

## Time Alone – with God

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1: 35*

Days are long and hectic, too,  
With multitudes of tasks.  
We are exhausted when we're through  
With all that we are asked.

We need to take the time much needed  
To find some solitude,  
And even if we feel impeded,  
We long to be renewed.

Our Savior knew the burden of  
Attending to another.  
No one has ever greater loved,  
Or his own basics smothered.

And yet Christ knew to truly serve  
And pass life's cruel test,  
He must from crowds and pressure swerve,  
Find time to pray and rest.

The time we spend in sincere prayer  
Can benefit us so,  
Give strength to help us face and bear  
The trials we may know.

Much needed is time to reflect,  
Examine what we've done,  
Our motivations to inspect,  
And battles lost and won.

Self-care is never selfish when  
Its goal is to improve:  
Contemplation, planning - then,  
Refreshed, with wisdom, move.

So much to do; the world will call.  
We'll serve, near and abroad.  
Whatever challenges befall -  
Spend time alone with God.



Patti Miller

## Unjudged



I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 1 Corinthians 4:3-4

We waste so much of precious time  
In trying to please others;  
Too often then our lights don't shine  
For criticism smothers.

Yes, fitting in can comfort bring,  
Obeying rules can matter,  
But sometimes we must spread our wings,  
And expectations shatter.

The world can often chains impose  
On those who do not follow  
Its vain restrictions, gaudy clothes,  
And values, vile and hollow.

We're judged by others in our lives  
Who really have no right;  
Their cruel comments cut like knives  
And nasty words can bite.

There is but one all righteous Judge,  
Our dear Creator Lord,  
Who, as through life we weary trudge,  
Has mercy on us poured.

No human view or earthly court  
Can rule a humble heart.  
To God is whom we must report;  
God's laws our paths do chart.

Oh, yes, we live in love and peace  
As much as faith allows,  
But Christ has given us release  
From greedy, sinful vows.

Let's live our lives as Christ has shown,  
Not fearing worldly blame,  
For we the grace of God have known;  
Through Christ we bear no shame.

A Poem for Ash Wednesday: "Return to Me"

"Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." Rend your heart and not your garments. Joel 2: 12-13

On bended knee we come to God  
In prayer and true contrition,  
Admitting we are failed and flawed,  
And stained by sin's condition.

Our world is fractured and divided,  
Polluted and defiled.  
Destroyed are blessings God provided;  
We're each a wayward child.

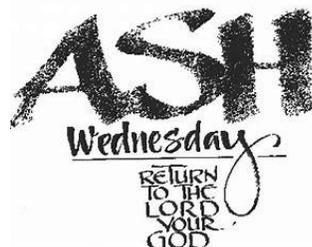
The time is now long overdue  
To fast and weep and mourn,  
To rend our hearts in pieces two,  
As pride and greed we scorn.

The ashes that we wear today  
Will but some hours last,  
But let our vows not fade away  
As we remain steadfast.

The forty days that lie before us  
Can offer sweet release.  
Oh, let us now please join the chorus:  
*God's mercies never cease.*

"Forgive us, Lord, we do repent,  
And strive to follow Christ.  
Do guide our paths on which we're sent:  
Your will, your grace suffice."

These forty days of introspection  
Can help us faith employ  
So that our dear Lord's resurrection  
Will culminate with joy!



Patti Miller

## Paradox

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. I Peter 3:18

A paradox can make us think,  
Examine our beliefs.  
Can we opposing concepts link?  
Can we our faith increase?

How should a God become a man  
to die, though innocent,  
And how are we to understand  
For us Christ's blood was spent?

To be the first, we must be last;  
To gain, we have to lose;  
We cannot dwell on what is past  
If we the future chose.

Yes, we must learn to fight for peace,  
To turn the other cheek;  
Surrender all, so we increase;  
Inherit, if we're meek.

We give our life to serve another,  
Eternity to gain.  
Our enemy becomes our brother,  
And "fools" for Christ is sane.

Our faith is true, a mystery,  
A paradox of love;  
Accepting what we cannot see  
And undeserving of.

We cannot think like others do,  
Misled by worldly goals,  
Or listen to the skeptics who  
See no hope for our souls.

Oh, let's surround ourselves with trust  
and find no stumbling blocks.  
The Lord reveals the truth to us,  
And that's no paradox!

## Couch Christians

Jesus said, "... *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" John 20: 21

Each Sunday finds me in church, praying  
And worshipping my Lord;  
Self-righteous, God's commands obeying,  
I leave, renewed, restored.

