

SLOWING DOWN

Lent Devotional 2024

Angela Schaffner

Oak Grove United Methodist Church



Palms to Passion Concert

Sunday, March 24, 2024
6 pm, Sanctuary

Maundy Thursday Service

March 28, 2024
7 pm, Sanctuary

Good Friday Tenebrae Service

March 29, 2024
7 pm, Sanctuary

Easter Sunday Services

March 31, 2024

7 am Sunrise Service
in the Memorial Garden outside

8:30 & 11 am Traditional Worship
in the Sanctuary

10:45 Modern Worship
in Fellowship Hall

These services will also be streamed online at
<https://youtube.com/ogumc>

Nursery care available for children ages 3 and under in all worship services.

About the Author

Angela Schaffner is a psychologist in private practice in Midtown and has attended OGUMC with her family since 2011. She's facilitated and participated in Discipleship, Children, and Drama Ministries.

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The intent of this Lent devotional is to invite you into a slower paced rhythm that allows you to move into what's next for you feeling refreshed, refocused, alive, and clear about what you value. Following the holidays, you may be naming a resolution or intention for the New Year, and my challenge for you throughout this study is to make space for rest each day, no matter what else you intend to pursue, engage in, or get done.

For each day of this study, we will keep a simple, practical focus. On Monday through Thursday of each week, the daily principle and practice can be completed in five minutes or less. You'll be invited to reflect on one principle related to your journey of faith. Then, you'll be offered a practice which encourages slowing down, listening, and being present first, before moving toward whatever else you have planned for your day.

Each weekend during Lent, you'll be invited to read and reflect on a passage of Scripture and pull one main principle or challenge from the passage to focus on for that weekend. You'll be asked to participate in a longer stretch of time spent in contemplation, labyrinth meditation, and writing practice. Some passages and practices in the study may be familiar to you, and you can benefit from repetition of practices that already benefit you. Other passages and practices may be new, and I encourage you to step into the unknown with an openness to the lessons that may be found in the spiritual places you've yet to explore.

(continued)

Slow down, invite the Spirit to lead you to what you most need to hear from God, and try some new practices in the next forty days. If you get off track, don't worry about catching up; just start again. Embrace your humanity and let yourself do these practices in your own way, making any adaptations you need to make. Embrace your divine nature and the beautiful, complex creation you are, and make this study your own.

Let's step forward in humility and courage as we walk this spiritual path together. The more you engage with one another, reflecting and talking with others about the joys and challenges on your spiritual path, the more you're likely to benefit and grow spiritually. I invite you to pray for the next 40 days: 'God, open my eyes to see that which I most need to see.'

Note: One day per week you'll be asked to either walk the labyrinth in Oak Grove Park (at the north end of campus by Oak Grove Road) or use a finger labyrinth to practice meditation. You can use the finger labyrinth printed here.



Ash Wednesday, February 14

Read 2 Cor 5:20b-6:10.

Begin Intentionally. Breathe.

Principle: Begin intentionally. Today's principle is deciding from the moment you wake up to begin with one intentional, purposeful act: a deep breath. By focusing on our breathing, we can better connect to the experience in our bodies and move into a fuller, wiser experience of ourselves. Before the thoughts and activities of the day begin, breathe first. Start from a calmer and more connected place.

Practice: *Today's practice is breathing. Find a peaceful place to sit or kneel comfortably. Close your eyes, and take a deep breath in, counting to 4. Hold for an additional 4 counts when your lungs are full, then release your breath completely, emptying your lungs as you breathe out.*

Thursday, February 15

Each Thursday during Lent, consider walking the labyrinth in Oak Grove Park or use the finger labyrinth below.

For today's labyrinth meditation, revisit the scripture from Ash Wednesday, **2 Cor 5:20b-6:10**. Consider these questions as you walk the labyrinth or trace the finger labyrinth: *What do you sense that God is saying to you about grace, obstacles, or sorrow? What comes up for you as you consider endurance in the face of the challenges in your life?*



Weekend Scripture Reflections (Feb 16-18)

Read Genesis 9:8-17

Contemplate. We all know the story of Noah and the ark from our childhood. After the flood, Noah built an altar to the Lord and presented burnt offerings to Him. God was pleased with Noah's offering and blessed him and his family. This passage details God's covenant with Noah. Read Genesis 9:8-17 as *slowly* as you can. Notice which words or phrases stand out to you the most and make note of them.

