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*Pastor Barbara E. Ingram
Lenten Project Coordinator*

From Ashes to the Cross...



A Call to Repentance

March 6—March 11, 2023



5263 Warwick Road Richmond, VA 23224
(804) 303-6291

Website: www.maabc.org

Facebook: [maabcva](https://www.facebook.com/maabcva) YouTube: [maabc-rva](https://www.youtube.com/maabc-rva) Instagram: [maabcva](https://www.instagram.com/maabcva)

Pastors:

Roscoe D. Cooper, Jr., Barbara E. Ingram, Darryl E. Walker

*From Ashes to the Cross:
A Call to Repentance*

At the heart of the Christian faith is our relationship with Jesus Christ. We proclaim Jesus' life, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. Through Jesus Christ, God saves us from sin to righteousness, from death to life, from slavery to freedom, and from oppression to liberation. God in Jesus Christ brings life in deathly situations, hope in despairing situations, and opportunity in desperate situations.

Lent is a time for us to participate in the life, ministry, suffering, and death of Jesus and to prepare for the celebration of Jesus' resurrection, which is Easter.* Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, the forty weekdays of preparation for Easter. Ash Wednesday calls for us to return to the Lord. We recall our mortality and wait upon the Lord to renew us. This is a time for putting aside our sins and failures in light of who we are yet to become; by the grace of God through Jesus' suffering on the cross.

Traditionally, the church has observed Lent as a time of penitence, fasting and prayers. This season of forty days provided a time in which converts were prepared for baptism into the body of Christ. It was also a time when persons who had committed sins and had been separated from the community were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness and restored to the fellowship of the church. Thus, these acts—preparation of persons for baptism and restoration of persons—reminded the church of its work of forgiveness.

As a mark of our mortality and as a need for the grace of God through Jesus Christ, let us go forth, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, to observe Lent by meditating on God's word, examining ourselves, fasting, almsgiving, and praying.

* Sundays are not a part of the forty days of Lent. They are in Lent but not of Lent. Every Sunday of the year is considered to be a "little Easter", a celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Therefore, Easter is a day of the week, a day of the year, and a season of the church year.

*Saturday, March 11, 2023
Confession and Forgiveness*

God our Awesome Companion, we place in your hands the contradictions that are part of our human lives. By your loving kindness in Christ, forgive and remove all that is sinful, straighten out that which is twisted, mend that which is broken, and bring harmony into our daily existence. In the name of Christ Jesus our Savior, Amen.

FORGIVENESS

Jesus said: you must be born from above by the Spirit of God.

My sisters and brothers, we have not been born from above by the Spirit of God to condemnation but to salvation. In Christ there is forgiveness for all who are ready to seek and receive God's grace. In Jesus' name God declares to you: Your sins are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

Saturday, March 11, 2023
Confession and Forgiveness

During the season of Lent, we are keenly aware of the reality that we are mortal creatures. Our mortality is marked by sin and death, which leads to a state of despair and hopelessness. Through the loving and gracious actions of our Savior and Lord, God is always willing to forgive us of our sins and to grant us eternal life. Therefore, with quiet confidence in the silent grace and quiet power of the Spirit of God, we confess our sins to God and accept God's forgiveness and renewal .

Prayer of Confession

Eternal God our Holy Friend, we admit to each other and to you, that we are mortal creatures in whom goodness and evil are untidily weaved together.

Sometimes we set out to do what seems good, only to later discover that we have been manipulated by evil from within us. At other times we have been afraid of our shortcomings, yet have done far better than we expected. Sometimes we have relied on our education and worldly wisdom, only to find out how stupid we really are. At other times we have trembled at our own lack of knowledge, yet have acted in far wiser ways than we thought possible. Sometimes we have pretended to be thoughtful and kind, yet in fact we have been pushed by nothing but self interest. At other times we have been sickened by our selfishness, yet have managed to rise above it and have served others in loving ways.

Season of Lent



Lectionary Readings

Ash Wednesday
February 22, 2023

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or
Isaiah 58:1-12
Psalm 51:1-17
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

First Sunday in Lent
February 26, 2023

Genesis 2:15-17;3-17
Psalms 32
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11

Second Sunday in Lent
March 5, 2023

Genesis 12:14a
Psalm 121
Romans 4:1-5,13-17
John 3:1-17 or
Matthew 17:1-9

Third Sunday in Lent
March 12, 2023

Exodus 17:1-7
Psalm 95
Romans 5:1-11
John 4:5-42

Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 19, 2023

1 Samuel 16:1-13
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

Annunciation of the Lord
March 25, 2023

Isaiah 7:10-14
Psalm 45 or
Psalm 40:5-10
Hebrews 10:4-10
Luke 1:26-38

Season of Lent

Lectionary Readings



Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 26, 2023

Ezekiel 37:1-14
Psalm 130
Romans 8:6-11
John 11:1-45

Liturgy of Palms

April 2, 2023

Psalms 118:1-2,19-29
Matthew 21:1-11

Liturgy of the Passion

Sixth Sunday of Lent
April 2, 2023

Isaiah 50:49a
Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 26:14-27:66 or
Matthew 27:11-54



Friday, March 10, 2023

Question: From where does my help come?

