

INTRODUCTION

Lent at TVC



"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

2 Peter 1:5-8

The practice of Lent has a wide and varied history. A most commonly accepted understanding connects this practice to the early church of the 4th century. Following the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., Lent was officially declared to be a period of preparation, beginning 40 days before Easter (excluding Sundays), on what has come to be known as Ash Wednesday. In imitation of Christ's fasting for 40 days in the wilderness in preparation for his public ministry, an observance connected with penitence and sacrifice is practiced in Anglican churches. Other denominations might choose only to observe special services and practices.

While the Evangelical church has not traditionally practiced a formal observance of Lent, many have found it meaningful to incorporate aspects of it in their preparation for Easter. This year at The Village Chapel we are inviting our church family to corporately join in an observance of Lent in a unique form.

Rather than a season of denial and fasting, we are inviting you to celebrate the gifts and resources of our faith, secured for us by Christ's death and resurrection.

Theologian Louis Berkhof said that "sanctification is a work of God in which believers cooperate." This is clearly the aim of 2 Peter 1:5-8 which calls us to "make every effort to add to our faith" six characteristics, or Christian graces, that equip us for a flourishing and productive life as a believer. So for our practice, we will observe a theme each week in scripture reading and prayer focus. Lovely pieces of art by creatives who call TVC home, as well as excerpts from the poetry of TVCer Julie Sumner, will accompany our practice.

We hope this will help us to be more spiritually aware of the season, and more grateful for the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Welcome to Lent at The Village Chapel.

Simon of Cyrene

Mark 15:20-21, Romans 16:13

*When the smooth glass of our plans
is shattered by the flung rock
of harsh, unimagined demands,
remind us, Jesus, of your last helper,
Simon the Cyrenian.*

*He might have been on his way
to the temple, rehearsing his litany
of sins, face gray with tired shame,
sacrifice fluttering in his hands—
a gesture never quite enough.*

*Did you have him in your mind
at the beginning, before everything,
before time? Did your love find
him the way water finds a way
through stone, washing through him*

*though the cross still blistered
his skin and bowed his bones? Help us
embrace your interruption, Jesus, even
though our once-lovely plans now are shards,
painful it may be, it is where you are.*

-Julie Sumner

WEEK ONE

Goodness

This first week, as we celebrate the work of Christ in our lives, we begin with “goodness”. Our imitation of Christ can be manifested in several ways. It is a virtue that comes to bear in our own spiritual practice, our expression of the Gospel at work in us, and how we act towards others. It could encompass generosity, kindness, rightness, mercy, and so much more. It is a good place to start.

In this painting by Ed Nash, there is a joyful collection and celebration of color that is overcoming the darkness. Perhaps this week, we might look for ways to bring light to darkness, celebration to mourning and beauty to ashes.



*“How beautiful on the mountain are the feet
of those that bring good news.” Mary remembered
as she sat at your feet, the good news shared
with women as well as men, poor as well as well off.*

Excerpt from “Mary of Bethany,” Julie Sumner

ABOVE: *Violet Hue 5*, Ed Nash (acrylic on canvas)

INSTAGRAM: @ed.nash.fine.art

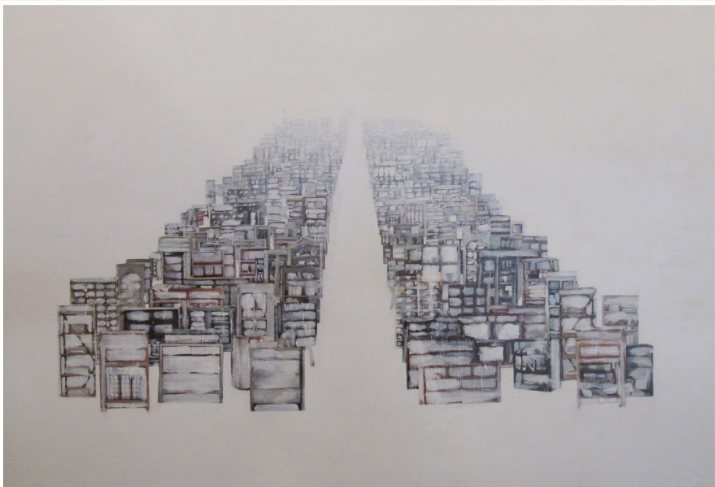
- 1 **READ** "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." **Galatians 6:10**
- PRAY** *Help us to be alert to how we might do good - in practical helps and thoughtful prayers - for others in the body of Christ.*
- 2 **READ** "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." **Romans 12:21**
- PRAY** *Protect us from the ravages of what is contrary to You Lord, and give us courage to bring to bear that which is good in all things.*
- 3 **READ** "Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." **Matthew 5:15,16**
- PRAY** *Give us opportunity to actively do good, that it might bring the glorious light of Christ to a dark and hurting world.*
- 4 **READ** "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?" **1 Peter 3:13**
- PRAY** *Help us to trust the safety of Your arms around us, that we might leave fear behind and move out in confident expectation of the goodness You will do through us.*
- 5 **READ** "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." **Philippians 4:8**
- PRAY** *Help us wisely sift our input, so that we might more wisely curate the things our hearts dwell on.*
- 6 **READ** "And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good." **2 Thessalonians 3:13**
- PRAY** *May the joy of doing good refresh and inform our often urgent but not important schedules.*
- 7 **READ** "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." **Luke 6:35**
- PRAY** *Oh God, give us eyes to see people as You see them, that we might do good to and for them, for the pure joy of knowing it pleases You.*

