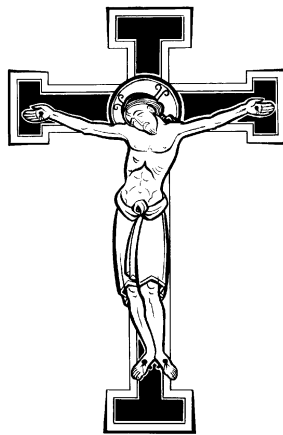


Bless Now, O God, the Journey

A Lenten Daily Devotional

compiled by the members and friends of

St. Luke's Episcopal Church
Sister Bay, Wisconsin



About this devotional: Thanks to the members & friends of St. Luke's who have taken the time to share their personal faith in the thoughtful devotions contained in this resource. The author's names appear at the end of the devotion. The un-credited devotions have been retrieved and edited from a number of different resources that allow them to be freely shared.

May your Lenten journey be a blessing . . .

March 2 - Ash Wednesday

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

~ 2nd Corinthians 13:11

Paul's closing remark in this letter is a beginning to our observance of Lent. "Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put all things in order..." (NRSV). Christians are invited "...to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word" (BCP, p. 265). In other words, put first things first. Adult friends of ours and their children decided to give up sugar for Lent as a spiritual discipline. They were thinking about candy, cake, and cookies. Reading food labels, they discovered how much sugar is disguised in foods. Giving up a few sweets became a more complicated fast. They plowed through it, vowing to give up something else next time! Spiritual discipline is not intended to cause physical harm or emotional stress. Lenten disciplines interrupt my normal activities to remind me to keep putting things in proper order. Prayer, fasts, quietness, study, service, and focused Christian conversation all keep me closer to God. Have a blessed Lent.

Prayer: Dear God, guide my Lenten journey. Keep me steadfast in spiritual disciplines that lead me closer to you, to personal transformation, and to serving others in the world around me. AMEN.

~ Mike Eischen

March 3

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

~Matthew 5:9

One of the lessons which we often learn too late is that it is not only hard to keep the peace but far more difficult to bring peace where there is none. "Blessed are the peacemakers," said Jesus, "for they will be called children of God"

Have you discovered that it is far easier to make war than to make peace? Strange, isn't it? There is something about our nature which makes us want to assert our rights and authority, to stand up for what we think should be ours, whether it is the territory of another's nation or the toys that children share in a sandbox. Those who hold to "the spark of divinity" in every person need to take a look at children playing in a school yard. Their aggressive, sometimes hostile behavior makes me think that "the spark" came from the same one who tempted Eve in the Garden, rather than God whose basic nature is that of love and peace.

There are, however, those rare individuals who have the ability to bring hostile parties to the conference table, whether it be ministers of defense, employees who can't work together, or husbands and wives who sleep in the same bed but no longer love each other. Thank God for the peacemakers!

March 4

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.
Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*

~ John 14:27

Do you know the peace which passes all understanding (Phil.4:7)? In his farewell discourse Jesus grants peace as his gift to his disciples. What kind of peace does he offer? The peace of Christ is more than the absence of trouble. It includes everything which makes for our highest good. The world's approach to peace is avoidance of trouble and a refusal to face unpleasant things. Jesus offers the peace which conquers our fears and anxieties. Nothing can take us from the peace and joy of Jesus Christ. No sorrow or grief, no danger, no suffering can make it less.

Prayer: "Lord, may your peace be always with me. May no circumstance, trouble, or vexation rob me of the peace which passes all understanding. You, alone, O Lord, are my Peace. May I always reside in that peace by believing your word and by doing your will." AMEN.

~ Don Schwager, submitted by Carol Ann Osinski

March 5

*Deceit is in the mind of those who plan evil,
but those who counsel peace have joy.*

~Proverbs 12:20

These verses in the book of Proverbs clearly show us the pattern of deceit versus truth. Notice that the first half of verse 20 points out that in the heart of an evil person is deceit. Deceit is all too prevalent today in our society. Webster's Dictionary gives us the following definition of the word deceit: 1.The act of representing as true what is known to be false; a deceiving or lying; 2. a dishonest action or trick; fraud or lie. People who use deceit have a wicked heart and evil imaginings. There are many fraudulent schemes today that are robbing people of their money.

The last half of Proverbs 12:20 tells us that those who promote peace shall have joy. The Lord tells us in verse 9 of the *Beatitudes* listed in Matthew 5, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." We are blessed when we pursue peace and counsel others to walk in peace.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your love and goodness to me. You have been very patient and merciful to me. Lord, I need that same love and mercy towards others. I ask you to remove all deceit from my heart and cleanse me so that I might have a pure heart before you. Help us all to keep our word, when we give it to someone. Restore truth to our land. We desire truth to abide in our homes and our businesses. Lord, I also ask that you give me faith and an overcoming spirit so that I will not walk in fear. Help me to trust you, even when my circumstances cause me doubt at times. Deliver me from doubt and unbelief in every area of my life. AMEN.

March 6

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

~Ephesians 2:14

Jesus has rightly been called the Prince of Peace, for Christ is the propitiation for our sins bringing peace with God for all who believe in him. And through Christ, those who have trusted in him as Savior may have the peace of God, which transcends all human understanding guarding their heart and mind, for he has promised to keep in perfect peace those whose mind is stayed on him.

But there is another type of peace that was brought into the world through Christ . . . our perfect Prince of Peace, for by his death and resurrection he has broken down the middle wall of petition that estranged Jew from gentile—bringing godly reconciliation and uniting us together in the bond of peace and harmony—through Jesus Christ our Lord. For Christ himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.

Prayer: Thank you God that in Christ I have peace with you and have been made a new creation. Thank you for the perfect, transcendent peace of God which is able to guard my heart as I look to Jesus, the author and finisher of my faith. And thank you, Lord, that in your grace and loving-kindness you have broken down every barrier that divided Jew from gentile, male from female; young from old; black from white; slave from free. May we live together in perfect unity and grateful thanksgiving. AMEN.

March 7

Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace — in peace because they trust in you.

~Isaiah 26:3

Isaiah 26:3 is known as the perfect peace scripture. It gives us directions for finding that perfect peace that keeps you calm even when life's storms are swirling around you. The secret to finding this peace is keeping your mind on God. God will keep you in perfect peace when you keep your mind on God and trust God with everything in your life.

In Isaiah 26 we meet the prophet, Isaiah, rehearsing a song of trust in the provision of God. He is prophetically singing of how God will restore Israel, who will once again walk in righteousness and peace. After the coming judgement for their sin, a day will dawn when Israel will be redeemed and restored, and they will be at peace when their eyes are fixed on the Lord. This promise was given to Israel during a very dark period in Israel's history. God promises that we can have perfect peace, and even be kept in a place of perfect peace in Isaiah 26:3.