Meditate. Choose the most notable or emotionally charged word or phrase, the one that speaks to you the most today. Take five deep breaths and notice what you experience as you focus on the word or phrase.

Write. Get a pen and journal. Set a timer for ten minutes and write continuously, letting yourself write anything without overthinking what it all means. Use one of the following prompts if you need a place to start:

'As I meditate on [the word/phrase I chose], I feel moved to...'

'As I reflect on this scripture, I remember...'

Monday, February 19

Notice your thirst. Have a nourishing drink.

Principle: Asking, 'Am I thirsty right now?' is one way to get in touch with your body and your needs. Consider what sounds good to you- Juice? Water? Coffee? Tea? Hot chocolate?

Practice: Prepare and enjoy a nourishing drink. Allow yourself to move outside of your normal routine if you feel a pull to do what you always do. Listen if your body tells you about a different preference. Honor your preference in this small, doable way as you get ready to start your day.

Tuesday, February 20

Notice your hunger. Eat something you enjoy.

Principle: Noticing hunger is another way to connect to our experience in our bodies, helping us maintain an overall mindful presence and care for ourselves, and preparing us to be available to others as well without becoming easily irritable or anxious.

Practice: Choose a breakfast you really want, love, and enjoy. It does not have to be a traditional breakfast food. The main goal here is to enjoy it, savor it, and let yourself experience something pleasurable and filling as the first thing in your day.

Wednesday, February 21

Appreciate musical sounds. Listen to a song.

Principle: Appreciate music. Various types of musical sounds can elicit powerful feelings and experiences.

Practice: Listen to a song. Allow yourself to be still as you listen fully to a song. You may choose a song you know well, or an entirely new genre. Notice what you experience as you listen.

Thursday, February 22

Each Thursday during Lent, consider walking the labyrinth in Oak Grove Park or use the finger labyrinth below.

For today's labyrinth meditation, revisit the scripture from the weekend, Genesis 9:8-17. Consider these questions as you walk the labyrinth or trace the finger labyrinth: *What do you sense that God is saying to you about signs, covenants, and floods? What comes up for you as you consider God's covenant with all living creatures?*



Weekend Scripture Reflection (Feb. 23-25)

Read Romans 4:13-25

Contemplate. We're reminded in this scripture that the promises of God came to Abraham through faith, not the law. We grow stronger in faith when we believe in God's promises and keep the faith. Read Romans 4:13-25 as *slowly* as you can. Notice which words or phrases stand out to you the most and make note of them.

Meditate. Choose the most notable or emotionally charged word or phrase, the one that speaks to you the most today. Take five deep breaths and notice what you experience as you focus on the word or phrase.

Write. Get a pen and journal. Set a timer for ten minutes and write continuously, letting yourself write anything without overthinking what it all means. Use one of the following prompts if you need a place to start:

'As I meditate on [the word/phrase I chose], I feel moved to...'

'As I reflect on this scripture, I remember...'

Monday, February 26

Value differences. Read something new.

Principle: Consider how seeking to understand another's perspective may help us remain curious and loving toward one another, drawing us together rather than dividing us.

Practice: Read a news article from a news source you don't typically follow. Note what you feel and whether there is a story or a perspective that differs from your own, noting any value you can see and name in the story.

Tuesday, February 27

Value your voice. Create music by singing a song.

Principle: Make music and value your voice.

Practice: Choose a song you know well, or one that you're just learning. You may try to memorize the lyrics, try it karaoke style and perform it for family or friends, or just enjoy singing in your car or shower by yourself. Turn up the volume and be as present as you can with the music. Don't worry about musical talent or skill, just sing your heart out!

Wednesday, February 28

Maintain a sense of humor. Create and draw a cartoon character.

Principle: Keeping things light balances out our intensity. We cannot sustain constant intensity, so allow yourself to keep things light today.

Practice: Create and draw a cartoon character that communicates some lesson or value from the scripture this week in a comical way. Share your creation with someone and share a laugh!

