

# THE COMPASS



## Family Devotional for February 2024

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### LENT

Our February 2024 Compass Family Devotional is inspired by the Christian observance of Lent. The word Lent comes from the Middle English word *lente*, meaning “springtime,” which is itself descended from the Old English *lencten*. What is Lent? Lent is a season of 40 days before Easter not including Sundays, that begins with Ash Wednesday. See our February Quill church newsletter and the Pastor’s letter for more information on how the 40 days of Lent are counted, leap year, and how time (and our experience with Lent) is relative.

On Ash Wednesday we gather for worship, remember our mortality, and receive the imposition of ashes, the sign of the cross on our foreheads. Why do we do this? To remind ourselves that life is fragile and precious and short, and we need to make the most of it. Often the ashes used for Ash Wednesday are made from burning the palms from the previous year’s Palm Sunday worship. A reminder that there is a sacred rhythm to our earthly lives, an endless cycle of life and death, of yesterdays, today’s, and tomorrow’s, that we are but a small part of in the history of everything. I like the fact that this year Ash Wednesday falls on Valentine’s Day. It’s another reminder that the way of Jesus is a gospel of love first and foremost. It’s all about love.

For the 6 weeks of Lent that follow Ash Wednesday many take the time to stop and think about our faith. Life is busy and being intentional about taking the time to think about our faith is essential to our spiritual growth and development. I always look forward to Sunday each week as a time to recharge my spiritual batteries so I can go out and make the best of another week as a follower of the way of Jesus. With worship attendance down to once or twice a month for most families due to work schedules and extracurricular activities for youth I feel like this makes the season of Lent even more important. Can you and your family dedicate 6 weeks to focus on your faith journey even if you can’t make it every Sunday or even every other Sunday? If busy schedules keep Sunday school and other Christian education opportunities out of reach all year

long, can you spare 6 weeks to make time for your faith? Think about it. Let’s reclaim Lent as a time to reconnect to our faith, our God, and each other. Let’s “right-size” ourselves in relationship to God and discover our more authentic selves defined by the love of Christ for all people (more on this in our Lenten sermons).

How do we best do this? There are many ways. This year we encourage you to choose a spiritual practice for Lent to guide you towards a closer relationship with God.

#### **Activity - A Spiritual Practice**

A spiritual practice is a way by which to set your eyes on God, get outside of your head and more fully into your heart. Do you think too much? This is for you. Are you so busy you don’t feel like you have the time to think about anything? This is for you too.

For the month of January, I have been doing the 100 pushups/ day challenge for St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital. Having lived in Memphis, TN for many years I have seen firsthand the miracles St. Jude’s has been a part of in the lives of children and their families. Every day I do 100 pushups and I have people who have pledged money online to motivate me to keep my promise as much as my pledge to complete the pushup challenge motivated them to give. A few days I was sore from the previous day’s pushups, or I didn’t feel well. When that happened, I would do extra pushups every day after that to make up the difference. I offered myself some grace and kept going. So far, I have stayed the course! I am writing this devotional on Jan 26<sup>th</sup> and I am all caught up. That means I have completed 2,600 pushups so far and only have 500 more to go to finish the challenge. This endeavor has become a spiritual practice for me. I want to tell you why and share what I have learned about spiritual practices.

Every day when I do my pushups I think about Madison. She is a young girl who was diagnosed with a terminal disease several years ago and went to St. Jude's Children's Hospital for treatment. When her hair started to fall out her mother was worried Madison would be upset and embarrassed. Her mother called the hair salon I was working at and asked if anyone could come to the St. Jude's campus and shave her 7 Yr-old daughter's head. When your hair starts to fall out due to chemo or radiation it can be a source of great anxiety. Your hair loss confirms something you have found hard to believe since your diagnosis, but there's that hair on your pillow every morning, on your clothes, on the couch, the hair gets everywhere reminding you, you have cancer. Shaving your head is an act of power in desperate and anxiety ridden times for many patients. They can't control their cancer, but by God they can control their hair falling out by shaving it all off. And while often many tears are shed when they get their head shaved, usually they feel better afterwards. Still sad, still hard to believe they have cancer, but still feeling better in their own sort of way. I shaved Madison's head while her mother and a friend stood there in that hotel room and cried their eyes out. Madison did not cry. When finished I showed her how she looked in a mirror and she shouted, "I'm beautiful!" Then I started to cry. I will never forget that moment.

