

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 discover the things in our lives that create distance between God and ourselves, and to consider gently letting them go. 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 and 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, Karen†

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:6

I have always been a bit troubled by this instruction by Jesus. It seems odd to say that “real prayer” is being locked away, and even more that it is “secret.” Of course, if you read a bit before this verse you see that what Jesus was saying is that some people make a “show” of their prayers, getting some reward for showing others how pious they are and by doing this, revealing in living color just how much they have missed the point! But today, I want to take up this one verse, Matthew 6:6. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. As have gotten older I have come to realize that this verse is not about place and secrecy but is really one of attention and promise.

First, attention. “Going into your room” is just about as good as saying, go into yourself. I take it that way. I think Jesus said this to say, make prayer intentional, as much as you can. Prayer is every bit the very organized, scripted, rote liturgy of our prayer book for instance, and it is also the casual cast off, “Oh my God!” Or “Help me Jesus” that is thrown out almost involuntarily at those impromptu moments of our life and it is everything in between. I believe what Benedictines and other spiritual persons have said in many different ways, prayer is every step. Prayer is every breath. Yes, it is. It is all those things, but there has to be a part of our prayer life that is a bit more intentional, where we take a posture, and a focus, that we are not always afforded in those more impromptu, more casual moments. We need both.

Second, promise. All this talk of secrecy makes me wonder, and yet, I think it is also very comforting. Jesus seems to be saying here, you can go into your room, you can go into yourself, you can run as far as you can, metaphorically, and actually, wherever you run, there, still, in every way and with the same intensity, you will find God already there. There is comfort in that. We can’t keep secrets from God.

Perhaps in this Lenten journey you can practice the more focused part of your prayer life. Whatever, or however we hear “go into your room,” do that this Lent. Go to a spot, a place, and intentionally pray. And then meditate on this promise from God, that there are no secrets from God. Another exercise you might try - contemplate the biggest “secret” in your life and each day of this Lent, meditate on the scene of sitting with God and that secret, together, wide open, exposed. Attention and Promise. May you have a blessed Lent.

Bishop Greg Rickel

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18TH

Take delight in the Lord, and he shall give you your Heart's desire. Psalm 37:4.

As I reflect on this beautiful, hopeful passage, I smile. God has a plan, and his plan includes my joy, my happiness. On a personal level I find this verse comforting. Even these darkest of times, I can remain hopeful. It is daunting to know, let alone ask, for the fulfillment of my heart's desire. I feel too small to ask the great I Am to hear my secret hopes and desires. I am a wife; I want my husband to be healthy and content. I am a mother; I want my children and those they love to be healthy, happy, productive, and fulfilled. It is challenging when those I love are hurting. However, I know we all experience Life's joys and sorrows. I am not in control. This passage eases my heart.

Living through the pandemic has condensed so many expectations. It is easier for me to find pleasure in small, shared moments. I ask for less; I feel more blessed. My heart's desires are lightened.

Thinking of this passage as we enter the season of Christ's passion is more difficult. He didn't know his own story's end; he, however, teaches faith. The Stations of the Cross are part of my Lenten devotions. No matter how familiar, I feel Jesus' pain and Mary's sorrow. As I feel this, I learn to be gentler on myself. I learn again to let go. I may not be able to ask for my heart's desire, but I pray to, "Almighty God to whom all hearts are open all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid." I take comfort that God knows.

Bonnie E. Chan

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19TH

I will give you thanks in the great congregation; I will praise you in the mighty throng. Psalm 35:18

When I first read this passage, it struck me with such longing - how I miss worshipping all together at St Barnabas, seeing your faces in person, hearing the choir, singing the liturgy together. How thankful I will feel to once again be able to worship in the congregation.

I wondered what David was so thankful for and read the rest of the Psalm. David was in a difficult place and is pleading with God to save him from his enemies. They are coming after him without cause, he sounds desperate. David is crying for God to save him. It's a prayer for deliverance, a cry of HELP me God! He prays for God to protect him, to fight for him like a warrior.

He then begs God "say to my soul, 'I am your salvation.'" If ever there were words of comfort, reassurance in dark times it would be to hear God saying to our souls "I am your salvation." Regardless of what terrors we face, what heartbreak comes across our path, the God of David is the same God of today.

David goes on to say three different times how exuberantly he will give thanks for God's salvation. I will give you thanks in the great congregation, I will praise you in the mighty throng... my soul shall rejoice in the Lord, all my bones shall say 'O Lord, who is like you?' ... my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all day long.

Even in these wearing and uncertain times, God says to our souls like David's before us "I am your salvation." Through loss and grief and when it feels like the security that we once trusted has left us: "I am your salvation."

Now that's worth celebrating, today while we are apart and when we can finally be together in the great St Barnabas congregation and give thanks as one. What a day that will be!

Bethany Anderson

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20TH

To you, Oh Lord, I cried, And to the Lord I made supplications. Psalm 30:8

Max Lucado, author and pastor, reminds us that sometimes life just doesn't seem fair, does it? Have you ever thought to yourself, why do good people have to hurt or become sick and struggle with their lives? Both of us have had blessed lives growing up. We both have enjoyed happy family lives, good educations, and marriages to good loving people. Neither of us has had health issues that were not easily remedied. In many regards we have cruised through life connecting all of the dots, allowing our spiritual life to be active and positive. At least until we each encountered a divorce from a spouse, both with whom we thought we would grow old.

Our bubbles had been burst.....the wind had gone out of our sails.....our life's vision had been clouded. All of our other life problems could be solved, but divorce?? Oh, Lord.....a splitting of our adult families....the pain brought tears, a feeling of loneliness, a sense of being abandoned.....pain neither of us had ever felt before. It was like losing a family member to death. Initially when we turned towards our spiritual and prayer life for direction it felt like we had been abandoned by God. We began to doubt and we began to question. A state of spiritual ruin assailed each of us as we searched our hearts for the God that had been with us throughout our unblemished lives.

What seemed to occur for us was a stepping back from the life we had been living. We gave ourselves a chance to spend time in thoughtful contemplation, humble prayer to God to bring us out of our very uncomfortable despair. And then came our friends, our neighbors, our work colleagues.....each giving us their support without even knowing it. And each day became a little brighter. Time, our faith in God, gave us the capacity to find our strength once again. As Psalm 30 expresses "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Helene & Steve Schmitz

He guides the humble in doing right and teaches his way to the lowly. Psalm 25:8

When I spent Orthodox Holy Week in Jerusalem years ago, I saw an unusual ritual in the Syrian church on Holy Thursday. The patriarch, imitating the humility of Jesus, girded himself with a towel and knelt at the feet of the clergy to wash their feet. After this, he took his seat. Then the clergy surrounded his chair and lifted it above their heads, for “all who humble themselves shall be exalted” (Luke 14:11). From this elevated position, the patriarch gave us all a blessing.

Humility is perhaps the most misunderstood of Christian virtues. It has been confused with low self-esteem, or suffering devaluation by others without complaint. Religious tropes of unworthiness (“I am a worm, not a person!”) haven’t helped. But humility is foundational to spiritual growth. When the Psalm says that God “teaches the divine way to the lowly,” it means that there is something essential and life-giving which only comes through humility.

In the 4th century, Christian men and women fled the corruptions of a dehumanizing culture in search of a more authentic way of being. In the deserts of Egypt and Palestine, they discovered that humility was not just the first step on the path toward the “divinization” of our humanity; it was the path itself—the self-emptying process which makes room for God to fill us. This is the wisdom the Psalmist promised, and it became foundational for western monasticism, of which every contemporary Christian is a beneficiary. As Thomas Merton put it, humility “empties the soul of all pride and annihilates it in the sight of God, so that nothing may be left of it but the pure capacity for God.”

Humility is countercultural in the age of “selfies.” It is the antidote for narcissism—grandiose self-importance, entitlement, insatiable lust for attention, and self-promotion. It gives glory only to God.

Humility begins with consciousness of sin—our own incompleteness, our distance from what we are made to be. This frees us from having to pretend to be what we are not. We drop the disguises and self-delusion, admit our weaknesses and limitations. We relinquish the need to be in control or make everything about us. We accept our dependence on God—everything is gift, not possession. We acknowledge our need for mercy.

Humility also heals our relationships with others. If we don’t have to be the smartest in the room, or the most important, or always correct, we can shed the arrogance, egotism, fear and competitiveness which disable loving community. We submit ourselves to the presence, influence and “otherness” of others, even when it is difficult to do, because interdependence is the truth of love. We even accept the hard things beyond our control without losing faith. And by not insisting on always having the best for myself, or asserting my rights without reverent regard for humanity or the planet, humility restores the balance of paradise.

Benedictine sister Joan Chittister sums it up this way: “Humility is the total continuing surrender to God’s power in my life and in the lives of those around me.”