WEEK TWO

Knowledge

The knowledge that Peter calls us to add to our faith in 1 Peter 2 is not about having a superior intellect, or academic prowess. In this context, he is referring to having a mind intent on knowing the will of God. Because we belong to God, working out our sanctification in this way is built on the foundation of that relational privilege.

Because Christ has called us "friends" as John 15:15 says, He has made known to us everything He learned from the Father. The will of God is the knowledge we seek.



*And though your stomach curled into a growl,
you knew that bread alone is never enough,
humankind's most ferocious hunger- the hollow
that gnaws in our souls, that longing that groans
for a word like a breath from beyond our selves,
for a word like honeycomb, like manna,
for a word like my, like beloved, like Son,
for a word from God whose name is love.*

Excerpt from "Luke 4:1-4," Julie Sumner

In Mandy Horton's contemplative piece, rows and rows of shelves house books infinitum. As we consider knowledge this week, let's be mindful that all the world's books and resources, while valuable, are of little profit to us if we are not first seeking the mind and will of God.

ABOVE: *Untitled*, 2014, Mandy Rogers Horton (3' x 4', mixed media on paper)

INSTAGRAM: @m.rogershorton

WEEK TWO Knowledge

- 1 **READ** "Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands."
Psalms 119:66
PRAY *Help us to learn to discern wisely, by knowing You and following You.*
- 2 **READ** "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline." **Proverbs 1:7**
PRAY *May our reverence and submission to You direct us in Your ways.*
- 3 **READ** "Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly."
Proverbs 13:16
PRAY *Teach us patience in how we respond to people and circumstances, that we might not be foolish in our haste.*
- 4 **READ** "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him." **2 Corinthians 2:14**
PRAY *Use us to be a good contagion for the Gospel.*
- 5 **READ** "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." **2 Peter 1:3**
PRAY *Thank you for the extreme generosity of Your resources for godly living in Christ Jesus.*
- 6 **READ** "For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge..." **1 Corinthians 1:5**
PRAY *Remind us to live and move by Your very present guidance in our lives in word and deed.*
- 7 **READ** "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight..." **Philippians 1:9**
PRAY *May our time with You Father, in prayer and scripture, quiet and study, continue to inform and enrich how we love with abundance.*

WEEK THREE

Self-Control

Matthew Henry says self-control in this passage could be seen as a "right understanding and knowledge of outward comforts." He continues by saying that having a proper view of their worth and usefulness, allows us to see how "vastly inferior" they are to spiritual mercies.

We are also aware, from Galatians 5, that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit in our lives. In fact, our efforts at self-control are only fruitful by the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, gifted to us by Christ.

Charlie Peacock's painting celebrates music in its great splendor. This is also a reminder that while beautiful music is grandly expressive, it also requires great self-control in the decision of what/how much/whether to play or not play each and every note of a song.



