

Devotions
for
LENT



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2022

This collection of devotions was composed by members and friends of St. Peter's Episcopal Church. The devotions are presented for your discernment as you pursue your personal journey of faith during this Lenten season. We especially thank Marilyn Foley, whose wonderful watercolor painting, *Easter Window*, is the cover artwork. We thank the writers who graciously shared their experiences, their faith stories and their insights. We commend them to you during this time of personal reflection and preparation.

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March 2

READ: Psalm 51:1-9

Ash Wednesday Meditation

Lent is not for shame. It is for liberation. Centuries of Christian practice may not have put it so starkly. Well-intended people might want to put the emphasis elsewhere. But Lent is for liberation, liberation of your body, your soul, your mind, to experience God loving you. Lent is for liberation. And confession is its beginning.

My first private confession, made as an adult, felt like a death. The sweat-wrinkled list of sins I'd brought with me (I didn't want to forget!) was a bullhorn of shame, listing all the things I had hidden away that pointed to why I was not good, not lovable, not redeemable. So it was absolutely galling and then relieving, that my confessing priest, having heard me uncover those very things that I hide, looked at me— looked right into my eyes— and pronounced God's absolution, God's love shaped like forgiveness and acceptance.

There, on the other side of a confession, I discovered that God's love and pardon were waiting for me. This is what God offers to all of us in this season of Lent, the opportunity to see ourselves and show ourselves as we truly are and to discover that God is waiting for us, not with contempt, but with love and wonder.

--Rev. David Wantland

TODAY: *It's almost spring. Start a daily journal tracking the end of winter and the return of the joy of spring as flowers bloom, birds travel and bushes show new growth.*

March 3

READ: 1 Corinthians 13:12

Through the Glass Darkly

“For now, we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I also am known.”

The above verse is referred to by Richard Rohr in “An Invitation to a Further Journey,” at the beginning of his book *Falling Upward*. Seeing though a glass darkly can be interpreted as pertaining to our limited vision of God and the increasing clarity we gain as we move closer to him. When we are transformed by our faith, we become more aware of all that is around us. We become *enlightened* and our path becomes easier to discern. I was thinking on the verse and its meaning when I came across a short piece on the same theme that I had written for a meditation journal years ago:

“Each of the windows in our home allows us to see the world from a single perspective. The framework surrounding them obscures the rest of the picture from our view. Sometimes in life, we isolate ourselves behind windows of the mind, frame them in and miss the big picture.

“Spiritual windows, structured around our relationship with God enlarge our perspective. They give us insight to help put together s gestalt or whole, enabling us to see ourselves and others clearly. The more we devote ourselves to enlarging our horizons through the study of our Lord and His word, the more fully we understand the world, ourselves, and others.”

Anne B. (Jones) Hurley

Anne B. (Jones) Hurley is author of *Tides of Fear*, *Gold Thunder*, *A Light on Peachtree*, *Tools for Successful Writing*, *All Around the Track*, and *Brave At Heart*

TODAY: *Every Thursday during Lent, Anne Hurley will lead a discussion of Donald Rohr's inspiring book, "Falling Upward." Make plans to join the discussion in the Church Parlor at 11 a.m.*

March 4

READ: 1 Corinthians 16:14

'Let All That You Do Be Done in Love'

This ongoing pandemic introduced many of us to new things – one of them being “Zoom.” I have grown quite weary of Zoom, but in the first year with Zoom I was, among other things, kept blessedly busy with St. Peter’s Bible studies and church services and Bible studies and church services “at” my former church in New Canaan.

One evening, I happened to glance at the sidebar on the New Canaan church’s website and spotted “Sunday Evening Children’s Service.” My interest was piqued and I clicked on that option and found myself drawn into a delightful fifteen-minute broadcast.

The church’s pastor walked into his study, in casual sweater Mister Rogers’ style, to chat with the viewing children. He introduced them to the portrait on the wall of the very first pastor of the New Canaan Congregational Church, Theophilus Smith. He proceeded to tell the children that the name “Theophilus” means “friend of God” and, of course, the pastor reminded the children that they are, we all are friends of God. The pastor then went over to his “tin-can” telephone and proceeded to call a lively and familiar female parishioner to ask her if she was ready for the children to join her in her home for this week’s Bible study. With the assurance that she was ready and eagerly awaiting their visit, the viewers were technologically “swirled” into her home. The woman (an old friend of mine who was born for the role) proceeded with a short and colorful telling of that week’s Bible story. Using her felt board already set up with appropriate desert background, she placed her felt biblical characters here and there as she told the biblical tale with great animation and drama. I was riveted!

But as suddenly as the children were swirled into the storyteller’s home, they were swirled back into the pastor’s study. With thanks to the storyteller, the pastor then gently, soothingly brought the children into quiet, reflective closure. Kneeling at his prie-dieu (not traditionally found in a Congregational Church, but effective for modeling a sacred stance before God), the pastor proceeded to thank God for the many gifts of the day, asked for God’s blessings on the family members and friends of the children and concluded with . . .

“Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep . . .”

(“Oh no, I thought, not that frightening conclusion!” But, instead, he continued with . . .)

“When in the morning light I wake,
Help me the path of love to take.”

“The path of love!” And with this simple, yet profound and new-to-me children’s prayer, I have happened upon my new night-time adult prayer. With each day’s end, I pray that tomorrow I will take “the path of love.” It seems an intention, direction enough for me – with God’s help.

--Ginger Malachuk

TODAY: *Give thanks for Fred Rogers. Here’s his advice: “Now you know, prayer is asking for something, and sometimes you get a yes answer, and sometimes you get a no answer. And just like anything else, you might get angry when you get a no answer. But God respects your feelings, and God can take your anger as well as your happiness. So, whatever you have to offer God through prayer – it seems to me – is a great gift. Because the thing that God wants most of all is a relationship.”*

March 5

Read: Matthew 25:40-46

Lessons of the Least of These

“In as much as you have done it unto the least of these you have done it unto me.

About 45 years ago I was swimming laps in the Armstrong pool. Among the other swimmers were two young students practicing for their upcoming swim exam. As I swam, one of them walked along the side of the pool watching the other. In the deep end, the other swimmer must have panicked and suddenly began flailing wildly. After a stunned moment I grabbed an arm and hauled her to the side of the pool where her friend helped her up. As she coughed and sputtered I continued my laps. A few years later the school where I taught hired a new chorus teacher. When we met one day she asked if I used to swim at Armstrong. I said yes, and she said “You saved my life!” With no thought or sacrifice I had passed a test.

About 40 years ago while riding a New York City subway I watched as the thinnest human I've ever seen stood in the end of the car and spoke to us all. "I have AIDS" he said "and I need money for food and medicine. If you help me or even if you can't, God bless you." As I touched my purse my two accompanying friends hissed "don't" and I didn't. Neither did anyone else. He had asked God to bless us. I had failed a test.

A few weeks ago, aiming for my last errand of the day, wearing a mask and worrying about COVID, I got out of my car in the Whole Foods parking lot and was met by a young woman who said shyly, "Can you help me get some food? I'm hungry." All my training from home, church, school, society kicked in: watch your purse, she's too well dressed to be hungry, don't talk to strangers, there are suitable places she could go for help. So I told her I had no cash which was true and hurried in to my ever-so-important errand. Inside I had a moment to rethink and realized I had two credit cards with me, it was a grocery store, and I had responded with fear taught to me from my youth and not fitting the situation. I looked for her outside but of course she was gone. I had failed a test. Mea Culpa . God have mercy on my soul.

I am too old to fail tests because of past lessons. I need to stop thinking past first instincts. Something in me wanted to help that dying man and that hungry woman. Thinking overcame instinct. and I failed spiritual tests. When will I learn? If not at 89 when?

--Claudette Warlick

TODAY: *Who are the least of these in your life? The hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the poor, the imprisoned or someone who is suffering and known only to you. Reach out with your hand, a prayer, a letter or some other tangible gesture to show they are remembered. Pass the test!*

March 6

READ: John 1: 5

The Parable of a Lighthouse

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there once was a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea. With no thought for themselves, they went out day or night tirelessly searching for the lost.

Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others living nearby wanted to become associated with the station and give their time, money and effort to support its work. New boats were bought. New crews were trained. The little life-saving station grew.

Some new members felt the crude, poorly equipped life-saving station should be made more comfortable since it was the first refuge for those saved from the sea. So they enlarged the building, decorated it and replaced the emergency cots with beds and better furniture. Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place, sort of a club.

Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The life-saving mission still received lip-service, but most members lacked the necessary commitment to take part in the life-saving activities personally.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews rescued boatloads of cold, wet, and half-drowned people. But they were dirty and sick. Some of them had black skin, and some spoke a strange language and they left the beautiful new club very messy. So the property committee immediately built an outside shower house where victims could be cleaned before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the club's now-normal life pattern. Others insisted that life-saving was still their primary purpose. After all, they were still called a life-saving station. But they were out-voted and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the first. They also evolved into a social club so another life-saving station was founded. If you visit the seacoast today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters.

Only now, most of the people drown.

--**Author unknown** (Adapted by Steve Rudd, Submitted by Fr. Don Hands)

TODAY: *Raise this prayer: Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

March 7

READ: Timothy 4:12

Youth Ski Trip Reflection

St Peter's Youth group (SPY) has been skiing together for a long time. Some of us are better skiers than others, but we stick together despite our skill levels. In early February, we traveled to Boone, NC, and were allowed to bring some friends along, some of whom, though athletic, had no experience on skis.

