

BREAD FOR THE JOURNEY

2019 LENTEN REFLECTIONS



FOR & BY THE PEOPLE OF ST. BARNABAS



CONTEMPLATIVE HOLY EUCHARIST

March 17th at 5pm in the church

Do you long for more silence in your worship? Would you like to sink more deeply into music, reflection, Word and Sacrament? Join us in the church this **Sunday Evening, 3/17 at 5pm** for our monthly Contemplative Holy Eucharist. We'll gather in the church for Eucharist followed by conversation and light refreshments. We hope you will join us. This service is a wonderful way to steep ourselves in the Holy in preparation for the week ahead.

Questions? Contact Rev. Karen, revkaren@stbbi.org



SUPPER & SACRAMENTS

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS IN THE PARISH HALL

March 13th, 20th, 27th, April 3rd, 10th

Join us Wednesday evenings in Lent as we explore the Sacraments of the church. What is a Sacrament? How many of them are there and what are they called? Do Sacraments matter? Why? We'll explore these questions and many others as we deepen our experience and understanding of the Sacraments at our Wednesday Evenings in Lent. Join us for a simple soup supper at 6:30, our program begins at 7. For each of the 5 weeks (March 13th through April 10th), we need 3 volunteer soup makers and 3 others to provide bread (including gluten free bread) and butter. You'll find sign-up sheets in the parish hall, so pick your favorite soup recipe and sign up to feed the congregation!

For information about exploring the Sacraments, contact revkaren@stbbi.org

For information or to volunteer to help with supper,
contact Elaine Percival epercival001@gmail.com or 360-440-4651

INTRODUCTION TO THE ST. BARNABAS LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

For Christians, Lent is a time set apart. Forty full, rich and long days to reflect and to pray, to look within, to seek out the things in our lives that create distance between God and ourselves. Lent is a time to discern how God may be calling us. What might we take on, or let go of, in order to more freely love God, our neighbors and ourselves?

We offer you the St Barnabas Lenten Devotional and invite you to spend some time each day reflecting on Holy Scripture with our St Barnabas community. These reflections have been written with great care and attention by the people of our community, and they offer us an opportunity to move more deeply into our relationships with God, with one another and with ourselves.

My heartfelt thanks to all who prayed and pondered and wrote so beautifully from the riches of their own lives to make this booklet happen. This little devotional is a great gift to us all, and it has been my privilege to have had a hand in bringing it to you. I invite you to use it to pray with, to come closer into community by coming to know a bit more of the people who have written these reflections. May this Lent be an especially rich and holy season for us all.

Faithfully, Karent†

Matthew 6:16. And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

You might say it is all about motivation. What is your motivation for doing the things we do in Lent, that season where we are called to give up, and perhaps also take on? Essentially, we are encouraged to do something different, to live life differently. The change does not have to be oppressive although that is often where we head with this first.

Somehow, for it to mean something, we tend to think it also has to hurt. This passage is all about this. If you are fasting so that you can gain accolades and praise from others, your motivation is off. As one of my favorite authors once said of Christians, we so often go on “adventures in missing the point” and this would be a good example. If we give out of our resources so that we can gain praise, or even worse, preference, we again, have embarked on an adventure in missing the point.

Whatever you do this Lent, take on, or let go, do it so that by doing it, you might be a better servant of our Lord, and the world might be better off because of it. This is not a contest. There will be no prize at the end for the person that has flagellated themselves, literally or metaphorically, the most, who suffered the most, who surrendered the most, or put up with the most pain.

There is no reward for any of that. The point of these changes is to open your heart, more, to clear out your vision, to be more aware, not just in Lent, but every day after too. Your reward has already been received, the full and complete unconditional love of God, for you, in Lent, and every day of your life. Take on what you take on, give up what you give up in Lent, so that you might get closer to your thanksgiving for that.

— The Rt. Rev. Greg Rickel, Bishop of Olympia
VII Bishop of the Diocese of Olympia

THURSDAY, MARCH 7TH

Psalm 37:1-3. Do not fret yourself because of evildoers; so not be jealous of those who do wrong. Put your trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and feed on its riches.

The PBS/PTV nightly news, selected morning podcasts, the New York Times paper, Seattle Times paper, and the Economist news magazine are the primary sources of daily news for our family. It takes time and energy to watch, listen, and read these various mediums on a regular basis. The time and energy spent often becomes a double-edged sword in our world. That is, on one side the information can assist us in remaining in the “know” and on the other side we begin to wonder how can this world continue with so many dishonest, hurtful, mean-spirited and selfish folks? Often this realization causes us to take up an exercise in self-reflection. Have we been hurtful, mean spirited and dishonest towards family, friends, and neighbors ourselves? It brings to mind the adage that when one points their finger at someone else there are actually three fingers pointing back at yourself. Try it and you will see. As we pray on Psalm 37: 1-3 we have a chance to include God in the equation and we are reminded of God’s wonderful mercy and grace in our own lives. Further, the act of prayer puts us in the relationship God intended for us to have: a perfect relationship.

—Helene & Steve Schmitz

FRIDAY, MARCH 8TH

John 1:42. He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (Which is translated Peter)

Peter, a simple fisherman, answered a simple call from a loving Jesus. Peter displayed great courage yet was a man of many flaws. He made mistakes, he fell down, and he had doubts. He was a complex man of the world, but he loved Jesus and chose to follow. The name given him meant "Rock", a perfect name to the one who was to be the foundation in building the Church as we know it!

Just like the apostle Peter, we all are flawed. We make mistakes and fall down. We are complex, as we struggle in a difficult world. We have our simple lives and duties as did Peter, but Jesus comes to each of us and in faith we follow his invitation. We "drop our nets", and no matter what follows, we can rely on Peter as a great model. As Christians we too can respond to the Great Invitation.... to walk with courage and in love.

Peter's great love and conviction for Christian values is the same love and conviction we have towards our fellow beings. Like Peter, we are called to be disciples, to be people of faith and a light to others. To me, this means loving greatly. Giving others a smile, a helping hand, an ear, a hug! It even means loving enemies! It means following the greatest commandment of all!

Jesus has come to me. He has looked at me. He has picked me, and I will certainly follow. I will do my best to love greatly. I shall recognize always that the goodness in my heart and my willingness to reach to others is an awesome gift from a great God!

— Roger Fredricksen

SATURDAY, MARCH 9TH

Titus 3:3. Titus 3:3. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another.

When I first read this passage I was incredibly disheartened and ready to retract my agreement to write this reflection. But Karen insisted that the Holy Spirit had chosen it for me, so here goes....

I have no problem with the word “foolish” and freely admit that often describes me but “disobedient” is an uncomfortable word for me. I am a self-made woman, competent and proud. I am a good person and make an effort to treat others well, why do I need to obey and how would that change what I do anyway? “Led astray”? Life is an exploration, how can I be led astray? Something might get me off track sometimes, but I learn from my mistakes, I am just finding my way. “Slaves to passion and pleasure”? Our bodies are important to care for and pleasure is not evil, in fact I would argue it is important to live life to the fullest, and this includes passion and pleasure.

However, what turns my head in this passage is that I do find myself at times “spending my days in malice and envy, despicable and hating others.” Acknowledging the hatred stemming from anger, grief and injury that exists in my heart is very hard. I sometimes don’t even recognize it is there and it comes out in distressing circumstances, shocking me and moving me to make a change. I don’t want to be that person. But I find that I am incapable of stopping that emotional response. It is not something I can reason my way out of. Whether the anger is justified or not is not the point. It seems for me that going down the rabbit hole of justification only serves to ingrain the anger into self-righteousness and hatred.

The word “slaves” sticks out to me in this passage. To me, it implies that focusing only on self-reliance, on passion and pleasure, and on the justification of our own thoughts and behaviors leads us to malice, envy and hatred. I also think it is important to note that slaves cannot work to earn their freedom, they must be set free. For myself, I am struggling to find something that works to move me off the dime. I am tenaciously rational and feel stuck in a rut of self-righteousness, unable to acknowledge the rights of others to see the world through a different lens.