*Jesus, grant us eyes to see
Your spirit like electricity,
that invisible dolphin
leaping from neuron to neuron
to marvelous neuron,
Your truth like gravity,
that unseen string strung
between moon and earth, earth and sun...*

Excerpt from "John 4:9-38," Julie Sumner

ABOVE: *Eighth Note Gesture*, Charlie Peacock (acrylic on canvas, 12" x 16")

INSTAGRAM: @charliepeacock

WEEK THREE Self-Control

- 1 **READ** "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."
2 Timothy 1:7
PRAY *May Your power and love imbue us with confident self-discipline.*
- 2 **READ** "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."
Galatians 5:22,23
PRAY *By consistent practice, we pray for the fruitfulness of self-control to richly ripen in our daily lives.*
- 3 **READ** "The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult."
Proverbs 12:16
PRAY *Help us to not be so easily offended by the words and actions of others.*
- 4 **READ** "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." James 1:19
PRAY *Give us restraint in our words, opinions and reactions. Help us to pause and wisely respond.*
- 5 **READ** "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age." Titus 2:11,12
PRAY *We are grateful for your grace that reaches beyond our sins. Help us be intentional in our desire to live in light of that.*
- 6 **READ** "A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back."
Proverbs 29:11
PRAY *Help us to control the temptation to spill our emotions at will with no regard for the result.*
- 7 **READ** "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls."
Proverbs 25:28
PRAY *As we learn the dignity of discretion, please fortify the goodness of our days oh Lord.*

WEEK FOUR

Perseverance

While self-control is a call to wisely enjoy good things, perseverance is a call to endure bad things. Some days the glory of God seems everywhere, but other days, persevering through our own sin and the effects of sin around us will be a battle for each thought. Thankfully, Peter's imperative to "make every effort" to add perseverance to our faith is not accomplished simply by our willpower, but it is enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit.



Elizabeth's painting shows the dogged perseverance of birds in pursuit of a loose kite - while the birds fly with the wind, the kite stays in the air against the wind. Both partner with the blessing of the wind as they fly. Similarly, our perseverance is powered by the ruach - the wind - of the Holy Spirit, sometimes urging us forward, sometimes keeping us from falling.

*Help us, Yahweh, obey your command—
help us to be truly unafraid;
and give us the gift of unkillable faith,
that our hope in you might overgrow the fear,
and grow stubbornly greener, year after year.*

Excerpt from "Isaiah 31:8-10," Julie Sumner

ABOVE: *The Run Away Kite*, Elizabeth Foster (12" x 12" acrylic on board)
elizabethfosterart.com

WEEK FOUR Perseverance

- 1 **READ** "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." **Hebrews 12:1**
- PRAY** *Help us let go of things that keep us from maintaining a healthy faith, moving and looking forward.*
- 2 **READ** "But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance." **Luke 8:15**
- PRAY** *As we feed on Your good Word, Lord, give us patience that You will, in Your time, produce fruit in our lives.*
- 3 **READ** "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." **James 1:2-4**
- PRAY** *Thank You for the promise that trials have ultimate purpose, and that we are not living at the whim of circumstances and random challenges.*
- 4 **READ** "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." **Romans 5:3-5**
- PRAY** *Grant us the eyes to see the process at work in us, as You lead us through adversity to realized hope.*
- 5 **READ** "Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." **Revelation 14:12**
- PRAY** *Give us courage to obey Your design for our lives, knowing that we will flourish most by living in Your ways.*
- 6 **READ** "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints..." **Ephesians 6:18**
- PRAY** *Lead us in the path of perseverance, not only for our good, but the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ.*
- 7 **READ** "But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it." **Romans 8:25**
- PRAY** *Strengthen us to hope in the things that are not often easily grasped, because the end result is the realization of Your promises.*

WEEK FIVE

Godliness

Theologian Joel Green describes godliness as a “practical awareness” of God. One can see that as we are present to His presence in every detail and moment of our lives, we would be urged to live in devotion to Him, or godliness.

This devotion manifests in living that is pleasing to God. Godliness is the fruit of an ongoing relationship with Him, the genesis of which is the extensive grace that has been gifted to us, to save us.



In the painting, we can see a contemplative narrative of the blood of Christ, spilled for us, so we might be given the opportunity for right relationship with God. That rich relationship with Him results in something more valuable, more beautiful than where we started, more precious than even gold.