The Reverend Jim Friedrich

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22ND

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting. Amen, and Amen. Psalm 41:13

Psalm 41, attributed to David, begins by recommending to us good deeds, consideration of and generosity to the poor, as a way to secure God's protection and good favor. Immediately afterward, confessing sin and asking for healing, the author goes on to lament the frailty of human character. Even friends who are closest can smile and be sympathetic in our company, but then turn to criticize, hope the worst for us, and attack us. Perhaps the author sees it even in himself. I know I find flaws in my character that I can witness and regret but not (so far) eradicate.

Who knows why? Misplaced loyalty? Envy? Insecurity? Blindness? Any reason we can consider is a human temptation that God is not affected by. Whatever the cause, human beings cannot be depended on to rise above and remain perpetually faithful. Only the Lord is everlasting. Only the Lord can be depended upon from age to age. Even while we love our neighbor, we can depend only on God.

Questions ring in my head. What does that look like and sound like? Developing a sincere, working, flourishing prayer life? Examining our energies, efforts, and actions in the light of our Baptismal Covenant? How can we meaningfully depend on the everlasting goodness of God?

We have tools: ancient texts, wise counsellors, and the voice whispering to or pleading with us from our own hearts. Lenten epiphanies. Let's be still and know God. Amen, and Amen.

Barbara Bolles

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23RD

For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Hebrews 3:4

The verse made me chuckle as we've been locked in a seemingly endless struggle to update our forty-year-old home. Exasperation hardly explains our present state of mind, and yet this verse reminds me that in all things God is at work – no matter how difficult, nonsensical or unfair circumstances may seem. Don't give up. Keep the faith, it reminds me. The verse, a side thought literally put in parentheses in its English translation, is a helpful metaphor for our present state of incomplete remodel, and even life itself. Projects (and even people?) have a life cycle and it's not uncommon to feel lost at the midpoint. Sheetrock mud and carpenter dust easily blur the vision. Rubble crowds the view; inspiration seems to have been in vain. It can be difficult to even see the value in reaching the endpoint.

Scholars assume the book of Hebrews was written for a Jewish Christian community in Rome. It's an epistle of encouragement to faithfulness – to remember that unity with God is possible through one act, the death of Jesus on the cross. Salvation is found in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, not the repeated sacrifices of temple ritual. The author reminds the community that there is an underlying unity to God's work in history and Jesus is the fulfillment of that hope. Avoid the temptation to return to the familiar, a former religion, a false truth, the author says. God is with us and for us. Embrace the new life of hope and become part of God's building project.

From our readings in the St. Barnabas contemplative book study group, we've been learning how faith actually changes the subtle physical composition of materiality. Faith makes a difference! I may not know how, but I can embrace the mystery and invitation that in a single action or prayer, I can become God's co-creator. The message of Hebrews also extends to our hope as a community in a politically divided country. God is still at work with hammer and nails. It's up to us to keep faith even if we are currently lost in the construction zone.

Julie Emry Dougherty

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. John 15:9

This scripture is probably one of the most important in the bible. Love appears 538 times in the NRSV bible, 221 times in the new testament. What makes 'love' so important in the bible?

God's first two commandments are to love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself.

The Kingdom of God is in you (Luke 17:21) as is the power of love is in you. Love is fundamental to God's 'kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.'

What is the significance of the word 'abide?' What did Jesus intend in using "abide?" Actually, different words are used in several other translations. Words such as 'dwell,' 'continue,' 'stay,' 'remain,' and 'live.' 'Abide' appears to be the most common.

In the first part of John, chapter 15, Jesus is using the relationship between a vine (Jesus) and the branches of the vine (his believers) to make the point that a branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine and "neither can you unless you abide in me." Later, Jesus says if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love.

However, abiding does not end with our abiding in Jesus. To abide in the love of Jesus we are to keep his second commandment that we love our neighbors. We therefore abide in the love of our neighbors as they abide in our love.

Love is evident in God's Kingdom in many different ways.

- Mother Theresa said: "We can do no great things, only small things with great love."
- No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (John 4:12)
- Richard Rohr said: "We were made by love to love."
- Ephesians 5:2. "...walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us..."
- Viktor Frankl wrote: "The Truth-that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which [we] can aspire."

For me, love is a way of being – I pray abiding in the love of Jesus guides my thinking and acting. The outcome of an interaction with another person(s) then, is changed for the benefit of each/all of us.

Mike Killion

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25TH

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork. Psalm 19:1

What better proclaims the glory of God and his love for us, his children, than the sky? It is ever changing, never remaining the same as the clouds and the sun move throughout the day and the night replaces the clouds and the sun with the moon and the stars.

And what better metaphor for God than the moon? The sun can be harsh and burn us but we never need fear the moon for it will never cause us any harm. The moon waxes and wanes throughout the month, sometimes invisible but -- like God -- still having a powerful force on the Earth. Then, on certain nights, it is brilliant and undeniable -- like God -- making night almost as bright as the day. There are times when the moon is but a tiny speck to the naked eye and then there are times when it appears enormous and brilliant orange or gold or even red. But the moon, for me, in whatever form or shape or color, whether I can see it or not, is always the face of God.

God could have made our world very boring and bland – no points of light or brilliant orb in the night sky; no warming sun or clouds in the shapes of cartoon characters by day. But He so loved us that He created a world to amuse and delight us with its many colors and textures, and no two things ever perfectly the same.

The precise balance between the land, the sea and the sky is remarkable and a sure sign of God's divine hand. The amount of gravity is perfect for our existence – not too little so that we float away and not too much so that we are crushed by it. The land is fertile enough for food to grow to feed us and other plants to grow to purify our air. The sea also provides us with food but also holds creatures the sight of which does nothing but entertain us. The sky holds the life-sustaining sun and rain-providing clouds.

God could have made the world very boring and bland but instead, because He loves us, He filled it with plants and animals every color of the rainbow. And don't get me started on rainbows .

Kathy Bolles

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Deuteronomy 10:12

God doesn't require a dramatic, herculean task, but a change of heart coupled with persistent nurturing of that heart. Unfortunately, sometimes persistence can seem like a herculean task, especially to me. I tend to throw myself into big projects to the exclusion of all else, work like crazy, finish them, then move on.

But I also grow a garden. The garden annoys me because it doesn't lend itself well to my feast-and-famine working style. It is never done. In the summer it can't be ignored when I dive into another project. My garden, like all living, growing things, needs consistent attention-not much, mind you- just a little nurturing every day over a long period of time: A weed pulled here, a pest addressed there, a little thinning, etc. If I let the tomatoes dry out then deluge them with water their skins will split. If the weeds get out of control they'll choke out the lettuce. That's not the kind of attention a garden needs. Or God.

A relationship with God is also a living, growing thing that needs nurturing. Loving God, walking in his ways and serving him with all our heart and soul first require a decision to focus on him. To spend time with him. That will lead to a change of mind, then heart, then life. It's not much, but it's everything. I need to remember this not only during the growing season, but always.

With infinitesimal but constant movement my sunflowers always turn their faces to the glory of the sun. I will try to take a lesson from them.

Angie Bickerton

Do I not hate those, O Lord, who hate you? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? Psalms 139:20

Our first reaction to this is revulsion. From the time she can remember Peggy's mother said "hate the sin and not the sinner." Kirk's mother (an English teacher and granddaughter of an Amish bishop) wouldn't even let him say he hated stewed tomatoes – "I dislike stewed tomatoes" or, even better, "I prefer the green beans." And we must have somehow conveyed this to our children, because once our son said to someone who called him a "bad boy" – "My mom loves me. She just doesn't like my 'bad things'." (although, he said 'sings' because 'th' was so hard for him.)

All the beautiful verses in this psalm:

"You have searched me out and known me...you discern my thoughts from afar"

"Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day"

"You knit me together in my mother's womb"

and on and on. Psalm 139 is a deeply personal expression of our relation to God and to God's involvement in every aspect of our being.

We would, of course, much rather talk about all those things, about the comfort this psalm gives us and has given our family over the years – it's one of the readings prescribed for funerals in our church, and Kirk read it at his mother's funeral – it fit her so well – describing her conflicted relationship with God ("Where can I go from your spirit/where can I flee from your presence?). It's given Peggy comfort when she feels she has no purpose, no calling ("Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb; all of them were written in your book").

All these beautiful verses, and you want us to talk about hate?!? Thanks a lot, Holy Spirit!

But when we look at the words, it does seem, in many ways, they are very representative of the situation we find ourselves in right now – where all actions, even something as simple as wearing a mask, have become so incredibly politicized that tempers flare when we see someone with different practices from our own – do we "hate" the person who sees the world in such a different way from our own? Do we see our own actions as being in accord with God's wishes, and those who disagree with us as being against God? Well . . . maybe we do, particularly in times of crisis, when we are literally afraid for our lives. When things are changing at such a pace, we will fight to keep our old normal. And, it might be that we return to the overt tribalism of our past. It could be that these feelings are so basic to human nature that we feel it now just David felt it 3,000 years ago.

So, the message we would like to take from this is that we should recognize the tendency in ourselves to distance (still can't say 'hate') others who disagree with us and, instead, try at least to understand where they are coming from – and just possibly start some dialogue where we try to bridge the differences . . . or, at least, understand them.

