

Sunday | JOHN 14:1-3

We live in a time of increasing isolation and loneliness. People move frequently, work remotely and have shorter tenures at their jobs. Yet, the need for connection and community is universal. Everyone needs a place where they are welcomed and valued, a space where they can both contribute and be cared for when they are at their worst. Jesus assures his followers that despite the physical separation that is to come, he does not and will not abandon them.

Yet, troubled hearts beat within and all around us. Anxiety pervades our pews and our culture. People feel weighed down and burdened. Isolation and loneliness silently creep into our lives. We hesitate to speak of our pain lest we appear ungrateful or incapable. Jesus knows our grief and our questions, our longings and our losses.

Lent offers us a season of repentance, but also a time to reconnect with the God who loves us with abandon. Lent calls us to confession, but also to community. As you take stock of your life – your hopes and disappointments, your worries and the wonder – remember that you are not alone. Jesus not only prepares a place for us, he gifts us with others to pray for and with us, to walk with us on this journey. As you enter time of intentional prayer and practice this Lent, know you do not do so in isolation. The entire Body of Christ goes together to the cross. Notice who is lagging behind, lighten the load of those carrying heavy burdens, rest when necessary, prepare a place for others to find solace and cling to the promise that Jesus will not abandon us.

Lord, you promise to make a place ready just for us. When our hearts are troubled and we feel alone, surround us with others who journey with us, no matter where we go or what we face. Send your Spirit to remind us that your burden is light, you grant rest, you give us the gift of community and connection and call us to seek out those still far off and afraid. Amen.

Monday | DEUTERONOMY 31:6

Today take courage, knowing that God does not abandon you. Consider where God may be calling you to speak up or step out in ways that witness to God's love. Are there people of faith you think of as courageous? What makes them so and how would you want to emulate them?

Letting go
of separation and
holding on
to relationship

by Jill Duffield
Presbyterian Outlook editor

Almighty God, you call us to be courageous in the faith, taking risks for the sake of the gospel. Forgive us when we shrink from bearing witness to your will and ways. Help us to take the next right and bold step on the Way until we are emboldened to run the race set before us. Amen.

Tuesday | HEBREWS 13:5

Today, practice being content. What gifts are in your life right now? Notice when you buy into the message that you need better or more of something. Recognize when you are being sold a consumerist vision of life. Notice and contrast it with Jesus' vision of life, and give thanks for all that you see that is good.

Lord, you came that we might have abundant life and that abundance consists of peace that passes understanding, a light burden, the promise of your never-failing presence and the gift of the Body of Christ. We praise you for the countless ways you daily chase us down with grace and mercy. Amen.

Wednesday | PSALM 94:14-15

What does judgment founded on righteousness mean? We often judge people based on their appearance, or their political views, or where they live, creating divisions where God desires connections. Pay attention to when and how you judge those you encounter today. What assumptions do you make? How can you let go of judgment and consider what God's judgment based on righteousness looks like?

Loving God, your ways are not our ways, and yet we often assume you agree with us. We fail to see with the eyes of Christ and instead project onto others our biases and experiences. Open us to the leadings of the Holy Spirit, suspend our judgment in order that we might first see in others your divine image and treat them accordingly. Amen.

Thursday | MATTHEW 18:20

We church people hear frequently that when two or three are gathered, Jesus is in the midst of us — but do we pay attention to his presence among us? Today, when you find yourself with others, remember that Jesus is in that very group too. How does this truth impact your words, attitude and interactions?

Lord Christ, you are always between us, among us, present with us. We can trust your promise to remain with us always. When we grow isolated or feel frustrated in our relationships, grant us an awareness that you are in the midst of us, bringing forgiveness, working toward reconciliation and holding us together. Amen.

Friday | JOHN 14:18-20

There are promises in the Bible that require us to enter a mystery that we can never fully understand, but can surely relish. Jesus tells us in these verses that we are united with God through him, that he abides in us and we in him. Read these verses several times and rest in the knowledge of your closeness with the holy.

Dear God, we rest in knowledge too wonderful for us, knowing that you are as close to us as our own breath, closer even. We will never understand the mystery of being united in Christ and, through Christ, made a part of the holy Trinity. Our only response is to rejoice in your grace and give thanks. Amen.

Saturday | MATTHEW 28:19-20

The assurance of Jesus' presence is not for our sake only. We are given a commission and sent to share the Good News we've heard. Today, how are you fulfilling the Great Commission? In what ways are you making disciples and teaching Jesus' commandments? Who are those who taught you about Jesus?

Lord, we are reluctant to make disciples and teach your commandments. We feel uncertain about what to do. Yet, you promise to be with us and to send the Spirit to empower us. Help us to live what we've learned so completely that everything we do bears witness and points others to you. Amen.