I read God's word, I worship God in the sanctuary, I unashamedly share the good news of God's Kingdom with others, in an effort to be counted as righteousness in the eye sight of God.

Prayer

Dear God I pray that you will continue to show your face to me and to us so that we might know the way to be called righteous. Father, just as we were baptized and died from the old and entered into the newness of life, we ask that you would forgive our sins as we seek righteousness. Cause us God to die to our sins and be resurrected from above to your will and way each time we stray. Show us, Father, your face and light our path that we might know the way to Righteousness. We love you, God our Father and we pray this prayer in your Son's name, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.



Eric Hunter, Sr.

Eric, a father and grandfather, serves in the Diaconate Ministry, Pastoral Leader of the Mighty Men of Christ Choir and Hospitality Ministry. As a Deacon of the MAABC family, with the help of the Holy Spirit, he seeks to serve as a mentor, model, and minister for church members and persons in the community. As a member of the Hospitality Ministry, he is faithful in ensuring that persons are graciously greeted and welcomed to worship. He is owner of Kevric, a Lawn and Home Service, which he sees as a vehicle for fulfilling his work of ministry in the community.

Friday, March 10, 2023

Question: From where does my help come?

In a world where we do life that is filled with trouble, our God wants us to know that God is God and God all by God's self. God sits high and looks low, watching over God's flock. In the evening years of my dad's life (the late Deacon Samuel Hunter), he would often say, "I look to the hills-- from where will my help come?" As citizens of the kingdom of God, I have come to understand that the work we are called to do is plentiful but the agents of our God's kingdom are few. We as his people in order to understand what is required of us we must look to God, the hills for our help and instruction, "not" this old crazy World. In Psalm 121, we are helped to know that our God is real, good, and faithful and when we serve God, God blesses us with righteousness and gives us peace.

The toil of true believers to live a life that is in accordance with God's will is real. We as believers seek to prosper by world standards and store up resources for ourselves so we can be counted as rich by world standards. We really, really do that with consistency. In Romans 4:1-5, 13-17, one of the assigned lections for this week, we come to understand that our faith walk is what makes us rich then God counts us as righteous. Righteousness comes from God as we serve to bring forth God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, and we do that through our example as God's people. The world is watching how we as God's agents do community.

I look to the hills--from where will my help come? I'm thankful that I was able to receive Christ early in my life unlike my dad and many others who continued to perish in the world godless! I take instructions from the Shepherd God assigned to my life Pastor Cooper. I read God's word, I worship God in the sanctuary, I unashamedly share the

Reading of the Gospels

During the 40 weekdays of Lent, we will read the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There are 89 chapters in the four gospels. We can complete our reading of the gospels by reading 2 1/4 chapters from the gospels each day of Lent. For the week after the Second Sunday in Lent (Monday, March 6) to the Saturday (March 11, 2023), we will complete the reading of the Gospel of Matthew and then we will move to read the Gospel of Mark.

<i>Day</i>	<i>Chapters</i>
Monday, March 6, 2023	Matthew 25:1 to 27:23
Tuesday, March 7, 2023	Matthew 27:24 to Mark 1:45
Wednesday, March 8, 2023	Mark 2:1 to 4:20
Thursday, March 9, 2023	Mark 4:21 to 6:56
Friday, March 10, 2023	Mark 7:1 to 9:29
Saturday, March 11, 2023	Mark 9:30 to 11:33

Monday, March 6, 2023
Extraordinary Things in Ordinary Experience

The scriptures for week 2 of Lent puts together some extraordinary things into our ordinary experience. From Matthew, 'Jesus transfigured before them and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white...Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.' From John and the Psalm, we are looking to the hills from whence cometh our help and then expected to believe or depend on the heavenly help and spiritual rebirth here on Earth. Who are the people that experience these extraordinary things in their ordinary human life?

I never used to believe that I was one of those people. There have been times in the past that I have asked people 'what do you mean you 'heard from God?' or "God showed you..." - What does God sound like to you? I never knew how we as people make that proclamation seriously. I thought that there were some people that had a direct line to the Lord and then there was me.