In the original Hebrew text, the term “perfect peace” is actually shalom shalom. This shows how in the Hebrew language repetition communicates intensity. It isn't just shalom; it is shalom shalom, “perfect peace.” It is as if God wasn't satisfied to give us one door of peace to walk through; God opened up the double doors of peace and said “shalom shalom.” If one assurance of peace is not enough for us, God will follow it with a second and then put on top of those two the promise to keep

us there.

Prayer: Thank you God that you long to pour out your sweet presence over me. Give me such a heart that yearns for your presence. Thank you for your supernatural peace that only you can bring into every one of life's situations, big or small. Help me to keep my mind stayed on you. Don't let me forget your promise of your, shalom shalom, your perfect peace all the time, in all circumstances. AMEN.

March 8

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

~ Philippians 4:6–7

It seems that I am the recipient of a family genetic trait. My mother and my two aunts belonged to a club that my cousins and I called the WWW Club – the Wagner Worry Warts. They shared so many traits, and were truly delightful; but their capacity to worry about everything was amazing. In fact, the joke line was that if there wasn't anything to worry about at a particular time, they would create something to worry about!

I seem to have been blessed with whatever genetic construct produces this trait. I decided years ago that I needed to try not join the WWW Club, and part of the time I succeed. The rest of the time I struggle. These verses have long been among scripture that I take to heart and treasure. When I am able to step back from a situation; and take that concern to God in prayer, it is then possible to let go of the gut-clenching worry and simply trust in God.

Reading the scripture again it seems that one key to seeking God's help is by praying with thanksgiving. We come to God with faith that God will answer the prayer. We ask for what is needed, but God may have a different solution. We need to express that thanksgiving part – being thankful for God's presence, love and support in all things; even if the results are not what we expected.

That peace that surpasses all understanding is very real and present. When we are able to let God take the control that we want to have, that peace comes into our lives. It is an amazing, precious gift bestowed by our loving God.

~ Judy Bush

March 9

*Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.*

Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.

The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.

Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

~ Psalm 85:8–13

Psalm 85 is set in the midst of a crisis. Israel has a history of moving from God's wrath to his grace and as the Israelites move from exile, they are again in turmoil, struggling to find peace. Verse 7 cries out: "Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation."

In verses 8-13, we see the transition and hope is renewed. Salvation is once again at hand. It is an eternal gift for the faithful, for those whose lives are focused on a relationship with God. God desires to bring this faith community to wholeness in life, that is, peace. All he asks in return is our abiding faith, in Him.

God has unrelenting love for his people which he has proven again and again. As we find ourselves once more in turmoil and chaos he is listening, waiting to renew our salvation, giving us peace.

Prayer: Dear Lord: Once again, your faithful find themselves in crisis and turmoil. The world is not how we would have it. Grant us your strength, love, and clarity of vision so we may find the courage and hope to restore peace to our world through your salvation. AMEN.

~ Diana Wallace

March 10

*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed
you were called in the one body. And be thankful.*

~ Colossians 3:15

There is a common saying "you cannot give what you don't have". This is very true in relationships, more so in families. If you always need someone else to validate you, it will be difficult for you to be there for other people. Similarly, if you lack peace within, you cannot give peace.

I believe everybody reading this will agree that peace in a family is essential. Unfortunately, some families are in constant disagreements, rancor and fights. From my experience talking to people, most times troubles in the family are usually caused when members lack peace. It may just be one member of the family that always create the trouble.

In Colossians we read, "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ...". If your family is going through disagreements, step back and think about how you may have contributed to the chaos. Is there anything you would have done differently, said differently? Do you have peace within you to give? If you think you may have contributed to the chaos, start by fixing your thoughts on the Lord

and depending on God to give you peace. Then, begin to live out the peace to people around you.

Prayer: I fix my thoughts on you, Lord, depending on you for peace. I pray for the ability to give peace to everybody around me. AMEN.

March 11

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear"
~ Genesis 28:20

Jacob was chosen by the Lord to be one of the great patriarchs of Israel but throughout his life, God had to teach Jacob many lessons before he could be changed from being a sinful man into the spiritual *prince with God* that he became. Jacob had to learn to trust God in every eventuality of life. He needed to believe that God was his provider, and that God would always fulfill his Word.

It was on his journey from Canaan to Haran that Jacob had a life-changing experience. He had a dream and behold a ladder, set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven, and Jacob saw the angels of God ascending and descending on it, and the Lord stood at the top of the ladder and said, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."


When Jacob awoke, he realized that God was in that place and he made a vow to the Lord saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear - then he will be my God."

Prayer: May we be ready and willing to learn the lessons the Lord desires to teach us. May we develop a teachable spirit and be ready to allow the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. May we have an understanding heart and a listening ear to hear all that the Spirit says to us through the Word of truth, and may we rejoice that no matter what difficulties we may encounter in life or what problems may come our way, God is transforming us, day by day, into the image and likeness of Jesus. AMEN.

March 12

*Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him,
"Please let me go back to my kindred in Egypt and see whether they are still living."
And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."*
~ Exodus 4:18

The Exodus passage is prelude to Moses leading the Israelites out of bondage. What drama! What going back and forth between Canaan and Egypt by the Hebrews in the Exodus story! What dialogue between God and Moses! God informs Moses that he needs to convince the enslaved Hebrews that they should follow Moses. Moses complains to God that he really is not the right man for the job. Read Exodus chapters 3 and 4 and hear God wanting to deliver the Hebrews from their misery and



sufferings. Fast forward from the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) to God sending Jesus in a time of Roman occupation and Israelite suffering and misery. There is no exodus or uprising against Rome here, but Jesus leads a new understanding of divisions between people. Paul says in Galatians 3:28 “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” This new vision speaks of one humanity, created by God. Christ has broken down the dividing walls to race, ethnicity, gender and economic class. Jesus adopted the tax collectors, Samaritans, Roman soldiers. and others to God’s family.

Prayer: O God of love and justice, just as you called Moses, let us answer “Here I am”. You call us to be your people. You give us the strength and power to do your will to welcome and seek justice for all. We pray that we may reflect your loving-kindness and be blessing to others. We pray for reconciliation, and that we may see all persons as equal in God’s kingdom. AMEN.

~ Marcia Eischen

March 13

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

~ Luke 2:8–11

That the angels appeared to shepherds isn’t just some bit of insignificant historical trivia. It’s important, because of who the shepherds were in those days. Like a lot of things in the Bible, we have kind of “romanticized” the shepherds, because we have heard about them all of our lives, and we associate them with Jesus’ birth. A lot of us think of them as those “sweet little painted characters” with classic looks, poised with a sheep sitting “just right” on their shoulders! We think it’s just not quite a real “manger scene” if we don’t have those perfect little shepherds in them.

The truth is, most of us would NOT want any of the shepherds from Bible times at our next Christmas party! They did not have a good reputation. They were considered to be “low life.” In fact, the *Talmud*, which contained the traditional Jewish interpretations of the Law, says that shepherds were not to be allowed to testify in the courts as witnesses. Their credibility was so bad, no one would believe them. In another place the *Talmud* goes so far as to state that “no help must be given to the heathen, or to shepherds.”