Several years later this is what I am thinking about when I am doing these pushups for the St. Jude challenge. This spiritual practice, doing 100 pushups every day, makes me stop whatever I am doing, to knock out these pushups, and then I think about Madison. Thinking about Madison makes me think about my own battle with cancer a few years after meeting her. This makes me feel an immense, sometimes overpowering and always humbling, gratitude for her life, my life, my body and my ability to knock out 100 pushups a day, and I thank God for all of it. This is how my participation in the St. Jude's 100 pushups/ day challenge has become a spiritual practice for me. Over the course of a month I do my pushups every day and I think about how precious life is and how grateful I am, and I am a better man for it. Since starting this challenge, I can tell you I feel more connected to my body, my sense of self, and God. This is what makes the St. Jude's challenge a spiritual practice.

What can you do as a spiritual practice for Lent to refocus your heart and mind on God?

- Traditionally people give something up and take something on. Like giving up chocolate, or soda or alcohol, (something you will miss), and start reading the bible every day.
- You could decide to fast for a meal, or even a

day, or not eat meat on Fridays, while committing to read a Lenten devotional.

- You could commit to doing a random act of kindness every day or week. Give yourself some rules. Say it must be for someone you do not know, a total stranger. You can do this as an individual, or for even more fun do this as a family. Everyone gets a chance to pick someone to be kind to. Then get creative, make a list, and knock it out.
- You could write a loving note or letter to someone you have lost touch with every day for 40 days, or once a week for 6 weeks. There are no Lenten spiritual practice police, you make the rules.
- You could give money to the poor and take the time to think about what it means before and after you do so. Commit to doing something to get to know the people and/ or organizations you are helping with your financial support. Let their stories change you as much as your gifts change them.
- Volunteer at the warming shelter or another well deserving nonprofit or ministry.
- You could devote a specific amount of time to prayer in a way that is new for you, even commit to trying out different types of prayer (silent, written, spoken, journaling, painting, creating in some way, prayer beads, using a prayer book, so many possibilities).
- Make a meal for someone who is sick, or a caregiver, or simply visit with the sick and/or their caregivers – they so often long for company and your visit could be a true gift for you both.

A spiritual practice can literally be anything.

- For young children I have always liked having them make cards for loved ones and then send them in the mail. (*Because at a certain age sending someone a card in the mail makes the card extra special.*)
- Older youth can commit to volunteering once a week for six weeks or whatever fits into their schedule.

Either way, and whatever you do, take the time to then talk about it afterwards as a family. Talk about why what they did matters and ask yourselves my favorite meditation question: Where is God in this? The answers are always illuminating and model for our families how to talk about God, something we don't do well and need to get better at, in my opinion. I have discovered that making any activity a spiritual practice requires a few guidelines.

- First, you benefit from deciding beforehand this is a spiritual practice. What you are doing needs to be intentional to get the most out of the experience. This way you go into the experience looking for insight.
- Next, repetition is everything. There is something sacred that happens when you do something over and over again until it almost becomes second nature, until you become so used to doing it that your mind can wander, and you can find new insights. Remember spiritual practice takes practice.
- Finally, you will need time to reflect, sometimes on your own and other times with your family or friends. Ask yourself: Where is God in this? is essential for further growth and understanding.

In my experience God will take care of the rest.

Commit this Lenten season to a spiritual practice and let the Spirit move your hearts, minds, and families in a new direction with God.



### Prayers (written by Ruth C. Duck)

May these prayers help you to focus on your faith in this Lenten season.