I’ve read recently that being grateful to God for his patience and saving grace is a way forward from hate and anger. Start with simple act of being thankful for anything and everything good in your life - none of it is deserved and yet all is freely given. I hope it can change my perspective from self-righteousness to obedience.

—Mary Anne Smith

Romans 10:12. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.

In 1968 I spent an exchange year in Germany. It wasn't until years later that I learned how hard this particular placement had been for my father who'd lost friends in Europe during World War II and was still angry. International Christian Youth Exchange, the program that sent me overseas, was expressly created within a decade after the war to promote reconciliation, healing and understanding between the US and Germany, with other countries joining in over time. Bridge building. Hands across the sea. Ambassadors of peace.

As I reflect on Romans 10:12, "...there is no difference between Jew and Greek. The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him..." I am drawn to memories of that watershed year in Germany. Yes, I learned about traditions, food and folklore, but more importantly, I heard people's stories about survival during the war, rebuilding out of rubble and escaping East Germany before the wall closed it off.

Why is it, when God offers absolute inclusion, we humans gravitate toward exclusion? We build so many walls—exterior, physical barriers to divide humanity into us-them camps, and internal barriers within ourselves to wall off prejudices, fears and tunnel-vision judgments. I believe the invitation God gives us in Christ Jesus, is to open doors in those walls—if only a tiny chink—so that healing love and light can flow through. Whether reconciliation between nations, peoples, or the splintered pieces within ourselves, the hope we have in Christ is that all that is broken into fragments can be made whole, and walls can come down.

—Sue Rhodes

MONDAY, MARCH 11TH

Psalm 44:23. Awake, O Lord! Why are you sleeping? Arise! Do not reject us for ever.

It is a peculiarity of human nature to always be looking to what is not. When we are comfortable, we give thanks, but it is rare that we give thanks with the same trembling feeling as when we cry for help. When the world shakes and shudders and everything is upended, we call out to God. God who has blessed me, why now do you curse me? Why do you close your eyes and turn your face away?

We cry out in our suffering, demanding to know why God has forsaken us, but it is only through God's great power that we have the ability to ask the question at all. Without God, there is no life, no food to sustain us, no spark to light the thoughts in our brains, no soul to respond to the pain--and in asking it, we reveal the answer: God is not asleep, for if he were, we would wink from existence immediately. He is there, in between one heartbeat and the next; He is all that sustains us when the world around us shimmers and moves and dissolves like a mirage. In prisons and wildernesses, in parched lands and flooded homes, in cities crumbling under onslaught, when the next moment might bring an end to all things--it is only by His will that we keep living, that we move through time, through the fear and pain, from, "Lord, how could you?" to "oh Lord... now I see."

All is not yet revealed. The story is not yet over. Remember as you fast that our sustenance comes not only through our own will and actions, but most of all by God's great grace. Become still, look to what may be, and rely upon the One who is as close to us as our own breath.

—Kendra Nuckles

TUESDAY, MARCH 12TH

Psalm 47:1. Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with a cry of joy.

While we may not know who actually wrote the psalms, what we do know for sure is that David loved them. This psalm reminds me of him, leaping and dancing with all his might with the people as the Ark of God is brought to Jerusalem. He was praising and worshipping God with every muscle and heartbeat. Such abandonment. Such energy. David gave everything in praise of his Lord.

Reading psalms like this one with admonitions to sing with all our skill, shout to the Lord, exalt our God are difficult to follow on these 40 Lenten days. It's not that I don't like to sing or shout or dance before the Lord. It's more that during this season when we see no flowers around the altar, somber colors on the altar and the lack of alleluias and glorias added to our prayers it is hard to feel like dancing or shouting or clapping in praise to God.

This psalm is our reminder that we are Easter people, even in the midst of Lent. We may not feel right about going to David's extreme when he worshipped, just as the symbolism of our ashes begins to envelop us. But that is exactly what our God wants from us, just for this Sunday. It's always appropriate to exalt our God who may delight in the offerings of the Davids of the world. God is also just as thrilled with our humble efforts to join the angels gathered around the heavenly throne as best we can, off key, off beat, off kilter as we are, singing, clapping and praising. God's delight in us is what gives us our courage to cry for joy.

—Joan Collins

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13TH

John 3:4-5. Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."

Meister Eckhardt asked, "What does it matter if Jesus was born 2000 years ago in Bethlehem if he is not born in our hearts today and every day." Jesus, in his answer to an older fellow teacher who came at night seeking to understand, gives us yet another hint about this elusive kingdom of God, that is in us and all around us and seems to require water and Spirit as our entrance fee.

We have moved from the dormant earth of winter into the NW spring. In January, the birds began to sing again; in February our plum trees blossomed under a blanket of snow. In March, we began our Lenten journey. Spring signals renewal and rebirth and birth calls to mind and heart baptism.

What if our human birth is not a one- time event and we too cycle with the seasons? What if we like great nature are to be reborn daily, hourly, minute by minute? Do have to ask to be born—again, and again—new, as if from our mother's womb, freshly wet from the baptismal font, shining with the chrism of confirmation, splendid with the inner glow of weekly Eucharist? And if this is so, how do we go about it? Perhaps we must dedicate ourselves, {saying} by our daily, hourly, minute by minute commitment to intentional living {"Come Lord Jesus" or like the woman at the well, "Give me this living water so that I may not thirst"}. My prayer for this Lent has become "Lord, increase my thirst, so that I will choose living water and the Spirit over and over again." I believe the answer is choice. L'chaim. Choose life.

— Pat Speidel

THURSDAY, MARCH 14TH

Psalm 46:5. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

A beautiful stream runs along the south edge of our valley, through willows, ferns and bracken, over and under stumps, roots and makeshift footbridges. Each summer we peer into the stream's dark pools hoping to find tiny fish fry; in the fall, we know the salmon are back to spawn when we see the blue herons and eagles keeping watch. Red-tailed hawks, pheasants, owls, frogs, coyotes and countless small birds and insects find food and drink, shade and shelter at the stream. It is holy habitation indeed.

It's holy for me, too. When I'm at the stream I feel a hush of reverence and praise for the beauty of God's creation. In its deep pools I sense mystery and timelessness: *"as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever."* Its moving waters remind me that I'm carried by God, that in returning and rest I'll be saved, and that, despite my heartaches, resurrection will come again in its season. My gladness in these lessons from the stream is like ancient wisdom. It can not be moved.

In Psalm 46 we hear "Be still and know that I am God," which seems the perfect Lenten reflection. When I'm still and quiet, I can feel the Holy Spirit flowing through me like our stream, offering me spiritual food and drink, shade and shelter. I rest in its holy habitation.



—Cathy Nickum

FRIDAY, MARCH 15TH

Psalm 51:11. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Wipe away my wrong doings according to your great compassion!

- 1. Wash me completely clean of my guilt; purify me of my sin!*
- 3. Create a clean heart for me, God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

When I find myself trapped in the conflict “I’m right, You’re wrong” I catch these thoughts and turn them over to God to “wipe away my wrong doings... Create a clean heart for me” find common ground with those whom I disagree.

My poem, “Love” was written the morning after I received Psalm 51 for my Lenten meditation assignment, revised this morning as noted. Since this poem was conceived it has been part of my daily meditation each morning, a new gift to help keep my spirit clean and healthy.

Love

listens
opens
views
everything

with Love

listen
open
view
everyone

with Love

listen
open
view
enter

with Love

SATURDAY, MARCH 16TH

John 4:15. The woman said to him, " Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus sits alone at a well, when a Samaritan woman approaches. He asks her for water and she replies that Jews do not speak with Samaritans, especially women, (who were considered impure.) He tells her he has water that will quench thirst forever and she responds in the citation above, imagining the relief from her womens' labor of drawing and carrying water. Subsequently, Jesus tells her she has " five husbands" and that her current one is not her husband, revealing his ability to see beyond the moment. This revelation marks how socially revolutionary Jesus is in His encounters. Jesus speaks of spiritual matters alone with a woman and one whose sexual practices are outside of the traditional morality. Even more, he then reveals to her that he is the Messiah—possibly the first time in the scriptural record. By telling her he is the Messiah Jesus makes of her an apostolic witness, as were the Marys at the cross and at the empty tomb.