So shepherds were not the “deserving poor” in Jesus’ day; they were unwanted, untrusted, unacceptable. But God sent God’s angels with the announcement to the shepherds — the low-life, the outcasts. That says something about who Jesus came for. He didn’t come for the person who thinks they’ve got it all together. So if today if you know you’re like those shepherds, and you’re not all you should be; that’s okay. God is saying. If I saved these guys, that means I can save you too — whoever you are — if you will accept it! It gives hope for every one of us.

March 14

*If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father,
and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. . . .
Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as
the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*
~ John 14:15-16, 27

As a child my mother took my brother and me to Sunday worship. We sat on either side of her to keep us from picking on each other. The sermons were often about salvation through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus. I got that, but something was missing. As a teen I attended youth meetings with my friends. There the message focused on behavior that reflected my relationship with Jesus. I eventually realized one theme without the other was not a full understanding of scripture or of being a disciple.

In Chapter 14 Jesus exhorts his disciples to have faith that God is in him and his works. Then, he immediately calls them to love and to do good works. One cannot separate believing Jesus is the son of God from acts of love and good works that reflect that belief.

When people ask me about the resurrection, I usually point beyond the empty tomb to his post-resurrection appearances that empowered his disciples. It is the “Advocate” (vs 16), that strengthens me in my discipleship. I will fail, but when I do the Spirit is there to sustain me and turn me around. “Peace I leave with you” (vs 27), he said. I am blessed by that peace.

Prayer: God, thank you for the peace of Christ that sustains us when life is overwhelming. Your abiding presence gives us the strength to believe and do acts of mercy in Jesus’ name. AMEN.

~ Mike Eischen

March 15

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the
elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.*
~ 2 Peter 3:3, 10

The apocalyptic verse from Peter might inspire a vision of terror. I think a better version of the same notion is “prepare the way for the Lord” One pastor noted that God hasn’t changed through the ages but our ability to understand God has evolved through the centuries so that we can now appreciate that God is the source of Love. The Lenten season offers us the occasion to focus on living lives of discipleship, by word and example, so that our Christian witness is made visible, our concern is not for things but for people, our energies are not spent on acquisition but on service to others. Another pastor said regularly that God doesn’t have hands, He needs ours to do His work.

Prayer of St. Francis, abridged: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, where there is hatred let me bring love, where there is injury - pardon, where there is doubt - hope, where there is darkness - light, and where there is sadness - joy.

May our Christianity been visible to all we encounter through our joy. AMEN

~ Tom Murray

March 16

Hannah prayed and said,

"My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory." "There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God." "Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed." "The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength." "Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn." "The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts." "He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world." "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail." "The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed."

~ 1 Samuel 2:1–10

After being blessed by God, Hannah takes time to write a wonderful prayer to God. Notice that she doesn't focus on the gift that God gave, but rather on the giver. She recognizes that God is the giver of everything. This gives her cause to rejoice in all situations. Notice also that she focuses on the power of God to reverse our fortunes; to make the poor rich or the rich poor.

All too often we focus on our situation and ourselves as the source of happiness. Hannah finds peace in knowing that God is in control. This is a reflection of her own life, where God changed her life. Remember to recognize the gifts that God has given to you and that God is ultimately the only one to call on when we need our lives changed!

March 17

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

~ Isaiah 52:7

Imagine the Jewish community exiled in Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and leaving it in ruins. Imagine the Jewish community in Babylon seeing the messenger. Hear the words of peace. There is good news that the people may end their captivity and return to rebuild their holy city. God reigns!

Where in our communities are people's lives in ruins? Through addictions, poverty, losses, mental or physical illnesses people wait for a messenger with good news. The messenger brings news of deliverance and that it is time to return and to rebuild their lives with God.

Jesus the comforter and sustainer feeds us with the spiritual food that we may be those messengers. Prayer and worship realigns our daily lives to heal, to help, and to proclaim the Good News.

Prayer: Savior God, we pray that we will be messengers of peace and promise. We pray that we speak words not of judgment but do deeds of deliverance and justice. Deliver us from words of anger, arrogance, cruelty. Instead let us be lavish with words of love and kindness and the promise of God's saving grace. AMEN.

~ Marcia Eischen

March 18

Deceit is in the mind of those who plan evil, but those who counsel peace have joy.

~ Proverbs 12:20

Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil. Those who secretly devise mischief in their hearts against their neighbors; that plough evil, as the word signifies, and sow discord among men and women; and by many artful and deceitful methods promote contention and division, in order to answer some base designs of theirs; but sooner or later they are deceived themselves, are disappointed of their views, the consequence of which is vexation and sorrow; but to the counselors of peace is joy.

Those who consult the good of others, who advise peace, concord, and unity; who seek to cultivate it in their families and neighborhoods, and in the church of God, in which, if they succeed, they have joy and pleasure; if not, they have a satisfaction, in their own minds and consciences that they have done what is right and good; such have a conscience of peace now.

March 19

"He (Jacob) called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this

way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear,

so that I Come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God."

~ Genesis 28:19-21

As I often do, I am sitting in the upstairs library. This is my prayer space and God is present to me. I am usually here about the same time every morning. Today is very cold, and snow is shining white in the sun. Still too cold for melting warmth.

Where I sit in my chair, sunlight strikes me with a fierce light. Sitting still, breathing slowly, forcing "babble talk" from my mind, I am calm, thankful in His Presence as a child of Christ.

Other times I don't feel God's Presence as strongly. On these "grey" days, even with the bright light, I know I am not seeking Him, but always God seeks me.

A few verses before today's reading in Genesis, while Jacob is sleeping he dreams of angels ascending and descending a ladder to heaven, then God speaks to him "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants....Behold I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back

to this land....”

Upon awakening, Jacob recognizes the Lord is in this place. Taking the stone, he used under his head, he sets it up as a pillar, marking the spot.

WOW! Isn't Jacob lucky! God appears to him in a special spot – where he slept no less! Or what about Moses? God sent him a burning bush!!! Do we seek dreams of angels climbing ladders; or burning shrubbery to find God's Presence in our daily lives? Where do we look? God's PRESENCE surrounds us everywhere. Are we PRESENT to know and respond? Can we open our hearts?

Perhaps you may wish to do as me. Find a spot, a place, and be still. Awaken your senses and wait. God is there.

~ In prayer,
Kathy Blankenburg

March 20

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.
~ Psalm 4:8

It is difficult for me to sleep when I am stressed. I keep thinking or worrying about things that, for the most part, are out of my control. Every day we are faced with stressors. The bible calls them cares of the world. We worry about family, Covid, our church, the chaos in the news. When we take our worries to bed, we toss and turn. We are deprived of a good night's sleep.

