

Lent 2025

Grounded in the Gospel



Those are your brown shoes on the front cover. You just bought them last week in preparation for this week's 40-mile hike, which you started today. The hike has been smooth in the hour since you got out of your car, likely due to the familiar sounds and manageable terrain.

Until now.

You felt your phone vibrate just a second ago, but despite the promise you made to yourself when you started the hike, you reach for it and look at the screen. You're surprised you're still getting a signal, and as usual, it's a work text. Annoyed at yourself, you quickly type your response.

You're thirsty, too, so you reach for your water bottle after returning your phone to its secured place and assuring yourself you won't look at it again. And once you take a sip of the now lukewarm water, you look up and see the landscape has changed. Yes, you've arrived at the wilderness - THAT wilderness - a place you've always heard about in the sanctuary during Lent, but a destination you really haven't had a desire to visit until recently. But, that pesky word, "transformation," kept reappearing in your thoughts, so you decided to let God speak to you in a different setting.

What's next? The decision is solely yours on whether or not you'll proceed and get some dirt on those new, comfortable shoes. Behind you is the life you already lead - a life of schedules, busyness, fatigue - and situations that still need to be addressed - hurt, anger, and grief.

You get to decide if you'd like to proceed into the wilderness with Jesus. If you do, it will be challenging, but it promises to hold a mirror in front of you at all times. This mirror will reflect a disciple who is willing to be transformed, a disciple who has chosen to walk forward and take hold of Jesus' outstretched hands.

Jesus says, "Follow me."

Ed Black - March 2025



March 9: Grounded in the Gospel: Core Behaviors

Scripture: Luke 4:1-13 (Common English Bible Version)

Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. There he was tempted for forty days by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and afterward Jesus was starving. The devil said to him, "Since you are God's Son, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus replied, "It's written, People won't live only by bread." Next the devil led him to a high place and showed him in a single instant all the kingdoms of the world. The devil said, "I will give you this whole domain and the glory of all these kingdoms. It's been entrusted to me and I can give it to anyone I want. Therefore, if you will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It's written, You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him." The devil brought him into Jerusalem and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, "Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here; for it's written: He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you and they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone. Jesus answered, "It's been said, Don't test the Lord your God." After finishing every temptation, the devil departed from him until the next opportunity.

Often Christians get caught up arguing over right beliefs, trying to prove ourselves correct and others wrong. This Lent, we'd like to shift the focus instead to Christian behavior and habits. What do you believe are the core behaviors - instead of core beliefs - that might show someone to be a follower of Jesus? how do followers of Jesus **act**? This Lent, Ellen and Ed will lift up a few possibilities for core behaviors for you to consider. But we invite you to create your own list of core behaviors that - when consistently practiced - will help change your head, heart and hands into a more faithful reflection of what Jesus taught and lived. Jesus said, "Follow Me!" **How will you commit to do that between now and Easter morning?**

Core behavior suggestions: Compassion, conflict resolution, embodiment/presence, generosity, gratitude, hospitality, prayer, Scripture reading, service, studying, truth seeking, worship



I Will Focus On...

Memory Verse: *Luke 4:8: It's written, You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*

March 16: Service

Scripture: John 13:1-16 (Common English Bible Version)

Before the Festival of Passover, Jesus knew that his time had come to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them fully. Jesus and his disciples were sharing the evening meal. The devil had already provoked Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew the Father had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So he got up from the table and took off his robes. Picking up a linen towel, he tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he was wearing. When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You don't understand what I'm doing now, but you will understand later." "No!" Peter said. "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't have a place with me." Simon Peter said, "Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!" Jesus responded, "Those who have bathed need only to have their feet washed, because they are completely clean. You disciples are clean, but not every one of you." He knew who would betray him. That's why he said, "Not every one of you is clean." After he washed the disciples' feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, "Do you know what I've done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you speak correctly, because I am. If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other's feet. I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do. I assure you, servants aren't greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them.