Thursday, February 29

Each Thursday during Lent, consider walking the labyrinth in Oak Grove Park or use the finger labyrinth below.

For today's labyrinth meditation, revisit the scripture from the weekend, Romans 4:13-25. Consider these questions as you walk the labyrinth or trace the finger labyrinth: *What do you sense that God is saying to you about faith, promises, descendants, or righteousness? What comes up for you as you consider Abraham's faith?*



Weekend Scripture Reflection (Mar. 1-3)

Read I Corinthians 1:18-25

Contemplate. Paul tells us that what we envision on our wisest days pales in comparison with the full truth, and that great strength may be weak in the grand scheme. Read I Corinthians 1:18-25 as slowly as you can. Notice which words or phrases stand out to you the most and make note of them.

Meditate. Choose the most notable or emotionally charged word or phrase, the one that speaks to you the most today. Take five deep breaths and notice what you experience as you focus on the word or phrase.

Write. Get a pen and journal. Set a timer for ten minutes and write continuously, letting yourself write anything without overthinking what it all means. Use one of the following prompts if you need a place to start:

'As I meditate on [the word/phrase I chose], I feel moved to...'

'As I reflect on this scripture, I remember...'

Monday, March 4

Continue to embrace musical expression. Play an instrument (your voice counts!).

Principle: Embracing musical expression.

Practice: Obtain an instrument and play without worrying about technique or skill level. Access your emotion and try to convey how you are feeling through the way you are playing the instrument. If you do not have a guitar or trumpet or any other musical instrument, consider that your voice is an instrument and sing a song you like!

Tuesday, March 5

Learn and read.

Principle: Learn from others. We can all get stuck in our own heads at times; allow yourself to be present with someone else's creative expression with an openness to learning something new.

Practice: Read something you wouldn't normally read. Choose a book excerpt, an online article, a news source, or a magazine that you don't normally read. Spend a few minutes reading it with an openness to learn something new. How, if at all, does this reading contribute to your view of yourself, others, the world, or God?

Wednesday, March 6

Be flexible and stretch.

Principle: Flexibility. Life throws curve balls. Sometimes, we do not expect to see the events of life unfold the way they do. Consider how adaptable you tend to be when something unexpected occurs.

Practice: Stretch your body in some way. You may choose to stretch your whole body, or one small part like a finger or hand. Notice the stretching sensation and consider how you can approach life with more flexibility today.

Thursday, March 7

Each Thursday during Lent, consider walking the labyrinth in Oak Grove Park or use the finger labyrinth below.

For today's labyrinth meditation, revisit the scripture from the weekend, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. Consider these questions as you walk the labyrinth or trace the finger labyrinth: *What do you sense that God is saying to you about wisdom, power, weakness, or strength? What comes up for you as you consider sources of wisdom in your life?*



Weekend Scripture Reflection (Mar. 8-10)

John 3:14-21

Contemplate. John references the Exodus to tell us more about Jesus. He tells of the healing power we access when we look toward the light. Read John 3:14-21 as *slowly* as you can. Notice which words or phrases stand out to you the most and make note of them.

Meditate. Choose the most notable or emotionally charged word or phrase, the one that speaks to you the most today. Take five deep breaths and notice what you experience as you focus on the word or phrase.

Write. Get a pen and journal. Set a timer for ten minutes and write continuously, letting yourself write anything without overthinking what it all means. Use one of the following prompts if you need a place to start:

'As I meditate on [the word/phrase I chose], I feel moved to...'

'As I reflect on this scripture, I remember...'

Monday, March 11

Notice your feelings. Write them down.

Principle: Noticing how we feel connects us to our bodies and helps us have a more whole experience of knowing ourselves, preparing us to communicate more effectively and note our needs so we can get our needs met. Name one emotion you are aware of, even if it's subtle.

Practice: Write down the feeling (sad, mad, glad, scared, excited, etc.). If you need a resource to make this easier that will also help you track your progress, try the 'How We Feel' app. This app makes it easy to choose a feeling word and add a note if you'd like about the experience you are having at that moment.

Tuesday, March 12

Be at peace. Reach out in a gentle way.

Principle: Many factors in relationships are out of our control, and we all know the pain of being misunderstood, betrayed, misled, or hurt. As much as it is up to you, be at peace with the people in your life.

