



2026

Weekday Devotional Guide

*Journey through Lent with
First Lutheran Church*

Week 2



Weekday Devotional Guide



This Lenten devotional invites you to journey through Lent with people of First Lutheran Church as they reflect on each week's Gospel reading. Five voices share insights Monday through Friday. We invite you to take sabbath on Saturday and worship on Sunday where you will hear Pastor Sami's sermon on the verse for next week.

Lent is a time of reflection, repentance, sacrifice and self-examination. But Lent is also a season of hope – hope in the work God is doing in the world, even in the most challenging times. It can be a season of spiritual renewal and preparation for the death of Jesus Christ. Lent means a lot of things to different people. What does it mean to you?

Thank you so much to everyone who contributed to the 2026 devotion booklet. I am amazed at the courage, faith and passion of First Lutheran Church. It is very unique to have 30 people willing to be so open and honest about their faith. I cannot thank you enough for sharing. This devotional booklet is truly a gift to everyone who reads it. Thank you so much.

Pastor Sami



Week 2
John 3:1-17



Weekday Devotional Guide

John 3:1-17

By Jeff Langdon



In the Gospel of John 3:1–17, we meet Nicodemus, a religious leader who comes to Jesus under the cover of night. His timing feels symbolic. He is learned, respected, and devout...yet something in him remains restless. He comes in the dark not only because of social risk, but because he himself is in the dark, bound by questions he cannot answer. Many of us know this kind of binding: the weight of expectations, the quiet fear that our faith is insufficient, the longing to be whole. Nicodemus' nighttime visit gives us permission to bring our own half-formed questions and unspoken fears directly to Christ.

Jesus responds with a phrase that has echoed through centuries of Christian reflection: "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." To be born from above is to receive what we cannot achieve. It is the Spirit's work—like wind moving where it will...unbinding us from the illusion that we save ourselves.

Nicodemus struggles with the image. "How can anyone be born after having grown old?" he asks. His question is honest, even tender. We too wonder whether change is possible...whether old wounds, entrenched systems, and inherited prejudices can truly be undone. Jesus points him toward water and the Spirit. In the waters of Baptism, we are named and claimed for participation in God's renewing work. The Spirit unbinds us from shame and also from complacency, and moves us towards love, justice, and reconciliation.

Then comes the heart of the passage: "For God so loved the world..." While this verse is often used as a test, or a gate, of who is in and who is out, in John's proclamation, the scope is unmistakable. The world is not just the church, but everything and everyone in God's good creation. But then comes the

Weekday Devotional Guide

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punchline, the verse that follows changes everything, Jesus didn't come to condemn. Pause for a moment and let it sink in. If God's primary purpose was judgment, then the incarnation is a failed mission. God's purpose was and is ...healing, restoration and wholeness. In our faith tradition this is where we focus... God's grace.

PRAYER: Loving God, you meet us in our night and unbind us by your Spirit, birthing us into the wide grace of your Son. Send us into the world made whole in your love, that we may live as signs of your light and your promises for all.

Weekday Devotional Guide

John 3:1-17

By Joyce Stroud



Verses one through seven are the human side of the story. Nicodemus, “a ruler of the Jews ... came to Jesus by night.” He came with questions and doubts. Am I like Nicodemus, do I only seek God in the safety of darkness: Do I hide his light in my life under that bushel that we sing about?

Verses eight through fourteen talk about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit who is in us and with us. Like the wind, we don’t know where the Spirit came from and where it will lead us.

Verses fifteen through seventeen tell us of Jesus’ reassurance of the promise and gift of eternal life. In the midst of my doubts and failings, I only have to remember that like the wind, the Spirit will guide me through the trials of my life. Knowing this, I can see the joy and beauty of the world around me.

Thank you Lord for the renewal of springtime and your guidance in our journey. Amen.

Weekday Devotional Guide

John 3:1-17
By Kent Heir



Nicodemus came to Jesus with the certainty we might expect from a Pharisee and member of the ruling council. “Rabbi, we know, you are a teacher who has come from God.” Not “we think” or “it seems like” — “we know.”

Jesus, though, doesn’t leave him in his certainty: “I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again...The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

This bewilders Nicodemus: “How can this be?” Jesus responds with a mini-sermon highlighted by what Luther called “the Gospel in miniature,” John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

We don’t immediately learn of Nicodemus’ reaction to this encounter. But we see the results later. In John 7, he argues for justice, asking fellow leaders if it was right to condemn Jesus without first hearing him out. And in John 19, after the crucifixion, he lovingly helps prepare Jesus’ body and lay him in the tomb.