- **Serve:** Participate in one of our community cleanups! Check your e-news or the worship announcements for more information.
 - **March 15:** Forest Lake Presbyterian Church property cleanup (9-11 AM)
 - **March 22:** Gills Creek cleanup (10-11:30 AM)
 - **March 29:** Decker Collective litter cleanup (9 AM)
- **Serve:** Volunteer at the Decker Collective March Madness Watch Party on Thursday, March 20! Check your e-news for more information.
- **Serve:** Do a nice thing anonymously for someone who cannot pay you back.
- **Read:** *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Time is Now: A Call to Uncommon Courage* by Joan Chittister, *Strength to Love* by Martin Luther King, Jr., *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis.

Memory Verse: *John 13:15-16: I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do. I assure you, servants aren't greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them.*

March 23: Hospitality

Scripture: Mark 6:7-13 (Common English Bible Version)

He called for the Twelve and sent them out in pairs. He gave them authority over unclean spirits. He instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a walking stick—no bread, no bags, and no money in their belts. He told them to wear sandals but not to put on two shirts. He said, “Whatever house you enter, remain there until you leave that place. If a place doesn’t welcome you or listen to you, as you leave, shake the dust off your feet as a witness against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that people should change their hearts and lives. They cast out many demons, and they anointed many sick people with olive oil and healed them.

- The biblical Greek word for hospitality is **philoxenia** (see **Romans 12:13**), which means “love of strangers.” Does the word “strangers” change the meaning of “hospitality” to you?
- **Read** 1 Peter 4:9 and Hebrews 13:2.
- **Reflect** on the times someone was more hospitable to you than you expected (or deserved). How did you feel afterwards? If you wish, **journal** your thoughts.
- **Reflect** on the times when you’ve failed to be as hospitable to strangers as you would like. If you wish, **journal** your thoughts.
- **Make or buy** a baked good and bring it to a neighbor you do not know very well.
- **Write, call, or text** someone on the FLPC prayer list to let them know you’ve lifted them in prayer.
- **Write** a thank you note to someone who is not expecting one from you.
- **Pay** for someone else’s groceries, coffee, etc.
- **Join** the FLPC note writing team. This group writes notes to the FLPC family members throughout the year.
- **Introduce yourself** at FLPC! Before or after worship, find someone you do not know and say hello.

Memory Verse: *Mark 6:12-13: So they went out and proclaimed that people should change their hearts and lives. They cast out many demons, and they anointed many sick people with olive oil and healed them.*

March 30: Truth Seeking

Scripture: John 8:31-43 (Common English Bible Version)

Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teaching. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They responded, “We are Abraham’s children; we’ve never been anyone’s slaves. How can you say that we will be set free?” Jesus answered, “I assure you that everyone who sins is a slave to sin. A slave isn’t a permanent member of the household, but a son is. Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you really will be free. I know that you are Abraham’s children, yet you want to kill me because you don’t welcome my teaching. I’m telling you what I’ve seen when I am with the Father, but you are doing what you’ve heard from your father.” They replied, “Our father is Abraham.” Jesus responded, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do Abraham’s works. Instead, you want to kill me, though I am the one who has spoken the truth I heard from God. Abraham didn’t do this. You are doing your father’s works.” They said, “Our ancestry isn’t in question! The only Father we have is God!” Jesus replied, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God. Here I am. I haven’t come on my own. God sent me. Why don’t you understand what I’m saying? It’s because you can’t really hear my words.

- **Read** an article or listen to a news channel that you **DISAGREE** with and try to identify one or two partial truths that you hear. Invite someone with whom you disagree to talk to you about their opinions and thoughts and promise them that you will **only** listen (no arguing or disagreeing, but only deeply listening to see if you can understand their position). You may still disagree, but the goal is to understand another viewpoint.
- **Consider** how a partial truth can become an untruth if we ignore the whole truth. How are you are tempted to settle for a partial truth?
- **Consider** all of the actions that our current President and his advisors have initiated. How do you feel about the changes and the pace of change? How would you feel about these actions if you were:
 - A person who is tired of paying high taxes and wants more income
 - A millionaire
 - A poor, single parent
 - An immigrant who fled gang activity and lives in the United States without any authorization
 - A non-profit employee in Africa who no longer has the funds to feed malnourished children
 - A federal employee who has lost their job
 - A senior citizen who is living on a fixed income
- **Does how you feel about the rapid pace of change in our nation** shift depending on your perspective? How can truth, change, and compassion coexist in our everyday lives?
- **What are your core beliefs?** List 3-5 things you believe are always true for everyone everywhere? Do you live in ways that are consistent with these core beliefs? Is it possible for something to be true for you, but not true for everyone? How hard is it for you to talk calmly with those with whom you disagree?