We can take those stressors to the Lord. As the popular saying goes, “Let go and let God”. We can spend time seeking the Lord's comfort and wisdom for those situations. When it is time to go to sleep we can sleep in peace knowing that we have a special Someone who is working things out on our behalf.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for your ever presence and protection. Tonight as I lie down to sleep, I will place all my worries into your loving care, knowing that with you, Lord, I am always safe. AMEN.

~ Carol Ann Osinski

March 21

*Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike.
Let all be fully convinced in their own minds.*

~Romans 14:5

So often we let personal preference, peer pressure, and concerns about the celebration of certain days, especially holidays, have a divisive effect on our Christian relationships. Bottom line, we're not to try to press our opinion or position on anyone else. We're not to judge another because he doesn't celebrate a special day to the Lord and we're not to judge another because she does celebrate special days. This is a matter of personal conviction that revolves around our desire to please the Lord and to honor God in ways we feel are appropriate. Let's not be so insecure that we have to do what everyone else does or force anyone else to do as we prefer. Instead, let's remember the right angle to take with all things: honor God with everything we are and to consider the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Prayer: God, please forgive us for fracturing the fellowship of your people based on human observances and our preference about those observances. As for me, please give me courage to honor Christ according to my convictions, but also please give me the wisdom to do so in ways that bless your people and that do not cause division. I know I will never fully succeed at this goal, but I do believe with your help, I will find ways to bring you the glory due you and to also maintain my fellowship with your children. Purify my heart in this matter and guide me in the way I need to go. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

March 22

*But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you,
and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them
very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.*

~ 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

Among Paul's final exhortations to the Thessalonika church is this little, and yet significant reminder about the importance of those who devote their lives to the care and feeding of Christ's flock. I ask that you spend a few minutes considering these words, especially if you are a Christian.

First, I want to point out an assumption Paul makes here: these Christians in Thessalonika have people in their midst that pastor them. Church leadership is not an option in the New Testament. It is the assumed norm that every church has people that are appointed to preach the Scriptures and tend to the spiritual, emotional, and sometimes physical needs of the church. Furthermore, every Christian ought to be able to point to someone, or a body of people, to whom they are accountable for their spiritual lives.

Paul mentions three ways in which the church leadership operate in the lives of the church. First, they labor. Pastoral labor involves discipleship, visitation, and any number of other means necessary for the spiritual health of God's people. Second, they care for God's people; that is, they are devoted to and deeply concerned for each person in their charge. Pastors pour themselves out for their people

daily. Finally, Paul mentions the fact that pastors are responsible for instructing God's people.

So, pray for your church leadership. Honor them as Christ's under-shepherds devoted to your spiritual well-being. AMEN.

March 23

*By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

~ Luke 1:78–79

It was on my first day in seminary when a preacher said, "We spend so much time talking about Jesus that we forget to talk to Jesus." It was a convicting truth that would come to fruition over the following months and I knew I needed to do something about it. Days would pass and, though I had been deep in scripture for particular class, I realized that I had not taken the time to pray to the Lord who was being revealed to me in the scripture. It was at that point when I committed to attend Morning Prayer in Goodson Chapel with all of the Anglicans and Episcopalians.

I was one of the token Methodists with a few of my denominational colleagues and we tried to keep up with our peers as they bowed their heads at particular times during the liturgy, as they made the sign of the cross across their bodies, and as they drank from a common cup when we had communion. It was difficult to assimilate during those first few weeks; many of the people in attendance did not even need to look at a Book of Common Prayer to say all of the right words at the right time. However, after a few months passed, I started to realize that I no longer needed to look at the book because the words and habits of Morning Prayer had sunk deep into my soul.

I don't remember when it happened, but one morning while we were proclaiming the words from "The Song of Zechariah" (Benedictus Dominus Deus) the young man next to me changed some of the words. Instead of speaking in the plural, he spoke individually: "By the tender mercy of my God, the dawn from on high will break upon me, to give light to me as I sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide my feet into the way of peace." His willingness to proclaim God's faithful words for himself, has stuck with me ever since.

This week, let us take time to proclaim the words from The Song of Zechariah personally. Whether in the morning when we wake up, or at night before we fall asleep, or whenever we feel called to during the day, let us proclaim: "By the tender mercy of my God, the dawn from on high will break upon me, to give light to me as I sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide my feet into the way of peace."

~ Taylor Mertins

March 24

Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed. [NIV]

~ Proverbs 3:13–18

How splendid that a poem saying silver, gold and rubies can't compare to understanding is, in and of itself, a pearl of wisdom. Not glittery or gleaming, but large and lustrous in counsel. As God's people, we aren't to chase things that the world deems precious but seek biblical wisdom instead.

Wisdom is God's gift to us, unwrapped when we pray, study God's word and walk with Christ. That walk—the Servant's walk which we sometimes avoid, fearing it too long and arduous—that's the path to peace. Silver, gold and rubies may shine and tempt us along the way, but our eyes gaze upon the promised tree of life.

Prayer: Dear God, help me walk with Jesus today, serving without temptation, complaint or distraction. Keep me humble in heart and wise in my thoughts and encounters. AMEN.

~ Carol Heil

March 25

And now, O Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you.

~ Psalm 39:7

When we read the Psalms, we read prayers to God. Some are prayers of praise and thanksgiving. Some are full of darkness, despair, and pleas for deliverance from present ordeals and conditions, and destructive relationships. They reflect both the individual and the community.

Psalm 39 expresses the transiency of human life and is full of complaints to God since “good behavior” seems not to have been rewarded. So, the Psalmist is asking “what do I wait for? My hope is in you.”

The concept of hope reflects the Hebrew verbs to wait, to expect, to be full of confidence, or to trust. The scriptures tell us that God is faithful and full of steadfast love, and that “loving kindness” will be the refuge of the poor and the righteous. I think about people who reflect “hope” in their speech and actions. I think about worship where “hope” is presented in song and speech. Do you associate “hope” in God's kingdom with wealth and power - or with those risking safety and the familiar?

Pauli Murray was named in 2012 by the Episcopal Church as one of its Holy Women/Men. In 2018 the Church added her to its permanent calendar of saints. July 1st is her saint day. In 1977 she was the first African American woman and among the first women to be ordained in the Episcopal Church. She was a lawyer before she was a priest, and was recognized by Ruth Bader Ginsberg as

co-author of Reed vs. Reed where she compared sex discrimination with racial discrimination. In the Clearing class where we read and discussed her book, Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family, we pondered her life and work and how she went forward in life in spite of enormous difficulties. Where was her hope? It seems appropriate to end with a prayer written by this incredible woman lawyer, writer, priest, worker for social justice, poet, American, and saint.

Give me a song of hope—
And a world where I can sing it.
Give me a song of faith—
And a people to believe it.
Give me a song of kindness—
And a country where I can live it.

~ Marcia Eischen

March 26

*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

~ John 15:12–13

This section begins and ends with the command of Jesus: “I command you to love one another”. The fact that this is put in the imperative mode means it is not an option in our life. It is not something we do if we feel like it. It is to be a deliberate response to another person whom we know to be in the family of God, regardless of how we feel toward that person.