It's amazing to see beginner skiers take to their skis. Some embrace their lack of control in the name of speed and careen down the hill, crossed-fingers that they'll slow down before

running into other people. Others prefer caution, seeking to understand the mechanics of skiing before turning downhill to give it a pizza slice-shaped try.

It might seem like the speed demon should be the celebrated novice, but really both methods are their own way to learn, to get to know the mountain, to become a skier. It's a good reminder that God does not look at any one of us with judgment (you should be more cautious, speed demon; you should be more adventurous, cautious one). God blesses our particular ways, also known as our lives, to learn, to get to know the world that God created, to become a follower of Jesus.

That's true for the season of Lent too. However we decide to seek God during this holy season, God welcomes it and smiles at us, just like we did every time we all made it together to the bottom of the hill, always with stories to tell.

--Anna Mondy, Jackson Mondy, Langston Bass and Carey Bass.

TODAY: *Pass the word that St. Peter's is inviting young people to join the fun. Every other Sunday in the church parish hall at 6:30.*

March 8

READ: 1 Chronicles 16:11

Who Needs Roller Derby? I Do

You may remember that I play in women's roller derby. During the pandemic, the Women's Roller Derby League has necessarily shut down operations to avoid spreading the virus. It's created much consternation as a beloved pastime has been ripped away, not unlike how many of us felt with online worship. It's given me time to reflect. My neck and hips are grateful for the break, honestly. Why did I join a women's sports team in 2015 as soon as I moved to Georgia? Why did I play a sport that wrecked my body so much?

The easy answer was that I needed girlfriends nearby and I needed a hobby, a joyful distraction, as intense as my work. I thought it was mainly for stress relief and a needed distraction from life's troubles. I needed a way to avoid my to-do list and just have fun with other women.

And, now, I see it differently. I didn't only join derby because I needed a joyful distraction. I joined roller derby for the same reason I joined the church: so that I would learn not to flinch from life's troubles. I joined that women's league to grow a backbone and to be more comfortable in my own skin. I learned to skate, play and try maneuvers I never would have tried without cheerleading friends on the sidelines. Borrowing each other's confidence, we skated *into* fear instead of away from it. That's why it's so addicting and empowering -- you face your own demons and *win*.

And in that way, it's very similar to the life of faith.

I've heard so many people say to me, with anxious looks in their eyes about the future of the institution of the church, "I wish the church was more open, younger, fresher, and cool like roller derby." But actually, the church has something far more precious to offer the world than women's roller derby does. Sure, I learned to skate into fear at derby. But I've learned that I needed something beyond myself, I need what I find in the church: *God and God's abundant love*.

--Rev. Kelly Steele

TODAY: *Prepare for the unexpected. Break the routine. Go to a place you've never been before – a library, a park, a beach, a skating rink or a place to listen to music. Put your mind to discovering something new.*

March 9

READ: Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Share Our Gratitude

Today's lesson from Deuteronomy instructs the Israelites to remember God's deliverance of them out of Egypt into their new inheritance, the land of milk and honey. They are to put some of the first fruits of all that is produced from the land that the Lord their God is giving them into a basket. Then take that basket to the priest to be set down in front of the altar of the Lord.

It amazes me that when I sat down with the list of 47 scripture readings for Lent to select one or two to write on that this lesson was the first one I looked up. God definitely had a hand in it. You see, in a way, Kathleen and I are convinced that we have been led by God to our new home at St. Peter's. And comparing St. Peter's to the land of milk and honey is not as far-fetched as it may sound when you consider the exceptionally warm welcome we have received from everyone here.

We feel truly blessed to have been led here and I pray that as instructed, we will be able to place our basket before the altar and "celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord our God has given to us and to our house.

--Kathleen and Roy Te Turner

TODAY: *What brought you to St. Peter's? Recall the greeting and welcome you first received. Make a point of thanking the first greeters and then of passing that welcome forward to visitors you see or to friends you invite to join our worship. Don't forget Lenten Church and Chowder today and every Wednesday at 11:30 in the chapel.*

March 10

READ: Luke 4:14-21

No prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown

A cloud is not a cloud only here for a moment and then gone
A cloud is never really lonely searching for a distant dawn
A cloud is the light that made the vapor
A cloud is the waste of decades past
A cloud is a thousand, thousand acres
A cloud is millennia recast
We are more than what we are
We are pulsed from distant stars
We are burnt by many scars
And yet, and yet, we are also clouds

An orange is not only what it does, sweet for a moment and then gone

Listen to an orange buzz with bees that help it carry on
We are more than what we are
We are pulsed from distant stars
We are burnt by many scars
And yet, and yet, we are also sweet

A child is not a child only, single hope to conquer night
A child is never really lonely when it knows its inner light
A child is parents and their failings
A child is bruised, but stands again
A child is sometimes still unveiling, not to answer if but when
We are more than what we are
We are pulsed from distant stars
We are burnt by many scars
And yet we are, and yet we are
Still a child

--Rt. Rev. Jim Hamilton, Rector at Baltimore's Church on the Square

TODAY: *Today's scripture tells of Jesus' return to his home town, and the townspeople's rage at what he says, even though what he says is true. How patient are we to hear harsh words, even when they are true? Let us devote special energy, starting today, to listening quietly, to contemplating thoroughly and to responding appropriately.*

March 11

READ: Genesis 40:8

Wide-Eyed Dreamer

They said to him, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God?"

I'm a big dreamer. Sometimes I have several in one night. Sometimes, I remember them and the people and circumstances. But most times, once I open my eyes, dreams are gone forever. Or are they?

I have no control over what I dream. They just come and then go, most of the time with no apparent effect on my life. Except for one dream I had that a life-changing event would change one of my children. God guided me through the situation with such confidence that when it occurred, I was prepared with acceptance and joy. It's one dream I have never forgotten.

So what about the dreams I have with my eyes wide open? I look around daily with wonder at where I am today because it was not one of my sleeping or waking dreams. When I stay out of the way and let God guide me, He is the real dream maker!

--Babs Lutton

TODAY: *Where do you fit in God's plan? Spend time today considering your place, then plan your week. What can you do to fulfill God's plan for you this week -- at home, at work, in your neighborhood, for yourself.*

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March 12

READ: 1 Corinthians 12:27-30

Love and Hate

No one person or group, not even the Romans (who we know killed Christ on the cross because this form of execution was a Roman one) were solely responsible for Our Lord's death. The Church has consistently taught that every human being who ever lived contributed to the suffering and death of Jesus. "It is you," Saint Francis of Assisi says, "who have crucified him and crucify him still, when you delight in your vices and sins" (ccc 598). As a result, the Catechism teaches, quoting from the Council of Quiercy, France in 853 AD: "There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer" (ccc 605). Why? Because there is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being who has not contributed to the suffering and death of Jesus. From the cross, therefore, He says to all: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

In reading the above excerpt from the *Catholic Spirit* by Fr. John Hillier - Article 53, I am reminded of Love and Hate. This in turn, reminds me of the times we live in. I don't know about you, but I am battle fatigued!

I desperately want to be around Love and Peace. Not Hate. I can't watch "Hate" on TV or read any more about "Hate." There is so much "Hate" in the world, amidst Love, that one part of me shrivels inside - trying to hide and pretend there is no hate. I am angry (Hate? Hmmm!) in having to be bombarded with Hate every day.

To a point, I have almost become numb to Hate because I feel so helpless. So I shrink back from a lot of living life - cocooned. As if I am in a bomb shelter. I have dealt with the dying/dead, murders, suicides, rapists in my life/profession, and I am "Spent" at this point.

At my age, I just want Love, Gentleness, Softness, Kindness, Friendship, Sharing, Music, (Yes - I hug-play my cello every day!) and to enjoy picking up a fallen leaf on a walk with our German Shepherd, "JJ." Talk to my tulips and daffodils that are breaking through the surface of mulched soil. YEP! I do this! (Surely a sign of old age!) I treasure sunrises and sunsets. And gaze across the ocean and waterways. All God's Creation - in all its Glory and Magnificence. I look for Crosses and Angel wings in the sky - those made by cloud formations. Or are they?

However, let me not forget that I too, being part of the human race, hold the cat-O-nine tails, thorns and sword and hyssop. It was when I was in Divinity School that I first learned of this from my Theology professor. Our entire class was rooted to our seats in horror.

We are all indeed - One Body in Christ.

--Pam Clift

TODAY: *Let us all recognize that the current times are full of fear and threats of persecution. We can choose to Love one another amidst the turmoil. Choose the path of kindness and mercy for the rest of our life on earth. Life is short.*

March 13

READ: Proverbs 3:5-6

Holy Yes, Holy No

“The Holy Spirit is guiding you,” a dear friend and prayer partner gently encouraged me. “Remember that she is both wise and practical,” she continued. “Listen with the ear of your heart; she may be leading you to a holy no.”

A holy no? I knew about a holy yes. But you mean that sometimes in holy listening there might be a holy no? Pre-pandemic, searching for the “holy yeses” in my life had become my spiritual quest. It seemed as though before sheltering-in-place in March 2020, there were so many opportunities to say yes; and I often did so. But that was before COVID-19 and both of the Delta and the Omicron variants ushered in new -- and heretofore unimaginable -- limitations and restrictions.