Meeting Jesus had challenged Nicodemus’ confidence in his own understanding, had taken him out of the comforting world where he knew what was expected of him, and had equipped him to “seek justice, love, mercy, and walk humbly with your God.”

Weekday Devotional Guide

John 3:1-17

By Kent Heir



Prayer: God, challenge the certainty that can keep us from fully knowing you. Lead us to rely not on our own understanding but to seek you and your ways in all that we do, so that we may live life abundantly and whole. In Christ's name, Amen

Weekday Devotional Guide

John 3:1-17
Maggie Knight



The key verse that is typically considered the favorite is John 3:16. When Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus during the time of this passage, Nicodemus was considered to be a religious expert who although he thought he had everything figured out, he would go to Jesus at night searching for more guidance. Jesus would often challenge his perspective and in doing so Jesus explained to Nicodemus that entering the kingdom of God isn't actually about obeying rules or even being born into the right family. In fact, Jesus offered what at the time would be considered a radical, inward transformational viewpoint of being "born from above" or born of the (or through the) Holy Spirit.

This "take" on the passage of John 3:16, in particular, switches the focus from "believing in the Son of God, to the acknowledgement of the Holy Spirit in our path to being saved through grace. The Holy Spirit's work is invisible but powerful, changing us from the inside out from the time of birth (or even before) and beyond death. In John 3: 1-17, Jesus is actually inviting us to stop working to "earn" our place and instead look to him for salvation through our daily lives.

Heavenly Father, thank You for your unwavering love. Lord, I confess that I often try to do things on my own strength and much like Nicodemus, I need reminding that I only need the presence of your Son and the Holy Spirit in my life to bring about daily new birth. I pray that the Holy Spirit remains a constant, invisible although transformative, presence in my life allowing the renewal of my heart and mind daily. I thank you, Lord, for your never-ending grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Weekday Devotional Guide

John 3:1-17
Janice Harmsen



Under the cover of darkness, a Jewish leader named Nicodemus came secretly to Jesus with a question. It's strange that Nicodemus came in secret because Jesus' answer became the best-known Bible verse of all. Perhaps Nicodemus went in the dark so nobody would be able to see where he was going. Nicodemus was a powerful and wealthy man. Not only was he a Pharisee but also a member of the supreme court of the Jews. Perhaps he came at night because he was troubled in his soul. Maybe Nicodemus was afraid, ashamed or embarrassed to be seen with Jesus, who was causing much confusion among the Jews. Jesus explained to him how everyone would know if they were Heaven bound when they died. The way of salvation involves believing in Jesus only. Salvation hinges on belief. People must look to Jesus and trust His death on the cross as the only payment for the forgiveness of sins that God will accept. Salvation cannot be earned by anything that is done or said. Jesus had done it all by His sacrifice. These verses contain some absolutely essential truths of life. We need to be undivided in our devotion to God and to Jesus Christ. We need to obey God's commands and not make a practice of sinning. We need to love God and to love others as God so loved the world.

Let us pray: Lord God, you know that we are set in the midst of so many great dangers. By nature, we are frail and cannot always stand upright. Grant us strength and protection to support us in the danger we face and help us resist temptations. Through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, we ask for your help and guidance. Amen

FIVE MINUTES OF STILLNESS AND SILENCE

Holding stillness and silence sounds like a relatively simple practice, which in principle, it is! Despite the simplicity of form, however, it can be one of the more difficult practices to stay with as a daily practice. Every day we are bombarded with so many stimuli, that when we are presented with stillness and silence, our mind quickly fills the space back up.

The goal of a stillness practice is not to find some amount of stillness or silence. When we practice stillness, we practice creating a settled feeling within, which helps us experience and engage with the world differently and more clearly. It ultimately becomes a practice of listening to the presence of God.



FIVE MINUTES OF STILLNESS AND SILENCE

To enter this practice, find a space where you are likely to be uninterrupted for a few minutes. Sit with your feet flat on the floor, back straight, and close your eyes. Allow the distractions to melt away and take a few deep breaths. Notice how simply by breathing deeply, your body already begins to find some ease. Set a timer and enter into stillness for five minutes. If (and when) you find yourself mentally wandering away from stillness, simply return to your breath. Allow yourself to be present to the moment, to yourself, and to God.

When the five minutes are up, take a moment to notice what the experience was like for you. Notice any changes within yourself.

Lord of stillness,
in the quiet we have met You.

Where words have faded, let Your presence remain.

Carry what has stirred in our hearts into the light of this day,
and guide us gently in Your truth and peace.

Amen.