



# Grace Lutheran Church

*Lent 2021*



*Grace Lutheran is a community that is:*

*Christ-centered*

*Accepting to Everyone*

*Compassionate*

*Connected*

*Empowered to Share God's Love*

## *Why Values?*

I spent my first eight months at Grace listening to you and contemplating these questions: Who are we? Who is Grace Lutheran Church? In my time of listening, I discovered that we are a unique body of believers with diverse political opinions, different musical tastes and an openness to God's spirit. Some of us are life-long Lutherans, and many of us come from different denominations and have found a home here at Grace. However, knowing this didn't help me understand who Grace is. What I have longed to discover is, given our differences, what are the shared values that we possess as a church that makes us who we are.

Susan Beaumont, writes in her book, "Leading during Liminal Times" that Core Values do the following:

- Clarify who we are when we are at our best
- Articulate what we stand for
- Explain why we act the way we do
- Guide what we teach
- Inform who, how and what we recruit and reward
- Guide us in decision making

I loved this! Core values are the first step of answering this question of who we are, to lead us on the pathway of what we will do next.

Grace had their values already up on the walls: values that had been part of your conversation for a long time: we worship, we serve, we connect, we give and we (are) Lutheran. However as a new person at Grace, I wondered what do these values really mean about who we are? Are they really at the heart of Grace Lutheran Church in Andover? Beaumont says: *Core Values are not descriptions of the work we do. They are not the strategies we employ to accomplish our mission. They are principles we hold.* They are the foundation of our work- the core of who we are, helping us establish priorities and make decisions.

So in order to discover, I listened once again by asking this question: tell me a story about when you were proud to be a member of Grace. Tell me a story about when Grace was at its best. This is some of what I heard.

*I remember when Crooked Lake Elementary had to evacuate their building and our church opened our doors and school was held here.*

*Grace pushed me to be bold in my faith, to take risks and do things that I wasn't sure about or was waiting till later to try.*

*I am so proud of how we serve the community. We have deep relationships with our partners through Grace 4 Rakai or Haiti and Family Promise. We put our faith into action.*

*The bakery in Rakai has made Grace (grace) known throughout the world.*

*I was personally invited to get more involved. We have friends here.*

*All are seen for who they are.*

*When my grandchild was born with health concerns, Grace prayed in support, and supported the family (financially), and people checked in regularly.*

*I remember feeling welcomed and at home at Grace.*

*We value individuality.*

*Emphasis on learning. WOW- a chance to get to know other people better and to learn more about God.*

*People intentionally reach out to you and ask you to share your gifts.*

*We work to be inclusive, where we are all seen as children of God along the road.*

These stories helped me and a small group of people to narrow down and word smith what I believe are the core values of Grace.

Grace Lutheran Church is a community that is:

- Christ-Centered
- Accepting of Everyone
- Compassionate
- Connected
- Empowered to share God's love

This list has already changed since I shared it. People have helped me see things we were missing or helped reword things to be more truthful. It is still a work in progress.

During Lent we are invited to a time of prayer and contemplation, a time to think and reflect about God and what God has given us through the gift and love of Jesus. I believe it is also a time for us to reflect on who we are and how to live out our faith, and

our core values seem like a good place to start. I hope you will join the conversation. Are these the right values for Grace? Do they describe how we are currently living and working in the community? Will they guide us forward in the best way to live out our Christian identity? This packet is an invitation to small group and family discussions. I hope that you will use it for prayer and contemplation. I hope that you will consider sharing your thoughts with me and members of our staff. I hope that you will wonder and question how God is leading us at this time and place, and how we might continue to bear witness to God's love.

Pastor Joanna Mitchell

# LENTEN DEVOTIONS

-Ash Wednesday-

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## Background (*adapted from Illustrated Ministry*)

*Ash Wednesday is the day in the church year where we make the beginning of the season of Lent. During this season, we are all invited to reflect on the things in our lives that may be causing us to be distant from God and distant from others.*

This year at Grace, the reflection of our distance from God and others, draws us toward repentance or turning away from the things that distance us. We will mainly focus on our congregational values as a way to draw us closer, back toward our relationship with God, one another, and our world. *Beginning around the 11th century, the Ash Wednesday service became a way for Christians to physically mark and remember the beginning of the season.*

*Historically, during the service, ashes are prepared from the palm fronds used during the Palm Sunday of the prior year as a way to point toward the Gospel message of the upcoming Easter. The ashes are mixed with oil and placed with the sign of the cross on the foreheads of the service participants and the words, "From dust you have come and to dust you will return," are shared with each person. This can be a startling statement to hear. However, the purpose is not to alarm, but to remind us that we have been created by God and that it is God who holds us in life and in death.*

*Perhaps it is because of our increasingly virtual world, Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent become powerful opportunities to reconnect with our families, friends, and our faith communities, and most importantly our Creator. The scent of oil, the scratch of the ashes, and the sound of song and Word all provide us with different ways to feel and understand the significance of the season.*



## **Ash Wednesday Activity** *(adapted from Illustrated Ministry)*

*Supplies needed: Labyrinth sheet, finger, an attitude of prayer.*

**For this activity, we will be using a labyrinth you can find on the following page.**

*Christians have used labyrinths as a means to have a multi-sensory expression of prayer and contemplation. Labyrinths look like a maze but are different from a maze in the sense that it is not meant to be confusing, but rather to provide space and time to reflect and pray while traveling the path. We will be using our labyrinth as a way for families of all ages to participate in this activity.*

*Please gather around a table or other flat surface in your home. Place the labyrinth in the middle of the table or surface. It will be helpful to use the labyrinth with 2 or more people.*

Designate one member to read through scripture. We have included scripture for Ash Wednesday only, but if you choose you may use the labyrinth each week and begin by reading scripture and the corresponding value. This activity may aid in your discernment of our Grace Lutheran Church Values.

