzLU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z32HiCoFzLU)

**Family Time.** Select a place to go—a park, the grocery store, to a friend’s house. Plan the trip together. No step is too small. Think about where the location is and how far (online map!), what do you need to take with you, what do you need to wear, who do you need to tell before? Anticipate how you feel or any excitement as you get closer to your destination. How do you know when you are almost there? What do you think God has planned for our lives? Do you think God is excited for you in your journey?

## Week 6 (Holy Week) - *What We Carry from the Wilderness* March 29-April 4, 2026 (Sunday – Saturday)

**Theme:** What do we take with us from the wilderness?



Guatemala: Procession | Betty LaDuke

**Focus:** The Wilderness journey brings us to the edge of the city, where a dusty road meets the shouting crowd. Jesus enters not as a warrior on a stallion but as a humble servant on a donkey. This moment is both celebration and confrontation, joy and judgment. The wilderness has prepared us for this tension: to see God's kingdom breaking in through humility, compassion, and courage.

Palm Sunday invites us to carry what we have learned in the wilderness into the heart of the world's unrest—to walk with Jesus through praise that soon turns to pain, through hope that will meet the cross.

***Jesus didn't come to fight or rule; rather he came to show love and peace.***

### At Home Reflections

- Set your alarm to watch the sun rise. What do you notice about the word around you that surprises you at this time of day?
- Watch the full moon rise this week (April 1). What do you see around you that shows wonder as the moon rises? What do you find in the night that you do not notice in the light?
- Watch the news... Who (or where) do you see humility, compassion, and courage in unexpected places?

**Weekly Connection:** This week we will connect in the following ways.

Join us by ZOOM on **Wednesday, April 1 @ 6 pm.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84415486213?pwd=VSsrVm5kUGdyN1dOZ1ZlVDNCNlErZz09>

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**April 2, 2026 - Maundy Thursday Service @ 6 pm. First Pres CHAPEL (to be confirmed)**

**April 3, 2026 - Good Friday Vigil from 6 am – 6 pm. Service @ 6 pm (to be confirmed)**

### Connecting with Scriptures

- God surprises us. In the scripture passages **underline** what is unexpected or is surprising. How does God surprise us now?

**Primary Text.** Matthew 4:12–17 (The Message) **Teaching and Healing as** <sup>12-17</sup> *When Jesus got word that John had been arrested, he returned to Galilee. He moved from his hometown, Nazareth, to the lakeside village Capernaum, nestled at the base of the Zebulun and Naphtali hills. This move completed Isaiah's revelation:*

*Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,*

*road to the sea, over Jordan, Galilee, crossroads for the nations.*

*People sitting out their lives in the dark saw a huge light;*

*Sitting in that dark, dark country of death, they watched the sun come up.*

*This Isaiah-prophesied revelation came to life in Galilee the moment Jesus started preaching. He picked up where John left off: “Change your life. God’s kingdom is here.”*

### **Supporting Scriptures**

Deuteronomy 6:10–12 <sup>10-12</sup> *When God, your God, ushers you into the land he promised through your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give you, you’re going to walk into large, bustling cities you didn’t build, well-furnished houses you didn’t buy, come upon wells you didn’t dig, vineyards and olive orchards you didn’t plant. When you take it all in and settle down, pleased and content, make sure you don’t forget how you got there—God brought you out of slavery in Egypt.*

Matthew 21: 1-11 **The Royal Welcome** - <sup>1-3</sup> *When they neared Jerusalem, having arrived at Bethphage on Mount Olives, Jesus sent two disciples with these instructions: “Go over to the village across from you. You’ll find a donkey tethered there, her colt with her. Untie her and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you’re doing, say, ‘The Master needs them!’ He will send them with you.”*

<sup>4-5</sup> *This is the full story of what was sketched earlier by the prophet:*

*Tell Zion’s daughter,*

*“Look, your king’s on his way, poised and ready, mounted*

*On a donkey, on a colt, foal of a pack animal.”*

<sup>6-9</sup> *The disciples went and did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They led the donkey and colt out, laid some of their clothes on them, and Jesus mounted. Nearly all the people in the crowd threw their garments down on the road, giving him a royal welcome. Others cut branches from the trees and threw them down as a welcome mat. Crowds went ahead and crowds followed, all of them calling out, “Hosanna to David’s son!” “Blessed is he who comes in God’s name!” “Hosanna in highest heaven!”*