This scene takes place Jacob's well, where Jacob first met Rachel (Gen 29 1-11) and fell in love with her. The passage uses the subtext of love, even marking it with a woman who is sexually out of bounds, in order to emphasize the revolutionary turn that Jesus makes in terms of the relation of matter to spirit. Beginning with the myth of Adam and Eve, women were made to hold the rites of seduction, reproduction, and the limits of morality—in other words the body. Jesus manifests a new understanding of women and thus, materiality, in assigning them as apostolic witnesses. Women can witness, comprehend, the spirit in matter: in water, in his sacrifice, and his resurrection. Spirit is in the world like nothing less than water, the necessity of sustaining life, drawn up from the earth as through the body. There is no impurity here, either with five husbands, or as a Samaritan-- impurity serves only to judge the impure from the pure, to punish and to exile, it does not flow and quench the thirst. Jesus with the woman at the well reveals how the old binary of matter and spirit is revolutionized by Him to reveal not so much God on earth as God in the earthly, which, through Grace is unbound from even death.

—Sue Ellen Case

Luke 13:34. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

My first thought on reading this passage was remembering how often this text has been used in history to promote the idea of Jews as Jesus-killers and hence fair game for persecution--a terrible stain on our history. But it seems to me that this is not just about Jerusalem, the holiest of earth's holy places, and its inhabitants, but about the perverseness, the frustrating wrong-headedness of human beings. We are a motley crew, putting our own desires and urge to power first and what we know to be right and good a remote second. We use religion (often our own preferred interpretation of the truth) to beat and denigrate those who feel and believe differently from ourselves. In spite of this, God's love, the love of a parent: urgent, forgiving, and enduring, longs for us to respond, to have us enter the light, to be safe from the miseries of sin, to assume our birthright and grow closer. I love the image of the hen protecting her brood; when I was a small child it was my job to collect eggs from my grandfather's henhouse. This was terrifying: the hens would squawk and fly about, doing whatever they could to prevent their eggs being taken. I don't remember the hens having chicks, but I can believe that the will to protect their broods would have been even more determinedly fierce. That God is willing to be that protective force for us, even though we mess up, time and time again, even killing those he sends to help us, is humbling.

—Mo Godman

MONDAY, MARCH 18TH

John 4:38. I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.

This verse comes in the context of the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. After speaking with Jesus, the woman returned to her village and gathered many who came to hear Jesus and believed. Jesus tells the disciples that the fields are ripe for harvest and he is sending them to reap what others have labored over, to enter into the work of those who had gone before. Had seeds of belief been already planted in the Samaritan town and tended to over time by others such that they were now ready to hear and believe?

We are called to be the hands and feet of Christ to those around us. To serve God and love our neighbor. Sometimes this will result in planting seeds for a future that we may not see ourselves, sometimes tending to work that was started long ago, sometimes participating in the ending of a story that so many others have contributed to over time. What a privilege it is to get to be part of God's work in the world, even when all seems dark and we don't see the future or the end.

As a therapist, I sometimes have the honor of witnessing when someone experiences a breakthrough in their life or relief from a problem that has been holding them captive. When this happens, we can invariably trace the history back and find that there were seeds of change planted long before, small glimmers of hope along the way, people who believed in them, who showed love to them, all of which led up to this moment.

What words of comfort and love that we speak today may plant seeds for future growth? What acts of kindness may tend to the seedlings of belief? It takes the faithful work of many to get to harvest time. As our 8 year old, Luke, reminds me "many hands make light work, Mom." How can you be the hands and feet of Christ today?

—Bethany Anderson

Luke 2:49. [Jesus] said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Luke recounts the journey Mary, Joseph and Jesus made to Jerusalem for Passover when Jesus was twelve years old. Afterwards Mary and Joseph left thinking Jesus was somewhere in their traveling group but unbeknownst to them he had stayed behind. When they realized that he was missing they went back and searched for three days before finding him in the temple, deep in conversation with the teachers. Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph had been worried and were astonished to find him there.

Then Jesus said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

In this, the only mention in the Bible about Jesus' youth, he refers to his special bond with God. And it's the most amazing relationship possible. He reveals that he is the son of God, although Mary and Joseph don't understand what he is saying.

I've been thinking about those two special relationships in Jesus' life – to Mary and Joseph, and to God. He was and is a perfect son on both accounts. And it has prompted me to give some thought to two special bonds in my own life – to my parents and to God. I've been very imperfect on my end of both of those relationships. At different points in my life and to varying degrees I've fostered or outright neglected them. At times I've reached out, shown love, been there when they've needed someone, helped out. But I've also been absent, uncaring, neglectful. I've taken it for granted that my parents and God would always be there when I needed them. (Heck, that's their role – it's what they're supposed to do, right?) When I've had hardships or felt sorrow I've appreciated to varying degrees that they have shown special care for me, but I don't know that I've always done a very good job of expressing gratitude. Sometimes I've offered up thanks only grudgingly.

My parents were good to me and they were always there for me. But God knows there were times when we didn't get along, when one or the other of them would be angry with me or I with them. But by and large, over the course of our lives together our relationships were imperfect but good. I think I was a reasonably good son to them.

But I'm a very imperfect child of God. Fortunately, despite my many shortcomings He is also good to me. He is always there for me, always there to listen, never judgmental. He gave his only begotten son for sinners like me, and I know we can look for the Resurrection of the dead and the Life of the world to come. What a gift. I certainly should and can do better on my end of this special relationship. And I believe I can show my love for God by making a much better continuing effort to foster the other special relationships in my life. I can be more loving, more caring, more giving. I pray for God's help and thank Him for His patience and forgiveness.

How about your relationship to God and the other special bonds in your life? How are you doing?

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20TH

John 5:6. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

"Do you want...?" Jesus asks the man. The words directly before this passage note that the man "had been ill for thirty-eight years." Jesus could see that he was sick, and Jesus had the power to heal the man. So why did Jesus ask for his permission? It would be hard to believe that the man might say, "No."

It's also startling to think that the Divine asks for our consent, our participation. Yet, repeatedly in scripture, our triune God does exactly this. Father, Son, and Spirit continue to ask people, ask each of us, "Do you want to be made well? Do you want me in your life? Do you want to be a part of the work that I am doing?"

Grace is a gift. It is freely offered by our Lord. It may be freely accepted or rejected by us. It may also be ignored, as we are buried under the details of our lives. When Jesus asks the man if he wants to be made well, the man doesn't say, "Yes." Instead, he gives reasons why he can't be made well.

While I know that I'd never say "No" outright to God, I also know that I can give plenty of excuses for, "Not now." I ignore Him, like someone busy on their phone while a friend is trying to talk to them. Yet, every moment, I'm being offered an opportunity to invite grace in, to work with God.

Free will is the second greatest gift that God gave us. The greatest gift was Himself. He offers Himself to us. Absurd as it seems, the Almighty asks us, "Do you want...?"

When I stop saying "Not now" and get to "Yes," what will I do? What will you do when God asks you, "Do you want...?"

MOVING FORWARD: What is God asking your consent for, your help with? How will you say "Yes" to God?

—Brian Oldham

THURSDAY, MARCH 21ST

Psalm 71:9. Do not cast me off in my old age; forsake me not when my strength fails.

“You have showed me great troubles and adversities, but you will restore my life and bring me up again”

At a time of trouble, I am more likely to call out to God for help. But God is always there, in good times and bad. But what sort of relationship is it if we only come to God at times of adversity?

It's up to us spend time talking to God in good times and bad. To have a healthy relationship, we need to remember to be thankful for blessings that God has given us, and to make time to just spend time talking and listening as well as asking for help when we need it. Setting aside time for prayer on a regular schedule allows us to build our relationship with God.

Then, when we need help climbing out of the deep places of the earth, we will know that God is already there to bring us out. Moving Forward: Set aside time to spend with God, praying and listening.

—Dale Walker

FRIDAY, MARCH 22ND

Psalm 95:7. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!