Many people struggle at this point. They say, How can you command love? Love is a feeling, and if you don't love somebody, you can't help it. Love is our master; we do not master it. Those who say these things reveal that they have a very serious misconception of love. Unfortunately, we are victims of Hollywood in this respect. We think of love as a feeling we have of affection toward another.

But love, as Jesus speaks of it here, is far different. We can be sure of one thing: He would never command us to do what is impossible for us to do. The secret, of course, is that we are to love, he says, “as I have loved you”. This kind of love is to arise out of the same kind of relationship that he has with God that made it possible for him to love us. In this same manner, and from the same source, we are to love one another with the same quality of love. He loved us because God is love, and he was indwelt by God. He was in the Father, and the Father in him. As he yielded to that relationship, love flowed out. It could not help it--God is love. Since God is love, as we yield to that relationship to the Son, love flows from us. And it will have the qualities that his love has. He goes on to define for us the aspects of love that mark the quality of his love for us, which we also are to show to one another.

Prayer: Heavenly God, thank you for the greatest of all examples of love, that Christ demonstrated towards me, in that while I was still a sinner he died for me and has called me to be a member of his Church and to love others as he has loved me. May I love others in his strength and power, to your praise and glory AMEN.

March 27

“In hope, we already have salvation; in hope, not visibly present, or we should not be hoping—nobody goes on hoping for something which he can already see. But having this hope for what we cannot yet see, we are able to wait for it with persevering confidence” (New Jerusalem Bible).

~ Romans 8:24–25

How hard hope seems in these deeply troubled and challenging times! The deep divisions in our country and around the world, climate change’s accelerating disasters, a pandemic that appears to abate but then recurs with a cruel new ferocity, the expansion of autocracy...all of these and other crises combine with our own personal difficulties to conspire against hope.

And yet Paul tells us that it is exactly in these times when we are privileged to hope! We can’t see the promised new creation that awaits beyond our present circumstances. We can’t see our salvation. If we could, if we could declare with certainty that on some date certain all will be well, then that would not be hope.

Rather we hope for what we cannot yet see. We hope because we know God is sovereign, and he loves us and his whole creation. We hope because we believe what Jeremiah prophesied: “I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord, “plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you hope and a future” (Jer. 29:11).

Hope is not mere optimism. Hope is much deeper and rooted in faith. Hope is ever present for us to draw on, “flowing like a river,” in the words of the spiritual. Hope is a gift from God.

And thus we wait and work for what we hope for — peace, justice, healing, mercy — with persevering confidence, a confidence that does not fail, that presses on in the face of evidence to the contrary and the temptation to despair. I thank God for the hope he gives us.

Prayer: Father of mercies, Lord of hope: thank you for your hope that flows like a river, setting us free from fear, doubt and despair. Hold us up in hope; help us in everything we do to reach for your hand and follow where you lead. In Jesus’ name, AMEN.

~ Betsy Rogers

March 28

*The Lord is my Light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?
The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?*
~ Psalm 27: 1

*One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.*
~ Psalm 27: 4

David was in the wilderness seeking refuge from his enemies even though all he wanted to do in his life was to make his relationship with God his first priority. He wanted to spend each day in worship and his heart longed only for the beauty he felt when he was in prayer and he dwelled in the Light of the presence of the Lord.

During these days, we have a great deal in common with David. We long to escape the trials and tribulations of the world. We long to leave behind the media hype, the politics, the awareness that others are suffering with so many dire conditions of poverty, the environment and the virus. Opening the door on Sunday morning to walk into the haven of the presence of the Lord where we can worship with those who feel the same pain as each of us does, brings us solace for a short period of time. Just as David longed to do, we want to wrap ourselves in the house of the Lord. Through prayer, meditation and the realization of the continued presence of the Lord, we can carry that beauty with us into the wilderness of the world just as David did. The first verse of the Psalm can be repeated continually:

*The Lord is my Light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?
The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid? AMEN.*

~ Lori Holton

March 29

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

~ Revelation 21:1-5

These words have long fascinated and confused me – who is seated on the throne? Who or what is speaking here? Is it God or an angel? I went to my New Oxford Annotated study Bible for some answers. It was not very helpful! Those editors remind us that Isaiah spoke of a new heaven and a new earth. They also state that it is indeed God speaking, so that perhaps clears up one question. As I thought about all of the symbolism and confusing language, I decided that it was beyond me to understand or try to explain what is being pictured here. It is the beautiful promises here that matter. They give us hope for the future in a new afterlife.

On one level, I look at the mess this world is in right now. There seem to be many signs of the end times, of the second coming – wild fires, wars, rumors of wars, pandemics, floods and bad storms are only a few. However, these are global issues that we are concerned about; but don't affect us on a personal level unless we have been impacted by one of those terrors. The impact of this scripture for all of us is on a more personal level. We will live with God, and we will be God's people for all time. There will be no more pain, death, mourning or crying. Shortly after George died, I told Mother Barb that I wanted George back, not as he had been with so much suffering, but as he had been whole and healthy. He reply to me was, "But he will be now." That is indeed a new heaven and a new earth – how we all long for those blessings given to us by God's grace.

~ Judy Bush

March 30

Trust in the LORD forever, for in the Lord GOD you have an everlasting rock.

~ Isaiah 26:4

Our lives are filled with moments of doubt. Not a single one of us can say that we have never thought that God has abandoned us. Our faith is so very weak.

We often look at our circumstances and become completely overwhelmed by how difficult things can be. Perhaps you are struggling right now with a difficult relationship, finances, problems at work or your health, COVID, or politics. Maybe all of the above!

When we see mountains we feel small, knowing not only how much larger it is than we are, but also how much longer it has been here than we have been. But the Lord was long before any mountain and will be long after it has melted into nothing. He is the only rock of security and stability. All the forevers we have are found in him.

Prayer: Eternal I Am, who is and was and will be forever, I trust that you are and will always be my God, my Redeemer, my Savior, my Shepherd, and my Father. I commit all my tomorrows to you. In the name of Jesus, my Lord, I pray. AMEN.

March 31

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

~ 1 Peter 1:3b-4

God is worthy of our worship. The apostle Peter begins where we all must begin. He so wonderfully expresses a doxology of praise and worship to God. The word doxology comes from the Greek word doxa (doe-xa), which describes the splendor, the glory, the majesty, and the greatness of our God. Doxa, combined with the Greek word logos (low-gose), which means “word” or “speaking,” brings us to our verbal, spoken, or sung, praise, worship, and adoration of God.

We must begin here. We must begin our focus on God, the God of the Bible, Creator of everything, all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present. The truths that provoke our adoration of God here in 1st Peter are, God’s mercy. What a beautiful truth that God didn’t have to save, but wanted to save us. The fact that we have a precious eternal hope, a living hope, and that our inheritance is immeasurable. God alone is worthy of our worship and it will take all of eternity realizing that.