Memory Verse: *John 8:31-32: Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teaching. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

April 6: Forgiveness

Scripture: Matthew 18:23-35 (Common English Bible Version)

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle accounts, they brought to him a servant who owed him ten thousand bags of gold. Because the servant didn't have enough to pay it back, the master ordered that he should be sold, along with his wife and children and everything he had, and that the proceeds should be used as payment. But the servant fell down, kneeled before him, and said, 'Please, be patient with me, and I'll pay you back.' The master had compassion on that servant, released him, and forgave the loan. "When that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred coins. He grabbed him around the throat and said, 'Pay me back what you owe me.' "Then his fellow servant fell down and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I'll pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he threw him into prison until he paid back his debt. "When his fellow servants saw what happened, they were deeply offended. They came and told their master all that happened. His master called the first servant and said, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you appealed to me. Shouldn't you also have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' His master was furious and handed him over to the guard responsible for punishing prisoners, until he had paid the whole debt. "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you if you don't forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

- **Reflect** on when you've received forgiveness. How did you feel afterwards? If you wish, **journal** your thoughts.
- **Reflect** on when you've failed to offer forgiveness. What is holding you back? If you wish, **journal** your thoughts.
- **Read** *The Shack, The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World* by Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu. **And, join our combined adult faith formation class on *The Book of Forgiving* after worship!**
- **Watch** *Unbroken: Path to Redemption, The Shack, The Parent Trap, Beauty and the Beast, The Lion King, Grumpy Old Men*

Join us on April 6 at 5 PM for a family movie night! Details to come.

Memory Verse: *Matthew 18:35: My heavenly Father will also do the same to you if you don't forgive your brother or sister from your heart.*

April 13: Palm Sunday

God's New Day

Scripture: Luke 19:28-40 (Common English Bible Version)

As Jesus came to Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he gave two disciples a task. He said, "Go into the village over there. When you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, 'Why are you untying it?' just say, 'Its master needs it.'" Those who had been sent found it exactly as he had said. As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "Its master needs it." They brought it to Jesus, threw their clothes on the colt, and lifted Jesus onto it. As Jesus rode along, they spread their clothes on the road. As Jesus approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole throng of his disciples began rejoicing. They praised God with a loud voice because of all the mighty things they had seen. They said, "Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens." Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!" He answered, "I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout."

- **Join us for a covered dish brunch** for all ages in the fellowship hall after the 10 AM worship service. We will also have an Easter egg hunt for our youngest disciples!
- **Make palm crosses** to hang onto your doors during Holy Week. The Board of Deacons will be hosting a palm cross workshop after you finish your meal in the fellowship hall.
- **Journal** your thoughts during the upcoming week as you journey to the cross with Jesus. Reflect on the core behaviors you focused on during Lent. Where have you been especially challenged? Where have you been comforted?

Memory Verse: *Luke 19:38: They said, "Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens."*

Lent/Easter Calendar

Wednesday, March 5: Ash Wednesday: Join us for a drive-thru imposition of ashes from 4-5:30 PM, and from 5:30-6:30 PM, we will have an Ash Wednesday observance in the sanctuary. There will be no regular service (with a beginning and end), but instead an imposition of ashes and an invitation to pray on your own for as long as you wish.

Sunday, March 9: Grounded in the Gospel: Core Behaviors

Saturday, March 15: Service Opportunity: Forest Lake Presbyterian Church property cleanup

Sunday, March 16: Core Behavior: Service

Thursday, March 20: Service Opportunity: Volunteer at the Decker Collective's March Madness Watch Party! Details to come.

Saturday, March 22: Service Opportunity: Gills Creek cleanup

Sunday, March 23: Core Behavior: Hospitality

Saturday, March 29: Service Opportunity: Decker Collective litter cleanup

Sunday, March 30: Core Behavior: Truth seeking

Sunday, April 6: Core behavior: Forgiveness

Sunday, April 6: Family Movie Night at FLPC: Details to come.

