

## Third Week of Lent

### **Spiritual Practice: Practicing God's presence**

Practicing God's presence invites us into a heightened awareness that God is with us in all of life. In ordinary moments, we pause to remind ourselves that God is present and to look for His activity in our lives. Practicing God's presence helps us abide in Christ and in His love. Consider using daily routines to focus on Jesus.

For example:

- As you gaze out the window or walk in your neighborhood, acknowledge God's creativity and beauty.
- As you drive to work or begin a task, commit your way to the Lord.
- As you enjoy a meal or beverage, remember that Christ is the Bread of Life and Living Water.
- As you spend time with family and friends, view them through God's eyes of love.

## Monday, March 9

*“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, [Syzugus], true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”* Philippians 4:2-3

### **Names**

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We know the names of these gospel writers. We know Peter, Paul, Silas, and Timothy. But who are Euodia, Syntyche, Syzugus, and Clement?

Paul describes them as fellow workers, both men and women who were part of the early church and helped spread the good news of Christ. The believers in Philippi who received Paul’s letter probably knew them well and knew that they were faithful, diligent, and hardworking, since Paul says they labored side by side with him.

We don’t know the backstory Paul references. We don’t know the disagreement or misunderstanding Paul wants the women to resolve. But we do know what matters most—their names are written in the Book of Life. They are children of God through the redeeming work of Christ, and nothing can change that.

Once, Jesus sent 72 of His disciples out on a preaching tour and gave them power to heal and cast out demons. They must have had amazing experiences, because they came back super excited. *“Lord,”* they said, *“Even the demons are subject to us in your name!”* (Luke 10:17b). But the Lord reminded them that their work in the kingdom was not as important as their standing as God’s children. *“Do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you,”* He told them. *“Rejoice that your names are written in heaven”* (Luke 10:20).

As we begin another week in Lent, we can rejoice that our names, too, are written in the book of life through faith in our Savior, the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.

**Dear Jesus, Thank You that You know me by name. Amen.**

## Tuesday, March 10

*“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.”* Philippians 4:4-5a

### **Rejoice!**

What brings you joy? Long-awaited good news? The coming of Spring? Special time with those you love? Any of these things might cause your heart to well up with rejoicing. And rightly so!

In today's Scripture, Paul encourages believers to rejoice in the Lord. Other Bible translations help flesh out what this might mean for us:

*“Delight yourselves in God; find your joy in him.”* (J.B. Philipps)

*“Always be joyful in your union with the Lord.”* (Good News)

*“Rejoice in the Lord always—delight, take pleasure in Him.”* (Amplified Bible)

Can't you just sense the bubbling, overflowing kind of joy these verses express? And the reason behind the joy is our relationship with God Himself. It is as if Scripture is saying: Remember whose you are! That is where your joy comes from.

It's interesting, then, that the verse continues, *“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.”* Reasonableness is sometimes rendered as gentleness and considerateness. Perhaps that follows naturally, because when we are grounded in the joy of knowing we belong to Christ, we can extend His gentleness, grace, and kindness to others.

Who in your life needs a touch of grace today? Who could be encouraged by the joy you have in the Lord? Let it overflow!

**Dear Lord, Today I choose to find my joy in You. May it overflow to others, too. Amen.**

## Wednesday, March 11

*“The Lord is near; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”*

Philippians 4:5b-6

### **The Lord is Near**

The End is Near. That is what the sign said. You know, the one carried by the street preacher or the odd-looking guy wandering around downtown. It is meant to be alarming, to raise people's fears about what "the end" might mean.

By contrast, when the Apostle Paul writes that the Lord is near, he is not trying to scare us. Just the opposite. He wants to calm our fears, to soothe our worries. In fact, it is because the Lord is near that we can release our anxieties and turn to Him in prayer. Since God holds all things in His hands—our days and years, our futures, even the return of our Savior—surely we can entrust everything to His wisdom and His care.

That's exactly what today's verse invites us to do, and to do so without limit or exceptions. *“Do not be anxious about anything ... in everything let your requests be known to God.”* How are we to do this? "By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving." Supplication is a strong word. The Bible dictionary defines it as an earnest prayer or request, a petition expressed with confidence that God will indeed answer. And that is where the thanksgiving comes in. Even as we pray, even before we see God's answer, we give thanks as we anticipate what God will do. We know it may look different from what we expect. We know it will come on God's timeline rather than ours. But still we pray with thanksgiving because the Lord is near—coming again; and also with us right now.