Now my choices seem to be one of four options: yes; no; not at this time; and possibly. I have found that these choices have led me to a liminal space that is filled with grace...for I have been provided with an opportunity to live into this time of transformation. It is a time when I am able to hear the “holy no” and even say “no.”

Author, teacher, and scholar of Buddhism Joanna Macy encourages us to remember that “You don’t need to do everything. Do what calls your heart: effective action comes from love unstoppable, and is enough.”

Listening with the ear of the heart opens up a place within me to experience love unstoppable, and allows me to hear the very wise and practice Holy Spirit when it whispers a “holy no.” And in doing so, I also am now able to hear the holy yes...and know that it is enough.

--Westina Matthews

TODAY: *Listen in silence because if your heart is full of other things, you cannot hear the voice of God.*

*Then get a copy of Westina Matthews’ best-selling book: [*This Band of Sisterhood: Black Women Bishops on Race, Faith, and the Church*](#). For a free PDF study guide, go to this link: churchpublishing.org/siteassets/pdf/excerpts/this-band-of-sisterhood-study-guide.pdf*

March 14

READ: Psalm 27:13-14

A Time for Conversion

There is an expression in Spanish: “God forgives always. We forgive sometimes. But Nature never forgives.” We did not respond to the partial catastrophes. Who now speaks of the fires in Australia, or a boat can now cross the North Pole because the glaciers had all melted? Who speaks now of the floods? I don’t know if these are the revenge of nature, but they are certainly nature’s responses.

We have a selective memory. I want to dwell on this point. I was amazed at the 70th anniversary commemoration of the Normandy landings, which was attended by people at the highest level of culture and politics. It was one big celebration. It’s true that it marked the beginning of the end of dictatorship, but no one seemed to recall the 10,000 boys who remained at that beach.

What comes to mind is another verse from Virgil's *meminisse iuvabit*: "It may be that in the future you will be helped by remembering the past." We need to recover our memory because memory will come to our aid. This is not humanity's first plague; the others have become mere anecdotes. We need to remember our roots, our tradition, which is packed full of memories.

Every crisis contains both danger and opportunity: the opportunity to move out from the danger. Today, I think we have to slow down our rate of production and consumption and to learn and contemplate the natural world. We need to reconnect with our real surroundings. This is the opportunity for conversion.

Let us not lose our memory once all this is past. Let us not file it away and go back to where we were. This is a time to take decisive step, to move from using and misusing nature to contemplating it. We have lost the contemplative dimension and we have to get it back.

This is a moment to see the poor. Jesus says we will have the poor with us always, and this is true. They are a reality we cannot deny. But the poor are hidden because poverty is bashful. I am also thinking at this time of the saints who live next door. They are heroes: doctors, volunteers, religious sisters, priests, shop workers – all performing their duty so society can continue functioning. How many doctors and nurses have died! All serving.

What comes to my mind is something said by the tailor, in my view one of the characters with the greatest integrity in Alessandro Manzoni's "The Betrothed." He says: "The Lord does not leave his miracles half-finished." If we become aware of this miracle of the next-door saints, if we can follow their tracks, the miracle will end well, for the good of all. God doesn't leave things halfway. We are the ones who do that.

What we are living now is a place of conversion, and we have a chance to begin. So let's not let it slip from us. Let's move ahead.

--Pope Francis (in an interview with the British publication, The Tablet)

TODAY: *Look back over the past two years. What have you learned about yourself and the way you live that you would like to change? Take a small step in that direction.*

March 15

READ: Jeremiah 17:7-8

God Nudges Me Onward

"For what is less possible for us by nature, let us ask the Lord that he may provide it for us by the help of his grace." -- Michael Casey in *The Road to Eternal Life: Reflections on the Prologue of St. Benedict's Rule*

One of the most important lessons I learned from a study of St. Benedict is what we *can't* achieve on our own, we *can* achieve through God's grace. During the past years,

I have felt as if God has been giving me writing prompts. I don't think this is unusual. I imagine it happens to others. I do know, when this occurs and I follow what I believe to be His direction, I gain a good and confident feeling, even if the topic is something I know little about.

Usually, the path begins with a curiosity or desire, or, in some cases, someone making a suggestion. I begin to investigate a subject area and find people on my path who are experts or "in the know," are accessible and give their help. This happened during this past year when I decided to write articles for TWATL magazine and then revise them for a short history book.

Almost as soon as I began, I found a plethora of resources available. Archaeologists and geologists gave their time and energy for ideas and proofing. I came across books and periodicals I would not have ordinarily noticed.

Yesterday morning, I completed a rough draft for more passages in my book and another article for TWATL. Both contained references to Spanish galleon wrecks along the coast and the gold and silver they carried. I lamented I had no pictures for my article and none for the section in the book. Last night Mike and I hosted a dinner party. I walked a friend of Mike's with his wife. She was wearing a Spanish doubloon from the 1600s, set into a necklace. The coin came from the famous Spanish treasure ship, the *Nuestra Senora de Atocha*, which sank in 1622 off the Florida Keys. I now have my pictures. Coincidence? Or a "God Wink"? I believe I am a witness to God's grace.

--Anne B. (Jones) Hurley, author of *Tides of Fear*, *Gold Thunder*, *A Light on Peachtree*, *Tools for Successful Writing*, *All Around the Track*, and *Brave At Heart*

TODAY: *Look back over the past month at the times you have been touched by God's grace. With a grateful heart, give thanks.*

March 16 **READ: Psalm 35**

At All Times, Gratitude

The 35th Psalm is one of many in which the psalmist is asking the Lord to deliver him from his enemies. However there is an added wrinkle, requesting God's help when people whom you have tried to help turn on you despite your best efforts on their behalf. To wit: "Malicious witnesses rise up; they ask me about things I do not know."

"They repay me evil for good; my soul is forlorn. But as for me, when they were sick, I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting. I prayed with head bowed on my bosom, as though I grieved for a friend or a brother; I went about as one who laments for a mother, bowed down and in mourning. But at my stumbling they gathered in glee, they gathered together against me; ruffians whom I did not know tore at me without ceasing; they impiously mocked more and more, gnashing at me with their teeth.

"How long, O Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages, my life from the lions!"

It kind of reminds me of the old adage, “No good deed goes unpunished.” But it also brings to mind something that really bothers me.

Regardless of the purity of my motives, when I go out of my way to be helpful to someone or for some worthy cause, I expect my efforts to be acknowledged in some way, even if only privately. I really struggle controlling my disappointment and not letting it rise to real anger when my “good deeds” are totally taken for granted or ignored. It really hacks me off! I feel just like David, wanting to petition God to make those bad guys pay for their evilness and “rescue me from their ravages.”

Fortunately, we have Christ's exhortation in Matthew 6:14, the verse immediately following the Lord's prayer, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” Since I am constantly in need of forgiveness, my prayer is that I can follow Christ's guidance and, as David does, petition God for his assistance when my good deeds are not acknowledged. But rather than asking for God to punish those who have wronged me, instead let me ask God to give me the strength to forgive them and move on.

--Kathleen and Roy Te Turner

TODAY: *Plan this for the next time you and family or friends have dinner. Go around the table and ask each person to say why they're thankful for the person sitting next to them. Don't forget Lenten Church and Chowder today and every Wednesday at 11:30 in the chapel.*

March 17

READ: Matthew 6:19-21

The Cloths of Heaven

It's St. Patrick's Day when eyes, hearts and voices turn to Ireland and celebrate its rich history. The galaxy of its most famous patriots includes the writer and Nobel prize winning poet, William Butler Yeats. Among his most popular poems was “He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven.”

*Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with gold and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.*

If he were wealthier, he says, he would spread under his beloved's feet the “heaven's embroidered cloths” laced with gold and silver, as a token of his love. Instead, he has only his dreams, which he also offers – again in the gallant tradition of Sir Walter Raleigh spread under her feet. He's making the point gently that his romantic dreams are superior to material riches.

During our Lenten journey, let us rethink the notion of giving. What dreams do you have for your family, your spouse, your church, your neighborhood, your community? Is there a greater gift than helping define aspiration?

TODAY: *Start the day with a prayer written 16 centuries ago by St. Patrick, himself raised in poverty and once a slave. As a missionary, he became the founder of Christianity in Ireland.*

As I arise today, may the strength of God pilot me, the power of God uphold me, the wisdom of God guide me.

May the eye of God look before me, the ear of God hear me, the word of God speak for me.

May the hand of God protect me, the way of God lie before me, the shield of God defend me, the host of God save me.

May Christ shield me today.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit, Christ when I stand, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me. Amen.

March 18

READ: 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

Why Would Jesus Pray?

Jesus often prays to his Father, but we may wonder why.

Surely, he knows what is in the mind of the Trinity already. But we are also told that he grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52) and even had to learn obedience (Heb 5:8), so his maturing was a process, the growth of the person named Jesus more than the divine being whose title was Christ.

When Jesus prays to his Father, he seeks help in becoming not only who he is but in becoming one of us, not only the Christ or anointed one, but also, as the hymn goes, “our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.”

When Jesus prays to the Father, I think he is asking, “Help me to become this thing called human.”