Practice: Reach out to someone you know, someone whose relationship with you is strained in any way. Maybe you've been out of touch, or forgotten an occasion to celebrate, or they have not reached out to you as often as usual. Consider extending some act of gentle kindness, a text or letter or email, or maybe a phone call. Take a step closer in a relationship you value with someone who feels distant.

Wednesday, March 13

Encourage belonging. Communicate to someone their importance to a group.

Principle: We benefit from having a sense of belonging, from knowing one another as part of a community.

Practice: Reach out today to let someone know they are an important part of a group to which you both belong. Let a coworker know you're glad you both work at the company. Let a church member know you're glad to be in the congregation with them. Let a teacher know you're glad they teach at your child's school. There are many ways to communicate and strengthen the sense of belonging.

Thursday, March 14

Each Thursday during Lent, consider walking the labyrinth in Oak Grove Park or use the finger labyrinth below.

For today's labyrinth meditation, revisit the scripture from the weekend, John 3:14-21. Consider these questions as you walk the labyrinth or trace the finger labyrinth: *What do you sense that God is saying to you about love, light, darkness, and truth? What stirs in you as you consider the significance of Moses lifting a serpent up in the wilderness?*



Weekend Scripture Reflection (Mar. 15-17)

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34

Contemplate. In this passage we learn about God writing the law on human hearts, and about the free-flowing forgiveness God extends to us. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 as slowly as you can. Notice which words or phrases stand out to you the most and make note of them.

Meditate. Choose the most notable or emotionally charged word or phrase, the one that speaks to you the most today. Take five deep breaths and notice what you experience as you focus on the word or phrase.

Write. Get a pen and journal. Set a timer for ten minutes and write continuously, letting yourself write anything without overthinking what it all means. Use one of the following prompts if you need a place to start:

'As I meditate on [the word/phrase I chose], I feel moved to...'

'As I reflect on this scripture, I remember...'

Monday, March 18

Value kindness. Extend kindness.

Principle: Speaking up in truth, communicating when there is tension and conflict, and resolving difficult questions can all be done while also practicing kindness.

Practice: Choose something that you know you need to communicate to someone in your life, but that you know will be somewhat uncomfortable or difficult. Spend a few moments considering some ways you can communicate what you need to say with as much kindness as possible, while remaining authentic and direct. Ask for help or ideas from others if you need to!

Tuesday, March 19

Value truth. Tell the truth.

Principle: Be honest with yourself and convey your thoughts and feelings truthfully in love.

Practice: Identify one way that you've not been fully honest with yourself in the past week. Allow yourself to consider why it's difficult for you to be fully honest. Maybe it's about a concern, event, feeling, or relationship. What would you say or do differently if you were fully honest?

Wednesday, March 20

Value time. Consider how you spend your time.

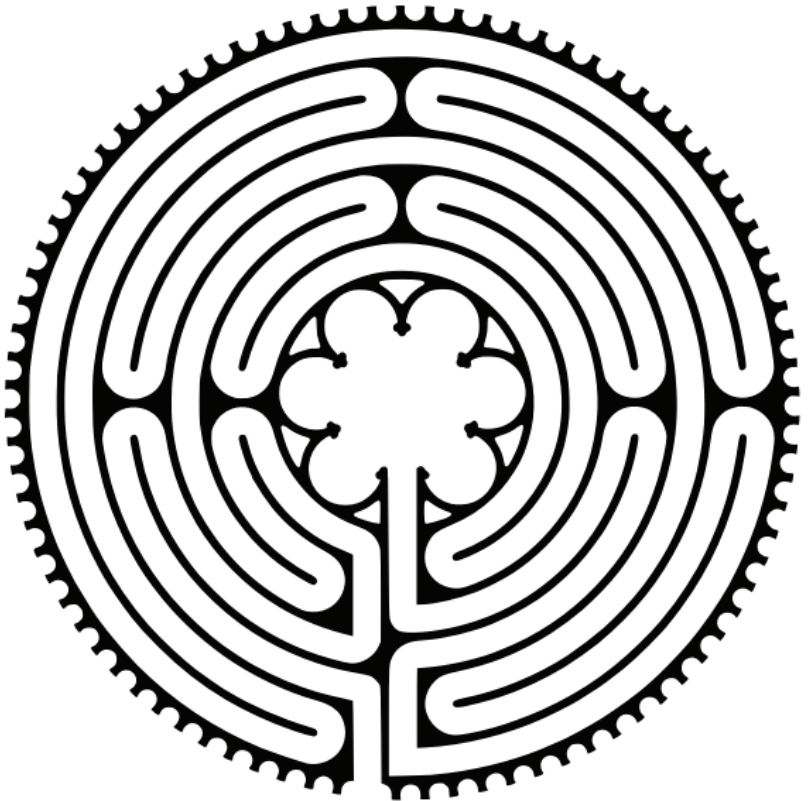
Principle: Be mindful of using your time well without obsessing about productivity or efficiency.