The afternoon finds me relaxed,  
Perhaps watching tv.  
My energy, not spent or taxed,  
Enjoying family.

The couch is comfy, cozy, too,  
And yet I feel uneasy.  
Should I have something else to do  
Besides the tasks that please me?

I know that God has called for more  
Than just a few brief hours  
To praise the Lord, repent, adore,  
Give thanks for blessings showered.

We have a calling to spread the Word,  
To tell the Gospel story,  
To share the mercy of our Lord,  
To celebrate God's glory.

Our faith is not a way to hide  
From evils of this world,  
Nor should we ever put aside  
Christ's love, God's grace unfurled.

"Go to the world," our Savior calls  
To witness and to serve.  
Confining faith behind safe walls  
Is less than Christ deserves.

Christ has the Gospel seed well planted;  
Let's work His church to grow.  
We must not take our faith for granted;  
Couch Christians, rise! Let's go!



*"I am sending you."*

*Patti Miller*

## Share the Love

*We know love by this, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. I John 3:16*

Too often in our busy lives  
We don't reciprocate.  
The goals and dreams for which we strive  
Can place a heavy weight.

We take God's grace and love unending  
With gratitude sincere,  
But fail that love to be extending,  
Refuse Christ's call to hear.

Do we lay down our lives for others  
As Jesus did for us?  
View people as our sisters, brothers?  
Accept and not distrust?

Are we complacent with our place  
As children of the Lord,  
But do not always share God's grace?  
Let others be ignored?

We teach our children they must share  
All that they have been given;  
Blessings, we hoard; no cross we bear  
To help others reach heaven.

We laugh at jokes that hurt someone;  
We judge and oft condemn;  
We leave the church when worship's done  
Think we're better than "them."

A life of faith is one of giving,  
Of love and sacrifice.  
Beyond our easy, secure living,  
Faith asks a costly price.

We are adopted; God loves us so,  
And that can't be denied.  
We must others that same love show -  
For this our Savior died.



## Laughter

*Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?"* Genesis 17:17

We feel so burdened and oppressed  
With daily duties given.  
We long for respite and sweet rest,  
A piece on Earth of Heaven.

Perhaps our mindset is to blame,  
Conditioned to be wary,  
Anticipating loss and shame  
And tragedies to carry.

But we forget, must be reminded,  
That our God is supreme.  
Let's not by sin and doubt be blinded,  
For love and light still beam.

We need to trust that God knows best  
And that joy can be found.  
Life is not always some harsh test  
To pin us to the ground.

We can take flight with joy and hope,  
With eyes that open wide.  
A little laughter helps us cope  
And will us not misguide.

Have you not listened to a child  
Find boundless perfect pleasure?  
In some small act beguiled,  
Heard laughter without measure?

We need to grasp such openness,  
Such absolute belief  
That God will always each one bless  
And be with us in grief.

Enjoy! Believe! Be open to  
The happy ever after  
That God has planned just for you—  
A part of faith is LAUGHTER!



## Idols

*You shall not make for yourself an idol,...* Exodus 20: 4a,...

The couple sat in church and listened  
To God's commands and Word.  
The diamonds on her fingers glistened -  
More than they could afford.

Her husband wore his Rolex proudly;  
His car was parked outside.  
His Rolls could roar its engine loudly,  
A source of his great pride.

He thought just briefly how he'd skipped  
His son's last baseball game;  
Well, he had work, that manuscript p  
How was he to blame?

The mother, too, had briefly mused  
That she must soon employ  
A nanny so Mom might be excused  
From tending her small boy.

Important shopping to be done  
And her day at the spa,  
No time to play in childish fun,  
Or with crayons to draw.

The pastor's voice drew their attention:  
"No idols should one make."  
To them a strange rule to be mentioned.  
Who'd make that old mistake?

Annoyed, the husband checked the time:  
He had so much to do.  
And with the organ's closing chime  
Rejoiced that church was through.

No judgment here, but realization  
We all make idols, yes.  
As people, sinners, and a nation,  
Let us this sin confess.



## Choose the Light

*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. John 3:19*

We walk in darkness, foolish souls,  
Pursuing useless dreams.  
We set unrealistic goals,  
Get tangled in vain schemes.

Like spoiled children, we protest  
When called to do what's right,  
Forgetting how much we've been blessed,  
Blind to another's plight.

We do not want to "see" the wrong  
That plagues our broken world,  
Ignore the cries of hungry throngs  
And racist comments hurled.