As that person reads, invite the other to start by placing one finger at the beginning of the labyrinth. As the person reads, slowly trace your finger through the labyrinth. Once you reach the middle pause for as long as you desire in prayer before tracing your path back out.

### **Ash Wednesday: Christian Identity**

The Cost of Following Christ

Luke 9:57-62

*On the road someone asked if he could go along. "I'll go with you, wherever," he said. Jesus was curt: "Are you ready to rough it? We're not staying in the best inns, you know." Jesus said to another, "Follow me." He said, "Certainly, but first excuse me for a couple of days, please. I have to make arrangements for my father's funeral." Jesus refused. "First things first. Your business is life, not death. And life is urgent: Announce God's kingdom!" Then another said, "I'm ready to follow you, Master, but first excuse me while I get things straightened out at home." Jesus said, "No procrastination. No backward looks. You can't put God's kingdom off till tomorrow. Seize the day."*





Journey through the  
**LABYRINTH**



## Week Two: *Christ-Centered*

Written by Pastor Maria Markman

Reflection:

- What is your favorite story about Jesus?
- What does that story tell you about who Jesus is?
- What does that story tell you about how a Christ-centered life is lived?

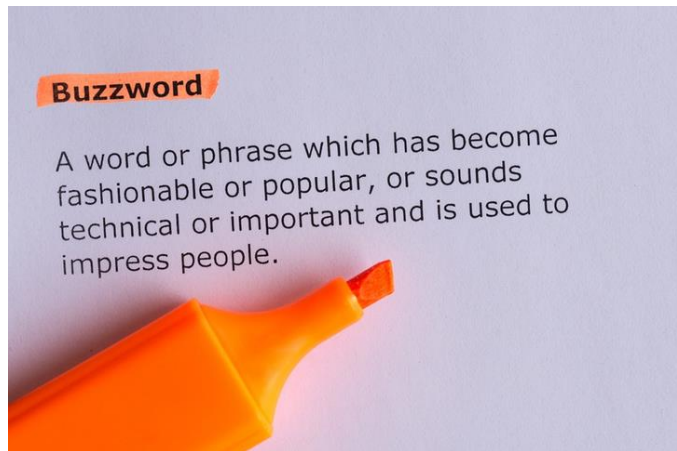
While on Instagram a few weeks back I came across an advertisement for new a bracelet. The bracelet had the same look as a WWJD bracelet (what would Jesus do) but this new bracelet had different letters: HWLF. The advertisement was enticing, so I clicked on the image to figure out what it was all about and I came across this story:



*A while ago I was looking at my WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) wristband and I wondered what my answer would be if someone actually asked me that question. "He Would Love First TM" was my immediate thought. Before labeling anyone as an "outsider" or letting what society said change His view of people, Jesus loved fully and unconditionally. With no strings attached He sowed seeds of love. With this simple revelation I began to realize, first, how often I can get things backwards or over complicate them instead of simply walking in love. Secondly, I thought how*

*many people might not know what Jesus is like or "what he would do." Maybe they think he would call them out or list off all the things they're doing wrong. But Jesus is so much deeper than that and we want the world to know what he's really like. So a couple close friends and I created the H.W.L.F. TM wristband! Instead of wondering what Jesus might do let's answer the question so the world can know who He is and what He's like.\**

Christ-centered was often a buzzword or popular phrase at Seminary. For those of us who were studying to be pastors or ministry leaders, saying our sermon was Christ-centered or that our catechism lesson was Christ-centered, or even that we were looking to lead Christ-centered ministries meant we didn't have to define what Christ-centered meant. We could just say "Christ-centered," no one would ask what we meant. We all assumed everyone knew what everyone else was talking about. Labeling something Christ-centered was a shortcut and often left undefined. But living Christ-centered lives really doesn't seem like a shortcut to me. Living Christ-centered seems to be the opposite of a shortcut.



An old Lutheran teaching about sermons was taken from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where Paul states, "*When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*" The teaching emphasized in each sermon, a pastor must preach Christ and Christ crucified. In the same way, on youth mission trips, camps, and in Vacation Bible School curriculum often teaches Jesus crucified on Thursday and resurrected on Friday.