...but do read the rest of the psalm; it really is wonderful!

Kirk and Peggy Eichenberger

“For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.” Romans 4:14

The gist of this verse is that by obeying God’s laws as given to Abraham, well before the 10 Commandments were given to Moses, they must be obeyed with faith in God, more than just following the laws. To be righteous before God, we must have faith in Him. Just obeying his laws does not make us righteous in his sight. If anyone can be an example it was Abraham; he and Sarah finally started “building many nations” at the ages of 100 and 90 respectively because his faith in God grew and stayed strong. Paul is also explaining to Jews and Gentiles that this love of God, and faith in Him is how God will give us salvation from ourselves. Jesus tells us that all of us are God’s children, loved by Him and through Jesus’s death and resurrection, forgiven for our sins. We ask forgiveness, because, as Christians, we have faith in our Lord to see us as human and transgressor. This He understands. Because we have faith in Him, we know God forgives us. And by faith in Him, we constantly are asking for help to lead righteous lives.

This is my conundrum: What about those who are not members of our faith? There are many people who live their lives without prayer and belief in God, but are generous, hardworking and for the most part, follow the laws as were taught to us as children through the Golden Rule: Do unto others, as you would have done to you. For whatever reason, they either cannot accept that there is a supreme God or want proof before declaring belief. Therefore, they have no faith in His being, but they continue to live “righteous” lives.

My prayers are for these people, that God will see them as worthy and welcome them, come the day their souls take flight, and even more so, that they will one day find and have faith in Him.

In God’s Love for All.

Babe Kehres

MONDAY, MARCH 1ST

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that [Jesus] was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" John 4:27

Another unnamed woman in the Gospels, but this one is engaged in an incredible conversation with Jesus. It is from the verses just prior that we first hear of the water of life. What a powerful concept! Who wouldn't want to drink from the water of life?! But in this verse, the focus is on the disciples - there is clearly some tension. Is it because Jesus is speaking to a woman? This woman specifically? Did they hear the words exchanged between Jesus and the unnamed woman? The impact of this verse seems to be in the unknown, the sense that what is 'normal' is no longer normal, and a feeling of uneasy anticipation. What will happen next?

It is interesting to me how familiar these feelings and questions seem today on this stop along my Lenten journey.

Linda Maxson

TUESDAY, MARCH 2ND

When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." John 4:47-48

In these days of Corona virus, we see the point of death all around us, caught up in the signs of a demon virus, who can revise its own RNA to better survive and thrive, pursued and conquered by those wizards of the labs who create shields of protection and healing in vaccines and treatments. But many of us are neither unwell, nor scientists and this battle of life and death may touch us directly, or it may simply drive us into the solitary safety of our homes.

How then, to understand this exchange between the man with the dying son and Jesus? How, in our Lenten contemplations, might we approach our belief in healing, as Jesus teaches, by seeing signs and wonders? Speculative seeing can renew those things the demon virus has robbed from our lives, making us feel alone. Signs of community surround us in our solitude, as we remember to walk solemnly and lightly, as Jesus did upon the waters, upon the once sacred island ground of the Suquamish people, feeling their footsteps beneath our soil; or beneath the waters we may not walk upon, but ferry, or row across, swim the pods of the great whales we seek to protect; clusters of anemones direct our vision to soft commingling, in the outgoing tide, and for strength we find the hard clustering of barnacles on the rocks. Community comes to us in the trees whose roots are commingling under our feet, or in the skies where water and air partner into clouds. When brought inward, these signs and wonders perform the experience of the community that surrounds us, and, in our contemplations, includes us. We can learn to feel ourselves a part of these many communities that have come before, or swim, float, and cling around us. The Episcopalian poet Mary Oliver wrote, "the world offers itself to your imagination/ calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting--/over and over announcing / your place in the family of things." And, in touch with these signs and wonders, we may sink into the embrace of God's love and people.

Sue Ellen Case

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3RD

He shall come down like the rain upon the mown field, like the showers that water the earth.

Psalm 72:6

In this psalm, King David is reflecting on his reign as king and that of his son Solomon, who will soon be his successor. David's prayer asks God to entrust the future king with the ability to make sound judgements and to rule his people with justice. David understands that a good monarch endeavors to bring hope and prosperity to all. David asks God to bless Solomon so that he is able to rule justly, that his nation prospers and that he will be able to crush those who oppress others. His desire, much like that of any parent, is for his son to be a good man with an understanding heart. His petition is that Solomon will have God's guidance and blessing throughout his reign as king.

This psalm of petition for Solomon, transitions to a psalm of worship. David sets aside his concerns for the role his son will play during his time and focuses on what has sustained him as ruler of Israel. David speaks prophetically of one greater than any king, He who is yet to come. He speaks of the Messiah, who will bring hope to all. This is a psalm of good news. As he praises the wonders of this future King, he helps us to understand the transforming change that will occur to those who embrace God and endeavor to be faithful servants of the Lord.

Like David, many of us have experienced a heavy heart over the anxiety of what is to come. Certainly, Covid-19, political division and social injustice has lately given rise to insomnia and fretfulness. Yet, just as the rain pours down to nourish and renew the mown field, we too can find our source of comfort and joy in God's message of love. He will be our source. He will help sustain us as we maneuver in these challenging times, feeding our souls and allowing us to grow and thrive.

Drucy Burnet Hodge

THURSDAY, MARCH 4TH

Therefore I will praise you upon the lyre for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing to you with the harp, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will sing with joy when I play to you, and so will my soul, which you have redeemed. Psalm 71: 22-23

Praise Gratitude Redemption Faith

There is no better way to express these sentiments than through music. Lifting up with voice in praise and gratitude. As a musician, I have been blessed with knowing God differently. I became active in church, growing up, through the choir and instrumental musical offerings. It was power beyond words.

The harp and lyre are first mentioned in the book of Samuel and Chronicles and were commonly used for temple music because of their mystical qualities, thought to bring one ever closer to the numinous, the unspoken, the unknowing qualities of our God. It was also understood that the harp and lyre could drive evil spirits out and were also played signaling the arrival of Yahweh.

We sit in wait during the darkness of lent. We reflect. We hope. We pray. This passage from Psalms assures us that the “Holy One” is with us and watching over us. The prophet Isaiah first views the “Holy One” as that awesome being whose greatness is beyond our human understanding. How can we grasp the concept of His eternal existence and presence everywhere in the universe, especially during the darkness of lent? This is where music can take over and express that “something other.” During lent it may often be difficult to realize that The Holy one is among us. Words, language and thought speak to our cognition or knowing in a practical way whereas music, for me, especially those offerings without words, remind us of the greatness and awesomeness of the unknown, speaking more to the heart.

Lent is a time for waiting, wondering and reflection. For some, with fear, for some with sadness and for some with despair. The concept of fasting, abstinence and repentance is not that of deprivation, but rather that of making space for, opening up to transformation. Confusion, darkness, fear, and uncertainty lead to reflection and reevaluation.

The struggle is imperative to the journey. The darkness necessary to illuminate the light when it comes. Again, waiting in anticipation for the unknown. Then death! And without death there cannot be rebirth and new life.

Perhaps The Psalms being sung during lent are signaling a coming . . . Listen, watch and wait!

Judith Hanna

FRIDAY, MARCH 5TH

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing and it is amazing in our eyes?'" Mathew 21:42

A cornerstone is a stone at the corner of a building, uniting two intersecting walls, sometimes referred to as a quoin. If the corner stone is not planted firmly, the house will fall down. Unlike the chief priests and Pharisees, the landowner with his sons and servants were in awe of the cornerstone as "marvelous in our eyes'. To the chief priests and Pharisees Jesus proclaimed 'The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and will be given to those who produce its fruits.' (the landowner, his sons and servants).

A cornerstone is also a stone that often bears an inscription to be installed at a ceremony, honoring the historic origin of a building. It is also metaphorically used as period landmarks throughout someone's life as well as the life of a city, state, country. This passage inspired me to write "Listen" reflecting both smooth and rocky cornerstone memories.

Listen

inside out
back
to
front

Seek
where you will find
your open door

Trust
inconvenient
holy moments

Embrace
your
Spirit

Now

Listen

Susan K. Hylan

SATURDAY, MARCH 6TH

One thing have I asked of the Lord; one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; To behold the fair beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.

Psalm 27: 5-6

Dominus illuminatio is the traditional Latin reference for Psalm 27, which begins in our Book of Common Prayer, “The Lord is my light and salvation.” It is considered even more beautifully poetic in the original Hebrew. The psalmist, perhaps King David, expresses deep trust in God’s love, regardless of whatever circumstances may be present. During the challenges of this past year, in an ongoing pandemic, we have refocused on the foundations of our faith. We are inspired by remembering the lives of those who have gone before us.