On Tuesdays I watch the program Finding Your Roots on PBS. Decades before I ever heard Louis Gates Jr. say those familiar words “these are your people” to his celebrity guests researching their family ancestors, I remember my grandmother saying to me ‘these are our people’ or ‘our people came from...’ Psalm 95:7 made me think of those long ago moments with my grandmother and how comforting I found her words, knowing I belong to ‘a people.’ In Psalm 95:7 it is reemphasized that all of us are part of God’s family. God is ‘our people,’ we are His people. Sometimes we forget and we need reminding.

Through doing nothing more than believing, we are in His hands and we are the sheep of His pasture. He is our Shepherd, our Father who loves us as a parent, unconditionally. From those times before the psalms, from the gospels and from Jesus we know this. God has promised us. God’s unconditional love is hard for me to wrap myself around but I keep trying. Lent is that special time when we remember that gift, the great sacrifice made for us and like the words in the old hymn *Were You There?* it causes me to tremble. For all that He gives, so little is asked in return.

—Robin Cook

SATURDAY, MARCH 23RD

Romans 3:20-21. For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets.

First of all the bad news, which is, that we humans cannot live by a divine standard. Even if we follow the letter of the law, we cannot be righteous in the sight of God and will always carry the baggage of our sins. Then comes the Good News. The righteousness of God is not based on God keeping the law. It is disclosed to us as a free gift through the grace and love granted by Jesus Christ. God made the ultimate sacrifice of his son as atonement for our sins because he loves us so much. Justification for us comes from God through mercy, forgiveness and love. This love is accessible for all those who have faith. The profits bore witness to a merciful and loving God, e.g. Abraham's reprieve from sacrificing Isaac.

These verses also bring to my mind the comparison between the Old Testament Ten Commandments which are specific in their thou shalt nots and with the two commandments which Jesus gives us a guide to live our lives in faith and love. Jesus tells us to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves, rather than telling us what we shouldn't do. Love is at the core of our faith and all that exists.

—Maggie Ball

SUNDAY, MARCH 24TH

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

1 Corinthians 10:13. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

As I write this, I am in a period of 'testing'. The circumstances of my testing are something we all experience...challenges at home, work, and life in general. I do not believe that God gives the test and provides a 'grade' based on how we perform. Instead, life's tests just happen and they are an OPPORTUNITY to deepen our relationship with God and to draw on our Spiritual resources. A few years ago, a friend of mine said the phrase, 'We're all Bozos on the Same Bus'; It was a time where I felt very alone in my 'tests' and no one would understand what I was going through. Once I gained an understanding that all humans experienced what I was going through, God came into my situation and offered me His Love and Healing Consolation.

Dear God, may we all know You are there in our daily tests. You will intervene before the circumstance goes beyond what we can carry. Amen.

—Tony Hansen

Luke 1:30. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

Can you begin to imagine how Mary must have felt on hearing these words... a host of emotions must have come bubbling up, as she endeavored to take it all in....And it was without a doubt, a lot to take in! Although few of us could imagine being called to such a task as Mary's, I believe that, like Mary, we do experience a "host of emotions" when God calls us. The spectrum is wide and even though a call might initially be alarming, it most often follows a course that ends with our knowing that we can do what we are being asked to do—thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The first instruction from the angel was that Mary not be afraid. How many times have we feared being asked to do something that makes us apprehensive if not downright fearful! We might wonder, For why me, God, are you sure you meant me? Our shock and uncertainty heighten our lack of confidence in being able to take on this new challenge. When Mary got over her initial amazement at being greeted by an angel, she began to listen attentively to his message and to ponder "how it would be."

Mary's faith is deep and she goes from accepting her calling, to actually embracing it. Having been told that her cousin Elizabeth was also with child, Mary ventures forth "with haste" and journeys to be with her cousin. The Holy Spirit has empowered Mary and filled her heart with joy. May Mary's faith remind us that nothing is impossible with God.

—Drucy Burnett Hodge

TUESDAY, MARCH 26TH

John 7:41. Others said, "This is the Messiah." But some asked, "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?"

We all have our Galilees. If not outright prejudice, expectations will do. John's account tells us the throng is divided over Jesus, some followers have dropped out, and even his own brothers don't believe in him. Jesus' claims that he is "bread from heaven" and "where I am you cannot come" are confusing at the least, blasphemous at worst. Most disturbing to the religious authorities is the promise the kingdom of heaven is available to anyone – the only requirement is to be thirsty for truth.

"Surely the Messiah (anointed one) does not come from Galilee, does he?" offers layers of possible interpretations. Is Galilee the sticking point, as in, "what good comes of those people?" Perhaps it's a smokescreen – a ploy to avoid looking inward to examine the possibility Jesus is telling the truth. The failure to recognize Jesus as Messiah may even come from an overzealous adherence to the law or an absence of curiosity, or both. Doubters, this Gospel story seems to say, don't have the full picture. The faithful would know the Christmas story, of Bethlehem and Jesus' connection to it.

This scripture reminds me how disorienting God can be. Confusion, disillusionment, and frustration are on full display. What blinds me to Jesus, or to put it another way, the truth of God's reality, may very well be my own expectations of how things should be or who should be the messenger. To have doubts is not wrong. It becomes a matter of what I do with them. In mid-life when my theology was no longer big enough to contain my life experience, I took Seminary classes and connected to the humanity of Jesus. In John 7, Jesus wavers about whether to attend the feast in Judea at all; when he finally decides to go it's with the intention to maintain a low profile. But once there, after seeing the need, Jesus steps up in the temple to teach despite threats on his life. Even for Jesus, answering the call not a straight line. The spiritual life is often awkward, messy. I do not need to be perfect, only thirsty. The best I can do is pay attention to the parched throat.

—Julie Dougherty

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27TH

John 8:12. Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

For those who live in the Northwest "the light" has special meaning. When fall arrives, our days become darker and we settle into our winter routine of less time in the garden and more time indoors. And yet it is a time of great light in our spiritual life for we now experience the joy of Christ's birth and soon the quiet holy days of Lent.

The concept that Christ is the light first came to me as a young child. My mother was very ill when I was ten, after her near death experience, I was told about the light she saw. It did not frighten her or call to her. It was simply there and let her know she could go to the light or stay with her family for a little longer. She chose to stay and was with us another two years. The story my mother told me, when I was a child, gave me comfort and helped me believe that there is more to this life than we can possibly understand until we enter into our last days.

Today, I continue to search for what lays ahead that I cannot yet see. And yet following Christ's light is not so difficult if I just look around and watch. There is the burst of new life when bulbs appear, the kindness of others who care for those in time of need, our church community that is filled with good people who do their good work, and the cry of a newborn baby that signals the miracle of birth. So, what more do I need?

It seems that I seek my mother's words, to confirm that the light is so. But now I have the comfort of the scripture passages that provide answers that guide me to the meaning of the light and what lays ahead. And pray that I will follow Christ and not walk in darkness but have the light of life.

—Rosalys Peel

THURSDAY, MARCH 28TH

John 8:31-32. Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Truth - and - Freedom. Two charged words in our life today. Which truth? Free from what? And, if you read on for a few more verses, it appears that many of those to whom Jesus was speaking at the temple in Jerusalem didn't get it either. Weren't they, as children of Abraham, already "free" and slaves to no one? Jesus goes on to clarify that he is talking about freedom from the slavery of sin.

One definition of sin is being apart from God. So the Truth can bring us closer to God. And the Truth Jesus is talking about is beyond the facts of our day to day living. It is absolute Truth, eternal Truth, something he understands from his unique relationship with the Father.

And when speaking of these Truths, Jesus frequently used story to get his point across:

The kingdom of heaven is like...

A man planted a vineyard ...

A sower went out to sow his seed....

While the stories he tells may never have happened on this earth, the Truth underlying them is obvious and demands our attention. Through repetition, from childhood on, these stories become a part of us.

As we journey through this life, it is our hope that, through glimpses of these eternal Truths, we may grow closer to God and be truly free.

—Peggy & Kirk Eichenberger

FRIDAY, MARCH 29TH

John 8:43. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word.