--Chris Baker

TODAY: *Write a prayer of gratitude, focusing on a blessing or gift for which you thank God.*

March 19

READ: Colossians 3:23-24

A Life Lesson – at Age 10

As we leave the Advent Season, I am still left with the idea of gifts given to the baby Jesus or more broadly, gifts given to God. With me, it begs the question, what are the gifts we bring to God? I suppose the answers to the question are endless. I submit however that being/doing your

best at any worthy endeavor is a gift to God. In this case I have framed this gift as a Life Lesson. And I add that Life Lessons can be learned at any age...maybe younger the better!

Here's my story:

I was 10 years old, maybe younger, enjoying a summer at the seashore. Philadelphians favored Ocean City, New Jersey. Early in the summer my Mother urged me to find a job. Mothers, you know, have a way of urging that can be pretty powerful to a 10 year old. Her suggestion came with a job description: how about selling newspapers on the boardwalk and the beach. The object of the job is simple. Get a bundle of papers, fresh off the truck from Philadelphia. Then stroll down the boardwalk 4 blocks to the most popular beach at 12th to 14th streets. Even as a 10 year old it was obvious to me that being the first down the boardwalk allowed me to sell more papers...and I might add, sell them faster.

Thus, at a young age, I learned how to be successful. Said differently, performing well at a worthwhile task is a gift...a gift to God.

--Dave Fox

TODAY: *Raise this 16th prayer of Sir Thomas More: "The things, dear Lord, that we pray for, give us grace to labor for."*

March 20

READ: II Samuel 7:29

Find Your 'Amigo Campechano'

On the doorposts at each of the three outside doors of our home, we have a mezuzah that we touch as we enter. They are small, decorative pieces containing a tiny roll of parchment. They were installed – at just the proper angle, slanted to the room into which the door opens --by the previous owners who were Jewish. A section of the Torah is written on the parchment – “Love the Lord, your God, and walk in his ways,” but more important is the prayer that the mezuzah inspires: “God’s blessing rest upon this house and all who dwell within.”

We’ve left them in place and followed the tradition as a constant reminder of God’s presence and as a gesture of affection for dear Jewish friends.

We’ve also left them in place out of respect for Pope Francis, who was born and served in Haydee’s neighborhood in Buenos Aires. Frequently, he tells the story of his best friend, a rabbi in Buenos Aires, and their regular meetings when they argued not about theology or ancient priests or philosophers, but about soccer, which they both loved, although they supported rival teams.

We also tell friends the story of his days as Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, archbishop of Buenos Aires, when he once received a phone call from parents anxious to baptize their son. They had encountered resistance from the neighborhood catholic church because one of the parents was Jewish. No problem, the archbishop, now pope, replied. Meet me at the Cathedral and we’ll have the ceremony.

And they did. The cardinal, now pope, performed the baptism, concluding the service with these instructions for the parents: “Remember your roots. We are all children of God.”

--Haydee Toedtman

TODAY: *Follow the lead of the pope's best friend, Rabbi Abraham Skorka, frequently called "the pope's rabbi," refers to Pope Francis as "un amigo campechano"—a real pal. Make an effort today to talk to your "amigo campechano." Devote much energy to developing an even deeper relationship with one another, whether you're discussing the roots of theology, major league baseball or anything in between.*

March 21

READ: Romans 8: 38-39

Discovery in Disappointment

Have you ever wished you were not a procrastinator? I'll do that tomorrow, we say. Taxes can wait for another day, or registering for that event I want to attend will still be available tomorrow, or grocery shopping for that special meal. And then, have you later experienced regret when the procrastination leads to an unnecessary challenge or disappointment? We wait too long to file the tax and pay a fine; the event has sold out before we got around to registering; the grocery is now out of the ingredients necessary for the meal.

I would guess that we've all been in the procrastinator's doghouse a time or two! Sometimes though, the consequences of procrastination can be even more difficult and more devastating than a missed deadline or event.

I am an historical genealogist. For more than three decades, I've been researching a specific family connection for one branch of my family, dating back hundreds of years. For those of us who are dedicated to preserving family genealogies for posterity, this is incredibly important, incredibly rewarding, incredibly meticulous work. Last summer, I was given a personal introduction, through a mutual friend, to a renowned expert in New England genealogy. She was, perhaps, the one person with the knowledge and expertise to resolve the genealogical puzzle with which I had been grappling, and I finally had an entrée to reach out and ask for her help. For whatever reason, despite having all the time in the COVID world with "nowhere to go and nothing to do," I procrastinated and put off contacting this woman. It would have been such a simple task, the door had been opened, all I needed to do was follow through. Sadly, because I procrastinated, I missed my opportunity, as she recently passed away.

To say I am disappointed is an understatement. I have been filled with self-recrimination and regret over my failure to act promptly, and deep sadness for the missed opportunity and incalculable loss of the key historical information I was seeking. And yet...God. In the silence of my soul, God reminds me that "we are dust, and to dust we shall return" (Genesis 3:19). He knows the very hairs on our heads (Luke 12:7), and as Psalm 139 so eloquently reminds us, "He knit us together in our mother's womb...all our days were written in his book and ordained for us before one of them came to be."

God has all the pieces of our lives in His capable hands, woven together like tapestries. And the greatest news of all is that, despite all our weaknesses and failures-including procrastination in both small and great matters- he loves us with an everlasting love. "Nothing can separate us

from the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:39) To God be the Glory. Amen
and Amen

--Joan Loos

TODAY: *Identify a long-delayed project – a letter to a friend, a phone call to a relative, a spring planting, pruning an overgrown plant, a visit. Is there a reason it’s been delayed and a lesson that can be applied to other tasks? Then, and most importantly, finish the task!*

March 22

READ: Matthew 12:18

Meditation on the Bicameral Brain!

Look within the brain
See pleasure there and pain.
What part do my ancestral genes play in my soul?
What slice of me is learned?
And what innate, unearned?
How do these factions fit to make me whole?
Images run wild,
Unfettered as a child,
Bright dazzling leaps of intuition claim the night.
But reason overrules
With careful, measured tools
It’s steady logic tames creation, limits light.
Why puzzle what I am
When God has sent a Lamb
Through whom my Self, beyond itself is meant to grow?
Enough to ponder this:
From clay to endless bliss
Is mystery beyond both sides of brain to know.

--Claudette Warlick

TODAY: *Put this poem/prayer by Claudette Warlick to work. Pick and begin a new God-inspired project.*

*Jesus, Lord, who died for me
Grant that I your servant be
By your love transformed and free
To live in paradise with thee.*

*Let my smiles reflect your face
With your joy my sin replace
Let your love my choices trace
And fill my actions with your grace.*

Claudette Warlick

March 23

READ: John 8:12

Chasing Lightning Bugs

“Again Jesus spoke to them. ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”

Where have all the fireflies gone?

One of the wonderful memories from my childhood is of my cousins and I running around in the dark in my grandmother’s backyard catching lightning bugs. You couldn’t see them until they lit up. Then you had to get close to where it was last seen but guess which way it was heading to be close enough to catch him when he lit up again. We’d put them in a mason jar (which I suppose wasn’t too good for the fireflies) and at the end of a successful hunt that jar would have its own beautiful glow.

I don’t remember the last time I saw a firefly. Biologists call them *Lampyridae*, a family of insects with more than 2,000 described species. Yet, amazingly, many species are close to extinction, and others are endangered. Could we lose their light entirely?

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” Do we risk losing that light if we are not diligent in seeking it out? Protecting it, nurturing it?

--Kathleen and Roy Te Turner

TODAY: *Be spiritual firefly, shining the light of Jesus’ love and God’s grace. Make a point of helping someone you see today. Share a kindness, offer a word of encouragement. And don’t forget Church and Chowder, starting in the Chapel at 11:30 today.*

March 24

READ: James 1:19

Listen to Your Heart.

Listen to your heart. It’s there that Jesus speaks most intimately to you. Praying is first and foremost listening to Jesus who dwells in the very depths of your heart. He doesn’t shout. He doesn’t thrust himself upon you. His voice is an unassuming voice, very nearly a whisper, the voice of gentle love.

Whatever you do with your life, go on listening to the voice of Jesus in your heart. This listening must be active and very attentive listening, for in our restless and noisy world, Jesus’ loving voice is easily drowned out. You need to set aside some time every day for this active listening to Jesus, if only for ten minutes. Ten minutes a day for Jesus alone can bring about a radical change in your life.

You’ll find it isn’t easy to be still for ten minutes at a time. You’ll discover straightaway that many voices – voices that are very noisy and distracting, voices which are not God’s – demand

your attention. But if you stick to your daily prayer time, then slowly, but surely, you'll come to hear the gentle voice of love and will long more and more to listen to it.

--Henri J. M. Nouwen (1936-1996)

TODAY: *In her humble way Mother Theresa reminded us of the importance of listening. "God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer." Find a quiet spot today and learn to become an active listener.*

March 25

READ: Psalm 40:1-3

"A NEW SONG"

These days, with the continuing presence, threat and limitations of the COVID, plus the complexities of 21st Century life, we often find ourselves singing a sad song, even a lament, almost a dirge.

It seems we need to be reminded that the Christian faith is not a negative, heavy weight pulling us down but wings to lift us up.

Whenever you come across a person who really has caught the infection of the Good News, you find genuine joy. For example, take Martin Luther, who said that he created hymns because he refused to let the devil have all the good tunes.