I joined MAABC and attended new members' classes and teachers' classes. In those settings, I found out what it meant for other people to hear from or see God. I learned soon thereafter and still come to find that ordinary hurts and ordinary problems or just ordinary life-ing now avails me to hear or see the voice and presence of God. I live everyday now knowing that I find the voice of God and exactly what God sounds like - my parents, family, preacher, older aunts, friends, daughter, the scriptures and experiences that lead me to recognize that voice.

Thursday, March 9, 2023
Our Faith in God: Listen to Jesus!

The author of Matthew 17:1-9 emphasized for us to Listen to Jesus, even though Moses and Elijah were voices also heard by Peter, John, and John's brother James. It makes sense for us to listen to Jesus, who is the fullest revelation of who God is. My faith is in God, who is mysteriously three in one: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, I encourage us to put our faith in God who directs us to listen to God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior!



Prayer

Most Gracious, Merciful, and Loving Father God, I come before you to offer praise and thanksgiving to you for all that you have done, all you do, and all that you will do for us and through us. Thank you for protecting us from danger, seen and unseen. Please forgive us for not placing our faith in the world vs. on you. Please help us to maintain a right relationship with you by replenishing us with your Holy Spirit activated as we continue to do your will. Cleanse our hearts and restore our minds so we may speak and act in loving and just ways that create peace. We especially thank you for your son, Jesus Christ. It is in the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Deaconess Sharonda Ragland

Deaconess Ragland serves as Associate Pastoral Leader of the Diaconate Ministry, a Covenant Discipleship Group (CDG) J-Tribe member, a facilitator for Faith Talks, the Pastoral Leader of the MAABC Hospitality Ministry, a member of Nia Dance Ministry, and a member of the Christian Women Ministry. She is the mother of Jada and Tyler.

Thursday, March 9, 2023
Our Faith in God: Listen to Jesus!

As I meditated on the Scriptures for the Second Sunday in Lent, I experienced challenges, comfort, and direction. Starting with Genesis 12:14a, the author highlighted that the Egyptians saw Sarai as a beautiful woman. It was very challenging that the woman's voice had no sound for the reader to hear her input on the situation, yet Abraham's voice was evident in a plan to secure himself. The comfort was

knowing that, even in our silence, the Lord our God, maker of heaven and earth, watches over God's people day and night to keep us from all harm (Psalm 121).

Moving to Romans 4: 1-5, 13-17, I am reminded that righteousness comes from our faith in God. So, it is not what I do, what I have, how I behave, who I know, how I look, or how much education I acquire that makes God accept me. I reflected on how I tried to secure and hold on to things of the world I thought made me happy, to result in more weight than I could carry. It was challenging to feel helpless and hopeless when things didn't go as I expected. I found myself in the wilderness, which allowed me to hear God's voice. Before the wilderness experience, I did not hear God's voice because things were going well, and I had life all planned out. Through that wilderness experience, God melted, molded, and then filled me with His Spirit. My faith in God created a new mindset and path for me to follow and lead my children. Our faith in God directs us to Listen to Jesus!

Monday, March 6, 2023
Extraordinary Things in Ordinary Experience

I think that when Jesus transfigures before them, it confirms what Peter and James already knew - they were in the presence of God - man and spirit. When I am facing trouble, hurt or confusion, I can reflect or listen to those within my reach or my past to hear something that I know shows God's presence and what I learn happens in the Bible. Those people and their stories are the 'help that is in the hills' for me and for us. I know that when something really has me preoccupied and confused, I can hear what has to be God specifically through people, teaching, preaching, songs of the faith and even rejection or a missed opportunity. I know it's God's voice and presence because it becomes crystal clear to me what my answer or solution is. Sometimes it's almost like it starts to shine and take such a definite form that it's undeniable. Sometimes someone will say something and I want to grab them because they are answering something that my spirit has been asking God over and over. I also know that it's God's presence because it usually contradicts everything I want to do or feel like I know to do. It is not right away and it is usually not normal to what I would do, but I embrace it because I know how God works.

Monday, March 6, 2023
Extraordinary Things in Ordinary Experience

Prayer

My prayer is that God will continue to show up and make his face shine upon us and be gracious unto us. I pray for the discernment to know that when things go beyond my ordinary strength and my ordinary thinking, that God will transfigure any of those elements to make his direction and his voice clear. I know that your presence and your Spirit is near through your people and through your purpose for my life. I thank you, God, for growing me in the experience to know and recognize extraordinary and heavenly intervention and intercession on this earth and in this ordinary human life.