Why do we sometimes not hear what others are saying to us? Is it because we don't listen well and misunderstand what they are saying or do we sometimes disagree with their opinion so we dismiss it out of hand? Could it be because we are so bought into our own understanding that we cannot accept a different authority? We tell ourselves, "If what they are saying is correct, then I have been wrong all along." We then proceed to negate everything that person says. In these days of fake news, sometimes it's hard to know who and what to trust. Fortunately we have the ability to fact check information and there are many authorities we can listen to on both sides of an issue in order to form an opinion.

Similarly, when we pray and reflect on God's message to us, how do we know we are hearing His answer and not just what we want to hear? It would seem that in order to hear God's word we must listen carefully and with open hearts, knowing that His answers will always be in our best interest. We then need to examine our motivations for discerning His answers. Are we dismissive of certain answers because they don't fit with our own plans? Letting go of our own egos can be a daunting task and one that must be taken up anew each time we pray. We can also attend church, listen to our religious leaders and read the Bible to be sure the message we hear is in keeping with the teachings of Jesus. I will pray for an open mind in order to hear God's message to me.

—Claire Hicks

SATURDAY, MARCH 30TH

Psalm 136:1. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures for ever.

In the midst of the solemnness of lent, this psalm reminds us of God's promises. It brings to mind the small glimpses of spring that we now see announcing the coming change of the season. Though we've had more than our share of snow and the cold persists, the sun is starting to peek out and on those days the sight of the Cascades reminds me of the lovely weather that contrasts this winter.

As a person who loves science, I can't help but think of all the research supporting the benefits of gratitude- more specifically, writing down the things we are thankful for. God knows we need to be reminded to care for our psychological and spiritual health by exhibiting gratitude. Of course, God doesn't need us to give thanks to him for his benefit. Thankfully the readers of the Psalms didn't even need to wait for peer-reviewed studies to know that thankfulness is good for everyone, all the time.

Here we are instructed, no matter the season of life or the liturgical season, to give thanks to the Lord. Despite the sorrows of our world and the suffering of lent, we shall give thanks. Even when we are not inspired to give thanks, we are called to summon thanks not because we are good but because He is good.

As we walk with Christ toward his crucifixion we are compelled to gratitude.

—Megan Miller

Luke 15:22-24. But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.

Celebration for the finding of the one lost is a recurring theme in three successive parables—the one sheep, the one coin, the one son. In this story of the Prodigal Son, the new elements are repentance and forgiveness. The son, having wasted all on fast living and having fallen on the hardest of times, decides to return to his father to admit wrongdoing and beg the smallest favor of becoming and being treated as a servant. But seeing his young son a long way off, the father recognizes him, rejoices in his return, and—before the son has an opportunity to humble himself—the father compassionately embraces him.

Right away I feel the father's constant fear and worry over his son's absence, relieved the moment he spots him a long way off, returning. No thought of judgment or punishment. Sweet joy that his son is alive and safe. The son did nothing to produce this joy except return. By returning, he created a chance for reconciliation.

The father did not follow the son to the city, did not find him starving in the pigpen and call him home. When the father saw that the son was returning, the father felt compassion, rejoiced. When the son repented, the father celebrated, rewarded. The father rewarded the son in ways and to degrees the son would never have thought to ask and had not earned.

And what of the elder son? With his daily needs routinely met, he has forgotten to be grateful. Rather than thanking the father for his own blessings, he reacts in anger and envy and so excludes himself from the celebratory feast.

Warm sun, cool moon, each oxygen molecule, drop of water, crumb of rich soil, seed, plant, creature, brother, friend, neighbor: these are given to us compassionately in love and hope. Have we earned this unspeakable beauty? Do we remember to be grateful?

Am I the one lost? Are you? What is the prodigal nature of our lives? What does returning and repenting look like? If we set aside our wastefulness, will the Father embrace us compassionately? If we repent, will we be restored in ways and to a degree we can't even dream of? Whom could each of us embrace compassionately in gratitude for our daily blessings? A confused child, a lonely widow, a person with no home to return to, a Viet Nam veteran, a person in the last hours of life?

The story is always about love.

—Barb Bolles

MONDAY, APRIL 1ST

John 6:15. When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Jesus had just performed the miracle of feeding 5,000 people with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. After all were fed, they gathered the crumbs so that nothing was wasted and they filled twelve baskets. This was an enormous miracle with a large crowd of people. Once the people began to say, "surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" and he knew they were coming to take him away, his response? To leave the crowds, to go to the mountain, alone. Time spent away from the results of his miracle, alone.

Time alone with his Father.

Preparing for the next miracle?

Preparing to be taken away?

As an introvert, fulfilling commitments that involve many people make me uncomfortable. Giving a speech? A meeting with unfamiliar people? Making small talk? Hardly the level of performing a miracle for 5,000 people, but quite possibly a miracle for me. Retreating to a mountain is an understandable response for me. One I would pursue.

Yet these days, I wonder if retreating to a mountain is enough? It is easy to be alone and yet be totally connected to our world. Our phones, tv's and radios ever present, connecting us to social media and the world. A constant buzz, worry, connection in the background, when what is needed is the real alone time as Jesus had.

I am going to strive for this, to make my "alone time" this Lent actively disconnecting from social media. Striving to do as Jesus did with his alone time with his Father. Preparing for Easter with more silence. Alone in the presence of God. Creating a deeper relationship built on quiet strength.

—Julie Houck

TUESDAY, APRIL 2ND

Romans 7:15. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

I thought to myself, I resemble this scripture. In my case it is about my thoughts more so than my action. I often force my thoughts to change from ones I don't like.

On further reflection I wonder: Why is Paul divulging his own sinfulness at this point? By now he is at the midpoint of his ministry. If he has not resolved this by now, what chance do any of us have? After further study, I realize that Paul is preparing for his first trip to Rome. He has worked the East Provinces and is now traveling to the West Provinces. Paul is writing to the Romans to prepare them for his work with them.

It looks like he is preparing for a difficult conversation about the behavior of the Romans. He is suggesting to them that in not doing what you want and doing what you hate is the constant battle with indwelling sin. We must wage this battle against indwelling sin as long as we live. He wants to encourage them to pursue a righteousness life united with Christ Jesus rather than engage in a sinful life (doing what you hate) that leads to death.

Paul is referring to himself in this scripture perhaps at time in his life before his ministry. Whether or not Paul is talking about himself, his approach is appropriate. Framing his message in an "I" statement rather than a "you" statement is more likely to avoid defensiveness on the part of the Romans. Using this approach Paul shows a way of love toward the people of Rome.

—Mike Killion

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3RD

Jerem 18:6. "Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done?" says the Lord. "Just like the clay in the potters' hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."

When I was eleven-years-old my mother converted one of the bedrooms in our home into a pottery studio. She had taken some ceramics courses in college but didn't pursue it further for over fifteen years as her life turned to marriage, babies, and a career. Her renaissance into pottery started as a creative outlet, a small reprieve, but she was quite talented and soon was pursuing pottery as a means to earn a living.

With three young children and a husband who commuted almost two hours every day I can only imagine what people thought of her sudden change of profession. It was certainly not conventional or perhaps even practical, but my mother was called to her passion and both she and my father embraced satisfaction and sacrifice equally.

When I think of God in relation to my mother's pottery I think he embraces satisfaction and sacrifice in loving us. As any potter knows, forming clay is hard work; even a seemingly perfectly formed vessel can have an air-pocket which causes it to explode in the kiln and it's back to the wheel with a new slab of clay.

God, unlike the potter, doesn't need a new slab of clay when it comes to loving us. We can be formed, fixed, and forgiven by his love no matter our state.

What I remember most of my mother's pottery (besides clay and silt being tracked through the house) was watching her in her studio with a look of determination on her face as she selected a slab of clay and began to tediously mold it on the wheel, every ounce of strength focused into her finger tips as she worked her vision into reality.

I like to think of God at the potter's wheel with the same look of determination in loving us... working his vision into a reality.