Here at Grace, we describe Christ-centered this way:

*In the person of Jesus, God became flesh and lived among us demonstrating the importance of being in relationship with humanity. The cross is central to our identity, where Jesus opened his arms to all, proclaiming: "you are mine, beloved, forgiven and blessed." As God's people, we find unity in our diversity and inspiration to live as people doing the work of God in the world.*

Christ-centered isn't a shortcut. Christ-centered isn't only Christ crucified. Christ-centered is embodying the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus became God with skin on. Jesus humbled himself and while Jesus walked the earth, Jesus reframed what it meant to love God and love others. Mary proclaimed who Jesus was in the words of her Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56). Simeon proclaims it when as a babe Jesus is presented in the temple (Luke 2:34). And Jesus preaches it in his first sermon,

*He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the*

*blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, (Luke 4:18).*

What do you like about Grace's definition of Christ-centered? What do you dislike? What is missing?

Are we as a congregation living the value of being Christ-centered? Why or why not?

How can we more fully live into our value of being Christ-centered?

Pray together:

*Dear God,*

*Thank you for your son, Jesus. Thank you for his life. Humble us by letting Christ become central in our lives together. That Jesus' life be our example, showing us how to love you and love others. Help us find unity in our diversity and inspiration to do your work in the world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

\* <https://hewouldlovefirst.com/pages/story>



## Kid's Corner

### *Christ-centered*

*In the person of Jesus, God became flesh and lived among us demonstrating the importance of being in relationship with humanity. The cross is central to our identity, where Jesus opened his arms to all, proclaiming: "you are mine, beloved, forgiven and blessed." As God's people, we find unity in our diversity and inspiration to live as people doing the work of God in the world.*

Read "A Ruler from Bethlehem" in your Spark Story Bible on page 194.

- This story is about Jesus. What does the prophet Micah say about who Jesus is?
- If Jesus is like a shepherd who cares for his sheep, how should we act if Jesus is central to our life?
- Think of other stories in the Bible that tell you about who Jesus is and what Jesus did. As God's people we are supposed to do that work too, what does that look like?

*Week 3: Accepting of Everyone*

*Written by Pastor Joanna Mitchell*

*Read John 3:16 and 17*

*God so loved the world that God gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him, will have eternal life. 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.*

*Make a list of different groups of people that God loves.*

*Is there anyone that God does not love? If so why?*

*Is there anything you could do that would take God's love away?*

*Knowing that God loves the world so much, how should we act as a church?*

*What do you need to do to be accepted here at Grace? What do you need to do to belong?*

*When I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I had the hardest year of my life. It felt like when I was at school, that I could never do or say the right thing. I didn't know where I belonged. So many of my friends had changed, and the new ones that I had wanted me to be someone I wasn't. That summer I went on a trip with my church to a place called Christikon in Montana. It was beautiful. We went hiking and had bible studies. It was fun and a good place to be. But the thing I loved most about Christikon was in my small group, my counselor Steve wanted all of us to be ourselves and he listened to us completely. When I was with Steve I felt like I could just be myself and be accepted. Because of the way Steve cared for all of us, our small group started to accept each other. We still noticed that Nick couldn't pay attention very long, and we still would be annoyed Rebecca spoke out of turn, and others noticed when I also said the wrong thing, but because Steve lovingly led our group, we were transformed into people of love too. That week changed my life. I left camp much surer of myself. I made new friends the next year, and since then I have felt more comfortable being myself.*

*This is who I believe we need to be as a church. People who take notice of each other, people who accept people no matter what. People who listen. People who love and forgive.*

Today our value is accepting of everyone. Here is how we define it:

*You are invited to come as your true self, knowing that everyone else is invited to do the same. We honor and celebrate the cultural diversity of God's creation: all races and ethnicities, all genders, all sexual orientations, all abilities, all levels of education, old, young, poor, rich, conservative, liberal, single, married, certain, doubting, hurting, thriving, regardless of where you are on your faith journey. Each person brings a unique, valued and necessary perspective and voice to our community, allowing us to learn and grow in our relationship with God and with one another.*

What do you like about this definition? What do you dislike? What is missing? Are you included in this definition? If not, why not?

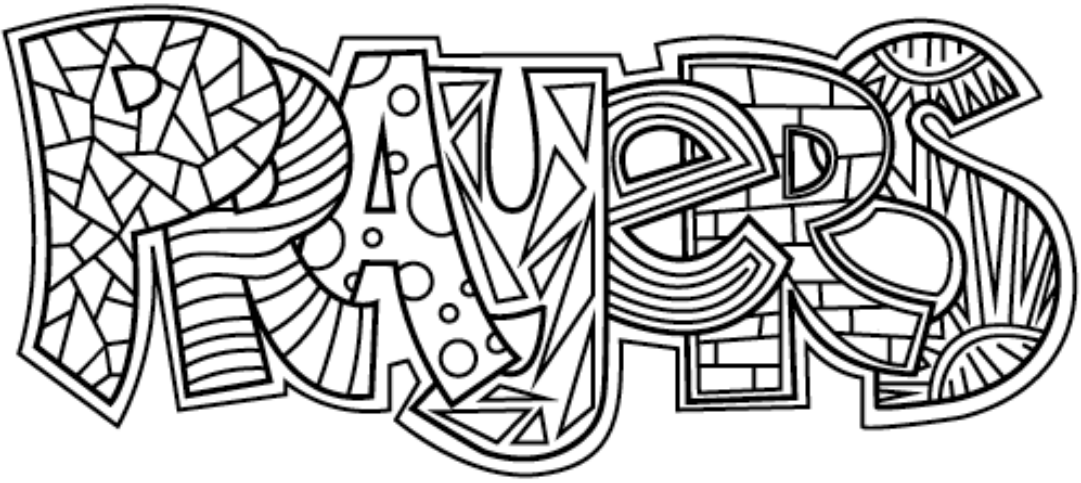
What image would you use to describe the kingdom of God?