Brian’s mother grew up in the Great Depression, later marrying a World War II veteran whose family had strong women of faith. She became one, too. Widowed at 64, she continued quiet, loving service to others at church and her senior residential community (the sole member of the Sunshine Committee!). Although vascular dementia limited her abilities over time, she still attended Bible study and Vespers, the constants of her schedule. Near the end of her earthly journey, she was confined to bed and could no longer speak. One Sunday afternoon when we started reading a Psalm, she closed her eyes and lifted her hands together in prayer. The body was failing, but the spirit was shining brightly. That image will always be in our hearts.

Throughout many centuries the words of Psalm 27 have given hope, reassurance and affirmation. We imagine that all of us have known, or currently know, someone who lives that message. It is worthy of our contemplation, especially this Lent.

Brian Andvik and Laura Carroll

[Jesus] told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" John 2:16

I have an older brother who is seven years my senior. He was in high school when I was still in elementary school and would listen to music in his room while doing homework at night when I had to go to bed. I have fallen asleep countless times with the sounds of U2's Rattle and Hum wafting into my bedroom from my brother's next door. There is a song towards the end of the album, Bullet the Blue Sky, where U2's lead singer, Bono, launches into a sort of spoken word soliloquy where he imagines an encounter with an unscrupulous televangelist, preying on the weakest members of society in an effort to enrich himself. Bono responds, in his most righteous intonation, "Well the God I believe in isn't short of cash, mister!"

I hear that voice and tone when I read John 2:16. There is a lot going on in this very short verse. Jesus is returning to the Temple in Jerusalem for Passover and encounters merchants selling doves and other animals for sacrifice in the Temple courts. Jesus gets angry and yells at them to leave the Temple. Not only does he yell, he refers to the Temple as his Father's house; publicly stating that he is the Messiah. This is a hugely significant statement but Jesus isn't just saying it to say it. Rather, it slips out as he articulates the source of his anger. "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

The reason these two statements rhyme for me is that they both object to the reduction of our relationship with God to a transaction. I don't think Jesus was just reacting to the surface-level ugliness of housing barn animals in pens outside of a sacred space like the Temple. God is boundless and infinite. The implication that our relationship with Him can be reduced to a simple, convenient monetary transaction reduces the power of God and implies that he is bound by our own material constraints. God desires a relationship with us, not a transaction. And I think that is what Jesus was reacting to.

In other words, the God I believe in isn't short of cash.

Dave Teves

MONDAY, MARCH 8TH

The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?" (Jesus answered them), "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with the right judgment." John 7:15,24

This passage's reference to Jesus' lack of formal education really struck me in light of the current state of our country and the extreme divisiveness that, in part, centers on our differing levels on education. It seems clear to me from this passage that the Jews in Jesus' time valued education, as we do in our time, and that this value can cause us to be wrongly judgmental of others.

It seems that education doesn't necessarily equate to wisdom. I think we all know this in our hearts, but we still look down on, feel sorry for, or blame ignorance for the ideas and behavior of those less educated than ourselves, rather than consider the world from a different perspective.

I noticed that Jesus does not admonish us not to judge, but to "judge with right judgment." This seems to me to be that hardest part of this passage. Judgment is a critical thinking skill that we must use in order to function in the world, but how do we know that we are forming "right" judgments? Scripture gives us some help, but literal interpretations would have us stoning people for their actions. How do we know our interpretations are correct? Our fundamental moral code and ethical response can help us, but there are some things that divide us on deeply moral and ethical issues. (abortion and the death penalty come to mind).

Maybe one of the problems with judgment is in being too sure of ourselves, too sure about what is right, instead of holding the conflict in our hearts and trusting God to help us discern what is the right action for us in the chaos of our world. Jesus' full answer in verses 16-18 helps me understand what he means by right judgment. He says that his teaching is not his own but comes from the one who sent him. He goes on to say that one who seeks the glory of the one who sent them, rather than their own glory speaks truthfully. While we can't really know what is in another person's heart or mind, we can listen and try to put ourselves in their shoes and broaden our perspective. I am not advocating doubt that can paralyze us into inaction, but doubt that can create empathy and compassionate action.

I wonder what other things we value cause us to judge others. Intellect, career, talent, wealth, race, gender, physical abilities, and appearance all fall into that category for me. Being recently retired has made me re-evaluate my own worth, to a certain degree. My career has been a major part of my self-definition for nearly 40 years, but is that who I really am? No, I am a child of God, loved and called to love others, and so is everyone else on this planet. I know this, at least, is a "right judgement".

Mary Anne Smith

TUESDAY, MARCH 9TH

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said 'out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" John 7:37-38

This unconditional invitation to everyone to receive the abundant love and grace of God through Jesus Christ, captures the true essence of the gospels.

In John's Gospel, this follows the perfect prelude of the feeding of the five thousand, where Jesus is manifested as "the bread of life." It takes place on the last day of the Jewish celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, the third of the three great pilgrimage festivals that Jewish males were required to observe. This festival is also known as the Feast of Booths or Feast of Ingathering and Sukkoth. It occurs in September or October and celebrates the autumn harvest of grapes and olives. It lasts for seven days with a holy invocation on the eighth day. Every day, there is a ritual in which the priest marches to the Pool of Siloam. He fills a golden vessel with water which he brings back to the temple accompanied by the singing of Hallel Psalms. The water is poured over the altar for an offering to God as a reminder of the water from the rock that sustained the ancient Israelites and the rains that over the last year have sustained the land and the harvest. Prayers are also offered for rains in the coming year.

The people have spent a whole week celebrating the gift of water which is essential for life. Then Jesus tells them that he can satisfy their spiritual thirst too! Jesus offers the living water that quenches all thirst and is a source of eternal life. The Good News is that this offer is free to all without any restrictions. The only prerequisite for this invitation is having a thirst, (desire or longing), to come to Jesus and receive this gift of love with an open heart, being or soul (belly in the original Greek translation). As believers, we become conduits through which the love from God which we receive, overflows to others around us. I can feel this love in your prayers for me as I navigate my challenges with cancer. I can see it in your faces, (via Zoom), and it sustains me.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Maggie Ball

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10TH

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." John 8:12

While in Galilee, Jesus speaks to the unbelievers, to his followers and to the resistant Pharisees. Jesus proclaims, "I am the light. The light of life, the light of the world." This is often difficult for followers and unbelievers. He chooses the light, the life of the world, and desires to tell more: the stories of history, of spirituality, of devoted believers who pass on his words, of his rightly place. Jesus proclaims to all: "I am the light of life, the life of the world."

Jesus attempts to help the Jews see that through him, they can know the spirituality of the Father as well as to keep the Jewish law. The words of Jesus create attention. Does Jesus want to be better known, to be seen and heard, to speak of himself, of the Spirit of the Father? To many Galileans, he is an enigma. "Who is this man? From where does he come? How does he acquire knowledge of the past and future? From whom?" The people learn that Jesus is a complex man.

The authorities are conflicted; this man may be a fraud. Should they arrest Jesus, the crowd will be excited, upset, perhaps a threat.

Jesus tells us to learn, and to know the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Judy Tingley

THURSDAY, MARCH 11TH

Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring up from the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Psalm 85: 10-11

First, some background. Please take a few minutes to read all of Psalm 85 to fully appreciate this passage. A note in my New Revised Standard Version - New Oxford Annotated Bible describes this psalm as a prayer for deliverance from national adversity (a group lament) and this passage as an oracle of assurance. Its translation of the passage differs, with steadfast love rather than mercy and faithfulness in place of truth – examples of biblical scholars differing in their interpretations of the ancient Hebrew texts. Then read the passage here again and think about how mercy and steadfast love are alike. And consider how truth is like faithfulness; when someone is your true friend, they are faithful to you. Then read on.

Psalm 85 certainly speaks to our situation today. We long for deliverance from national adversity. We grieve problems we are failing to resolve: the pandemic, global warming and environmental degradation, the politicization of too many aspects of our lives, racial inequity, widespread hunger, homelessness and more. Our world is a mess and to be candid, in some respects I have felt as though we have been in Lent ever since the pandemic struck and life changed dramatically. I have had very ample quiet time to contemplate my relationships, including with God. I have grieved. I have gone for long solitary, sometimes prayerful walks. I have thought that God cannot possibly be pleased with us. And I have pondered what I can do to try to make things better, to try to please Him. In some small ways I have acted, and maybe I am doing some good. But I have not felt much joy or hope.

Then I volunteered to pen a reflection and got Rev. Karen's note saying that the Holy Spirit chose this uplifting passage for me. I read it and broke into a great big smile. And at least for now my perspective has changed for the better. With God's help I hope it will last. Sure, we continue to face terrible adversity and it is not going to go away anytime soon. We Americans (and humans generally) have really gone overboard lately at things that you would think would greatly displease the Almighty. But God still loves us, and He grants us grace even though we do not merit it. He offers the prospect of steadfast love. Truth. Righteousness. Peace. Fortunately for us, His grace is greater than our sin.

But we are not off the hook. I believe we should always strive to be merciful, true to each other, giving, caring, peace-loving. We can offer ourselves, each other and the world around us more reason for hope. And we can look forward to Easter and the gift of salvation. Righteousness shall look down from heaven.