There is, then, such a thing as a deep-down laughter of the heart. And certainly, if anyone has a right to be joyful, it is Christians. The main reason for the inner joy of Christians is that they have something to be really glad about. They know themselves to be sinners saved by divine grace. God's mighty saving act has penetrated their beings. God has spilled joy into their hearts and they have more than ample reason to be joyful.

Therefore, we should remember what the Psalms say:

"I will sing and make music to the Lord";

AND

"Come before His presence with a song"

PLUS

TODAY'S PSALM PROCLAIMS:

"He hath put a new song in my mouth,
even a thanksgiving unto God."

That's just what we needed! A new song!

--George Hubbs

TODAY: *Make a point of finding our new music director this week and thanking her for joining us, leading us and inspiring us.*

March 26

READ: Matthew 18-1-5

A Prayer for Children

We pray for children
who sneak popsicles before supper,
who erase holes in math workbook,
who can never find their shoes.

And we pray for those
who stare at photographers from behind barbed wire,
who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers,
who never "counted potatoes",
who are born in places we wouldn't be caught dead,
who never go to the circus,
who live in an X-rated world.

We pray for children
who bring us sticky kisses and fistfulls of dandelions,
who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money.

And we pray for those
who never get dessert,
who have no safe blanket to drag behind them,
who watch their parents watch them die,
who can't find any bread to steal,
who don't have rooms to clean up,
whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser,
whose monsters are real.

We pray for children
who spend their allowance before Tuesday,
who throw tantrums in the grocery stores and pick at their food,
who like ghost stories,
who shove dirty clothes under the bed, and never rinse out the tub,
who get visits from the tooth fairy,
who don't like to be kissed in front of the carpool,
who squirm in church or temple and scream in the phone,
whose tears we sometimes laugh at,
and whose smiles can make us cry.

We pray for those
whose nightmares come in the daytime,
who will eat anything,
who haven't ever seen a dentist,
who aren't spoiled by anybody,
who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep,

who live and move, but have no being.

We pray for children who want to be carried,
and for those who must,
for those we never give up on
and for those who don't get a second chance.

For those we smother...and for those who will grab
the hand of anybody kind enough to offer it.

--Ina J. Hughes

TODAY: *We pray for ourselves and for the St. Peter's community that we willingly offer our hands to them so that no child is left behind because we did not act. The Market's wonderful commitment to the children of Savannah is important, but only a start. In the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.*

March 27

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

Our Change -Agent

In this passage we are asked to examine who we were before we knew Christ and how we changed after accepting Christ. This change is no minor tweaking of the past.

“Born again” is sometimes used to explain the radical change that occurs. How does the perspective of Christ differ from our pre-Jesus viewpoint? The Jesus story is told from the victim's perspective since Jesus was a victim of both secular and religious violence. Jesus emphasized dying to self and protecting the marginalized. Has such an emphasis really impacted my life to the point that I might be considered “born again”? Would observing me be a full reflection of the values of Jesus?

Years ago in a small Virginia town, John returned home after spending four years away in college. His hometown friend, Bill, asked Mary, another of his friends, if she had seen John. She responded, “Oh yes, I saw him yesterday, and he hasn't changed a bit!” Might the same be said by an old friend seeing me after all these years in church? Or, hopefully, not. Take a moment to ponder how our actions can make us a better reflection of Christ.

--A.L. Addington

TODAY: *Raise this prayer: Lord Jesus, as a branch of your vine, how may I serve you by answering the prayers of others. Amen.*

March 28

READ: Proverbs 17: 6

The Enduring Flame

At the base of the candlestick holder is an angel.

Spoiler alert: there's an angel at the end of the story too.

Our son and his wife have been anxious for a child for several years and announced last fall that they were expecting a child, their first -- and our first grandchild. It was a time of happiness, hope and crossed fingers as they were both in their late 40s and in the midst of successful careers. Time progressed, and we were treated to weekly reports as the child was growing -- from the size of a lemon, to a grapefruit, to a pineapple. On the way, we learned that it now had arms and legs, then fingers and toes. Its eyes and ears were developing, and fingernails and even eyebrows were growing.

Week 20 passed to Week 30. Week 35. Then Week 39, and the doctor told Kristen, the mother-in-waiting, to check into the hospital "next Tuesday." They would induce labor.

That's when Haydee found the old candlestick holder. It had been a gift many years ago and was used sparingly. But she would put it on a table, light the candle now. It became a symbol of hope and faith.

She lit the candle Tuesday morning, and it burned through the wintry day and all night. As the first candle began to flicker, Haydee inserted another candle and repeated our prayers for safety and health of the baby and her parents. The candle burned through the night.

Early Wednesday, the phone rang, and our son proudly announced the arrival of a baby girl, Josephine James Toedtman. Baby healthy. Mother and father delighted. Grandparents joyous!

At that point, we checked the candle -- just as the flickering flame died out. We looked at each other, and held hands as we often do at emotional moments and rejoiced.

Hope and faith, the light -- God's gracious touch -- had been passed to a new generation.

--Haydee and Jim Toedtman

TODAY: *The scripture for today is brief: Grandchildren are the crown of the aged. It inspires this prayer: Almighty God, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children. Give us calm strength and patient wisdom as we bring them up, that we may teach them to love whatever is just and true and good, following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ.*

March 29

READ: Ephesians 2:10

We are God's Handiwork

"For grace is given not because we have done good works, but in order that we may be able to do them." -- St. Augustine

When I decided to pursue writing, I made the commitment to “give my writing to God.” What happened after that has been profound. As I recount stories, there is an important thing to know ...it has all happened, not through me, but through God’s grace. At times, I have felt as if I have been a conduit, as if something needed to be done and I was being used to do it, with God’s grace affording me the means.

One of these times occurred when I was writing feature articles for a small newspaper. I had written a crime prevention piece for another publication and decided to recycle and update it. One part of the article dealt with the aftermath of assault and the importance of reporting it *and* going for psychological help.

I was rewriting the article, not far from finished, when I came to the part about going for help. No matter what I wrote, it wasn’t right. Finally, I was down to one sentence. One sentence! I must have spent fifteen minutes on that sentence. As I continued to work, I changed a word and, suddenly, a feeling of peace came over me. Satisfied, I completed the article and submitted it.

Several days later, my publisher called to tell me she had received a call from the local rape crisis center. “They wanted us to know that a woman who had been assaulted thirteen years ago, and suffered ever since, had finally come in to get help. They said it was because of our article.”

--Anne B. (Jones) Hurley’s books include *Tides of Fear*, *Gold Thunder*, *A Light on Peachtree*, *Tools for Successful Writing*, *All Around the Track*, and *Brave At Heart*

TODAY: *Offer a prayer. Ask God’s comforting touch for someone near or far who has been hurting and needs a helping hand.*

March 30

READ: John 10:11-21

What’s in a Name?

“Because they have set their love upon me, therefore will I deliver them
I will lift them up because they know my name.” --Psalm 91: 14*

Names are important.

I spent a good portion of my working life in Little Rock, Arkansas, and had the occasion to meet President Bill Clinton a few times when he was Governor, even played a round of golf with him. During his first Presidential campaign I attended a large fundraiser with probably 300-400 attendees.

When Candidate Clinton made the rounds shaking hands, he came up to me and called me by my name. In large measure that’s because he had great political instincts and a knack for names, but also because in his judgement, I was important to him. I just remember how special that made me feel.

On a different scale, we are all important to God, and God knows us all intimately by name. Maybe you know the song:

God, the Lord, who dwells in heaven, name and life to each is given,

*In his love they live and move.
In his love they live and move.
Do you know how many children go to little beds at night,
And without a care or sorrow, wake again at morning light?
God in Heaven, each name can tell, knows us, too, and loves us well.
He's our best and dearest friend. He's our best and dearest friend.*

That should make us feel really good.

--Kathleen and Roy Te Turner

TODAY: *Remember the name of your best childhood friend? Get a piece of paper and send him or her a letter. That will make both of you feel really good. Don't forget Lenten Church and Chowder today and every Wednesday at 11:30 in the chapel.*

March 31

READ: Romans 8: 38-39

The Miracle Baby's Miracle Life

My mother, Mabel Ruth Weitknecht, was born in 1903 on March 16th to a Pennsylvania Dutch Family that resided in Beersville, just north of Allentown. There they owned the General Store. She was their third daughter.

Mabel was born prematurely and weighed 3 pounds. She was born at a time when one of every babies in the United States died before their fifth birthday. But prayers were all around her as family members completed their daily chores. She was kept in a soft, padded shoe box on a stool by the kitchen coal stove. A woman from the community came by and fed her a mixture of condensed milk and porridge around the clock.

Prayers and loving care gave her a good start. She then took the baton and praised God every day. She had a happy life and lived until almost 102.

--Mary Ellen Fox

TODAY: *How do you praise God every day? Find a way, starting today, to show your thanks for God's blessing? Offer a prayer. Help a stranger. Call someone who's under the weather.*

April 1

READ: 1 Corinthians 4:10-14

Be a Fool for Christ

Let's celebrate April Fool's Day. Perhaps you've heard of Clown Ministry, the entertaining and inspiring ministry that uses humor, humility and imagination to share the lessons of God's love. The only requirement is people willing to make fools of themselves. There are all extremes – bands of clowns or individuals visiting homes for the elderly, summer camps, worship services or kindergarten classes. A favorite skit illustrates the technique:

At the altar is a manger with a balloon painted with the word LOVE and surrounded by gifts. The moderator reads the first lines of a familiar song:

*“What can I give him, poor as I am?
“If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
“If I were a wise man, I would do my part.”*

The clown then enters, carrying a paper or felt heart, attached by a long string. The clown bows before the manger, thrilled to see the LOVE-balloon, but carrying no gifts. To make the point, the clown pulls out an empty pocket, then notices something happening inside the jacket and retrieves the heart, then asks someone in the congregation to cut the long string it's attached to.