Practice: Make a pie chart showing how you spent your time yesterday. How much time was spent working? Resting? Helping? Connecting with others? Learning? Other activities? Notice how you feel as you assess your use of time. Now draw another pie chart showing how you'd like your time to be spent today.

Thursday, March 21

Each Thursday during Lent, consider walking the labyrinth in Oak Grove Park or use the finger labyrinth below.

For today's labyrinth meditation, revisit the scripture from the weekend, Jeremiah 31:31-34. Consider these questions as you walk the labyrinth or trace the finger labyrinth: *What do you sense that God is saying to you about the law, our hearts, knowing, or forgiving? What stirs in you as you consider the Lord's words, 'they shall all know me' (v.34)?*



Weekend Scripture Reflection (Mar. 22-24)

Mark 11:1-11

Contemplate. Jesus sent two of his disciples on an unlikely errand, with a specific outcome in mind. Read Mark 11:1-11 as *slowly* as you can. Notice which words or phrases stand out to you the most and make note of them.

Meditate. Choose the most notable or emotionally charged word or phrase, the one that speaks to you the most today. Take five deep breaths and notice what you experience as you focus on the word or phrase.

Write. Get a pen and journal. Set a timer for ten minutes and write continuously, letting yourself write anything without overthinking what it all means. Use one of the following prompts if you need a place to start:

'As I meditate on [the word/phrase I chose], I feel moved to...'

'As I reflect on this scripture, I remember...'

Monday, March 25

Identify a vision. Write it or create an image to go with the vision.

Principle: Consider the coming week, month, or year. Consider what your vision is for what that time will look like. What do you most want and envision?

Practice: Write down the vision in as much detail as you can. You may also choose to draw or paint an image that represents your vision. You may even identify a posture in your body that represents the vision (e.g., standing with open arms to represent generosity).

Tuesday, March 26

Value wisdom. Seek wisdom.

Principle: Approach life with an attitude of humility, willing to learn and receive new words, stories, or lessons of wisdom wherever you go, from whoever you meet.

Practice: Whatever you have planned today, maintain an awareness throughout the day of seeking wisdom from those who may have a different and valuable perspective on something.

Wednesday, March 27

Value balance in your life. Do a little less of one thing and a little more of something else today.

Principle: Sometimes we go to all-or-nothing extremes and experience more stress as a result. Try finding the middle ground, being gentle with yourself, and bringing your life into balance in some small way.

Practice: Think of one activity you could stand to do a little more of, and one activity you've done a lot of lately. Bring your day into balance a little more by asking for help with something, shifting your priorities a bit, or changing your approach to the day in some small way, and notice what you experience as a result.