Joe Salter

FRIDAY, MARCH 12TH

The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, and shall spread abroad like a cedar of Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of our Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.

Psalm 92: 11-12

I knew very little about Northwest gardening when I moved here from Colorado 15 years ago. With an empty garden to fill, I made the classic rookie mistake of overplanting everything. I was just so thrilled and excited by the wide variety of plants that could be grown here. One of those plants was a small palm tree. I had seen some palms flourishing around the island and was amazed that they could thrive in this northern climate. I put my little palm in a bed already crammed with every kind of flower and shrub that I took a fancy to. It suffered through a few hard freezes and managed to survive. It was not growing taller as I had expected though.

Instead, it seemed to just keep getting wider and threatened to take over the bed it was in. I finally transplanted it and was surprised to find that the reason it was getting wider was because it had produced several new palms that were being obscured by its long fronds. Turns out, it was not the tall elegant Royal Palm tree that I had pictured in my mind, but a fan palm that was intended to grow by reproducing itself. When I transplanted it I also discovered that the lovely loamy soil that I had in the front yard only went a few inches deep and was hiding a hard rocky earth beneath. My righteous little palm somehow managed to snake its roots through that unfriendly climate and thrive along with its babies. It is now the centerpiece of my front yard and it brings me a steady joy that I am so grateful for.

This Psalm confirms for me the knowledge that we too can survive, thrive and reproduce where we are planted. During these difficult days it is comforting to be reminded that we are not alone yet always connected by and through our love of God.

Claire Hicks

SATURDAY, MARCH 13TH

He gives food to every creature. His love endures forever. Psalm 136. 25

The 136th psalm, styled as a litany, concludes each of the twenty-six verses with “His love endures forever.” But how does that speak to us now, facing the realities of 2021? O Holy Names of the Creator, I cry out to you, I plead my case in this time of great anxiety. It’s challenging to offer praise to you despite fear, despite sickness and death, despite all that separates each from the other. Praise to you who is in loving embrace of us even as we cast doubt of your love.

Where are you in all of this? Rather than in churches, synagogues, mosques and other traditional gatherings of the faithful, we address our concerns and fears and doubts to you from homes and gardens, hospitals and shelters, lightness and darkness. God, where are you in all of this?

But our trust must remain in you, with you, through you. As the psalmist says, you have promised to give food to every creature, meeting our most basic needs. I need to remind myself that You are with me, within me, behind me, before me, beside me, beneath me, above me, in quiet, in danger, in hearts of all that love me, in the mouth of friend and stranger. You are there to comfort and restore me.¹

O Creator, we ask, we plead, we pray for your loving kindness in this time of distress. Protect those who care for the sick and dying. Protect those who are ill and restore their health. And we plead that your love for us overcomes our doubts and fears. And emboldens our love for you, our neighbors and our planet.

O Creator, where are you in all of this? As always: right here, right now, for your love endures forever.

Chuck Kirchner

1 A paraphrase of verse 6, St. Patrick’s Breastplate

"But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God." John 3:21

Light. Light. Light. Be the light! Come to the light! Jesus is the light of the world. Share your light for all to see. It's hard to miss the importance of light since it's mentioned over 200 times in the Bible and in many prayers and psalms. Taking on this work of bringing, being and spreading the light can be a daunting task for some. It can be exhausting and overwhelming. And yet we are told that we really are to be the light, bringing the light of Christ wherever we are.

Sometimes I do not feel that I am worthy of carrying the light of Christ. I honestly try to do my best. But when I am totally honest, I must admit that I fail quite often. In those times of severe scrutiny and self-judging I am called to remember that first and foremost I am loved by God. In addition to the miracle of that love I am also totally known by God. God knows my sins, failures and omissions. My every hair, word and thought are known by God. And yet I am STILL LOVED by God. In spite of me and all that I am and am not, God loves me. This trust that God has in me enables me to accept the mantle of light and carry my candle a little higher for all the world to see.

Joan Collins

MONDAY, MARCH 15TH

When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Phillip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. John 6:5-6

I find this excerpt of scripture meaningful in the context of Lent. During this time of spiritual reflection, of exploration into what Christ means in one's own life, and the stripping away of the excess baggage that weighs one down, the question "what is enough?" comes to my mind. Enough might refer to things like money or the stuff that we surround ourselves with, or maybe to our more basic needs like food and shelter. On an even deeper level, I think of enough as it refers to our spiritual needs, and that most basic need of all, for unconditional love.

I read Jesus' question and feel that the answer is in the unconditional love that Jesus represents to us. He provides sustenance for all mankind, truly a wonderful gift from God, a manifestation of God's love for us all. He gives us what we need, and isn't that enough?

With love and blessings to all.

Will Nickum

TUESDAY, MARCH 16TH

The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." John 6:18-20

John's passage speaks of being caught at sea in an unexpected storm. My storm occurred in the last two months of 2020 when my mother unexpectedly died, and, a week later, my father was diagnosed with a terminal illness.

I spent considerable time with my father during his final illness. It was painful to experience the loss of one parent and the imminent loss of the other in such a short time. On a particularly difficult day, one of the hospice caregivers sensed that I was in pain and invited me to sit with her. She talked about her childhood in a small Nigerian village. She also shared with me the story of her own father's death, her belief in God and her faith in the workings of the Holy Spirit. I typically would have felt embarrassed or even frightened to be approached by a stranger in this manner. Instead, I felt comforted, much as I imagine the disciples felt comforted when they heard the words, "It is I; do not be afraid."

Since that day, I have thought often about my father's caregiver. I reflect on how her faith sustained and guided her in working with the dying. I also think about how easily and naturally she spoke of God and the Holy Spirit not as abstract concepts, but as tangible things present in her everyday life. I wondered if the natural, heartfelt conversation that I had with my father's caregiver was like those among the first Christians in the early Church.

I also think about the struggles the caregiver must have known in her life and felt shame about the rise of nativism in our country. As part of this Lenten reflection, we should all pause and consider that the last face many of us will see is likely to be that of an immigrant nurse or caregiver whose black or brown face is not unlike those of the people depicted in the Gospels.

Postscript: My father, Robert Castanon, died in the early morning of February 6, 2021. This reflection is offered to God in his memory. "Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us." Sirach 44

Paul Castanon

So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to him. Jeremiah 18:3-4

Jeremiah had received the word of the Lord, being told, "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." And so he did. And watching the potter he saw the clay being reworked.

On the first reading of this verse, I was struck with the thought "That potter is me!" How often I attempt a project or goal (New Year's Resolution, anyone?) only to have it "spoil in my hand." Attempt many? Yes. Accomplish to my satisfaction? No. Accomplishing goals is not a strong muscle in my being. I must be the potter reworking my clay over and over until it 'seems good to me.'

Upon longer reflection, I realized that I am not the potter, but the clay. Changes in me do not necessarily come from my chosen goals to accomplish, but rather from God who is changing me regardless of what I think I should change or accomplish. I am the clay. This year has been a year of many changes in me. None of which I chose as a goal. Learning to navigate technology at levels I never thought I would/could or should have to. Changing my routines to working from home while also having to fulfill tasks that could only be done at my church office. Incorporating the presence of my husband at home (which is now my office) 100% due to an earlier than planned retirement for him.

But the strongest was the discomfort in me concerning racial and social injustice that needed to be addressed. Could no longer be ignored. I did not choose this feeling in order to create a goal. It was placed in me by the Holy Spirit. The reworking of the clay. I only need do the work that allows the change to occur. For this, I am ever grateful for the resources that abound.

Allow yourself to be the clay this Lent.

Julie Houck

THURSDAY, MARCH 18th

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18

This past year has felt like an endless stream of brutally confrontational suffering. Over a year and we are still very much in the middle of a devastating pandemic which has claimed almost a half a million lives. We've experienced extreme political upheaval which culminated in an insurrection on our democracy incited by our then President Donald Trump. We watched as a white officer knelt on the neck of George Floyd for eight minutes and forty-six seconds as he was murdered, pleading for his life and crying out for his mother.

Without ever knowing him, George Floyd, has forever changed me. His death devastated me. It shook my very foundation and sense of truth. Through the fog of my own ignorance and white privilege I understood that his suffering was nothing new to the black community and marginalized people throughout this country; he is certainly not the first (and unacceptably not the last) black man to be discarded so casually and cruelly.

In the wake of his death upwards of 26 million people took to the streets to peacefully (through the majority) protest Black Lives Matter with the hope and determination to end the inequity. Millions of others who were unable to join the protest have supported the movement through social media, financial donations, and learning. I have been so fortunate this year to learn and hear firsthand from my black friends and colleagues about their experiences, their suffering.

The Friday following the riots on The Capitol my company hosted an optional meeting to discuss the events of January 6th. The conversation was an open forum led by our CEO as an opportunity to process and grieve together. Many colleagues of all backgrounds shared their reactions, emotions, and uncertainties. As the conversation neared the end one of my employees unmuted himself to say "I didn't know I was going to share this today..." He detailed the impact of seeing the Confederate flag waved so brazenly that day had on him. He said it was a reminder of how unwanted, unaccepted, and unloved he is. He described an incident from his childhood where at eight years old he was held face down on the pavement with a gun pointed to his head for something he had no control over.