<sup>10</sup> *As he made his entrance into Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken. Unnerved, people were asking, “What’s going on here? Who is this?”*

<sup>11</sup> *The parade crowd answered, “This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth in Galilee.”*

### **Songs for Meditation** [Chalice Hymnal](#) and [Contemporary Song Links](#)

- **We Are Marching (Siyahamba)** (p. 442). Forte Tones @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJQelsJQGFg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJQelsJQGFg)
- **Lead On, O King Eternal** (p. 632). Good Shepherd Band @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=K591U2g-tig](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K591U2g-tig)
- **Ride on King Jesus** (African American spiritual). Shalom Chorale @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfF7ERoKP4Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfF7ERoKP4Y)
- **King of Kings**. Hillsong @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQl4izxPeNU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQl4izxPeNU)

**Key Question:** What wisdom, strength, or spiritual truth do you carry with you now—  
and how will it shape the way you live and lead?

*Each day write a few words that come into your mind and heart.*

**Family Time.** Visit the zoo together—what do you notice about the young animals or plants? What signs of new life and wonder do you see?

**Easter Sunday - The Wilderness Blooms and Rejoices!**  
**April 5, 2026** (Joint Worship at 10 am First Christian with First Presbyterian)

**Focus:** The wilderness journey ends in resurrection, where desolation gives way to life and what was barren now blossoms. The empty tomb becomes the sign that God brings life from what seemed lifeless, hope from despair, and joy from sorrow. Easter proclaims that God’s renewing work cannot be sealed away, and that new creation is already breaking into the world.

**Connecting with Scripture.** In the scripture reading, **circle** the signs of **love** or **rejoicing**.

John 20:1–18 (The Message) **Resurrection!** <sup>1-2</sup> *Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone was moved away from the entrance. She ran at once to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, gasping for breath. “They took the Master from the tomb. We don’t know where they’ve put him.”*

<sup>3-10</sup> *Peter and the other disciple left immediately for the tomb. They ran, neck and neck. The other disciple got to the tomb first, outrunning Peter. Stooping to look in, he saw the pieces of linen cloth lying there, but he didn’t go in. Simon Peter arrived after him, entered the tomb, observed the linen cloths lying there, and the kerchief used to cover his head not lying with the linen cloths but separate, neatly folded by itself. Then the other disciple, the one who had gotten there first, went into the tomb, took one look at the evidence, and believed. No one yet knew from the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead. The disciples then went back home.*

<sup>11-13</sup> *But Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. As she wept, she knelt to look into the tomb and saw two angels sitting there, dressed in white, one at the head, the other at the foot of where Jesus’ body had been laid. They said to her, “Woman, why do you weep?”*

<sup>13-14</sup> *“They took my Master,” she said, “and I don’t know where they put him.” After she said this, she turned away and saw Jesus standing there. But she didn’t recognize him.*

<sup>15</sup> *Jesus spoke to her, “Woman, why do you weep? Who are you looking for?”*

*She, thinking that he was the gardener, said, “Sir, if you took him, tell me where you put him so I can care for him.”*

<sup>16</sup> *Jesus said, “Mary.”*

*Turning to face him, she said in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” meaning “Teacher!”*

<sup>17</sup> *Jesus said, “Don’t cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I ascend to my Father and your Father, my God and your God.’”*

<sup>18</sup> *Mary Magdalene went, telling the news to the disciples: “I saw the Master!” And she told them everything he said to her.*

**Songs for Meditation - Chalice Hymnal and Contemporary Song Links**

- **Christ the Lord is Risen Today.** Reawaken Hymns @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDDn\\_abC-N4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDDn_abC-N4)
- **Lord, I Lift Your Name on High.** The Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVQvWFMt3F4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVQvWFMt3F4)

**Key Question:** Where are you seeing new life spring up from what once felt barren?

**Resurrection Recognition.** Who, like Mary at the tomb, is calling your name—reminding you that Christ is alive and near? How does hearing that call change the way you see your world?

**Transformation.** What has changed in you through the wilderness? What new growth or purpose is God inviting you to nurture?

**Family Time.** Pause as a family. Pray for ways that you can bring hope to others.