Ash Wednesday Prayer: Creating God, still Center of the world you have made, we come to you in this season of turning and returning. We do not know how to seek you with our whole hearts, but we know you are our source and our destiny. In the midst of life, we return to you, we turn towards you. We thank you that you receive even the broken heart, the troubled conscience, the conflicted spirit. Seeking you in secret, may we turn around to honor you among humanity; through Jesus Christ, our path homeward to you. Amen.

A prayer for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sun in Lent: Holy God, breathe your Spirit of life into us. We are creatures of earth, as we are your children, created in your image. We are frightened sometimes in this world full of risk and confusion. Sometimes things happen too fast, and we find it hard to make good decisions. We need your help. God, as you created life at the beginning of time, create and shape us anew. We want to be clay once more, shaped by your hand, touching earth, contemplating heaven, loving, working, and playing on this good earth. We want to be a part of the circle of love you began in Jesus, reaching to embrace the whole world – a circle where the sick are healed, the dying are comforted, the oppressed achieve new dignity, and all live in peace. Through your Spirit, let it be! Amen.

## Sunday Scriptures

Look for our February Scripture Puzzler. We used the New Revised Standard Version (updated edition) to create the crossword. Read the texts for the month of February and find the answers to the puzzler.

February 4 – Jesus Heals – Mark 1:29-39

February 11 – The Transfiguration – Mark 9:2-9

February 18 – Noah’s Ark – Genesis 6-9

February 25 – Abraham & Sarah’s Visitors – Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7

## Our Lent/Holy Week Schedule of Events

**Ash Wednesday Service** – February 14 – special service at 7 PM at Pilgrim UCC

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday** in Lent – February 18 – 9 AM worship at Pilgrim UCC

Wednesday Night **Lenten Series** begins – February 21 – Union Cong UCC, Waupun – Soup supper, serving from 5-6:15 PM (*this one Wed only*), 7 PM worship. (*See full details on Lenten series elsewhere in this Compass Devotional.*)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday** in Lent – February 25 – 9 AM worship at Pilgrim UCC

Wednesday Night **Lenten Series** – February 28 – Salem UCC, Wayne – 7 PM Worship

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday** in Lent – March 3 – 9 AM worship w/communion at Pilgrim UCC

Wednesday Night **Lenten Series** – March 6 – Church of Peace, Fond du Lac – 7 PM Worship

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday** in Lent – March 10 – 9 AM worship/45th PUCU Ann Celebration with Paul Thelen Jazz Ensemble

Wednesday Night **Lenten Series** – March 13 – Pilgrim UCC Fond du Lac - 7 PM Worship

**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday** in Lent – March 17 – 9 AM worship at Pilgrim UCC

Wednesday Night **Lenten Series** – March 20 – Union Cong UCC, Waupun – 7 PM Worship

**6<sup>th</sup> Sunday** in Lent – March 24 – Palm Sunday 9 AM worship at Pilgrim UCC

**Maundy Thursday** – March 28 – 7 PM worship at Pilgrim UCC (shared service w/COPUCC)

**Good Friday** – March 29 – 7 PM worship at Church of Peace UCC (shared service w/COPUCC)

**Easter Sunday** – March 31 – 9 AM worship at Pilgrim UCC



### Join us for a 4-church 5-week Lenten Series: God's Amazing Grace - Wednesdays at 7 PM:

- ✓ February 21 - **Host: Union Congregational UCC, Waupun, WI** – Rev. Steve Stepp of Church of Peace UCC preaching - Isaiah of Babylon (Isaiah 6:7) 125 Beaver Dam Street, Waupun, WI 53963

SOUP SUPPER 1ST NIGHT ONLY AT UNION CONGREGATIONAL IN WAUPUN. Serving from 5:00pm-6:15pm (service at 7, the fellowship hall is directly behind the sanctuary). Free, but there will be a free-will offering basket if people would like to contribute. All food and beverages are provided. Join us for a simple meal before the 1st Lenten series worship service in Waupun.