—Mavis Norwich

THURSDAY, APRIL 4TH

Romans 8:23. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

In reflecting on this verse, I wandered to the previous verse which says: “For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth until now.” What vivid imagery Paul uses...all of creation groaning with the pain of childbirth and each of us longing for adoption by a loving, merciful parent. Our world does indeed seem to be groaning, suffering and longing – but for what? And how are we to endure this time of pain and darkness? Lent provides an opportunity for us to engage in that longing, that time of waiting and eager anticipation, but cautions us not to move too quickly to the climax of Easter. Aching, longing, groaning with growth pains IF we allow the contemplation of Lent to seep into our being. The birth cannot be rushed, no matter how eager we are for the fruits of this God-given Spirit; we must long and wait with anticipation of God’s Kingdom more fully coming to our broken and suffering world. And in that period of waiting and longing perhaps we are to find our calling in helping to bring that Kingdom to earth, not as disinterested spectators, but as redeemed and adopted heirs of this new Creation, this new life.

—Linda Heller

FRIDAY, APRIL 5TH

Romans 8:38-39. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

These words from Romans remind us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing in the past, the present or future can separate us from His love. No power in heaven or on earth can separate us from His love. Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God.

The Apostle Paul had been arrested, bound, and restricted by evil governments on many occasions, but none of these actions were enough to separate him from the love of God. Even in a jail cell, Paul felt and experienced God's unfailing love.

We can at times feel overwhelmed by the situations we face in life. Loss of loved ones, strained relationships, misjudgments, and world events leave us feeling confused and weighed down. We wonder if God is still near to us. Especially during these times, we are reminded that God loves us unconditionally. We are children of the most-high God, and nothing will take His love from us.

Eighteen months ago, Paul's father, Henry, passed away rather unexpectedly. It was difficult to feel God's love for us at this time of personal loss. At Henry's request, the final song sung at his memorial service was "Blessed Assurance". What a wonderful and comforting promise of God's love for us and what a gift of faith from Henry to his family and friends during a difficult time

—Paul Roy & Peter DeMann

SATURDAY, APRIL 6TH

Psalm 107:35. He changed deserts into pools of water and dry land into water-springs.

I'm always taken aback by the number of biblical examples of God's extraordinary generosity. It's apparently not enough for God to provide a modest sufficiency, instead over and over in both the old and new testament we read of the plenitude of the gifts given. This beautiful short verse from Psalm 107 is yet another example in the parallel themes of abundance and transformation. In just fifteen words I have learned something profound about the nature of the Creator and in meditating on these words I am moved to express personal gratitude and offer thanksgiving.

Psalm 107 is part of a much longer expression of community thanksgiving to God for a safe return from exile. In previous verses the author describes the many hardships along the way as the people of Israel returned from captivity in Babylon and he/she thanks God on behalf of the people for delivery from the perils of the desert, imprisonment, sickness, hunger and stormy seas. However each disaster is overcome by the power of God to upend the natural order in support of a desperate people. In the face of these multiple trials the refrain "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good: for his steadfast love endures forever", is inserted into the text of the Psalm at various places. In reading these verses, I find myself giving thanks for a safe passage through my own personal deserts and acknowledging, often in hindsight, the abundance of mercy shown to me.

This very human and seemingly spiral process of captivity, loss, suffering, pain and tragedy described in Psalm 107 by the post exilic Israelites is also the pattern of my own human journey.

Yet the journey does not end in tragedy. A parched desert is transformed into pools of water and knowing that abundance and generosity are part of the nature of our God, we learn that there's more - not only are there pools of water but the parched land is transformed by abundant renewable springs.

"The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" John 4:14

—Yvonne Rolston

John 12:8. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.

This is not one of my favorite passages. In fact, I struggle not to feel negative feelings about the Jesus who says this.....it doesn't seem like the compassionate, "love your neighbor" Jesus who is a more approachable Son of God.

But then I think about the truth of what Jesus said, over two thousand years ago. It is clear that we have the poor amongst us, and perhaps more than ever, based on the increasing number of homeless sites in our region. And I wonder about the Buddhist idea of suffering as it may relate to this passage. Perhaps this was a way of Jesus instructing us that, in this Earthly Kingdom of God, things are not ideal and perfect.

So what are we to do when things are less than ideal and perfect? Simply wait for our heavenly reward, when we are reunited with Jesus? I don't think that was the message Jesus was sending. Perhaps it is that, not 'in spite of' but 'because of' the fact that we will always have the poor with us, we are called again to the most important commandment: to love God fully, with heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourself. And this brings me to prayerfully considering how I can better love my neighbor, and the poor amongst them, during this Lenten season.

—Linda Maxson

MONDAY, APRIL 8TH

John 9:1-2. As [Jesus] walked along he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"

I've been all over the map with this scripture and told Rev. Karen that the Holy Spirit has been doing a number on my brain! I grew up in the Lutheran Church but we never spent time memorizing Scripture. I have relied on verses from Psalms 46, 91, and 121 through the years to help with the anxiety I sometimes feel. I only mention this because as I read John 9, I felt for the blind man and wondered how he handled the people who questioned him after Jesus gave him his sight. But he did, not giving in to the Pharisees or the people. He knew something great had happened and he recognized Jesus as the Messiah when Jesus came to him a second time. That's powerful! I believe Jesus performed His miracles to help us understand Who God is.

The questions the disciples asked Jesus surprised me. I wouldn't have thought that this man was blind because of sins of his parents or sin within him. So, judgement is a word that bounced around in my head. Why would I judge someone with this kind of disability as having sinned? Why would I judge someone with different beliefs or who lives life differently? Why are people so judgmental of others to the point of hatred? They thought he must have sinned but Jesus said it was "to demonstrate the power of God." He used this man to show us what God can do. How is God working through me, through us? I think about this because of the climate we live in today.

Studying this scripture has kept me awake at night. I've wakened in the morning thinking about it and wondering what to write. I even dreamt about it one night! There is more to learn in this Scripture as I read beyond these two verses. I know there is so much to learn from reading *and studying* God's Word but I get complacent. God is there for us, I believe we just need to listen. Studying the Scriptures more during Lent rather than giving something up is a path I think worth taking.

—Barbara Herrick

TUESDAY, APRIL 9TH

Romans 10:10. For no one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

This passage comes from Paul's letter to the Christian church in Rome. It is concerned primarily with issues of righteousness and forgiveness and stresses that these tenets apply to Jews and Gentiles alike. Paul's premise is that everyone is sinful and in need of salvation. He says that righteousness comes from faith rather than following specific laws and rituals, and that forgiveness comes from confessing out loud our sins. Jesus is the one who makes this possible.

I personally have trouble with Paul's basic tenets because I have never felt particularly sinful or in need of salvation. I prefer to take a broader view of Christianity. I believe that the gospel is a message of compassion and love as exemplified by Jesus Christ. The important thing is that we believe this, that we have faith in love and goodness. Life may seem chaotic, random, cruel and unfair but we need to stay grounded in the belief in the ultimate goodness in each human being and in life in general. There is no proof that this is true but we believe it in our heart. The key is our faith in Jesus' message rather than specific acts. Good works are a natural outcome of this faith but no one is perfect. When we realize that we have done something that hurts another person, the best course is to admit our transgression. This helps us further align our actions with our faith. This is not an easy path and requires us to continually dedicate ourselves to the principles of love and forgiveness.

—Darden Burns

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10TH

John 10:14-15a. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.

God is *our* good shepherd. As a human shepherd knows and cares for his flock, God knows us each, individually, and cares for us. Even when each of us thinks we are abandoned or forgotten by our earthly family and friends, He knows what we need and want. We are never alone. Even when we think He's not listening to our prayers, we are wise to be patient. He hears us and answers our prayers in His time. We should not worry about anything as He will provide for us as He knows what we need and when we need it.

A human shepherd protects his flock and drives them in the direction they need to go for safety, comfort and sustenance, and provides for their needs. God does the same for us. When I pray about something I'm concerned about, I do so deferentially in terms of, "I know You know what I need and You will protect and care for me but, so long as it comports with your plan (while mentally digging my toe in the sand), it would really be great and I would really appreciate it if . . .," and then I tell Him what I would like to have happen. Fortunately, so far, God and I have been on the same page and He has granted my request . . . in His time. And, often, He surprises me by giving me, in an abundance of His blessings, more than I need.

He is constant and consistent for us as we should be for others. Reliability and strength for others shows those around us that we are walking in God's way by being constant and consistent even when current circumstances might seem as though another path would be more convenient or easier.