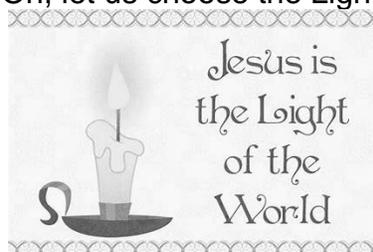
The Light has come to show the way  
So we don't have to stumble.  
We easily can go astray,  
Too proud – oh, let's be humble.

No groping through our troubled lives,  
No feeling we are lost,  
No fear or worry like sharp knives –  
Dear Jesus paid the cost.

Into a world so dark and cold  
Christ brought his light divine,  
And by the prophets long foretold,  
God's love and grace did shine.

We must our wayward wanderings cease -  
The time has come to choose  
The Light that brings us joy and peace;  
We can not one day lose.

Why love the dark, when Christ has come  
To guide us through life's night  
To bring each straying lost soul home?  
Oh, let us choose the Light!



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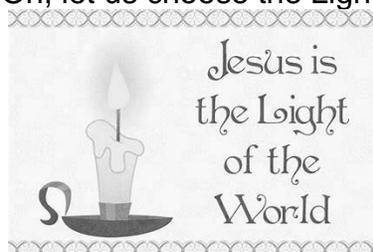
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## No Crying over Spilled Milk

*[S]ays the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people...; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. Jeremiah 31: 33, 34b*

The little boy had tried to pour  
A glass of milk to drink,  
But spilled the carton on the floor;  
His heart began to sink.

What would his mother do or say  
When she saw that huge mess?  
Imagination ran away...  
The worst was what he guessed.

She came around the corner, and  
Looked at his desperate face.  
Forgave at once her little man;  
She understood God's grace.

For we are like that little boy:  
Our efforts go astray.  
We break God's laws and peace destroy  
And often lose our way.

But God forgives us when we sin,  
The Lord's grace covers all  
And grants a new chance to begin,  
To rise up when we fall.

The mother laughed, consoled her son,  
And joined him on the floor.  
She cleaned the mess; they soon had fun,  
And there were tears no more.

The Lord forgives and blesses us,  
Turns coarse sin into silk.  
God's law and love we need to trust:  
No crying o'er spilled milk.



## Christ in a Box

*"Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Matthew 21:5*

We know that we're created in  
The image of our God,  
And yet we disobey and sin  
Instead of praise and laud.

Just like the followers of old  
On that Palm Sunday first,  
We paint a king with power and gold  
And for reprisal thirst.

We make our Savior fit our aims,  
With motives like our own.  
We make misguided foolish claims  
And love and grace disown.

"Hosanna!" for a king desired,  
Then changed to "Crucify!"  
Such discontent that week transpired  
Which led our Christ to die.

A king upon a humble colt?  
No army armed and able?  
No one to lead a planned revolt?  
Just prayer at twilight's table.

The Savior is not ours to draw,  
Imagine, or define;  
He is the Mystery of all -  
A man, and yet, divine.

We turn our hearts and backs on him  
For selfish expectations;  
And conjure favors at our whim  
Built on our false foundations.

Christ is the Savior. Yes, he reigns,  
But not as we create.  
He freed humanity from chains  
Of greed and sin and hate.

A king and servant; master, slave -  
The Christian paradox.  
We could not keep Christ in the grave;  
Don't put Christ in a box!



## *Don't Be Afraid*

*He said, "Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus the Nazarene, the One they nailed on the cross. He's been raised up; he's here no longer." Mark 16: 6*

Perhaps this year, beyond all others,  
We come to Easter Day,  
Aware of darkest death that smothers  
And steals all hope away.

But Easter dawns with new-born hope,  
And spring blooms once again;  
We'll find the strength to grow and cope,  
For nightmares always end.

We've been through lockdowns, isolation;  
We've lived in anxious fear;  
For everyone and every nation -  
We've known the longest year.

Now days are longer, brighter, too.  
Our resurrected Lord  
Brings life through grace to me and you;  
Oh, sing that joyous chord!

Soon we can hug and greet each other,  
Renew relationships:  
No fear can Christian fondness smother,  
No virus can eclipse.

It's Easter! Christ the Lord has risen!  
Be we in church or home;  
No grave, restriction, or no prison  
Will leave us all alone.

For God is with us in the dark;  
We're saved by grace divine.  
No matter how severe or stark -  
The light of Christ will shine.

"Fear not!" The Christmas angel said,  
Repeated in the tomb;  
New life awaits. Nothing to dread.  
Peace, hope, and joy can bloom.