Sunday, April 13: Palm Sunday: We begin worship with a palm processional. After worship, will have a covered dish brunch, and our youngest disciples are invited to an Easter egg hunt in the courtyard. In addition, our Board of Deacons will be hosting a palm cross workshop after you finish your meal. You'll be able to make a palm cross to hang onto your door during Holy Week.

Thursday, April 17: Maundy Thursday/Upper Room Communion service (4-6 PM drop-in): Attendees will also be invited to participate in the same ritual that Jesus performed on Maundy Thursday: foot washing. This will give each of us a chance to be served by a neighbor AND serve a neighbor.

Friday, April 18: Good Friday sanctuary service (6 PM)

Sunday, April 20: Easter! The Lord has risen! We will have two Easter morning worship services. Our first one is at 7:00 AM in the parlor, and the second one is at 10:00 AM in the sanctuary. Join us!

What is...

Lent: The season of Lent is a time of prayer, fasting and self-examination in preparation for the celebration of the resurrection of the Lord at Easter. It is a period of 40 days — like the flood of Genesis, Moses' sojourn at Mount Sinai, Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb, Jonah's call to Ninevah to repent and Jesus' time of testing in the wilderness. (The Sundays in Lent are not counted in the time period between Ash Wednesday and Easter, as every Lord's Day is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.)

Ash Wednesday: The Lenten journey from the ashes of death to resurrected life begins on the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, which signifies a time to turn around, to change directions, to repent. The first step of this journey calls us to acknowledge and confront our mortality, individually and corporately. In many traditions, this is symbolized through the imposition of ashes — placing a cross on one's forehead. During the imposition of ashes the words: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19) are repeated again and again. We are to remember that we are but temporary creatures, always on the edge of death. On Ash Wednesday, we begin our Lenten trek through the desert toward Easter.

Palm Sunday: Passion/Palm Sunday begins Holy Week, a time in the church year when we remember how Christ gave his life in love for the world. As this service opens, the crowd waves palm branches, wanting to crown Jesus as king. But as the story of the passion unfolds, their shouts of praise turn to demands for his crucifixion; he receives a crown of thorns as he is handed over to be mocked and killed. The palm procession with ringing Hosannas symbolically foreshadows the Hallelujahs of God's promised future when the risen Jesus will lead his people into a new Jerusalem. Interwoven with such liturgical experiences are the stories of the passion of Christ. Thus, the eight-day week from Passion/Palm Sunday to Easter Day is framed by resurrection and death on one side, and death and resurrection on the other.

Maundy Thursday: On Passion/Palm Sunday, we celebrate the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem...and then turn with him to face the cross, where he gave his life for us and our salvation. Tonight we remember his new commandment to love one another even as he has loved us. We will also celebrate the Sacrament of Communion.

Good Friday: On Maundy Thursday, we remembered his new commandment: to love one another even as he has loved us. This evening, we turn to the cross, remembering Jesus' last words.

Easter: On Good Friday, we witnessed the tragedy of Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, where he gave his life for us and our salvation. Today, on the first day of the week, we gather at the tomb...only to discover that the stone is rolled away, and the grave is empty. Today we celebrate the good news of the gospel: Jesus Christ is risen!

Sources: <https://pcusa.org/about-pcusa/agencies-entities/interim-unified-agency/ministry-areas/theology-worship/worship/christian-year> and <https://pcusa.org/about-pcusa/agencies-entities/interim-unified-agency/ministry-areas/theology-worship/worship/christian-year/three-days>

We Belong to God

Question 1. Who are you? I am a child of God.

Question 2. What does it mean to be a child of God? That I belong to God, who loves me.

Question 3. What makes you a child of God? Grace -- God's free gift of love that I do not deserve and cannot earn.

Question 4. Don't you have to be good for God to love you? No. God loves me in spite of all I do wrong.

Question 5. How do you thank God for this gift of love? I promise to love and trust God with all my heart.

Question 6. How do you love God? By worshipping God, by loving others, and by respecting what God has created.

Question 7. What did God create? God created all that is, seen and unseen.

Question 8. What is special about human beings? God made us, male and female, in the image of God.

Question 9. What does it mean that we are made in God's image? It means we are made to reflect God's goodness, wisdom and love.

Source: Belonging to God: A First Catechism Approved by the 210th General Assembly (1998) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)