- ✓ February 28 - **Host: Salem UCC, Wayne, WI** – Rev. Rob Van Ess from Pilgrim UCC preaching - The Woman at the Well (John 4: 13-14) N8925 County Highway W, Campbellsport, WI 53010-9804 (The address is correct but misleading as the church is in Wayne, WI.)
- ✓ March 6 - **Host: Church of Peace UCC, Fond du Lac, WI** – Rev. Jacob Nault from Union Congregational UCC preaching - The Blind Man (John 9:24) 158 S. Military Rd, Fond du Lac, WI 54935
- ✓ March 13 - **Host: Pilgrim UCC, Fond du Lac, WI** – Rev. Ruth Hansen from Salem UCC preaching - Paul (1 Timothy 1:15) 535 Stow St, Fond du Lac, WI 54935
- ✓ March 20 - **Host: Union Congregational UCC Waupun, WI** - All clergy participate - The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:32) 125 Beaver Dam Street, Waupun, WI 53963



**SOUP SALE** Get ready for our Super-BOWL soup sale **Sunday, February 11th** (after our 9 AM worship) where some of our youth will sell soup for \$10/ quart to raise funds to attend their mission trip to Knoxville, TN this summer (July 21-27). In Knoxville our youth will join other youth groups from across the United States to work with home repair and emergency and transitional housing programs for children, women and men. We still have some open spots if you know a youth who would benefit from this once in a lifetime experience. Talk to Pastor Rob. Steven and Rachel Wicichowski and Deb Wamser are our chaperones.

### **Did You Know?**

Did you know this year we decided to line up Pastor Rob's preaching texts on Sundays with the Spark curriculum we use in our Sunday school classes? This means what we read and preach about in our 9 AM worship service is what we are teaching about in our 10:15 AM Sunday school classes. This also means our Lenten scriptures are different than what we are used to. Our bible readings for the first 3 weeks of Lent will come from the Hebrew Testament. Check us out in worship and see how Pastor Rob connects various themes from the readings about Noah's Ark, the unexpected visitors for Abraham and Sarah, and the 10 Commandments to our Lenten journey and the shocking grace revealed in the Resurrection. Then come to Sunday school and see how our teachers and shepherds bring these stories and their wisdom to life for your youth.

**THE BIG QUESTION:** There are so many stories in the bible. What is your favorite story in the bible and why? Share with your family over dinner one night. While you are eating, everyone takes a turn and shares, or a different member of the family can share each week, say over Sunday dinner. One of Pastor Rob's favorite stories is Daniel in the Lion's Den because this story reminds him the promises and faithfulness of God is always with us even if we feel like everything has been lost.

### **CONTACT:**

For questions about the youth group activities or the 2024 mission trip to Knoxville TN, please contact **Rachel Wicichowski** for more information at [ra.burns@hotmail.com](mailto:ra.burns@hotmail.com) or 1-920-238-5919.

For questions about our Sunday school or Family Fun Nights, please contact **Karen Goodacre** for more information at [karen.goodacre@pilgrimuccfdl.org](mailto:karen.goodacre@pilgrimuccfdl.org) or leave a message at PUCG at 1-920-921-0415.

For questions about confirmation, The Compass Family Devotional, or any other reason, please contact **Rev. Rob Van Ess** at [rvaness.pilgrim@gmail.com](mailto:rvaness.pilgrim@gmail.com) or 1-920-273-9794.

### **YOUTH GROUP EVENTS**

Saturday February 3- We will attend a basketball game between the Wisconsin Herd and the Westchester Knicks at the Oshkosh Arena. \$5 per youth to attend. Contact Rachel Wicichowski ([ra.burns@hotmail.com](mailto:ra.burns@hotmail.com)) to attend. Ride share available. YOUTH GROUP EVENTS FOR MARCH – MAY WILL BE ANNOUNCED NEXT MONTH.