—Kathy Bolles & Tom Clark

THURSDAY, APRIL 11TH

Psalm 133:1. Oh, how good and pleasant it is, when brethren live together in unity!

Of course it sounds good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity, but is it really possible? In my younger years I wouldn't have thought so. I grew up within the disharmony of an ununited family. As a child I observed my elders' epic arguments, disownings and lifelong estrangements. As an adult I've seen how these attitudes and behaviors permeate through a family tree like a generational arboreal disease, rotting it branch to trunk, threatening the integrity of the whole.

Then I met my husband and married into his large, extended family. Here were group of people who come to each other's aid, who keep in touch, who forgive and forget, who gather peacefully and welcome newcomers into their fold with open arms, including me. To them this is simply normal behavior, it's just how families work. To me it was a revelation. "Good and pleasant" don't begin to describe the love, acceptance, and security I've found within this tree onto which I've been grafted.

For me, understanding this verse means thinking about unity. I don't believe that human beings, each having different personalities and inclinations, will ever be in total, perfect, agreement about everything. But as long as we understand that we are all important parts of something bigger, as long as we consciously choose to turn our leaves toward the light, as long as we strive to be governed together by the rule of love (and love's sister, forgiveness), then it becomes possible to respect differences, give a little, not sweat the small stuff and achieve unity. Colossians 3:13-14 says *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

My husband's family innately understands that being part of a united group of people means letting go of the small stuff. What's not small stuff? Love. Love is big stuff. Love is the great uniter.

—Angie Bickerton

FRIDAY, APRIL 12TH

John 11:27. [Martha] said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Martha was influenced by Jesus teaching when she complained that she was doing all the work while Mary was with Jesus. Jesus told Martha that his time was limited and that it was more important that she sit and listen. Jesus had spent frequent visits to Martha, Mary and Lazarus' house and the close relationship that developed between them all enabled Martha to really know Jesus. When having guests come to your house for a meal it is best to do the preparations before so, like Martha you can sit and talk. This quiet communication with Jesus enabled Martha to believe and say, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

—Amanda Hettleman

SATURDAY, APRIL 13TH

Jerem 31:33. But this is the covenant that I will make within the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Cameron and I have shared a life together for almost a decade and over the years have found many things that unite us, and things that remind us of how we exist as individuals. This last Hanukkah I learned the prayers for lighting the menorah, for the wine, and for the food (I learned how to fry latkes, and how to make our house smell like fried latkes for weeks). We invited our friends and family to share in the Festival of Lights, making more latkes, saying more prayers, and sharing a part of our lives with them that we had not before. In inviting others to our lives, we found comfort in the acceptance of our friendships and their enthusiasm to join us. We have so much love in our hearts for them that it was a cathartic experience to have it reciprocated without hesitation.

Rather than focusing on what separates us, we can focus on what we share. The experience of living has its difficulties and its joys, no matter your faith or beliefs. As humans we are privileged to share our lives with each other as a collective experience. Our views, our opinions, and our religions may differ, but the fact that we remain on the earth, feet planted in soil, ultimately unifies us. Empathizing with another is creating a covenant in and of itself, a faith from heart to heart.

—Cera Rodriguez & Cameron Overturf

SUNDAY, APRIL 14TH

PALM SUNDAY, THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION

Luke 23:28. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."

When I first read these words I thought them sad and disturbing, Then after reading them in context I discovered that they were almost the last words Jesus spoke before He was crucified. I felt awe: sadness was replaced by a wonderful feeling of gratitude. How amazing is it that some of His last thoughts showed His deep compassion, concern and love for all women! So when I read the verse again it was with this huge feeling of joy. He spoke to me, His sister, He told me that he understood the plight of women, He says "...do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." It is as if He looks into the souls of all the women of the world, Women who bear children, only to watch them go to war, Women who fight the battles of a career while trying to nurture their family, Women who struggle to achieve greatness, often despite the derision of men. The current "Me Too" movement comes to mind! Women who as they age and become more frail, often find themselves as caregivers, giving the last of their strength and health caring for another. It is as if Jesus saw all this clearly and reached out to us with love and empathy. He was on his way to be nailed to a cross and yet he called out to His sisters and told us not to worry about Him but worry about ourselves. I have always been grateful for my strong abiding love for Jesus. As long as I can remember He has been my friend. At no point in my life has He ever left my side. He is truly my rock and my salvation. It has been my most successful relationship and I am humbly grateful for this gift. I love the words of Dame Julian of Norwich. "...the greatest blessing we could ever receive is this wonderful courtesy and familiarity from our Father who is our Creator, through our sweet Jesus Christ who is our brother and our Savior. " How blessed I am to have this wonderful brother and Savior who has loved me and been beside me my entire life. I feel not only loved but empowered!

—Caroline Myers

Hebrews 9:15. For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

Holy Monday. The day *after* Jesus rode into Jerusalem to cries of “Hosanna” (please, save us!), and the day he *returned* to Jerusalem, this time to the temple, where he symbolically destroyed it. We might say that Holy Monday is the day that Jesus goes “all in.” He’s no longer the little-known prophet from the small town of Nazareth; he’s now become the living embodiment of a promise (the Messiah has come at last!) and, more, of a threat (the Messiah, yes, but what will he do?). We know, looking back, that it was both this promise and this threat that leads to his arrest and crucifixion. But we also know that was not the end of his story; actually, it was a new beginning.

But a new beginning required a new covenant and, thus, a revised interpretation of the old covenant. The letter—perhaps better, a homily—to the Hebrews also offers one such interpretation, in this case of Jesus as *both* Messiah and High Priest. In the early years after Jesus’ resurrection, Jewish and Gentile Christians faced tremendous suffering for their faith, and many of them were dealing with the fact that they had sinned in the face of that suffering. The author of Hebrews urges them to endure and to remember that they have a High Priest in Jesus who suffered as they did, “though without sin,” and who now intercedes for them directly with God as no priest of the old covenant could ever do. A new beginning and a new covenant. For the early Christians, for the world, and for us.

—The Rev. Jan Heller

1 Corinthians 1:27. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

Christ-like sacrificial humility protests our worldly definition of wisdom. Holy Fools (Yurodivy) of Russian Orthodoxy, resembling biblical prophets, live a Christ-like humility. More importantly, they reveal truth. Their actions participate in a hidden spiritual dimension of salvation.

Yurodivy drop out of mainstream society. Indifferent to the body, they wear rags, go barefoot, naked. Withdrawn into religious folly, their attention falls on the suffering on society's edges.

St. Xenia is one such revered Holy Fool. Born into lower nobility in 1736, Xenia wed a royal soldier. Petty demands of court life and her longing for a child overshadowed their mutual devotion. Xenia feared for her family; dreamt of death. Their infant daughter died. Her husband died. Withdrawing into grief, she underwent a profound and radical transformation. Turning away from family and friends, she began distributing her money and possessions to the poor.

Then she vanished.

Years later, wearing her husband's ragged military uniform, Xenia was discovered in the slums of St. Petersburg, tending paupers who revered her as a soothsayer and blessed healer. Empress Catherine feared her, correctly interpreting Xenia's behavior as a rebuke to the excesses of the royal court. Today believers circle in procession around the church devoted to Xenia.

In a world of vanity, power struggles, greed and lies, the acts of a Holy Fool like Xenia are judged irrational, outrageous. In the words of one Russian hymn, "the yurodivy) strives with insanity to reveal the insanity of the world " The yurodivy 's actions provoke discomfort with unexamined faith. We are spectators, standing on the boundary between truth and lies, between self-awareness and self-deception. In the person of the Holy Fool, we are challenged to recognize and honor Christ.

—The Rev. Nancy Tiederman

Hebrews 12:1. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

On this day in Holy Week we celebrate our union with a great cloud of witnesses whose lives have been made holy by the grace of God; and we follow those who have gone before us through the meaning of our own life and death. This moment is filled with sweet communion, fellowship divine. But it is also a day charged with sober reflection. For this day holds in tension the unresolved issues with which we are confronted everyday.