Do you think in our church everyone is accepted? If not, why not? What can we do to be more accepting to all people?

Pray together:

*God of acceptance, you have made us uniquely in your image, rich in diversity with different ideas and experiences and yet you have named us all beloved. Help us be your people to accept others, to speak up for people who are left out and always be on the lookout for people who need to be welcomed in care. In Jesus' name. Amen*



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## Kids Corner

### **Accepting of Everyone**

*You are invited to come as your true self, knowing that everyone else is invited to do the same. We honor and celebrate the cultural diversity of God's creation: all races and ethnicities, all genders, all sexual orientations, all abilities, all levels of education, old, young, poor, rich, conservative, liberal, single, married, certain, doubting, hurting, thriving, regardless of where you are on your faith journey. Each person brings a unique, valued and necessary perspective and voice to our community, allowing us to learn and grow in our relationship with God and with one another.*

Read "Share God's Love" in your Spark Story Bible on page 326.

- Who is God's love for?
- What kinds of things can you do and can Grace do to help other people know that God's love is for them?
- How might we celebrate and understand our differences at Grace?

## Week Four: Compassionate

Written by Kristi Larson, Director of Youth and Family Ministries



Read: Matthew 5:7-9; 43-45

*Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.*

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

Compassion is not hard to find in the Holy Land. The Jewish religion and culture of the Israelis is rooted in loving God, and loving other people. Resiliency and goodness abound, even in their long, tragic and storied past. On the other side of the fence, of a literal fence, hospitality oozes out of the Palestinian people. If you ever find yourself in Bethlehem, you will be welcomed with love and hugs from strangers (who insist on calling you their friend) and perhaps even invited into their homes. They will make room for you at their table and in their hearts, asking for nothing in return.

But the goodness found in these people is overshadowed by a conflict<sup>1</sup> spanning decades and distrust and hatred that has been festering for generations. Here, people are taught to vehemently hate the other side. Young people are taught to fight for land, freedom, power and dignity. Most want peace, but very few are willing to give up everything for it. A war-torn country is an odd place to look for compassion, but it is often these places of strife that the Holy Spirit shows up in grace and mercy.

Among the fighting, bombings, war, and grief in this tangled conflict ultimately holds the stories of people who have lost family and friends to soldiers and bombings: children, siblings, mothers and fathers. Six hundred of these grieving Israeli and Palestinian families formed a group called The Parent's Circle.

*"Their common bond is that they have lost a close family member to the conflict. But instead of choosing revenge, they have chosen a path of reconciliation.*

*Through the different works of the [Parent's Circle], these bereaved members have joined together to take tens of thousands of Palestinians and Israelis on their personal journeys of reconciliation. It is often raw and always emotional. But out of these interactions, comes change. Not the kind of change that makes headlines, but a more personal and profound shift in perspective."<sup>2</sup>*

I was lucky enough to hear the life changing story of two members from The Parent's Circle, two fathers from opposite sides who lost their young daughters in this war, one at the hands of an Israeli soldier while walking to school and the other from the blast of a Palestinian suicide bomber. Now years later, they have taken the darkest hour of their lives and used it for not only the betterment of their communities, but the betterment of themselves. They have traveled around the Holy Land and beyond telling their story of forgiveness. Today the two men do not refer to one another as friends. Instead, they say "best friends."

On that day, two men, a Muslim and a secular Jew, taught me more about grace than anyone before. It is this compassion, forgiveness and longing for peace (above all else) that points me to what it means to be a compassionate person, and what calls me to belong to a Christian community rooted in compassion. I know it is possible for us, because somewhere in our world, two former soldiers who once couldn't even see the

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<sup>1</sup> For those unaware of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, it is too complex to explain briefly. What is important to know is that it has been an ongoing struggle for sacred and religious land since as early as the 1930s. Currently, there is a physical wall running almost 450 miles separating the two territories. Both sides of the wall hold significant religious spaces for Christians, Muslims and the Jewish people.

<sup>2</sup> Quote taken from the Parent's circle "about us" page on their website, [www.parentscirclefriends.org](http://www.parentscirclefriends.org)

humanity of those on the other side, now passionately tell others of the importance of forgiveness, the need for peace, and the ongoing possibilities for compassion.

Compassion is...

...caring for our neighbor and our earth.

...being forgiven and forgiving.

...extending God's mercy and grace to others.

...hearing the cries of God's children, bearing witness to their pain, and responding with love.

- What stories of forgiveness have you heard or experience? (Real or fictional)
- Why is it important to "bear witness" to the pain of others, even if we can't help? Why shouldn't we just ignore it?