## **MISSION TRIP TO KNOXVILLE, TN - JULY 21-27, 2024**

Steven and Rachel Wicichowski, and Deb Wamser are chaperones. All youth 6<sup>th</sup> grade and older eligible to attend this life-changing spiritual journey. We are signing up youth now.

## **FAMILY FUN NIGHT ACTIVITIES** - Select Fridays from 5:30PM-7:00PM

February 16 – Bowling for All

March 15 – Movie Night – Movie TBA

April 19 – All Ages Game Night

May 17 – Outdoor Yard/Camp Games

## **SUNDAY SCHOOL DATES**

\*Sunday School runs September 17, 2023 – May 12, 2024 after worship (10:15 AM – 11:15 AM)



## **2024 YOUTH MINISTRIES AT PILGRIM UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**SUNDAY SCHOOL** – We have a wonderful program for children offered after worship on Sunday mornings! Each class focuses on a Bible story, a lesson, or a way of living faith. We use art, music, prayer, and group activities to share stories that connect us with our God and our understanding of community.

**CONFIRMATION** – A small group that meets for approximately nine months of confirmation preparation during which young people participate in church activities and reflect on questions of faith and life, both alone and together with their peers.

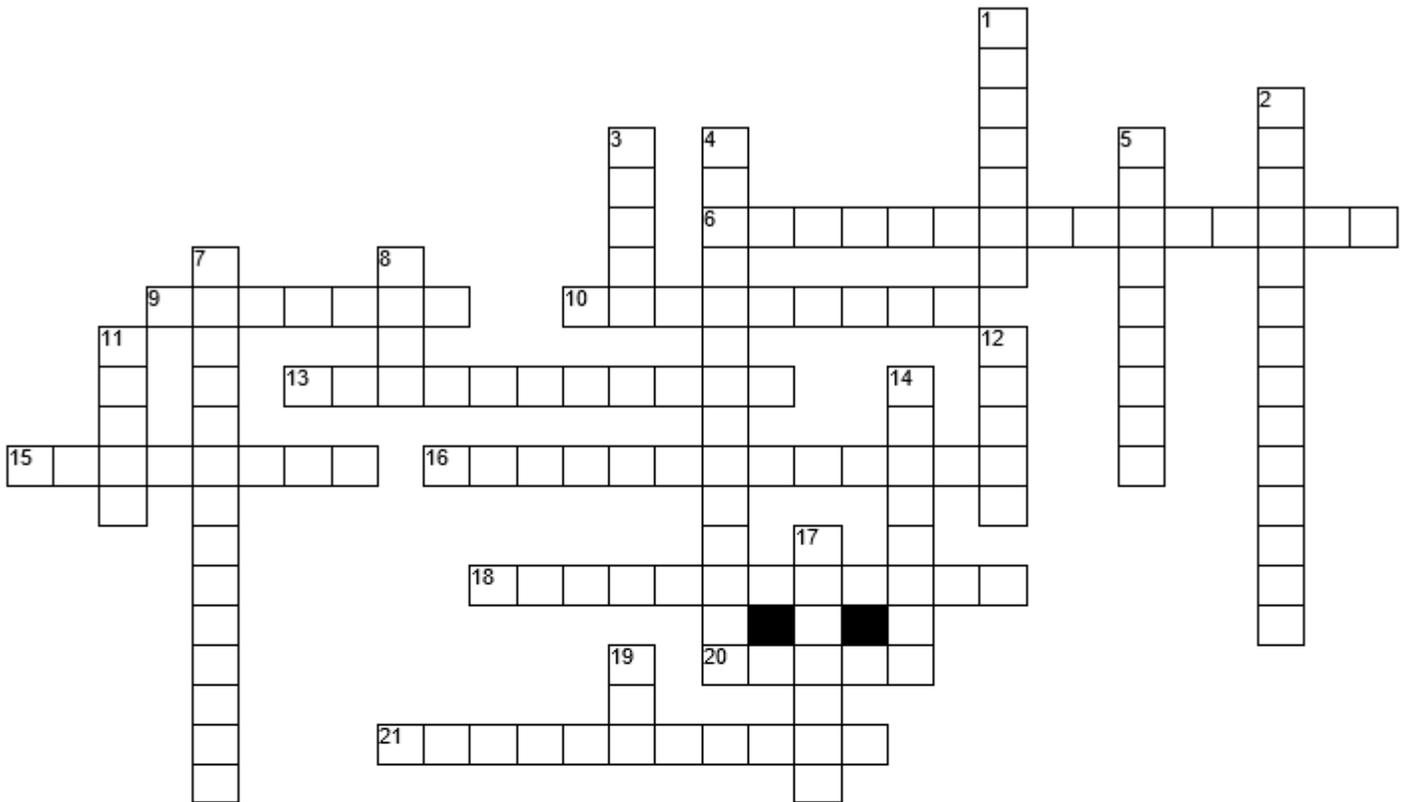
**MISSION TRIPS** – Our mission trips provide opportunities for students to explore their faith, experience God, and extend service to others. This is a transformational experience by which our youth get to know themselves by getting out of their comfort zones while being the hands and feet of Jesus. Last year we went to Cleveland, OH and next year the youth will go to Knoxville, TN.