Then the clown returns to the manger, kneels and holds up the heart as the moderator finishes the verse: “Yet, what can I give him? I give him my heart.”

TODAY: *Be a clown for the day, raising this “Clown's Prayer.”*

As I stumble through this life, Help me to create more laughter than tears, Dispense more cheer than gloom, Spread more cheer than despair.

Create in me the gift to bring laughter to others And never let me fail to see the wonders in the eyes of a child Or the twinkle in the eyes of the aged.

Let me experience the laughter, the wonder, the joys, And the delights that only you can bring, Lord.

Let me share my painted face that others might Understand the Power of your Word; The Strength through Faith; And the Joy of your Love; So that all might delight in the Lord's laughter.

And in my final moment, May I hear you whisper: When you made children smile, You made me smile.

April 2

READ: Jeremiah 29:11

Prepare a Graceful Heart

As I understand it, into the heart of every Christian, Christ comes, and Christ goes. When, by his Grace, the landscape of the heart becomes vast and deep and limitless, then Christ makes His abode in that graceful heart, and His Will prevails.

The experience is recognized as Peace. In the absence of this experience much activity arises, divisions of every sort. Outside of the organizational enterprise, which some applaud and some mistrust, stands the figure of Jesus, nailed to a human predicament, summoning the heart to comprehend its own suffering by dissolving itself in a radical confession of hospitality.”

--Leonard Cohen

TODAY: *You won't hear "Hallelujah," the best known of composer-philosopher-poet Leonard Cohen's songs, today or any time during Lent. In Hebrew, the word Hallelujah means Praise the Lord, which is out of character for Lent, when we are in a period of reflecting and cleansing and searching the roots and heart of our faith. This is when flowers are removed from the altar and purple vestments and altar cloths are donned. Consider that we are fasting from Alleluia and other joyful prayers. We are in the space envisioned by St. Isaac, a 7th century abbot and bishop venerated in Eastern churches, who wrote: "When a man begins to fast, he straightaway yearns in his mind to enter into a converse with God." Give thanks today for this time of reflection.*

April 3

READ: 1 John 5:15

God as G.P.S.

"And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him."

A friend of mine from our New Canaan, CT Bible study called me early one morning. Barbara, an eager student of the Bible and ardent in her faith, had been praying for an occasion to share her faith with a friend of hers, Lisa, who was going through the most difficult of circumstances – a young adult son with leukemia. At that time, Lisa's son was in a New York city hospital receiving a prolonged course of chemotherapy. Many people in New Canaan were pitching in to help the family in whatever ways were needed – meals, caring for the younger children, and more.

On this particular day, Lisa, exhausted and overwhelmed with worry, reached out to her New Canaan friends and asked if anyone was willing to drive her into the City to spend the day with her son and to have some in-depth conversations with his physicians. Barbara jumped at this perfect opportunity. Driving Lisa, who did not attend church and had no faith community supporting her, would provide Barbara with private, uninterrupted time to speak to Lisa of God's love and care, God's desire to walk alongside Lisa, her son and family during this challenging time. Barbara was calling to ask me if I would pray that God's Holy Spirit would give her the words to convey all of this to Lisa. With my assurance that I would certainly be praying, Barbara was about to end the call when she added, "Oh, by the way, I've never driven into the City before and I'm not at all sure of the way or how to find the hospital. Actually, I'm quite nervous about the drive in general. Pray about that, too, please!"

With my promises of prayer, we ended the call and I immediately sat down in the nearest chair and began to pray earnestly for Barbara and her well-meaning desire to convey God's love and care for Lisa, her son, and family. I prayed for God's healing of Lisa's son, wisdom and skill for the doctors, and God's perfect peace for all. After many minutes of prayer, I rose from the chair and was about to get on with my day when I suddenly thought of Barbara's last-minute request that I pray for her drive into New York. Oops! Sitting back down in my chair, I blurted out, "And please, Lord, I pray that Barbara's drive into the City would be 'a piece of cake!'" "A piece of cake!" I thought dubiously to myself. "What a ridiculous prayer!" But there it was.

Much later in the day, Barbara called. She went on and on, bursting, rapturous over her conversations with Lisa. Lisa was so receptive, so eager to hear all that Barbara had to say. Minutes later, almost as an afterthought, I asked Barbara about her drive into the City. “Oh, that, a piece of cake!”

--Ginger Malachuk

TODAY: *Recall your circle of friends. Pray today for relief from the problems and challenges that face them.*

April 4

READ: Isaiah 40:26-31

Open Your Eyes

No, Celie. God's not some gloomy old man like the pictures you've seen of him.
God's not a man at all.
God is inside you and everyone else that was or ever will be.
We come into this world with God.
But only those who look inside find it.

God is the flowers and everything else that was or ever will be.
And when you feel the truth so real,
And when you love the way you feel, you've found it
Just as sure as moonlight blesses the night.
Like a blade of corn,
Like a honeybee,
Like a waterfall,
All a part of me.
Like the color purple,
Where does it come from?
Open up your eyes,
Look what God has done, Celie.

--Willis Allee, Stephen Bray, Brenda Russell
(songwriters of the Broadway adaptation of *The Color Purple*)

TODAY: *British composer Fred Pratt Green captured the connection between God and music: “When in our music God is glorified, and adoration leaves no room for pride, it is as though the whole creation cried alleluia! How often, making music, we have found a new dimension in the world of sound, as worship moved us to a more profound alleluia! Let every instrument be tuned for praise! Let all rejoice who have a voice to raise! And may God give us faith to sing always alleluia!”*

April 5

READ: Psalm 23

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art
with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head
with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house
of the LORD forever*

Prayer and Poetry and Dreaming

This psalm is many people's favorite because it gives us a rich image of life with God, of being cared for and loved. The image of a sheep who is led by God, a loving shepherd, is powerful indeed.

Whenever we take time for prayer, we are basking in God's presence just as we would enjoy sunshine on a beautiful day. We may ask for what we need or we may thank God for what we have received, but prayer involves a sense of being with God.

The late poet, Jean Valentine wrote: "For me, there's a likeness between poetry and prayer that is not so much thanks or supplication or other conscious activity, but the more unconscious activity of meditating or dreaming. The likeness lies in poetry and meditative prayer and dreaming all being (potentially, anyhow) healing, and all being out of our hands. For me, poetry is mostly silence. The deeper the better."

TODAY: *Spend time today considering how you can replace complaining about what you don't have with gratitude for what you do have. Start the transition with prayer time today.*

April 6

READ: Jeremiah 23:1-5

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord. The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." Jeremiah 23: 1-5

Time for a Hymn

There are days when I believe that we are more scattered in today's world than the Israelites were in Babylon and Chaldea. There seems to be no shortage of evil shepherds driving us away from the Lord. So where is this righteous king who is to deal wisely and execute justice and righteousness in the land?

God did indeed send a Good Shepherd to tend his scattered flock. So what did we do? We killed him. Pretty depressing, huh? When I do a downer like this, it's time for prayer and it's usually best for me to grab my hymnal. I always seem to be able to find a hymn that can give me hope. Here's just one:

*"O day of peace that dimly shines through all our hopes and prayers and dreams,
Guide us to justice, truth and love, delivered from our selfish schemes.
May swords of hate fall from our hands, our hearts from envy find release,
till by God's grace our warring world shall see Christ's promised reign of peace.
Then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb, nor shall the fierce devour the small;
as beasts and cattle calmly graze, a little child shall lead them all.
Then enemies shall learn to love, all creatures find their true accord;
the hope of peace shall be fulfilled, for all the earth shall know the Lord."
(Carl P. Daw, Jr. The Hymnal 1982 #597)*

--Kathleen and Te Turner

TODAY: *Thank a member of the choir this week for the inspiration, the hope, the comfort, the joy they bring to our worship each week. And don't forget Lenten Church and Chowder, the 11:30 AM Wednesday gatherings for brief worship in the Chapel, then soup.*

April 7

READ: Psalms 143:8

Finding the Path I Should Walk

"Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee."

-- Psalm 143 verse 8

Years ago, I was working as a teacher and part-time writer when I found myself at a crossroads. I had dreamed for years of becoming a psychologist, but time constraints had held me back. Thinking my psychologist goal was out of reach, I had thrown myself into teaching, but then discovered the joy and satisfaction of writing.

One day, knowing my interest in psychology and what training I had been able to have, the minister of a local church approached me. Would I go back to school if the church paid my tuition? Would I become that church's pastoral counselor?

I agonized. Which path should I follow? My years-long dream of counseling clients or my new “career” in writing? Was it not a “sign” if the request came from a church? I fell to my knees and asked God for guidance. I prayed, then was silent.

Suddenly, I received an overwhelming thought. *“You can do more with the power of the pen. You can do more with the power of the pen. You can do more than with one-on-one counseling. You can reach more people than the thousands of students you have taught.”* Stunned, I chose to pursue my writing, and gave my writing to God. *That* has made all the difference.