Set your hearts to the worthiness of worship that God alone desires and deserves. Do you only worship God on Sundays? Fill your everyday experiences with the everyday worship of our gracious, wonderful Lord and discover the joy that will fill our hearts and lives, no matter the valleys that may come and go.



April 1

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

~ 2 Corinthians 5:17–18

One of my favorite past times involves watching home renovation shows. There is something magical about the transformation of a tired old room into a cozy place of rest. From decrepit and broken to new and restored. From hideous and unsightly to beautiful and welcoming. From useless to useful.

Having lived through many a renovation project, I can assure you there is nothing magical about the process itself! Mary and I have renovated three different homes. It can be tedious and tiresome. Many evenings are spent tearing down old walls, pulling out nails, getting dirty, tired, and sometimes, frustrated. But the result is always a home that is beautiful, refreshing, functional, and welcoming.

Why is it human nature receives so much satisfaction in viewing the process of transformation? We delight in watching this progression over and over again as is evidenced by the popularity of renovating shows on HGTV and similar channels. We simply can't get enough of seeing what was once old and ugly being renewed into something our minds had not conceived.

Perhaps we are drawn to this process because it reflects the very work that God longs to do in each of our hearts and lives. When we live as Jesus would have us live, we exchange our old life for a new one. We exchange sin for forgiveness, pride for humility, legalism for grace, fear for love, weakness for strength, and anger for joy.

Just as a home renovation takes time, our transformation is slow and steady. Day by day, God strips us of the old habits and old thoughts that keep us blind and replaces it with truth. Though the echoes of our old life will come calling, they have no power over us. Sometimes, we fear that we haven't changed at all, but rest assured, if you are walking obediently in God's Word, you are not the same person you used to be!

Transformation does not come easily. Though God does the work, we are called to surrender every area of our life and live in obedience to God. Such transformation takes time . . . but, thank God, our God is a patient God.

~ Frank Maxwell

April 2

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

~ Matthew 18:21–22

We, as Christians, approach those who have sinned against us with the sentiment of grace deeply ingrained in our hearts. We forgive others because we ourselves have been forgiven.

Forgiveness is the releasing of our wrath and condemnation in favor of these things. Forgiveness means: praying for those who have evil intentions for you; abounding in love that is only possible when you really are abiding in Christ; never avenging yourself, but leaving it to God's capable hand; doing good to those who never do good to you; watching your own life, and ensuring you're not guilty of the sin that's been committed against you.

Forgiveness does not mean: Feeling good about something bad that happened to you; letting someone out of the consequences of their wrong; never being disciplined by a loving Father.

While Scripture is full of stories, parables, and words about forgiveness, the heart of the matter is that it will not always be easy to forgive.

People do horrible things to one another, and sometimes genuine forgiveness isn't going to bring about the restoration of a relationship. This is especially so if the person in the wrong is unrepentant and unwilling to change.

So, while it may be difficult to immediately forgive, we need to spend time dwelling on the fact that no matter what has been committed against us, it has been committed against God a thousand times over.

This is yet another reason why genuine biblical community is so crucial to living a Christ-centered life, because we need help remembering who God is, and in turn, who that makes those of us who are his.


April 3

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

~ Amos 5:24

Such a wonderful image the prophet Amos gives us! But prior to verse 24 the prophet confronts the people of Israel with their social injustice and religious arrogance, and that they are held accountable for their transgressions:

They have not kept the LORD's statutes
They sell the righteous for silver
They trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth
They push the afflicted out of the way



They are sexually promiscuous
They store up violence and robbery in their strongholds
They oppress the poor and crush the needy
They abhor the one who speaks the truth
They take a bribe and push aside the needy
The list goes on. . .

But Amos counters the accusations with the words of the will of the Lord in 5:15. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate. Justice is required by God for the poor and oppressed. The demand for justice is so central that other responses to God are empty or diminished if they are without it. Amos rejects the burnt offerings and calls the people's worship empty and despised.

Prayer: Holy God, give us the visions of the flowing waters of justice. Those waters flow and nourish your kingdom. Help us to live as Easter People proclaiming your goodness in word and deed. AMEN.

~ Marcia Eischen

April 4

Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor.

~ Proverbs 21:21

Though this proverb was written before Jesus, it still holds some wisdom. "Righteousness and love" here is similar to what Jesus talks about when he says that we should love one another. So, when we pursue love and strive to live an upright life that considers others first, we find life. However, this is not from ourselves. We can only find life when we do these things in Jesus's name because he is the true life.

Let's be clear on a part of this verse that may have grabbed your interest. The proverb writer writes that you'll find "prosperity" and "honor" when you pursue righteousness and love. There is typically no financial gain in loving others. In fact, in today's world, you may miss out on financial gain and honor by living an upright life. It should go without saying that if you're loving others or pursuing righteousness in order to gain prosperity, your motives are most likely misplaced.

Don't allow this verse to cause you to follow a prosperity gospel. Instead, apply this verse how it's meant to be applied. Don't seek out the gains you get from loving others, but rather, seek out love and righteousness itself. Jesus showed us the way in this, so I encourage you to follow his example by sacrificially serving others.

Prayer: Father, thank you for providing a way to acquire a full life through your son, Jesus. Help me to stay focused on that truth and not be distracted by the things that try to take my attention off of you. Give me the strength to love and live in an upright way no matter what the world around me says. It's in Jesus's name I pray, AMEN.

April 5

When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them. Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why.

Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to

Esther, explain it to her, and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people.

Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law — all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days. When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.

~ Esther 4:4–16

The story of Esther is a great story. A woman perfectly placed in a bizarre situation who saves an entire nation through her courage and conviction.

She had to be absolutely petrified with fear. She knew she had to approach the king. Without his invitation, she knew that entering his presence could mean a death sentence for her.

What does she do? She asks for the help of all the Jews. She requests that all the Jews in Susa fast and pray for three days. Then, she plans.

Sometimes things in our lives may feel like life or death. Maybe they are actually life or death in yours. When life gets completely overwhelming or there is a huge scary risk that we know we should take, when fear is knocking at our door, we should take a page out of Esther's book.

The trick for overcoming fear is taking action. Part of that action is to fast and pray to seek the Lord's direction. Plan to do something – then DO IT before you can chicken out.

Rayer: Dear God, thank You for inspiring characters in the Bible that we can learn from. It is awesome to see people of faith, men and women, who follow You and make a real difference in the lives of others. Help us to follow their example. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

April 6

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to
the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.*

~ Luke 4:18

Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit when he entered the wilderness. After testing by the devil, he returned to Galilee still filled with the power Spirit's power. That's what we want. We want to face our times of testing filled with the Spirit of God so we move through difficult days prepared to be a faithful disciple in whatever tasks God gives us. For Jesus it was a visit to the synagogue in his hometown. Imagine the conversations. "Look, it's Joseph's son. We've known him since he was a kid. He's become quite a young man, and he speaks so well." He could have sat down and soaked up the praise. But the Spirit strengthened him for God's agenda: good news to the poor, pardon for prisoners, sight for the blind, and setting free the burdened. He gets to the point. He opens their eyes to their blind provincialism, and tries to set them free from their racism by reminding them that God's love extends beyond them. God sent Elijah to an immigrant widow not of Israel, and of all the lepers in Israel Elisha only cleaned Naaman the foreigner. They ran him out of town.