**Dear Jesus, I lay these requests before You now [fill in your prayers], and I thank You that You will do what is best. Be near me today. Amen.**

## Thursday, March 12

*“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7*

### **The Protection of Peace**

God’s peace. The peace of the Lord. Peace that passes understanding. Perfect peace. Peace the world cannot give. These are just some of the ways peace is described in Scripture. The Psalms also offer word pictures for peace: birds sheltered under strong wings and warm feathers; a child at rest in his mother’s arms; sheep safe within the Shepherd’s watchful care.

Today’s familiar verse describes peace as a guard, something that protects us and keeps us the way a soldier would stand watch over an important place or person. Perhaps that’s why various translations say that God’s peace will: “guard your hearts and mind,” “keep your hearts and minds,” “protect your hearts and minds.”

These descriptions may make us think that to experience God’s peace is to be in a calm, restful, safe situation. And sometimes it is. But other times, peace comes to us while storms (literal or figurative) are still raging. Countless believers through the ages have discovered that God’s peace is real and deep and true right in the midst of illness and suffering, of darkness and despair, even when facing death. Perhaps you have experienced this as well.

God’s peace stood guard over His Son during His lifetime and especially during His passion, enabling Him to endure torture and crucifixion, empowering Him to love and forgive His enemies. What amazingly precious peace! No wonder this is called peace that passes understanding!

May God’s peace protect and keep you this day.

**Dear Savior, Thank You for loving me and dying for me. Keep me in Your peace. Amen.**

## **Friday, March 13**

*“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”* Philippians 4:8

### **Wise Thinking**

You are what you eat. That's an old saying, and there is some truth to it. If we were searching for a pithy way to summarize today's reading, we might say: You are what you think.

What we set our minds on, what we allow to occupy our focus moment by moment, hour by hour, day after day, shapes us in sometimes subtle yet profound ways. Perhaps you have experienced how negative, critical, or discouraging thoughts (about yourself, about others, about circumstances) can plunge you into a downward spiral. But when you counter those thoughts with more positive ones, you begin to feel uplifted and hopeful.

The Living Bible puts Philippians 4:8 in very practical terms: *“Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about.”*

Straightforward advice, but not always easy to do.

I wonder how Jesus managed His thought life. After all, He knew fully the frailties and fickleness of even His closest disciples. He knew the agony that awaited Him and the way His friends would flee when He needed them most. Nevertheless, He pressed on.

The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus set His face resolutely toward Jerusalem, toward the cross. His mission was always on His mind. He was always thinking about those He would redeem—you and me and all who will believe.

**Dear Jesus, I praise You for Your love. Thank You for keeping Your mind fixed on saving us all. Amen.**

## Lessons on The Path of Prayer from Alyssa Zeldenrust

Living with a chronic illness can shape our interactions with loved ones, the church, and with God. In a life of pain and medical complications, and the accompanying mental challenges, it's easy to lose one's voice and sense of spiritual connection. Romans 8:26 reminds us that when words fail us, the Holy Spirit remains close: "*We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.*" During those dark, wordless moments when my heart cries out, and my mind fails, I still know that God is always with me. He hears through anger and sorrow.

Sometimes God makes His voice so obvious, but sometimes that voice seems silent. Never stop praying. He hears you always. That is one of the only things in this life I can say confidently. With patience, that steady voice will grow stronger one day. Psalm 34:18 says, "*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*" God knows chronic illness affects loved ones, too, and He understands that the struggle to survive may be crushing at times. But there is always light.

Prayer for the ability to help others who suffer is a wonderful way to be His hands and feet. You can use your pain as a purpose. God will be with you every step of the way, and you may never know your full impact. Trust that God loves you and regards you so highly that He entrusts you with unique testimonies, whether you are someone living with health issues or a caring family member or friend.

I do believe in miracles; I'm just not particularly waiting for one. I pray for God to put my mind at ease and to send His children to lift me up. As members of Peace, we are blessed to be in a community where strangers will step up to help and pray, and where friends are remarkably loyal. I thank God often for this congregation.