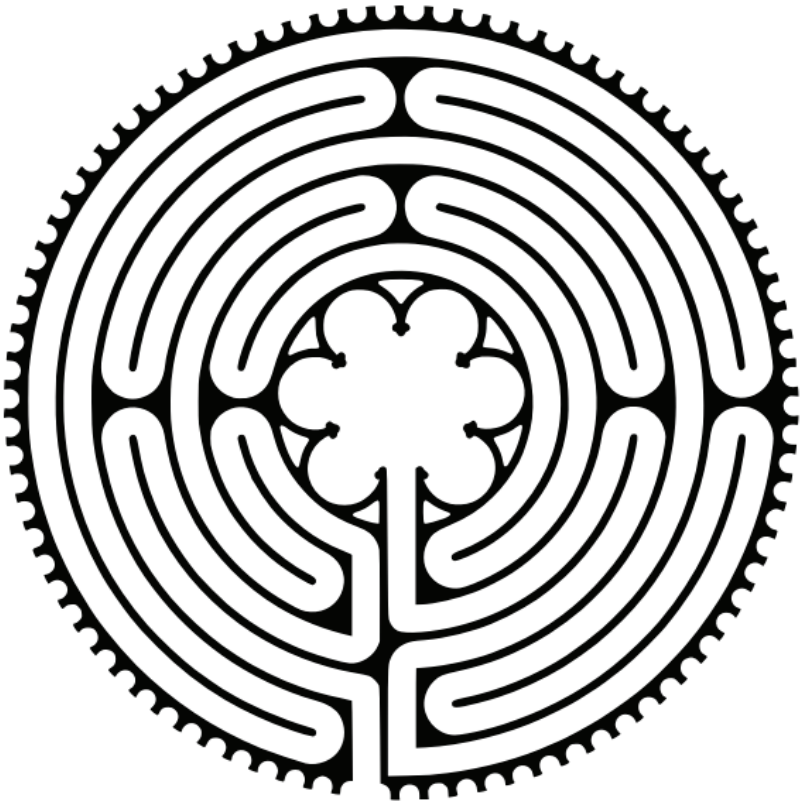
Maundy Thursday, March 28

Read Mark 14:1-52

For Maundy Thursday, consider walking the labyrinth in Oak Grove Park.

For today's labyrinth meditation, revisit the scripture for Maundy Thursday, Mark 14:1-52. Consider these questions as you walk the labyrinth or trace the finger labyrinth: *What do you sense that God is saying to you about anointing, betrayal, denial, or abandonment? What comes up for you as you consider Jesus' responses to the events that unfold in this passage?*

You're invited to attend Oak Grove's Maundy Thursday Service at 7 pm in the Sanctuary and also streamed online at <https://youtube.com/ogumc>



Good Friday, March 29

Read Mark 14:53-15:47

Have you ever denied something over and over that you knew in your soul to be true? What was it like for you to experience the internal dissonance perpetuated by denial? We commonly use denial as a defense when facing a truth that is painful, unpopular, or difficult to reconcile. Be compassionate with yourself about your denial. Defenses help us, or we wouldn't use them! We can thank our denial for the role it has played to protect us, maintain relationships, make us more comfortable, or allow us some time to accept and work through the truth. We are Peter, and Peter is us. Eventually, with courage, we may move beyond our denial as Peter did when he broke down and wept. When we move beyond denial and other defenses and access our fear, shame, grief, and sadness, we too may break down and weep. Jesus welcomes, loves, and forgives us in our pain.

You're invited to attend Oak Grove's Good Friday Tenebrae Service at 7 pm in the Sanctuary and also streamed online at <https://youtube.com/ogumc>

Easter Sunday, March 31

Read Mark 16:1-8

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome asked, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' They had come to anoint Jesus' body after his death, but the stone stood in the way. Do you ever feel there's something blocking your access to new life and new beginnings? Do you, like these faithful women, continue forward in faith anyway? The women approached the burial site at sunrise, aware of the obstacle before them, without a plan or strategy for removing the stone. Faithfully, they carried out their task and were surprised to find the stone rolled away for them. They witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, the promise of new life and redemption. The anticipated obstacle didn't end up being an obstacle at all. We can pause, worry, and engage in a lot of problem-solving around anticipated obstacles, but when we step forward in faith, the obstacles may not be what they seem. The obstacle we expected may not even exist! We can trust that God will make a way for us to know and witness exactly what we need to see, in the timing when we most need to see it. Let Salome, Mary, and Mary be your inspiration today, to step forward in faith toward new life, even when you're not sure how it's all going to work out.

You're invited to attend Oak Grove's Easter Sunday Services: 7 am Sunrise Service in the Memorial Garden outside the Sanctuary, 8:30 & 11 am Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary and 10:45 Modern Worship in the Fellowship Hall. 10:45 & 11 am worship services will be streamed online at <https://youtube.com/ogumc>.

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