Even as we acknowledge companionship with brother and sister witnesses, we must, as it were, turn the pages of the calendar and go forward with an increased awareness of the link between life and death, conscious of the possibility of either life or death in every step we take.

For life and death are joined. All our living is bound up with dying; and all our dying, with living. Every moment is a choice for one or the other. Yet in the midst of our striving to get ahead, our yearning to be on top of things, we don't often ask ourselves just what it is we're choosing. Too often it seems it is not death we're conquering, but life. And if we're conquering life, then what follows? Nothingness?

Dying to the destructive elements in ourselves---the weight and sin that cling so closely, our death-dealing inclinations and all that separates us from God, our fellow human beings, and the self God created us to be---dying to that old self is fairly easy to understand. But how our dying can become living---and living in Christ---is much harder to fathom.

Some people read the Book, turn from the text, and witness to others. Some people walk beside us in quiet reflection. Some people support others with action. Some people encourage others by listening. Some people choose openness rather than self-protection. Some people choose to love rather than to judge. Some people choose forgiveness rather than resentment. Some people choose humility rather than pride. Some people experience hardship and persevere. Some people suffer loss and continue to trust. Some people sustain rejection and maintain hope. Some people are weighed down with grief yet journey forward with courage. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

—The Rev. Judith McDaniel

John 13:34-35. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Christ's "mandate" is commemorated on Maundy Thursday—"maundy" being a shortened form of *mandatum* (Latin) which means "command."

This past week in the midst of the "Big Snow," our all electric home was freezing cold and dark. Snow and ice blocked our driveway and the steep road out of the neighborhood. City emergency reports informed us to stay put as trees and power lines were down on many access roads. On the first morning without power I was attempting to light an outdoor barbecue but the wind was blowing out the flame. Back inside the house I heard a knock at the front door and a neighbor we rarely see, stood there with a thermos of hot water, homemade breakfast sandwiches and sweet rolls. She checked in with us daily, and even shoveled the driveway.

Jesus visited us this past week, feeding us, keeping us warm and even shoveling our driveway. We are Jesus's hands and feet in this dark and cold world and by keeping the new commandment to love one another, He lives through us.

—The Rev. Dan Fowler

John 19:1-3. Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flagged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face.

Jesus' cry from the cross is the most terrible verse in the Bible. God's own Beloved, whose intimacy with God was so foundational to his existence that he could say "I and the Father are one," here experiences the inexplicable loss of the Presence in which he has lived and moved and had his being. And God's reply to Jesus is even more chilling: *Silence*.

Uncomfortable with this image of a Christ seemingly abandoned to the void of a godless universe, some have said that Jesus is merely quoting the first verse of Psalm 22, as though his piety outweighs his pain even on the cross. But Jesus was not just quoting Psalm 22; he had *become* Psalm 22. The Christ who was truly human had to taste even the most painful extremities of the human condition in order to redeem us fully. The one revealed to be *God-with-us* had to become, in that most bitter hour, *us-without-God*.

Have we not been there ourselves? Whether in the personal hour of trial when our own cries go unanswered, or in modernity's cultural house of mirrors where the intervention of a loving God seems not only unnecessary but unthinkable, there are times when the Presence feels beyond our reach.

But as Paul says, Jesus became sin itself in order to save us from it (II Cor. 5:21). Sin is wherever God is shut out and we are walled in. And in making even the hellish absence of God as integral a part of his own experience as the intimacy of divine communion, Jesus performed the ultimate paradox: even when God seems most absent, God is yet present.

Good Friday means that whatever happens to us happens to God. From now on there is no place where God is not, for God has taken into Godself even the experience of separation and forsakenness. The Presence now includes the absence.

And we who have turned from God, or lost God, we who have cried out into the SILENCE, can yet live in hope. The One who died abandoned and bereft now keeps us company on our own crosses. As the Psalmist affirms with his possessive pronoun ("My God, my God!"). the relationship remains firm and unbroken even when God seems most mute and distant. We are not alone.

—The Rev. Jim Friedrich

Job 14:7. For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease.

Our house in Foster City, California had a deck that overlooked a lagoon. The deck had a hot tub which I loved to use regularly. Next to the hot tub was a beautiful tree that had grown to such a state that it leaned over the tub and deposited a lot of debris. So I arranged to have a gardener cut it back. Well, what I envisioned and what actually happened were two different things. I arrived home to a tree completely devoid of green leaves with hacked branches. It felt like a gut punch and the end of the tree.

Death of someone (or even creature or thing) is often like that. I mourned that tree for weeks, thinking that it would surely die. Jesus' friends had much more than grief to deal with. Not only the one they had come to love deeply and believed in had died – an awful death, but also their hope had died. Just being together was painful.

The church, in her Wisdom, provides a day to be present to our grief – all the losses we have endured over our lives, and maybe even some new ones. Holy Saturday is intended to be a quiet day, a pondering day. What new is coming out of our Lenten journey together?

Job's witness points us to and encourages us to hold on to hope no matter how dim it may become, to realize that it is only as we go through the darkness together that we will realize that answer. I invite you to resist the urge to jump over this most Holy Day into the celebrations that are to come. Be present to your grief and hold onto the hope that new love will become apparent, just as the leaves on my tree returned and were even more glorious.

—The Rev. Patricia Rome Robertson

Issiah 65:17. For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

Easter is indeed the herald of all things new - the time of new growth, new beginnings, new life. We see it all around us in God's glorious creation – in the wisteria that is climbing all along the garden trellis, in the frogs who sing now not just at sunset, but all night long, in the stirrings of our own souls as the days grow longer and warmer and softer. We have been through the season of Lent, having been given the gift of 40 long luxurious days to reflect on, and perhaps even to let loose of the things that keep God at a distance. We walked with Jesus through Holy Week, reconciling ourselves to ourselves and to God, sharing in the intimacy of that last supper in the upstairs room and hearing the new commandment to love one another with faith-filled servant hearts, standing at the foot of the cross and encountering a Love vast enough to hold everything that has ever been or ever will be, watching and waiting in a space as empty as the tomb for the resurrection that would change everything. And having come to Eastertide, the invitation to live in God's time, in Kairos time, is ever-present. The promise of new life is everywhere. Will you take a moment in time, take a moment out of (Chronos) time to see it?

What would it mean for us to live in Kairos time, in the kind of time that measures value not by the number of tasks accomplished or the number of events participated in, but in the particularities of this day, in opportunities acknowledged and in the seasons of the heart? While the demands of our daily lives are measured and real, if we recognize the signs of God's time all around us, our lives really will be changed. When I walk through my garden upon arriving home each evening rather than rushing in to check the mail, cook dinner, make lunch and lay out my clothes for tomorrow, I "give up" a little Chronos time... but I take in so much from those moments in Kairos time. While we may be tempted to measure our lives in hours and days and accomplishments, life is so much richer when, while doing all those things we need to do (or think we need to do!), we live into the opportunities and the seasons of God's time.

Easter blessings! The birds are singing, the flowers are blooming, the air smells of newly cut grass and God is in all of it. I pray that you find yourself lost in God's time at least every now and again, and that those precious Kairos moments call you back to the One who loves you and longs for you to come near. Indeed, God is making all things new.

Abundant blessings, Karen+

HOLY WEEK

PALM SUNDAY

8AM

Liturgy of the palms, Passion gospel and Holy Eucharist RITE I

10AM

Liturgy of the palms, Passion gospel and Holy Eucharist RITE II

GOOD FRIDAY

12:10PM

Spoken Good Friday Liturgy

7PM

Sung Good Friday Liturgy,
cantor only, no choir

A SERVICE OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

7PM

Holy Eucharist with Confession and Meditation.

Confessions will also be heard prior to the service, from 6-7pm

THE GREAT VIGIL OF EASTER

8PM

New Fire, Sacred Stories, and The First Service of Easter and Festal Eucharist

Incense used at this service

MAUNDY THURSDAY

6PM

Supper in the Parish Hall

7PM

Eucharist with foot washing,
stripping of the altar, and watch

EASTER SUNDAY

9AM

Festal Easter Eucharist Rite II

10:15AM

Easter Egg Hunt, Hot Cross Buns & Bubbly

11AM

Festal Eucharist Rite II

Incense used at this service