*We intentionally and actively care for each other and the earth God gave us. We are forgiven and forgiving people, striving to live out our name as an extension of the grace and mercy God grants us, as we live and interact with one another. We pay attention and listen to the cries of God's creation when it is in pain and respond in faithfulness and care.*

- What do you like about this definition? What do you dislike? What's missing?
- In what ways are we, as a congregation, demonstrating our value of "compassion?"
- What can we do to further live into this value?





## Kid's Corner

### *Compassionate*

*We intentionally and actively care for each other and the earth God gave us. We are forgiven and forgiving people, striving to live out our name as an extension of the grace and mercy God grants us, as we live and interact with one another. We pay attention and listen to the cries of God's creation when it is in pain and respond in faithfulness and care.*

Read "Love Your Enemies" in your Spark Story Bible on page 274.

- What does Jesus say we should do if someone hurts us?
- What are things you can do to help other people?
- Who is one person that has made you angry or sad this week? What happened? Take a moment and pray together for that person.



## *Week 5: Connected*

by Debbie Jorgens

*"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another...." (Hebrews 10:24-25)*

One evening in the fall of 2019, I drove to the United Church of Christ (UCC) in Anoka to help with a Family Promise event. Grace was hosting the families that week, but on this particular night, all the parents were at UCC to participate in a financial education workshop, one of the requirements of the Family Promise program. My job that evening, along with Grace member Alden Riley, was to babysit about a dozen kids while their parents were in class.

All the families were invited to enjoy dinner together in the Fellowship Hall, and those of us who were assisting in one way or another were invited to eat with them. When I walked into the room, I noticed a young woman with four children sitting around a table. There seemed to be one extra space next to the mother, so I decided to join them, if they'd have me.

As I approached the table, my eye caught an infant carrier on the floor next to the mother's chair. I saw that it held a beautiful baby girl. I greeted the woman and her children and asked if I could sit with them. The woman nodded, and then her oldest son (who I learned was 11 years old) stood up, motioned to the open seat and said to me, "We'd love to have you join us!" Then he asked, "Can I get you something to drink? There's water and lemonade."

Over the course of the next 1/2 hour or so, I enjoyed hearing from each of the kids as they talked about school, their favorite subjects, and what kinds of things interested them. They were, without question, the most polite kids I have ever met in my entire life. While the children were talking and laughing amongst themselves and the baby was fast asleep in her carrier, I had a chance to hear a little of their mother's story. Tanya's husband had left her, very abruptly, just several months earlier. She hadn't seen it coming at all and frankly, although Tanya was very composed, she still seemed a little stunned as she spoke about it. She went on to say how grateful she was to have found her way into the Family Promise program and for all the people who were so supportive of her and her children. She felt "blessed."

As we ate, I was able to share a bit of my story with Tanya - how years ago I, too, suddenly found myself in the role of a single mother. I told her about my three

wonderful, but very rambunctious young boys, and how the journey of being a single parent, while not at all easy, was nevertheless fulfilling and at times, so joyful.

Glancing around the table, I also told her that never had I seen such young children with such impeccable manners. Her eyes lit up and she said, "Thank you! Yes, they're *really* good kids. But of course, they have their moments." (It was just about then that her 9-year-old asked if I would like him to take my plate and silverware to the kitchen.)

Suddenly Tanya asked, "How *did* you do it - as a single parent, I mean?" "By the grace of God," I answered, "one day at a time, with a lot of prayer and the support of others along the way." And then, just as we were about to get up from the table she leaned over and said, "Thank you so much for telling me about your own situation. I feel so encouraged knowing that you made it through and that your sons are all doing well. It gives me hope that my kids and I are going to be okay."

I had arrived at church that night thinking my sole purpose in being there was to care for a bunch of kids whose parents were in a workshop. Little did I know that God would connect me with a young woman who needed a few words of encouragement, as I once did, from someone who had walked down a similar road.

Reflection:

- When has God surprised you by connecting you with someone in a way you had never anticipated?
- When have you felt most connected to the community of Grace or to another faith community? What contributed to that feeling?

### ***Core Value: Connected***

*As people of faith, we recognize the importance of a strong relationship with God, knowing that it transforms our hearts, minds and spirits, and that it inspires our love and care of our neighbors. Relationships are vital within our church community and are essential in our local and global partnerships, as well. We value not only caring for others, but really knowing and learning from each other. By building strong relationships we can deepen our faith, be transformed in our thinking and grow as individuals and as a community.*

What image or story comes to mind when you think of being connected to others – whether within Grace or out in the world?

What can we do to help ensure that everyone feels connected within this faith community?

How can we build or strengthen relationships outside the walls of Grace?

Pray together:

*God of faithfulness, we give you thanks for the many ways you make your presence known to us – in creation, in the love of family and friends, in the gift of others who walk with us in faith. Strengthen our relationships, lead us to those who are feeling disconnected, and give us the courage to follow wherever you lead, trusting that you can use us in ways we can't even begin to imagine for the sake of the world you love so much. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



A Prayer for...