"I shouldn't be alive today, but because of my Mom and the grace of God I am. I didn't get a choice; I was born with this skin. I live in a country which is not proud of me, but I am proud to be an American. This is my country too."

Mavis Norwich

FRIDAY, MARCH 19TH

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through righteousness of faith. Romans: 4:13

Immediately upon reading this passage I thought “of course it was not law but love that moved Abraham”—moved as in Genesis 12:4: “So Abraham went.” Each time God spoke, Abraham packed up and traveled—from Haram to Egypt, to Hebron, to the Negev, even to Moriah to sacrifice Isaac. It seems Abraham did not weigh options, consider alternatives or simply ignore God. He was not “trying” to obey the law, as no law commanded him to these actions. So, was he simply following directions or might his apparent acquiescence include the deeper meaning of obedience, *ob audire*, literally to “listen to” (or for) his calling?

Paul cites “righteousness of faith” as the way the promise came to Abraham and comes to us. How then are we to understand the agency of this “righteousness of faith”? Since faith is not action itself, but somehow a precursor to action, more than belief, something variously described as tiny as a mustard seed... that can move mountains (Matthew 17:20) or the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). Where might that impulse have blossomed in Abraham? Better yet, how might it live within us?

If we take the whole story, it seems to point to something like God alive within Abraham. Abraham knew, with singleness of heart, mind and body, full of Grace as Mary’s consent to Gabriel, accepting God’s invitation to become the mother of Jesus. Abraham must have lived and moved and had his being in love of God and it was to his knowing, awakened heart that God gave, and continues to extend to us, the promise of eternal life wherever a human heart awakens. Perhaps “Love believes all things” (Corinthians 13) invites us to listen deeply, wake up to the radiance, consent to live and move and have our being, and claim as our inheritance the Kingdom of God within.

Pat Speidel

SATURDAY, MARCH 20TH

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

John 6:68

Shortly before Peter says this, John tells us that followers of Jesus have begun to drift away. Jesus asks the twelve whether they, too, would like to leave. Peter's answer suggests that what he's learned as a disciple is that there is no other option, no other creed or philosophy that can compare to what he now knows to be true. So, what did Peter understand by the second part of his statement, I wondered. What was the "eternal life" that he envisaged? We are mostly challenged when it comes to picturing a life after this one. A jovial atheist I once knew said we could keep heaven as far as he was concerned because he couldn't imagine a duller existence than sitting on a cloud playing a harp ☺. The life we know in this world has pain and pleasure, achievements and failures, the ability to feel love and loss. The tension that comes from that variety of experience is part of the pleasure of life, so imagining a pleasurable state where no variety exists is very difficult. But our own dear Dan Fowler, speaking some time ago to residents of Messenger House, gave a memorable picture of what he thought eternal life would be like. He said that for him bliss, a taste of heaven, was when he saw his newly born twins for the first time. The essence of that sheer joy, he said, was what he imagined the experience of heaven to be. Here we have only hints such as these and a very limited ability to imagine what lies beyond. But this I believe: it will be a place of love and belonging and beautiful beyond our wildest imaginings.

Mo Godman

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. John 12:24

When I watch documentaries or hear the call for abolition echoed through centuries, I am frustrated. Because the same things are happening on a loop: Innocent Black people are murdered, voter suppression of Black and Brown voices in the south, and sour biting fly named racism buzzing in the ears of millions. What do I learn when I read or watch TV? That while overt racism exists, it has rebranded itself into something new. It has found comfort in nuance and sleeps soundly in our divides.

Survival can trick you into thinking that getting by is living. But to thrive, we need change. We need adaptability, and we most of all need to push away from the fear, the grief. We all must understand that this call to equity is not something being taken away from you and in fact it has nothing to do with you or me. It is an invitation for others to thrive because rights are not a pie: one slice for me does not take away pastry from you. Let the grain die.

As a person of color I waver in and out of impostor syndrome because I have a loud, angry world telling me to be grateful for the boot I lick because not everyone gets to taste rubber. And to break away from that is to see that every faction of my life has told me to believe truths, generalizations, and myths about what it means to be a Brown even when I am white passing. I have to turn away from those loud words to understand the truth in myself. While this unlearning is still happening—I am finding more peace and discovering how much fruit there could be if others abandon the grain they hold so tightly in their hands.

Cera Rodriguez

MONDAY, MARCH 22ND

And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him." John 9: 2-3

It is not always about us. We make the mistake of thinking that when something unfortunate, or fortunate happens to us it must be all about us. We don't know what the blind man thought about his blindness. The disciples thought that it must be the result of sin.

Perhaps the blind man thought this too, but no matter what the cause, he lived with his blindness at least into early adulthood. Because he was unable to hold a job, and apparently his parents were poor, he had to beg for a living. He could have rightly concluded that life wasn't fair, and he had been given the short end of the stick. However, it turned out that he was to be an instrument of God's will. His blindness and the curing of it, were to be a way to manifest God's glory. Jesus took plain old dirt and his spit, made mud of it and put it on the man's eyes and then told him to go to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man went and washed and was then able to see. His blindness was gone and the curing of it opened not only his eyes, but the eyes of those who saw it to the glory of God.

Every day we go about our lives and seldom consider the effect we have on others around us. We are all instruments of God and can have a profound effect on the people we meet. Few of us will go out on Mercy Ships and save people's lives or heal their infirmities. However, we can all have a positive effect on those we meet in our daily lives. In Matthew 5:16 we are told: Let your light so shine before all, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. By letting the light of Christ's love show through us in our everyday doings and small, good works, we can make this world a better place and manifest God's love.

At the end of Godly Play we thank the children for coming and tell them: you have been a blessing to us this morning, now go out and be a blessing to the world. If this is our daily goal, then we can indeed be a light in the darkness.

Beth Gudmundson

TUESDAY, MARCH 23RD

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" John 9:35

This verse is from the story of Jesus, who, in his final days while en route to Jerusalem, cured the blindness of a man by using his (Jesus') own saliva to make mud, putting the mud on the man's eyes**, having him wash his eyes, resulting in his being able to see. The Pharisees, seeking to discredit Jesus, interrogated the blind man for an explanation of how this could be. The man explained: "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Offended and unconvinced of the miracle, the Pharisees "drove (the blind man) out," a sort-of excommunication. And the blind man answered Jesus' query, quoted in the above verse, saying: "Lord, I believe."

We have viewed this story as being about our personal spiritual health. What does it mean—what does it take—to open our eyes and see? Isn't it acknowledging, and dealing with, reality? And how we do that is influenced by our faith.

As we considered this passage, the strains of "Amazing Grace" (written by a former slave ship captain, who later became an Anglican priest and an abolitionist) ran through our minds:

"I once was lost, but now I am found, was blind but now I see."

Are we, perhaps without being aware of it, in some ways, blind? Are we, like the ex-captain of the slave ship, blind to the consequences our lives and actions have on others, and blind to wrongs in our society, as he was blind to the inhumanity of what he had been doing?

Conversely, are we blind to the opportunity of having faith, blind in not acknowledging Jesus, blind to the caring nature of God, blind to the workings of the Holy Spirit in our world, blind to God's saving grace? And blind to the opportunities for ourselves to lead a more fulfilling life through our faith?

During Lent, we can explore what we are blind to in our personal lives and in the lives around us. Let us share an example in the history of Bainbridge Island.

At the beginning of WWII, war hysteria gripped the country after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. Our large Japanese-American community on the Island was given 6 days to put their affairs in order before they were shipped to a concentration camp in the California desert.

Walt and Millie Woodward, owners of the Bainbridge Review (and life-long members of St. Barnabas), were the only editors in the country to editorialize against this incarceration as unconstitutional for the duration of the war. They were not blind to the fact that most of these 276 neighbors were American citizens and were singled out because they looked different. Walt and Millie made sure that every week in the Review they published articles about the day-to-day lives of our Japanese-American neighbors. Because of this they were welcomed

back to the Island after 3 ½ years.

Most of the US population was blind to the fate of the returning evacuees. Bainbridge was the exception. Walt and Millie made sure that our community was not blind to the wrongs our government had wrought and opened our eyes to the shared humanity we had with our returning neighbors.

Pay a quiet and reflective visit to the Japanese-American Exclusion Memorial. It was built by the community to honor those who were incarcerated and to send a message: Nidoto Nai Yoni—Let It Not Happen Again.

Lent can help us discover where our blind spots are—and call on God so we too may see.

**Consider that the familiar “Mud in your eye” toast may have been derived from this story of the blind man, and actually be a prayer for spiritual health.

Karen and Tom Beierle

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24TH

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7

Written in about 61 CE from prison, St. Paul encourages the Philippians to avoid divisions and distractions and to help each other. Grateful for the congregation's assistance to him, he offers the above blessing.