Anne B. (Jones) Hurley

Anne B. (Jones) Hurley was written *Tides of Fear, Gold Thunder, A Light on Peachtree, Tools for Successful Writing, All Around the Track, and Brave At Heart*

TODAY: *Celebrate the memory of a teacher who gave you good advice. Maybe it was career advice. Maybe it was life advice. It is worth recalling and celebrating. Now reach out and find someone else facing a difficult decision and be the wise counselor for that person.*

April 8

READ: Psalm 96:9-12

Almost A Bit of History

For the tenth year, we’re getting ready for a winter trip to the sunny Caribbean. Little matter that we hardly see the sun, that we mostly only hear the ocean, or that we sleep in cots and seldom if ever get to the beach.

All we do is make a lot of people see better, see things they haven’t seen for years and in some cases, see things they’ve never seen before. But what we really do is discover that WE are the ones who benefit. We don’t just see the joy of the people we examine. We rejoice in their joy. We’re part of St. Peter’s Gift of Sight Mission Team that has been traveling to the city of San Pedro de Macoris since 2013, and our joy is beyond measure.

Since that first trip, we’ve grown – to 35 people; we’ve tested the eyes of 6,000 adults and children and seen 6,000 people smile. We’ve distributed 7,000 pairs of reading glasses, sunglasses and prescription glasses and heard gasps and seen tears as their lives have changed. And for three years, we’ve been able to treat the most serious of the cases we’ve seen by supporting the Georgia Eye Institute’s surgical team for more than 300 cataract operations.

Our favorite family, still, is Longino Polanco, his wife, Reina, and children. We called him Patient Number One because his was our first cataract surgery. He was 90 and had not seen his wife for a decade. Our clinic judged him a good candidate for surgery, the surgical team replaced the swollen cataracts in each eye with new lenses. Suddenly, he could see. We’ll not forget the embrace as Reina greeted her husband. We talk to her every month, always a joyous conversation even though her husband passed away last year. Then there was Jose Torres, the 55-year-old bus driver who was forced to stop driving, but this winter, after surgery, is back on the job. Or Teadora Mercedes Agosta, 63, who could not distinguish light from dark and knew her son only by his voice. After her operation, she hesitated as she saw this grown adult, then exclaimed, “Johnny!” More tears. More joy.

Our focus changed during the COVID pandemic and we were unable to travel. Instead, we coordinated the effort that collected 14,000 masks from across Georgia and shipped them to the Dominican Republic. This is part of the Episcopal Church's rich Companion Diocese program that encourages and facilitates global exchange and mission programs. In our case, there have been six Georgia churches who have sponsored schools and sent mission teams and supplies to the Dominican Republic. We plan to resume our eye mission in October – there's literally a ton of medicines and supplies already waiting for us.

But mostly, we're anxious to meet again with wonderful people, now friends and part of our larger family. The touch of St. Peter's has been the touch of God in this small corner of the Dominican Republic.

--Jim Toedtman

TODAY: *Raise the prayer of St. Lucy, the saint of sight. Relying on your goodness, O God, we humbly ask you by the intercession of your servants, to give perfect vision to our eyes and the grace to use them for God's greater honor and glory and the salvation of souls. Preserve the light of my eyes so that I may see the beauties of creation, the glow of the sun, the color of the flowers and the smiles of children. Amen.*

April 9

READ: 1 Peter 4:8-10

Be a Faithful -- and Patient -- Servant

*"People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered;
Forgive them anyway.*

*If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;
Be kind anyway.*

*If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies;
Succeed anyway.*

*If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;
Be honest and frank anyway.*

*What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight;
Build anyway.*

*If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;
Be happy anyway.*

*The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;
Do good anyway.*

*Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough;
Give the world the best you've got anyway.*

*You see, in the final analysis, It is between you and God;
It never was between you and them anyway."*

—Mother Theresa

TODAY: *Say this prayer: Dear God, thank you for caring about my worries and my pain. Forgive me my impatience for change to happen, and help me trust in your guidance. Amen.*

Palm Sunday, April 10

READ: Matthew 21:1-11

A Donkey Too

Jesus rides in on a donkey. It's an overlooked character in the story, the donkey, but it was not an overlooked character in that moment.

Literally, all eyes lining the path of Jesus' triumphal entry were on the donkey and Jesus on its back, together a fulfillment of the prophet Zephaniah's words:

*Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious,
humble and riding on a donkey!*

Minds who perceived the rhetorical mechanics of this moment rushed straight to political implications— king, overthrow, Rome, glory. Those minds rushed past the intimacy of the moment: carrying Jesus.

Think about that. The disciples may have journeyed with Jesus, but they never carried him. Only four biblical characters carried Jesus: his mother, his adoptive father, this donkey, and Joseph of Arimathea, the man who carried Jesus from the cross to his burial place. That is intimate company.

The details of the donkeys' origins don't really matter, right? I mean, they could have said, "they put Jesus on a donkey" and I doubt we'd have asked, "Yes but where did the donkey come from?" Yet the details were included, for a reason, perhaps to say, that God is drawing all creation into the redemption story.

Here, at the triumphal entry, animals, not just for sacrificing, become a part of Jesus' story. We'll see over the course of Holy Week celestial bodies like the sun and the moon conspiring in a solar eclipse and weather patterns responding to the crucifixion with dark clouds. At the dramatic moment of Jesus' death, linseed fibers woven into flax and embroidered into a temple veil, seemingly inert, dead things, will repulse each other and tear in two.

We could see it as if God were a divine conductor with a magic wand, swirling the sky together into darkness and ripping the veil with invisible hands.

We could see the donkey as nothing more than a pack animal being used. Or, we could see this as creation itself participating in God's great cosmic exercise to make things new. *All* creatures of our God and King will make their praise heard. A donkey too.

--Rev. David Wantland

TODAY: *According to legend, the donkey so loved Jesus that it followed him to the cross where he turned his head away rather than watch the crucifixion. Jesus caused the shadow of the cross to fall onto the donkey's back as "a sign of the love of God for all to see." Plan today a way for all to see your love for God*

April 11

READ: Psalm 31: 9-16

Egeria's 4th Century Pilgrimage

In the late 4th Century, a woman from Spain, Egeria, began a long pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where she stayed for three years. She wrote an extended letter to her sisters, describing her journey. The *Itinerarium Egeriae* (The Travels of Egeria) became the earliest, existing first-hand account of a Christian pilgrimage.

Here is a summary of her account of Holy Week: It begins on Passion Sunday with a procession to Bethany, where the gospel of raising of Lazarus is read. On the afternoon of Palm Sunday, the whole church goes out to the Mount of Olives and returns in solemn procession to the city, bearing branches of palm.

There are evening visits to the Mount of Olives on each of the first three days of Holy Week, in commemoration of our Lord's nightly withdrawal from the city during the week.

On Maundy Thursday morning, the Eucharist is celebrated. All make their communion. In the evening, after another Eucharist, the whole church keeps vigil at Constantine's church of Eleona on the Mount of Olives, visiting Gethsemane after midnight and returning to the city in the morning for the reading of gospel of the trial of Jesus.

In the course of the morning of Good Friday, all venerate relics of the Cross, and then from noon to 3 p.m., all keep watch on the actual site of Golgotha (still left by Constantine's architects open to the sky in the midst of the great colonnaded courtyard) with lections and prayers amid deep emotion.

In the evening there is a final visit by the whole church to the Holy Sepulcher, where the gospel of the entombment is read. On Holy Saturday evening, paschal vigil still takes place, much as in other churches, with its lections and prayers and baptisms.

TODAY: Find a map of Jerusalem to trace the events of Holy Week. Offer this prayer: Almighty and eternal God, who in your great love gave your only Son to die for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world: Enable us, we pray, by your Holy Spirit, to worship you with reverence, and meditate with humility upon those mighty acts by which you brought redemption to your people; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

April 12

READ: Matthew 26:40-41

Awake!

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What? Could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

“Sitting Shiva” is not something Christians generally do. However, during the last two years in this Pandemic, I have found myself being asked to come alongside the dying, as well as the families of those who have just died. We’ve watched the dead being lowered into graves through Zoom and observed family members doubled over in grief and guilt because they felt/feel robbed and unable to travel and be by their deceased loved one. Mirrors covered. Curtains drawn. A single candle flickering on a center table.

I have spent hours, days, weeks, months and two years observing grief and watching the dying. And there were times when **I fell asleep.**

Often, I have felt angry at Peter, John and James who were with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when He asked them to stay awake in His agony and momentary bartering with God. “Gee” I ask myself. “They couldn’t even do that for Jesus? How could they possibly fall asleep?”

Needless to say, I have had to confront my judgmental self! There are many ways to fall asleep. The biology of sleep is only one way. I have fallen “asleep” in many ways through this Pandemic. Withdrawing from others to store up energy to look through one more Zoom at one more funeral at one more casket or urn. Am I no less guilty than Peter, John and James?

The answer comes from Jesus at Gethsemane. Confronting the three sleeping disciples, Jesus expressed his disappointment, but then offered comfort, hope and direction: “Rise, let us be going.”

Indeed, there is much for us to do in this nearly post-Pandemic world. “Rise, let us be going.”

--Pam Clift

TODAY: Be a candle. Brighten the day of a grieving neighbor, a weary friend, a disappointed co-worker or a saddened relative. Make an extra effort by sending a letter, making a phone call or sharing a smile.