## Kid's corner:

### *Connected*

*As people of faith, we recognize the importance of a strong relationship with God, knowing that it transforms our hearts, minds and spirits, and that it inspires our love and care of our neighbors. Relationships are vital within our church community and are essential in our local and global partnerships, as well. We value not only caring for others, but really knowing and learning from each other. By building strong relationships we can deepen our faith, be transformed in our thinking and grow as individuals and as a community.*

Read "Many Members, One Body" in your Spark Story Bible on page 542.

- What does this story say about the church?
- Who are we connected to? This story focuses a lot on people and our relationships with one another, at Grace we are connected to each other, to the cities we live in, and to our mission partners around the world. What connection do you know about the most? Which do you want to know more about?
- We are also connected to the world we live in. How might Grace show we are connected to the earth and care for our earth?
- How can Grace strengthen our connections?

## ***Week 6: Empowered to Share God's Love***

By Pastor Maria Markman

Read Ephesians 1: 11-14

*In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.*

### Reflection

I still remember the first time I saw the Lion King Musical. It was during the Lion King's world premiere in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1997. That's right, the musical adaptation of the hit Disney animated film premiered right here in Minneapolis at the Orpheum Theatre. As the lights went down drummers began on either side of the stage; they were lit from below casting giant shadows around the room. I remember not only hearing the music that night but feeling it.

Years later I got to perform songs from the Lion King in a world outreach music tour with the Young Americans. We taught a medley of Lion King songs as the finale in our program. As we taught, a single drummer would keep the beat. We would invite the children we were teaching to begin by breathing together. Beat, beat, breathe in, beat, beat, breathe out. This drum became our collective heartbeat. Listening to the drum, and breathing together, our hearts began to beat as one. Then we would start to sing:

*He lives in you/ He lives in me/ He watches over/ Everything you see/ Into the water/  
Into the truth/ In your reflection/ He lives in you.*



In the musical this song is sung in both acts. In the first Act, Mufasa sings it to young Simba changing the lyrics slightly to: *they* live in you. Mufasa recalls the great kings of the past, Simba's ancestors. As they recall the great ancestors of the past, they

remember they are never alone. That they have their stories to lead them. In the same way, in Act Two, Rafiki summons Mufasa's spirit. During this scene, Simba realizes his own responsibility and he decides that he will return home and take his place as king.

Read 1 John 4: 9 -12

*God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 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. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

Empowered to share God's love is our very own "He lives in you" moment. That moment when we realize the ancestors of our faith are with us. All the prophets and poets, the people of God and their lessons we read in the Bible are not merely stories but revelations of God's love throughout the history of the world. Empowered to share God's love is that moment when we realize the God's love continues now and forever and expands beyond our imagination. Sharing this love can be a daunting task, one that pushes us beyond our comfort zones, challenging and transforming us. Simba could have easily continued the *Hakuna Matata*, "no worries" life but he knew he had inherited a kingdom and responsibility to it. We, too, are inheritors. Simba doesn't just go back to Pride rock changed, he becomes a leader who talks the talk and walks the walk. Through the Holy Spirit, we are changed, recognizing in our very breath and in the beating of our hearts -God is with us. Our transformation can be seen through words and actions – being the hands, feet, and heart of Jesus. Our final value, *empowered to share God's love* is a culmination of our values as we live Christ-centered, accepting, compassionate, and connected lives, we are sent out, empowered to share God's love.

- We seek to know Jesus, allowing his life and teachings to reveal and expand our understanding of God's love.
- We invite others and make room for all at the table.
- We extend compassion and forgiveness on the road to reconciliation.
- We share our stories and connect with others along the way.

Read Acts 2: 43-47

*Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they*

*would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

Our final value is "empowered to share God's love." Here is how we define it:

*The Holy Spirit is blowing wildly in our church and pushing us out into the world to share the good news of, and be the hands, feet and heart of Jesus. God will not leave us as we are but will transform us by moving us out of our comfort zones, challenging us to take risks and inspiring us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in his radical walk of proclamation, invitation, acceptance, love and care for the world.*

What do you like about this definition? What do you dislike? What is missing? If not, why not?