Prayer: God, whatever you ask of us today may we cling to the Spirit for strength to be faithful to the task. AMEN.

~ Mike Eischen

April 7

*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? [ESV]*

~ Micah 6:8

This beloved Bible verse appears in many forms and places - on t-shirts, wall hangings, jewelry, coffee mugs. Surely, we feel inspired when we hang "Justice," "Kindness" (or "Mercy") and "Humility" on our walls. We feel awakened sipping coffee from a mug painted with flowery script:

Justice ✚ Kindness ✚ Humility

The words are beautiful, melodic to the ear and filled to the brim with meaning. We know perfect understanding resides with God, but with warm, decorative mug in hand, we're inspired to meet a new day. Is it enough, to be inspired? Micah 6:8 reveals more. We're to do justice, love kindness, walk with God. Very different words. Sharp, single-syllable, active verbs. We're called to get doing, to correct societal wrongs. To get loving (and living!) kindness and mercy for all of God's creation. To walk and serve humbly, without fanfare or ego. Practicing what we believe - indeed, what God requires of us - grows our understanding of true justice, kindness and humility. What a blessed command we find in Micah 6:8!

Prayer: Lord, forgive me when I favor words over action. Open my eyes to need and injustice. Move my hands and feet to merciful service. And keep my heart humble. AMEN.

~ Carol Heil

April 8

Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

~ 2 Peter 3:11–13

As the apostle Peter neared the end of his life he taught about the coming day of the Lord and warned the little flock of Christ that in the last days mocking men would ridicule the truth of Christ's return demonstrating their ignorance of the God's Word and their foolish assumptions that things are going to continue on ad-infinity. God stepped into the pages of history many times to pronounce his judgement on a Christ rejecting sinful world – following an extended period of grace. ... at creation, the flood, the tower of Babel... and also at the Cross.

Peter's warning counsels us to hold the things of this world lightly, since all these things are to be destroyed in this way – i.e. via a day of judgment and the destruction of the ungodly. Peter warns us as to what sort of people we should be—holy in conduct and godliness.

Peter exhorts us to purity and holiness—to holy behavior and godly conduct. Our labor should not be in perfecting the things of this world which will one day all be destroyed but perfecting our relationship with God—to know God more clearly—to love God more dearly and to follow God day by day.

Prayer: Loving Father, thank you that there is now no condemnation for me for I am in Christ. Help me to hold onto the things of this world lightly and to draw ever closer to you, day by day, in Jesus name I pray, AMEN.

April 9

*Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you,
but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.*

~ 1 Corinthians 1:10

Along the western coast of Ireland, fishermen use a round bottomed keel-less craft known as a currach. This boat has a tarred canvas over a wooden frame. Because of its unique construction, it is vulnerable to sharp rocks or floating objects, and it requires the oarsmen to cooperate completely, rowing in perfect unison.

Out of this need for unity has come the Irish expression, “You will have to pull with the crew” Or, as another Irish proverb states, “There is not strength without unity”.

What is true for Irish fishermen is especially true for believers in Jesus Christ. Unity is so important to the success of the cause of Christ that Paul pleaded with the believers in Corinth to eliminate division and to work as one. In our ministry efforts, are we striving to work together in harmony? If not, let's ask God to give us the spirit of unity so that we will always “pull with the crew”. A church with one heart and one mind is a wonderful church.

Prayer: God, help me to remain focused on you and your sacrifice for your people. May I not be distracted by the less important issues but call others to oneness as a community of faith. AMEN.

April 10

Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

~ Isaiah 1:17

Isaiah is speaking to those who hold or wield authority and power, admonishing them to correct their behavior. He directs them to care for those of lesser rank and do justice by them; to put aside their own desires for the good of all.

He wants those in power to change their behaviors from greed, avarice, and self-interest to the practice of justice for all. Isaiah is asking that they make a habit of justice, siding always with God's intent.

Prayer: Dear Lord: Guide us all in the direction of benevolence, showing favor to those who cannot defend themselves, but must rely on us for equality and protection. Let God's wisdom and love flow over and into our leaders so they seek and act upon God's will for all of his people. AMEN.

~ Diana Wallace

April 11

If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

~ Romans 12:18

As far as it depends on us, we are to live at peace with everyone. How is that going for you? Are you making every effort to create peace in all of your relationships? Here is the harder question: are you doing so even when the other side doesn't put in the same effort? That is what Paul is calling us to. We are called to do everything that we can, on our side, to live peaceably with all.

Let's make this short writing very practical. Think about that person or persons in your life that you have struggled to have peace with. Now, think only about your own efforts in that relationship(s). Have you done all that you can to be at peace with them, or have you been too focused on the little effort that they have made? Our solution, the way to be obedient to Romans 12:18, is to solely look at our side of the equation. It does not matter how they act or treat us. We are only responsible for our side. What matters is that we try to live at peace with them, as far as it depends on us!

Paul started the verse with, "*If possible.*" We realize, and so did Paul, that some relationships have circumstances that prevent peace. However, Paul also wants to point out that some relationships seem too far gone in our minds, but can certainly still breed peace. So, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. You go and make the effort, even if they don't. Your attempt at peace may spark them to do the same. Just like we talked about yesterday, it would be an honorable witnessing example! How amazing is that?

April 12


So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

~ Matthew 5:23-24

"I want you to write down the name of someone who is currently driving you crazy." That's how I chose to begin a sermon more than a year ago. Each bulletin had a blank piece of paper inside, and after writing down the name I asked everyone to crumple it up and hold it in their hands until the end of the sermon.

The sermon was focused on Isaiah 6.1-8 and I talked about how Christians, for centuries, have been called by God to confront conflict. I said that to be faithful is to meet the outcasts where they are and show them love, that to be a disciple means a willingness to forgive people when they have done something wrong, and that to follow Jesus means having the courage to ask for forgiveness when we have done something wrong.

I concluded the sermon by asking everyone to look at the names crumpled up in their hands, and seriously consider making the first move to confront the conflict with that person. I warned everyone that it might not go well, and that it might blow up in our faces, but that the longer the conflict remains, the harder it would be to hear the living God speaking in our lives.



Like a lot of sermons, I preached it and hoped the people of St. John's took the challenge seriously. Over the next few months I occasionally heard about what happened when certain individuals confronted the conflict in their lives, but a few people told me that it was too hard and they were too afraid to face the person whose name they wrote at the beginning of the sermon.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, takes the art of reconciliation very seriously: Before you bring a gift to the altar (before you place your tithe in the offering plate during worship) you need to leave; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come back to offer your gift.