**FAMILY FUN NIGHTS** – Intergenerational activities for the entire family. The entire church family is invited to come together for card or board games, a chili cook off, movie night, Christmas caroling, etc. Time to relax as a family and get to know each other better.

**YOUTH GROUP** – Our youth gatherings are designed as a "respite" from a socially pressured world for teens, and an opportunity to participate in the justice and fellowship ministries of the church. We strive to help our youth experience Pilgrim United Church of Christ as a supportive, trust-worthy, and loving community – a place that is safe and enjoyable to explore and respond to the spiritual side of being human, by building relationships and creating community.

**THE COMPASS** – A monthly family devotional to grow your faith and draw you closer to God. Each devotional has a theme and activity for the family to come together while learning more about our faith.

# February 2024 Puzzler



## Across

6. Mark, chapter 9, verses 2-9 reports what is commonly known as the \_\_\_\_\_.
9. In Genesis 18 Sarah famously does something and then denies it. What does she do? Sara \_\_\_\_\_ to herself (Gen. 18:12).
10. The others with Jesus on the mountain did not know what to say, for they were \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Jesus heals Simon's \_\_\_\_\_ who was in bed with a fever.
15. Genesis chapters 6-9 reports the story of \_\_\_\_\_.
16. The morning after healing people at Simon's house Jesus went out to a \_\_\_\_\_.
18. What was gathered around the door of Simon's house in the evening?
20. As they were coming down the mountain Jesus ordered the disciples to tell \_\_\_\_\_ about what they had seen.
21. The others with Jesus on the mountain, saw \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_, who were talking with Jesus. to Jesus and the others, \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_.

## Down

1. As Jesus cast out demons he would not permit them to speak because they \_\_\_\_\_.
2. As a sign of God's covenant with Noah and his descendants, God sets their \_\_\_\_\_ (Gen. 9:13)..
3. Our 5-week 4-church Lenten series this year carries the theme Amazing \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Six days after leaving Simon's house Jesus went up the mountain with \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. As soon as the woman was healed at Simon's house she began to \_\_\_\_\_.
7. God says that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the \_\_\_\_\_ (Gen. 9:11).
8. Valentines Day is the beginning of the liturgical season of \_\_\_\_\_.
11. A son is promised to Abraham and \_\_\_\_\_ (Gen. 18:10).
12. How many visitors appear to Abraham and his wife?
14. Our activity this week is a spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ of your choice.
17. The voice that came from the cloud on the mountain said the disciples: "This is my Son, the \_\_\_\_\_, listen to him!"
19. Valentines Day and \_\_\_\_\_ Wednesday fall on the same day this year.