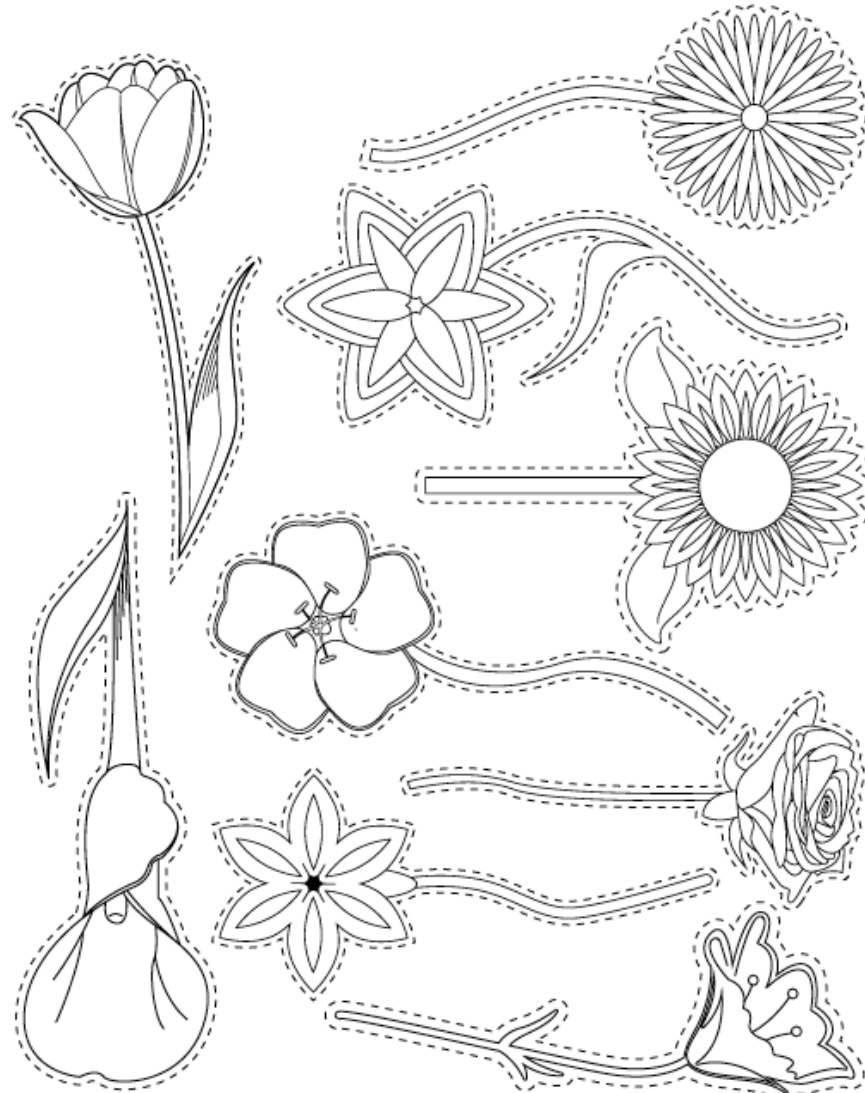
What does it mean to be empowered?

What does "empowered to share God's love" look like in action?

Pray together:

*Mighty God, you breathe life into our bones, and your Spirit brings truth to the world. Send us this Spirit, transform us by your truth that we might following you the footsteps of Jesus in his radical walk of proclamation, invitation, acceptance, love and care for the world. In the name of the triune God, let it be so, Amen.*





Kid's corner:

**Empowered to Share God's Love**

*The Holy Spirit is blowing wildly in our church and pushing us out into the world to share the good news of, and be the hands, feet and heart of Jesus. God will not leave us as we are but will transform us by moving us out of our comfort zones, challenging us to take risks and inspiring us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in his radical walk of proclamation, invitation, acceptance, love and care for the world.*

Read "Mary Anoints Jesus" in your Spark Story Bible on page 444.

- What is God's love like?
- How did Mary's perfume act like God's love?
- What does empowered mean?
- Empowered by the Holy Spirit, how can we live out God's love at Grace Lutheran Church? How can you share God's love?

## Holy Week

### **A Reflection from Illustrated Ministry**

*This Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week in the Christian faith. Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday and includes the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples, Jesus' death on Friday, and his resurrection on Easter Sunday. Many Christian traditions have several special services during this time including Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. Each service shares the story of what happened to Jesus during his final week.*

*Dearest Jesus,*

*Your Holy Week is filled with so many emotions. From pure joy of a Sunday Celebration to the loneliness of your final Friday. We take this journey with you, remembering to be mindful of the seriousness of your choice and recognizing the boundlessness of your grace and love. Help us to be prepared and present for all you will reveal to us this week. Amen.*

### **Palm Sunday**

*Palm Sunday is a special Sunday where we tell the story of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. Crowds of people welcomed and celebrated Jesus and shouted, "Hosanna!" They laid palm leaves and clothes on the path as Jesus passed by. Many congregations act out this event by inviting people to carry palms and walk into and around the sanctuary... [What makes this event special and] helpful for our lives is that it is vivid picture of what prayer can be like in a large group. Sometimes we think that prayer is something that we can only do quietly, with our heads bowed and eyes closed. Our Palm Sunday story tells us something very different. Palm Sunday is a parade of prayer, with bright colors, sounds, and smells. The story invites us to think of ways that we can approach God together as God's family, filled with joy and energy, in a way that encourages and lifts each of us up in our own faith journeys.*