Vanita Miles Mason

Vanita is the wife of Derek Mason and the mother of Kendall. She is an educator in the Emporia-Greenville County Public School system. She has used her gifts in the Discipleship Ministry and the Music and Fine Arts Ministry.



Wednesday, March 8, 2023
God is my Helper

Prayer

Dear God, continue to help me through the people you placed in my life. Use me to help others. Help us to always celebrate you for all the help you give us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Dennis J. Paxton

Dennis, known as DJ, is the son of Ms. Daphne Cooper and the late Dennis Leonard Paxton. He has been a part of Kindom Village Child Care Center since he was three months old. DJ is now a sixth grader at River City Middle School, where he has been recognized as the student of month and honor roll student. As a part of MAABC, DJ sings in the choir and now participates in the Youth Hospitality Ministry. He loves playing drums and hopes to do that for MAABC.



Wednesday, March 8, 2023
God is my Helper

Psalms 121 is the psalm for the Second Sunday in Lent. This psalm talks about how God helped the psalmist. God helps the psalmist by offering protection, direction and companionship. God is always present with the psalmist.

Like God helped the psalmist, God helps us too. God helps me by placing people in my life. God gave me a family who provides, protects and shares. My mom teaches me to be kind and to be the best I can be. My dad taught me to be respectful and mannerable. My step dad tells me stories about life and gives me advice.

God has given me teachers that share knowledge about different subjects. Also I meet people who are my friends. With them, I play games and have fun.

God has given me a daycare that teaches me about God. I come to know who God is and how God gave us Jesus Christ who sacrificed his life for us. God is with us through the Holy Spirit helping us to love God and others, to care for others, to forgive others, and to tell others about God. I thank God for Ms. Annie, Mrs. Cooper, Ms. Jones, Miss. Janae, Ms. Pam, Ms. Ann, Ms. Regina, Pastor Ingram and Pastor Cooper.

Tuesday, March 7, 2023
Choices

As I looked at the scriptures for the second Sunday in Lent, I saw several concepts that came out of them. But, as I prepared the worship format for this week, I did some additional reading. And when I met with the Worship Committee, it all helped me to focus on an overarching theme. The theme for this week is “choice.”

My goodness, our lives are filled with choices! Those choices are considered both major and minor. But, is there really a minor choice? It might seem like a minor choice to get up and eat an egg or two for breakfast. However, over time that “minor” daily choice may have your doctor advising you that your cholesterol is greater than 200 and you must change your breakfast routine.

Another thing about choices is that they often affect people other than yourself. If we decide we are in a hurry, drive too fast, and have an accident, that can cause injury to other people and property. I have had the responsibility of caring for others most of my adult life. It is a tremendous responsibility and challenge to constantly know that others are dependent on the decisions you make for their health, safety, and general well-being.

One bad decision or choice can change the trajectory of one's life in a split second. A word in anger, an act of revenge, a careless action, a moment of inattention, can send you on a path of sorrow and regret. A choice you make can also bring happiness and joy to you and others.

Tuesday, March 7, 2023
Choices

One bad decision or choice can change the trajectory of one's life in a split second. A word in anger, an act of revenge, a careless action, a moment of inattention, can send you on a path of sorrow and regret. A choice you make can also bring happiness and joy to you and others. A choice can be an expression of love and bring people together in peace. Choices are tricky. There are occasions when you know immediately what the results of your choices are and sometimes you don't know the results for years.

When it comes to our Christian journey, we are constantly presented with choices of good and evil, sin and righteousness, blessings and curse, life and death. Knowing, trusting, loving, and serving Jesus is a choice. We can choose to reject him as our savior and have a life of pain and sorrow, receiving eternal damnation or we can have faith in Jesus and receive his promised blessings and eternal life. I don't know about you, but for me and my house, the best choice is to have faith in Jesus Christ.

Tuesday, March 7, 2023
Choices

Prayer

Most gracious and merciful Father; giver of salvation, we come to you confessing that we are imperfect and sometimes find ourselves out of your will. We thank you for being forgiving and desiring that we all be saved. We thank you for guiding us. Help us as we embrace faith in you and your words of instruction. Please Lord, help us to make the right decisions. Don't let us hurt others but instead, to love them as you have loved us. And Lord, help us to help others, by encouragement and example, to make You their choice. It is in the precious name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

Lafonda B. Greene

Lafonda is the widow of Deacon John S. Greene, who was Artist in Residence and the mother of Alexis and Tiffany. Lafonda serves as Pastoral Leader of our Music and Fine Arts Ministry.