I particularly pondered "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" and reflected on what that "peace" is like. For me, it has three elements: trust, acceptance, and the belief that I am loved as a child of God. When I get stressed, fretting about this and that (I hear my sister saying: "Mo! You are like a dog with a bone!" 😊), I have to, in my better moments, consciously draw on that peace, trusting that my fretting is largely a waste of time and accepting the present moment. I can only do so because I believe, with a feeling of immense gratitude, that God loves me and all creation. Does it "surpass all understanding?" Yes. When I think about life in all its variety, I'm struck by what we cannot know, locked as we are within the bounds of our imagination and experience. Turning on the shower one day I noticed an ant scurrying around the bath. I scooped him up and sent him on his way, but it occurred to me at that moment that all life forms, ours included, have a limit to their knowledge; the ant knows what ants need to know but he cannot know how much larger the world is than his brief allows. The peace of God allows us to rest in that "unknowing."

Mo Godman

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly. Luke 1:52

This particular verse is one of the verses that comprises the Song of Mary or the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55. In our Book of Common Prayer we find it on page 50. Verse 52 is also a part of an 80-verse story found in Chapter One of Luke's gospel. The Angel Gabriel first visiting Zechariah, future father of John the Baptist and then his visit to Mary. As the chapter moves along, we read about the two cousins, Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah and the future mother of John the Baptist, and the Virgin Mary, the future mother of Jesus, Our Lord and Savior. They are visiting with each other and possibly discussing their pregnancies, and the circumstances surrounding them, and praising the powers, promises and love of God. Elizabeth and Zechariah were elderly (think Abraham and Sarah) and Mary, a virgin... extremely unusual circumstances, then and now.

In the Song of Mary we feel the joy that was possibly felt by Mary.

*And Mary said,
'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day, all generations will call me blessed;
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His name.
He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm;
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the help of his servant Israel,
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
The promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.
Luke 1:46-55*

FRIDAY, MARCH 26TH

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, and to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses, and live in them; plant gardens, and eat what they produce. Jeremiah 29:4-5

Prayerfully considering this invitation to write a Lenten Reflection, I thought “Who am I to take on this responsibility?” But It did immediately speak to me during this time of COVID-19 and pandemic.

Unlike the captives, we have not been carried away, but we have become isolated and cut off from our normal patterns of life. We are unable to attend church, as were the Jewish exiles in Babylon, being taken from the land God had given them and unable to go to their Temple.

This is all caused by something beyond our control and, just as the exiles, we have no knowledge of how long it will last or even what life will look like after this. The exiles response would naturally be to wish things would go back to normal, but God told them to build houses and dwell in them, in other words, settle down and make the best of it. Similarly, outside of our normal worship life, instead of waiting for things to change we need to make a different life in this pandemic situation.

We cannot see the benefit of COVID-19, as the exiles were commanded to do, although there is a feeling of people drawing closer together and reaching out in as many ways as possible. There are situations where we can help others, embrace this time to study and pray and enjoy the benefits of a modern society where we can gather via Internet and Zoom, enjoying a wonderful Sunday worship service at St. Barnabas.

We know God has plans for his people and when we pray to Him, he will listen. In this time of Lent let us seek the peace of others, exercise the patience of God’s promise of restoration, loving and caring for the place God has put us in so that others will see and follow him. A time to grow closer to God.

It brought to mind the following:

The Lord my refuge my rock in whom I trust.
He will raise you up on Eagles wings, bear you on the breath of dawn and hold you in the palm of his hand.

Peggy Vitale

SATURDAY, MARCH 27TH

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Romans 11:29

A Promise for the Ages: Romans 11

When God makes a promise, God stands by that promise. Paul, currently in Corinth, is writing to the Church in Rome prior to his visit there. Near the end of his letter he discusses the steadfast relationship God maintains with the Jews, God's chosen people. Paul tells the Romans that God will never forsake the Israelites. However, because the vast majority of them have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah, they have been cut off, essentially making room for the Gentiles to be grafted onto the Tree of Life. Christ preaches on this metaphor as recorded in the Gospel of John, Chapter 15:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful... No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit....

In Romans 11 Paul expands on this powerful image:

If the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Romans 11:16-20

The room created by cutting off the unbelieving Israelites generated the space divinely ordained by God to "graft in" the Gentiles. And yet, because God is love, God maintains his covenant with the Jews despite their unbelief:

As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Romans 11:28-29

The principle that God's gifts and his call are irrevocable may comfort us far beyond its direct relevance to the Israelites in the 1st century A.D. God does not give up on us and God continually leaves the path open to restoration. God's enduring love calls us into relationship ever and always. We are wild olive shoots, grafted into God's plan by faith, sipping the nourishing sap of the Mother Root. We are fruit-bearing disciples of the Living Christ.

The word "Lent" is a shortened form of the [Old English](#) word *lencten*, meaning "spring." Sap is flowing, trees are budding; and, early spring is the season of grafting. In this time as we turn over the cold dirt in our gardens, as we hear sweet birdsong while we sit in a patch of much needed sun, as we breathe deep the new spring air and receive its cleansing power, let us

kneel in awe and wonder at God's creation. Let us open ourselves to God's many and glorious gifts. Let us ponder the mystery of God's irrevocable call for us, seeking new ways to serve, comforted by the profound joy of our promised eternal covenant through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Let us bud and blossom in our faith as members of God's holy family tree. We are grafted in. God's promise is fulfilled.

Anne Pell

For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. Mark 14:7

In this scripture, Jesus was in Bethany and a woman anointed him with an alabaster jar of ointment. Some present thought this ointment should be traded in for money to serve the poor. Jesus was grateful for the kindness of the woman who anointed him. In addition, he called those present to be sensitive to the needs of the poor and serve them through acts of love and kindness.

Sister Marguerite was my 1st grade teacher and she taught me about serving the poor. She said that when you see someone in dire need, go up to them and greet them warmly while looking into their eyes. Sr. Marguerite promised that I would see the face of God when I looked directly in their eyes. While I didn't see the face of God in the poor I approached, I did feel the Holy Spirit between us and it was incredible.

When I attended St. James Cathedral in Seattle, I volunteered as an overnight host which entailed setting up bedding for 16 homeless men and we provided them a light evening meal before bed. I loved the time between having the meal and everyone turning in to bed. Some didn't want to engage but there were some who wanted to engage in conversation or just communally sit in silence. Christ was present.

As Lent approaches, I've been thinking about how I can 'show kindness' to the poor in my own community. I've decided to make weekly donations to the St. Vincent de Paul food bank. I will also be mindful of the poor that I see, look them directly in the eyes, and my prayer is we will share the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus needs help in doing His work to serve the poor. How can you contribute to His important work?

Tony Hansen

See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I will tell you of them. Isaiah 42:9

The book of Isaiah reveals the depth of God's judgement and salvation. The first part speaking of the coming destruction to the people and nations as they oppose God. This is followed by the return and restoration and the bringing of new life, finally the last third brings us to the reward of those who trust and obey God.

I would be greatly remiss if I did not touch upon those three basic parts as I reflect upon my life. I came to a point some time ago where my way of living, thinking and speaking simply was not working anymore. The ego, the false way of living trying to be someone I was never designed to be came to a quiet ending. I comprehended the choice to make, that is to continue in self-destruction to a predictable death or stop and turn to God simply as I was in all my messiness. "God, here I am. You and me. If I can be of continuing service to you then I will live out my days doing my best to fulfill your desire for me."

I have never been so scared in my entire life. To understand and realize where I had ended up and then to begin a journey of understanding the depth and forgiving nature of God's perfect love. Only by His grace do I live today. To rid myself of the false idols of life's excessive dramas which I had deemed normal: the news; social media; the needs of the ego; family, seemed impossible.

However, through many trials since, I have seen the grace of God revealed if I seek it. He has plainly shown me that if I reject my self will and obey his Will, I can be of service every day to someone. I come to God every day in humility and prayer to receive His grace for I only have this moment. We, as God's children, only have this moment to be open, honest and loving with each other regardless of anything else. I pray we can lay all dramas aside and simply come together in love.

Quiet reflection, studying the bible, and listening to the omnipresent voice of God guide me now. Every day responding to a call of service. And if I just BE, every day holds many blessings.

Denton Kiehle

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;

let me never be ashamed.

Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe;

you are my crag and my stronghold. Psalms 71: 1 and 3

“You should be ashamed of yourself!” Those words from my mother laid heavy upon me and indeed I was ashamed. My 10 year-old sister who I was babysitting had run away from home while in my care. I don’t remember what I did to cause her to do such a thing. What I do remember is the tremendous shame I felt at having disappointed and angered my parents so much. I was much relieved when she was found not terribly far from home and in good shape.

Shame is a vulnerable feeling in which our very self-identity and worth is called into question and judged as bad. It’s actually not a very helpful feeling if we get stuck in it. On Good Friday we hear the story of Peter’s denial of being associated with Jesus. His recognition of his failure occurs when the cock crows and he remembers that Jesus told him that he would eventually deny him. That moment he must have felt shame as he skulked away to hide. That’s what shame does to us – makes us want to hide in our vulnerability.