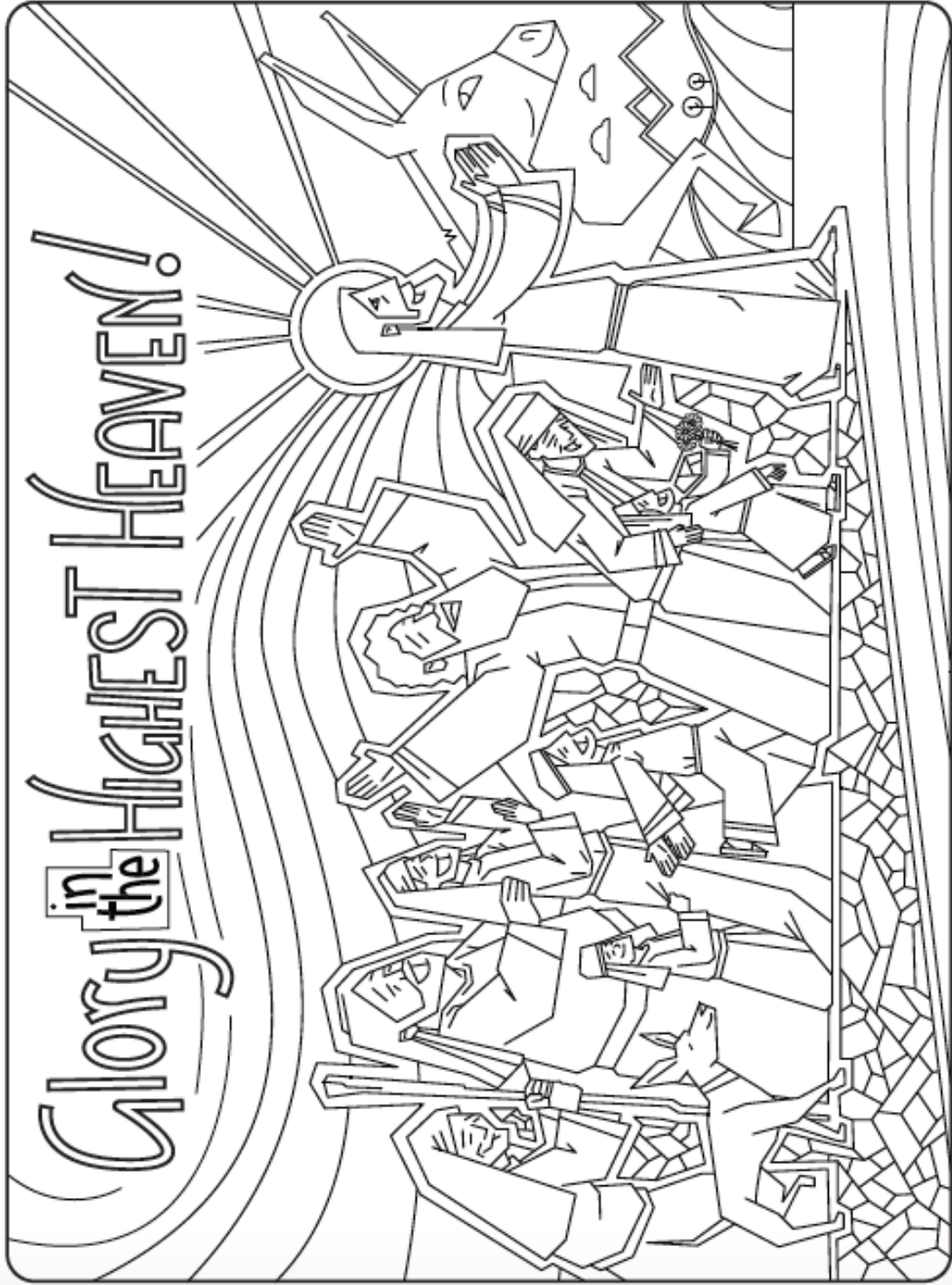
Read the story of Palm Sunday

Matthew 21:1-11

Mark 11:1-11

Luke 19:28-40

Or in your Spark Story Bible on page 454.



### *Maundy Thursday*

This night marks the ending of our Lenten journey. And the beginning of the three days where Christians all around the world will celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection. On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus shared a meal with his followers. Jesus will give them a new commandment to love one another. Jesus will show this love through his words and actions. As he washes his disciples' feet, and breaks bread and blesses the wine, sharing them with his friends. On this night we remember the invitation to each of us to share and serve others with the love of God.

Read the story of Jesus' last supper with his disciples

Matthew 26:17-30

Mark 14: 10-32

Or in your Spark Story Bible on page 462

### *Good Friday*

Isn't it strange how we call this day good? In ancient times, this day was called the Triumph of the Cross: a day where we celebrate Christ's life-giving passion. Is it good because we know the end of the story? That even though Jesus dies, death will not have the final say, but Jesus will live again? It is God's Friday where life and death stand side by side. We think about Jesus' outstretched arms on the cross, both are extended to criminals on either side saying, "today you will be with me in paradise." And we know Christ's arms are opened to us and to all, proclaiming: "you are mine, beloved, forgiven and blessed." Read the stories below as a family. And as you color the Lord's Prayer on the following page, think about the words of the prayer that we pray every week together. What do these words mean for you and for us?

Read the story of Jesus betrayed

Matthew 26:31-75

Mark 14:26-72

Luke 22:32-71

Or in your Spark Story Bible on page 468

Read the story of The Day Jesus Died

Matthew 27:27-66

Mark 15: 21-47

Luke 23:26-56

Or in your Spark Story Bible on page 476

LOVING GOD  
who art in  
Heaven  
hallowed  
be thy  
name.

thy  
KINGDOM  
come  
THY WILL BE DONE  
on EARTH as  
it is in  
Heaven

Give Us  
this  
DAY OUR  
DAILY BREAD

and  
FORGIVE US  
our debts  
AS WE  
FORGIVE  
our debtors

and  
LEAD US  
not into  
temptation

but  
DELIVER  
us from  
evil

# LENTEN

DEVOTIONS



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