*...So keep us from willful blandness,
from foolishly wasting this taste
on boredom and cynicism,
on numbness and excess,*

*sharp taste of salt, so familiar, so raw,
sip of the ocean, sorrow's tears,
sacred season on the sacrifice—
the reason your hand is pierced.*

Excerpt from “Salt,” Julie Sumner

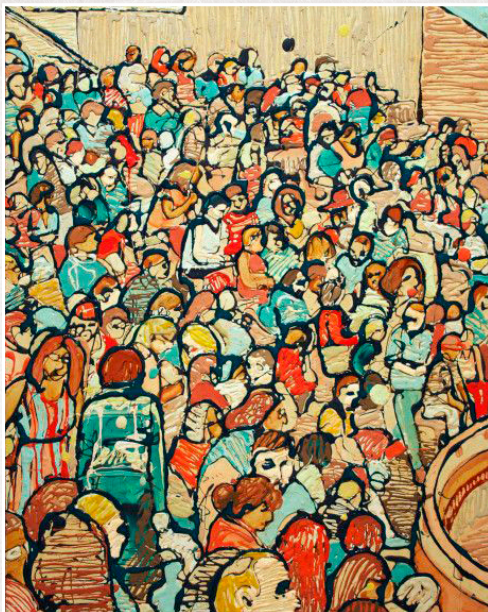
ABOVE: *Rain Water Chain*, Kim Thomas
(30" x 30" Nihonga - organic mineral pigment & silver leaf on paper-wrapped board)

INSTAGRAM: @kimthomasart

- 1 **READ** "But godliness with contentment is great gain..." 1 Timothy 6:6
PRAY *Help us to honor You more, knowing it is the way to contentment - which is yet another gift from You.*
- 2 **READ** "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness." 1 Timothy 4:7
PRAY *Don't allow us to be distracted by imposters and imitations, disguising themselves as truth. Help us instead to have a routine of habits that help form godliness in us.*
- 3 **READ** "But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness." 1 Timothy 6:11
PRAY *Grant us the discernment to run from foolishness, and instead pursue those things that will build on the foundations of our faith.*
- 4 **READ** "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence." 2 Peter 1:3
PRAY *Thank you for being our provision in all aspects of our lives, especially in drawing us to yourself. May Your glory be our desire in all things.*
- 5 **READ** "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Romans 12:1
PRAY *Let us remember that who we are, and what we do, should be as unto You.*
- 6 **READ** "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." Ephesians 4:1
PRAY *As members of your family, help us live out our faith in the reality of our adoption into the kingdom of God.*
- 7 **READ** "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me..." Galatians 2:20
PRAY *We are thankful that in our identification with Christ, all of who we are is now lived in the power of the Holy Spirit by the completed work of our loving savior.*

WEEK SIX

Brotherly Kindness/Love



The last theme from 2 Peter 1:5-8 is love - both philadelphia (love for our brothers and sisters in Christ) and agape (a self-less love towards all). This is the culmination of Peter's concern for right belief that leads to right behavior. If love is not the resulting action of our faith, have we truly been seized by the great affection of God?

In Amanda's powerful painting, there is an imminent reminder that we live in the context of community. The chaos that could result from that would be the selfish demand for "what is mine", or "me and my needs", or "what is fair". Instead, the love of God has turned our eyes and hearts outward to the needs of others. Amanda's perfectly balanced composition in shapes and colors underpins the joyful celebration of the coterie of humanity.

*How delicious you have made us, O Lord,
our crystalline inmost structure now
an essence to savor, a flung flavor
for the whole world to feast upon!*

Excerpt from "Salt," Julie Sumner

ABOVE: *Wooden Theatre*, Amanda Joy Brown (30" x 40" acrylic on canvas, 2013)

INSTAGRAM: @amissmandajo

Brotherly Kindness/Love

- 1 **READ** "We love because He first loved us." 1 John 4:19
PRAY *Father, thank You that Your initiating love for us enables our love for others.*
- 2 **READ** "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor..." Romans 12:10
PRAY *Help us love each other with familial affection and an attitude of willing otherness.*
- 3 **READ** "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:32
PRAY *We so desperately need to leave behind our bitterness Lord. Help us act in Christlike grace towards others.*
- 4 **READ** "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." 1 Corinthians 13:4,5
PRAY *Lord this list is a high standard we long to live by - may we be aware of the contrasting behavior that could so easily issue from us if we are not more consumed by your love.*
- 5 **READ** "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Colossians 3:14
PRAY *Father help us to pursue love above being right, or first, or heard, knowing that when we pursue love together, our missional work is made effective by our unity.*
- 6 **READ** "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Matthew 5:44
PRAY *You modeled this so perfectly from the cross for us - loving and forgiving those who sent you there. Grow that intention of heart in us, Your image bearers, we pray.*
- 7 **READ** "He answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Luke 10:27
PRAY *Oh that we could leave all other distractions and desires behind for the call of this verse - it is our heart's desire. So much else in our lives would be put in perspective by obedience to this great command.*