The psalmist knows this and knows that the place to hide is in the very being of love not shame. If we claim our identity as human beings of the Holy One then, even if we need to hide, we have a place of refuge and strength. Who we are at our very center is what Thomas Merton calls the point vierge: “At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God”. This is the castle to live from, the crag to hold on to, the very essence of who we are even when we behave shamefully, deny ourselves and others. To walk the Way of the Cross with Jesus is to hold on to this identity no matter what comes our way. It is God’s pure gift of God’s self to us and the world. Do not be afraid of your shaming moments. Walk through them, shedding them as you go. They are not who you are becoming on this journey of love.

The Reverend Patricia Rome Robertson

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, looking to Jesus the pioneer and prefecture of our faith. Hebrews 12:1-2a

In these times of COVID, political and civil distress, I find this passage from Hebrews a healing vaccination of hope. This passage was from a letter delivered to persecuted Jewish Christians meant to encourage and inspire. These Christians had given up houses; many had their property confiscated. Many had actually suffered physical persecution, some death. The writer of the Hebrews letter is encouraging the believers to “hang on”. The great Saints of faith in Hebrews demonstrate that the life of faith really works. We have before us a great cloud of witnesses who are willing to testify that they had lived the life of faith, committed to Christ, and it worked for them. God waited to deliver the ultimate fulfillment of His promises so that, we who are alive now, would have the opportunity to be saved.

I love the imagery of a race we are running. We are encouraged to run well because that is God’s intention for all of us. How do we run well? Great racers develop endurance. Christianity is not a hundred yard dash. It is a marathon of endurance. We have certainly had to endure this past year and our trust has been tested to the max.

Paddie, my wife found a message engraved on a paperweight stone that I keep on my desk that reads. “JUST LOVE EVERY ONE, I’LL SORT THEM OUT LATER. Signed GOD”.

We sometimes need to be reminded that in divisive times our endurance can get bogged down when we forget to love those we find difficult to love. We can be assured that the great cloud of witnesses will be cheering us on as we lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely to us.

Deacon Dan Fowler

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

On the night before he died, Jesus wanted to tell his friends the things he especially wanted them to remember after he was gone. And one of these things—the most important thing, really—was this: Love one another. Don't just talk about it. Make it so. Do love. Share love. Be love.

Jesus was telling his friends how to live together as a community in a way that reflected God's own way of being and enabled everyone to actualize their best selves. The world will know you are mine, Jesus told them, by the beauty of your life together – the life of mutuality, forgiveness, reconciliation, gratitude, praise and joy.

But as we know from Jesus' own inclusiveness and boundary-crossing, he was also asking something more. He was commissioning them to share this love beyond their circle, to carry it into all the world, to make every place a feast of love where every one is welcome. At a conference on Christian "changemaking" a few years ago, I heard many stories from friends of God who minister in the forgotten corners of our broken society. And those stories emphasized that love is more than an individual attitude or action. It is a collective work, done not just for others but with others. As one participant put it, "We seek to reconcile fractured relationships and celebrate differences by collaborating across cultural barriers and learning to live in solidarity with those in need."

We take Christ's love into the world not as colonists imposing our vision, or as saviors with the big idea for fixing everything. We come as relentless listeners, with the gifts of ears and respectful attention. Love listens. As the changemakers say, "Let the neighborhood speak to us, rebuke us, teach us."

Christian activist Shane Claiborne reminds us that "faith is believing despite the evidence—and then watching that evidence start to change." We have all seen the truth of this in our personal lives and our church lives. Love is transformational. But this is also true for the life of our community and our world. When we love one another in the widest way, even the most forsaken places begin to shine with the light of paradise.

Strangers sharing nothing but a zip code become friends over soup suppers. A trashy vacant lot is transformed into a beautiful park or neighborhood garden. Economic wastelands bloom as social entrepreneurs are raised up locally. The hungry and homeless become neighbors-in-need rather than faceless problems. The powerless organize to make their voices heard in civic planning and development. Police and residents defuse tensions and break

stereotypes by socializing together. “Low-status neighborhoods” are redeemed by the work of many hands, becoming places of human flourishing. Such miracles really happen when we remember what Jesus asked of us.

“Love one another,” Jesus told his friends. Just hours later, he was taken from them. But every time his friends do as he said, Jesus comes back.

The Reverend Jim Friedrich

"It is finished." John 19:30

She once left a job that was untenable, at which point her boss's son gave her a book entitled "Necessary Losses." At first, she was deeply offended. Then she realized that life is loss: loss of parents, loss of loves, loss of jobs. Without a higher meaning in our lives than these things and people, we'll lose ourselves. But one Being has joined us and will join us wherever evil threatens to overtake us. That He has promised. That He has done. In the person of Jesus, God has made himself available to humankind and all that humankind can do. There on the cross God is fully all in all. It is God's Friday, and we have been shown its goodness; for His end is our beginning.

That beginning is a discovery that each man and woman must make for him or herself--- the discovery that what she really stands in need of she cannot grasp for herself but has been showered with because God gives it to her. God has visited us to leave behind the materials for fullness of life, and all He seeks is recognition of that fullness and a sharing of its joy. No longer must we seek for the truth of our lives, for the truth has come to us. God has taken the initiative to search us out and know us; and with glorious, extravagant love, He ransoms us. Through Him despair is overcome by hope, weakness is swallowed up in strength, hatred is surrounded and finally conquered by love.

His was a life that began in humility and ended in triumph. By Him heaven and earth are reconciled and made one. By Him loss is finished, and whoever loses her life will find it. Yes, it is finished. The beginning is here.

The Reverend Dr. Judith McDaniel

“For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead...” ^{1 Peter 4:6a}

1 Peter was likely written from Rome during the late 50s or early 60s to the churches in Asia Minor, just before Peter himself was martyred. Gentile Christians had separated themselves from the civic and social life bound up with pagan practices (Jews had already separated), and they suffered for it. Peter wrote that they would be blessed for such suffering. They were to have no fear, and they should be ready to make a defense of their faith, though with gentleness and reverence just as Jesus had done (3:14-17). Peter then makes the mysterious claim that Jesus, after his death and before his resurrection, “preached to the spirits in prison” who, during the days of Noah, had disobeyed (3:18-20). Peter compares these people to the gentiles living in their own time, arguing that they too would eventually give an account to “him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (4:5). 4:6a then follows: “For this reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead...” All we to have the chance to be saved, even the dead who came before Jesus, but no one would escape judgment.

This epistle raises the question of how we react to our suffering. Most of us will not suffer for our faith, but some might. In today’s political environment, Christians are being stalked and threatened for doing good, sometimes by other Christians. Can we respond in gentleness and reverence? Can we endure without seeking retribution or revenge? Peter recognizes that it may not be easy, but he asks us to keep the faith, to imitate our Lord, and to leave the final judgment to God.

The Reverend Dr. Jan Heller

Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.

John 20:15b

As Mary stood weeping on that first Easter morning, she bent down to look into the tomb. It was the second time she had come that morning. She came alone the first time, and very early. When she found that the stone that sealed Jesus' tomb had been rolled away, she ran quickly to tell Simon Peter and the beloved disciple what she had seen. It was the first time she said the Lord had been taken from the tomb and she did not know where they had laid him.

Curious, and wanting to see for themselves, Simon Peter and the beloved disciple went back to the tomb with Mary. And after investigating the situation, the two men returned home. But not Mary. Mary stood weeping, looking into the empty tomb. The angels who were there asked her why she was weeping, and for the second time, she said "They have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they have laid him." And then she must have heard something behind her because we're told she turned round to see a man, likely the gardener, who asked her the same question – "Woman, why are you weeping?" And Mary, fully absorbed in finding the body of her dead Lord said those same words again - 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'

We know how it turns out, how Jesus who was not the gardener spoke her name and how she recognized him as her Rabbouni, her teacher. And we know how the bigger story turns out too. We can't help but see Jesus through the lens of his resurrection. But that wasn't true for Mary and the rest of those early disciples. No matter how many times Jesus told them he would suffer at the hands of men, be killed and three days later rise again, that wasn't what they were looking for. Even Mary, the apostle to the apostles wasn't looking for a resurrected Jesus on that third day... she was looking for his dead body.

How often do we miss God's presence when God is right in front of us? God is present in so many unexpected ways. In the beautiful things, yes, but also in places we would not necessarily expect - in the face of a mentally ill and homeless person, in the face of an exhausted healthcare worker, in the face of someone whose skin color is not our own, in the face of someone whose politics are the antithesis of our own, in the face of one who is dying. How often do we miss God's presence because we are looking for something that isn't there because all we can see is our own singular interpretation of how things are, or ought to be?

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! And because he is risen, we have the opportunity to see all things anew! I pray that your Eastertide is filled with the experiences of seeing God's beautiful, broken and beloved world through God's eyes, through the eyes of love. Easter blessings on you all!

Reverend Karen Haig