April 13

READ: Luke 22:54-62

Consider Peter

“Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, “This man also was with him.” But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!” Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, “Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.” But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about!”

At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.”

Poor ole Simon Peter! There he goes, messing up again. At one point he's trying to build shelters up on the mountain for Moses, Elijah and Jesus so that they can stay away from the rabble down below, and later, he's telling Jesus that there's no way he'll be killed by the elders and raised on the third day. (“Get behind me Satan!”) Now he's denying he even knows Jesus, the same Jesus that he recognized to be “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

But I think he gets a bad rap. For me he's a real person, certainly not perfect by any means. He's loyal and stumbling, perceptive and impulsive, the bedrock of the church, but for the gentiles, not so much. Consider that he gave up his occupation and possessions to follow the Teacher. Could I have done that? He did recognize and proclaim who Jesus really was. Could I have taken that great leap of faith?

So here we find him in the cold dark night. His leader has been arrested and threatened with death. A servant has had his ear cut off. His friends have scattered. Three times he is accused of being a follower of Jesus; three times he denies it. What would I have done under the same circumstances? As much as I value truth and honesty, would I have admitted to being a follower? Probably not.

--Kathleen and Roy Te Turner

TODAY: *Be quick to forgive. Recall a person who may have hurt you or ignored your success. Make a point of reaching out to that person with a phone call or a letter to put the past aside and reconnect. Don't forget Lenten Church and Chowder today and every Wednesday at 11:30 in the chapel.*

Maundy Thursday, April 14

READ: John 13:12-15

Re-mem-brance: The act of re-mem-bering

Jesus said, “Do this for the remembrance of me.” *Anamnesis* is the Greek word here for remembering. It should sound almost familiar as it connects closely to the better known amnesia. Amnesia is to forget. A seemingly common diagnosis on Soap Operas, true amnesia is a medical term for memory loss caused by significant brain injury, shock, or illness.

Anamnesis is un-amnesia or put another way remembrance is an unforgetting of something already known. In that sense, we all are all beloved children of God, loved by our creator who created us out of love for love. We were formed to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. But in a world turned from God we can forget that we are known and loved. In the Eucharist we remember, or in this case, un-forget this central truth.

The power of this word remember is that, in the Greek, the opposite was to dis-member. When someone has an arm or a leg amputated, we are getting closer to what is meant here by the opposite. For when a surgeon operates to reattach that arm or leg, they are re-membering the person, adding that member back to the body. That is what we mean when we say, 'do this in remembrance of me.'

In the Eucharist, we bring the Body of Christ together. We recall who we are and whose we are as we take Christ's body and blood in the midst of community. What is so beautiful is that we do so with people we know well and others we know not at all. We receive with those with whom we agree on most everything and others we never see eye to eye with. And yet, in Jesus, we are one as we are re-membered by the one who knows us fully and loves us completely.

Pax et Bonum,
The Rt. Rev. Frank Logue, Bishop of Georgia

TODAY: *What is a memory for which you are thankful? Why? Now take the time to tell someone about it. And why.*

GOOD FRIDAY, April 15

READ: Isaiah 53:6

A Dark Day of Grief and Pain

Today is the hardest day of the Lenten journey. We have to face the reality of the death of Jesus as the victim of a public execution filled with pain and sorrow.

On Good Friday in 1957, I visited the home of a stigmatic, Therese Neumann, in Bavaria. (Stigmatics identify with the suffering of Jesus by absorbing His wounds as their own.) Therese Neumann was lying in her bed on sheets bloody from the open wounds in her hands and feet, a gash in her side, and a crown of thorns. A priest was seated quietly beside her bed.

I walked by her bed in silence and then exited her house filled with a sense of awe. It was hard for me then and now to imagine identifying with wounds of a Jesus so completely that His wounds actually become my own. I now think of that experience as a metaphor for trying to make the wounds of any victim such a part of my conscious concern that I find ways to help absorb their pain and not looking away from the cross they bear.

--A.L. Addington

TODAY: *17 centuries ago, Egeria, a woman likely from Spain, traveled from her home to Jerusalem and wrote of the first pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Read her description of how she spent Good Friday: "From the sixth to ninth hours, the lessons are so read and the hymns said, that it may be shown to all people that whatsoever the prophets foretold the Lord's passion is proved from the Gospels and from the writings of the apostles to have been fulfilled. And so through all those three hours the people are taught that nothing was done which had not been foretold, and that nothing that was foretold has not been fulfilled. Prayers also suitable to the day are interspersed throughout. The emotion shown and the mourning by all the people at every lesson and prayer are wonderful; for there is none, either great or small who on that day during those three hours does not lament, more than can be conceived, that the Lord had suffered those things for us."*

April 16

READ: Lamentations 3:22-23

The Challenge of Prayer

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

When I was born I was baptized in the hospital because I wasn't supposed to live. I did live -- midst much rejoicing and assurances that God had saved my life. As a child I was often reminded by my mother that I was blessed. Often that was followed by a lecture on what I should do or not do! I liked to think of this God, whoever He was, and ask Him lots of questions and also plead for favors. I went to Catholic school and we said the rosary every morning. My prayers were often diverted to begging God that Sister Mary Mary would not call on me since I didn't do my homework. Oh, the innocence of childhood!

Yes, my approach to prayer has changed but my confidence that God is here for me everyday has only grown stronger. After all, I am His child and as a mother I know the meaning of steadfast love, and that love is far surpassed by God's love for us.

--Babs Lutton

TODAY: *Take a chance. Address a challenge you've delayed. Confront a dilemma you've tried to ignore. Try something you've never tried before. But first, check in with God.*

Easter Sunday, April 16

READ: Luke 24:1-12

A Special Love

Why did Mary, Joanna and Mary Magdalene rise before dawn and go to the tomb? They could have waited until the sun had risen. Or, they could have slept in, then

served breakfast, like a dutiful first century woman. Instead, they got up, in a coordinated fashion, and got to work -- on tiptoes and in hushed whispers reminding each other to bring a lamp, spices and oil for anointing. As they neared the tomb, I bet they covered their faces and prepared for the smell and stench of a three-day-old dead body. What kind of love they must've had for Jesus to do this, with heavy hearts on this darkest of mornings.

These women were special. They were wealthy early adopters of the Way of Jesus, early investors in his work and had financed much of his three-year nomadic ministry. *They* made Jesus' three-year preaching and teaching tour possible. First, Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute, despite the smear campaign started by Pope Gregory I. She was a wealthy woman from whom "seven demons were driven out" and who, because of that healing experience, became utterly convinced of the legitimacy of Jesus as Messiah. She never left his side -- even through his trial, conviction, death and burial. She is recognized as the first witness to the resurrection, and for that, she is hailed in several traditions as "the Apostle to the Apostles."

Joanna must've been a tough cookie herself, and pretty good with politics and navigating complicated relationships. Who was she married to? Chuza, the steward of King Herod, very much King Herod's right-hand man.

And don't even get me started on Mary, the mother of God. Having been visited by an angel and promised a child as an unwed teenage mother you know she rolled with the punches! Being an unwed mother alone would have broken someone of her day and time, but she accepted the call from God to do something extraordinary, something that others wouldn't fully understand for decades. Talk about forward-thinking faith! Imagine her conversation with Joseph about this mysterious pregnancy! She and Joseph figured it out, despite the scandal and death threats from Herod that sent them temporarily to Egypt. Mary never flinched, never doubted her son's greatness and was willing to share him with the world. Even when it seemed Jesus might die an ordinary, human death, she stuck by him. Mary must've had a backbone, for sure.

These women, even when it looked at the Cross like their guy had failed and their investment hadn't panned out, they nevertheless stuck by Jesus. Through his trial, crucifixion, cries of anguish, death and burial, these women did not look away from the horrors that befell him.

On the first Easter morning, these women still had not given up hope. Their faith told them that *something* was awaiting them at the tomb, even if they weren't sure what it was. They needed to be in-person, in-the-flesh, and in the place where Jesus was laid. True to their steely character, they needed to face death and face it head on. And they went early, when the stars were just fading, carrying jars of oil, spices in hand, tear-stained. By that point, they were well acquainted with supernatural hope, extraordinary courage. They trusted that God would meet them.

At the tomb on the first Easter, it didn't take long for them to believe the news that he had risen and that God had crushed death, and Jesus was alive again. The church has the reality of Resurrection, the reality that God loves us and has conquered death and is making all things new for our flourishing.

The church has taught me -- through normal, regular people like you -- that God works wonders, even in the darkest depths of sin, pain and death. The church has

nourished me when I needed it, encouraged me and shown me the awe-striking power of faith rolling up our sleeves.

The pandemic's effects loom large, but so did the stone that was rolled away before they even got there. God provided a way forward.

The challenges of the future church are numerous, but we stand on the shoulders of spiritual giants who have overcome worse. God provided a way forward.

The great cloud of witnesses still speak, even when we doubt. God provides a way forward.

When it all seems impossible, remember what Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary knew: With men "it might be impossible, but with God, all things are possible" (Matt 19:26).

May God bless all of us with their courage, strength and faith. Amen.

--Rev. Kelly Steele

TODAY: *Jesus loves us, this we know. But how do you show your love for Jesus? Go out of your way, in the spirit of the three women, to do something that reflects your love for Him.*