I've often thought about what this would look like in the middle of a worship service: How would people respond if we told them to leave the church right then and there to be reconciled with the people they are quarreling with before giving their gifts to the church? Would any of them come back the next Sunday? Would anyone walk straight up to me because I'm the person they're frustrated with?

It is easy to show up to church every week as if we have everything in our lives figured out and squared away, when the truth is that we are quarreling with people in our lives and that we don't have everything figured out. Church, however, is the place where we learn what it means to be broken, and how God is working through us to put the pieces back together.

So, if we took Jesus' words seriously, who would we need to reconcile with before we show up to church next Sunday?

~ Taylor Mertins

April 13

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

~ John 13:1–11

The washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus has taken on various kinds of meanings in popular literature and in the common imagination. But what does it mean? What was it originally intended to convey?

The first thing to notice is that nowhere does Jesus institute this practice as a regular and repeatable sacrament. When Jesus instituted the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, he told his disciples to do this as often as they ate it in remembrance of him. But there is no such instruction about the washing of feet. So while there is certainly nothing intrinsically wrong with performing such an action among Christians, there is no need to insist upon it as a common practice, and should not be imbued with special sacramental force.

What then does this action mean? John, the author of the Gospel, specifically tells us. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (13:1). This deed, then, is intended to show the full extent of Christ's love. It is intended to be an illustration, a visual aid, of the meaning of the cross and of Jesus' love. They did not understand at the time what Jesus was doing, but "afterward you will understand" (13:7). In the light of the cross, we can see that the washing of the feet of the disciples is indicative of the character of Christ: his compassionate love, his service, grace, his sacrificial mercy. He took up a towel, and washed their feet—dirty, grimy, soiled from the animal waste of an ancient street. He washed those feet.

Such is his love—perfectly revealed and finally fulfilled in his redeeming death for unwashed, dirty, foul, sinners like us. Perhaps this morning you feel unloved. You think no one could love you for what you have done—certainly not a holy God. You are too dirty to be loved.

Think again: in this illustration of Jesus' love, we see him loving us by serving us, even to the extent of washing the dirty feet of his disciples. It was their clean feet that meant he washed their feet! The fact that they were dirty meant that they needed their feet to be washed. So it is with us: our sins stink to high heaven, but heaven comes low to clean us and make us pure.

April 14

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

~ John 13:34–35

Jesus spoke these words after he had finished washing the disciples' feet. Firstly, he made it quite clear that our loving one another was not a suggestion, but a "new commandment" to men and women from God. This love we are to have for one another is not optional, but a required mark of the Christian.

Secondly, this love is to be of the same quality as Christ's. He implied that we would judge the quality of our love by his, "just as I have loved you". This sentiment should be deeply rooted in every Christian. We don't judge our spirituality by comparing ourselves with others, but with Christ. When we do this there is only one possible response: repentance and humility.

Thirdly, Jesus gave the world the authority to judge our Christianity by the love we have for one another. Regarding this verse Francis Schaeffer aptly commented, "Upon His authority He gives the world the right to judge whether you and I are born-again Christians on the basis of our observable love toward all Christians. That's pretty frightening." This is a high calling, but it will be to the world's good and our joy to pursue it in Christian community.

April 15

For if while we were enemies we were Reconciled to God by the death of His Son, Much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be Saved by His Life.

~ Romans 5:10

We all know the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the serpent, and the apple. A perfect storm of Eve's weakness, the serpent's deception, and Adam not willing to "man up" to Eve and the temptation. From that moment we were all in a state of sin. We were cursed.

Do any of us really believe this is what God wanted for His children living in His Creation. All God wants for us is joy; but we are so good turning away from what is hard to what is easy; and what is right to what is wrong.

God's love for His children, doomed to living in sinful darkness, is why He sent His own Son to save us. Jesus who preached forgiveness and love for the unwanted, Himself was shunned and despised, condemned to crucifixion.

What does it mean that "while we were enemies (sinners) we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son?" Read further in Romans.

Romans 6:9-11 Paul writes "For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. The death He died He died to sin, once for all, but

the life He lives He lives to God. So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

After this we are told (in so many words) “SO DON’T MESS UP!” You are dead to sin! Its up to each and every one of us how we live the life we have been given.

We are never left alone in darkness unless we choose it. We live in the existence of God’s creation, God said “Let there be light and there was light.” Each one of us is given an opportunity to transform our lives as we are illumined by the Word and Sacraments. God beckons us to absorb the Light that is His Son, Jesus Christ, reflecting it radiantly outward through our actions, words, and deeds.

~ In prayer,
Kathy Blankenburg

April 16

To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.
~ Proverbs 21:3

“What does the Lord require
for praise and offering?
What sacrifice desire,
or tribute bid you bring?
Do justly; love mercy;
walk humbly with your God.”

Words to this familiar hymn, based upon Scripture verse Micah 6.8 come to mind when one reads the devotional verse for Holy Saturday. As we complete the weeks of Lent and look forward to the festival and celebration of Easter, what have we given up during these 40 days. What has been our custom to help us focus and contemplate the meaning of sacrifice? Did we give up candy, a favorite food or television program? Maybe we thought that for the past two years we were sacrificing a great deal due to world conditions and it was not by personal choice. But God did not ask us to make sacrifices. He requires us to “do justly; love mercy and walk humbly” as we live in service to others. This is a lifetime requirement and not just for 40 days each year.

"Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."
Psalm. 100:4-5

Prayer: Let our lives be a living Psalm where we follow what He requires: to live justly; love mercy; and walk humbly with our God. AMEN.

~ Lori Holton

April 17

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

~ Luke 24:1-12

It is Easter morning, and the women who followed Jesus have gone to the tomb to tend his body. Finding the stone rolled away, they go inside, where two men in dazzling clothes appear and ask them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

Don't we all look for the living among the dead? Don't we look for life in material possessions, in power and prestige, in striving and competition, in mindless entertainment? But we will not find the living among these emblems of death.

What would it mean to look for the living...among the living? Among our families and friends, our neighbors and fellow-parishioners, our coworkers and all the throngs of people who help us in countless and often unacknowledged ways all through each day? In the needs of others that we can help meet? In the incredible life bursting forth in all creation?

It is here that we will find the living... the life that God promises us in abundance. Here, in the joy of relationships, in the faces of those we love, in the connections we can make with others, in the gladness of adding our helping hands to the work of the Kingdom, in the wonder we experience in the natural world, here we will find the living. Here we will find Christ himself, who rose from that long-ago grave and meets us moment by moment, day by day, if we will simply open our eyes and our ears and our hearts to his presence.

Prayer: Ever-living, ever-loving God, thank you for the life you give us in such abundance. Thank you for opening our eyes to the life all around us, for the life that wells up and holds us up and sustains us. Above all, thank you for your son Jesus Christ, who came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. In His name, AMEN.

~ Betsy Rogers