LENTEN DEVOTIONS

Written by:
McCormick Alumni/ae
But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God’s own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light. ~ 1 Peter 2:9

I would like to thank our alums whose contributions has made this Lenten Devotional possible. Also, I would like to give special thanks to Barbara Vaughan who assisted with editing.

This Lenten Devotional will take you on a journey each day for 40 days and 40 nights. On this journey you may discover that you have been wandering in the wilderness, being consumed by a flood, seeking guidance, or being tempted. Just know that once your journey starts you will find yourself being reminded, renewed, nourished, strengthened, and victorious! This devotional will minister to the complete human—mind, body, and spirit.

In Christ,

Stephanie Moore
Director of Development
Penance During, Pandemic Times

2 Corinthians 5:20
So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 6:10b
"... as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

DEVOTIONAL
Ash Wednesday 2021! A sacred time of fasting, prayer, and penance symbolized by the placement of ashes on the forehead (or hand this pandemic year!). While only the second month of 2021, it seems like we are already being pressed on every side, yet the Apostle Paul in this second letter to Corinth invites us to become Christ’s ambassadors and to rejoice. A holy appeal to personal conversion, and then proclaim this Euangelion, good news, to a world in distress. Ambassadors for the one who knew no sin but became sin for us. However, to be a herald, we must first be re-formed, re-shaped, and transformed in the presence of a loving God.

As we hear the familiar refrain, “we are dust and to dust we shall return,” we enter a time of self-reflection. Let this not be just a time of self, but a time to engage our collective communal lament. Caught in the pandemic tension of life amidst death, we must stand in solidarity with families mourning over 450,000 COVID-19 deaths and others experiencing loss. Yet, in the face of these sorrows, Paul admonishes us to rejoice. Rejoice because of God’s reconciling love for us, we are called to this ministry of reconciliation. To “reconcile” (Gr Katallossò), literally to remove enmity between two enemy parties. That’s our assignment. (After witnessing the recent Capitol riots, it sounds like we need that politically as well!) Know that your transformation through penance has great meaning, as an ambassador called to give hope, advocate for equity, liberation, and well-being of all God’s creation.

PRAYER
God, may our hearts be overwhelmed each day with your Holy Presence. We remember your sacrificial reconciling love at Calvary. Thank you for the forgiveness of sin. Pour out your Holy Spirit in fresh ways on us, our world, and our church. You alone are our hope. In 2021, let our ashes be meaningful. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Anita Crittenden, DMIN (2020); MDIV (2001)
LENTEN DEVOTIONAL DAY 2

Genesis 3:14-19

The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”

To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

DEVOotional

Genesis 3:14-19 is one of the most pivotal moments in all of Scripture. In this text, humankind seems to get the business from God, who metes out drastic, universal punishment in response to the disobedience of Adam and Eve.

God’s punishment includes making childbirth painful for women, and establishing patriarchy. God also sets up a pattern for life that goes like this: Born in pain, you work yourself to the bone for little reward, and then you die. Ashes to ashes.

When I was growing up in the fundamentalist Christian world, this passage reflected a view that we held to be inviolate: The world is a terrible place, full of trouble and marked by endless toil and temptation. And all of this is because of Original Cursing, which marks every one of us as sinful wretches... It’s a good thing that Jesus showed up to rescue us from this sick old world, am I right?

Much of what is wrong in Christianity today can be traced back to beginning God’s story of redemption with curses, not a blessing. When we begin the story with curses, it distorts most of what follows.

When we start with curses, our image of God can be distorted, our view of the world tainted, and even the way we see ourselves can be covered by the shadow of self-loathing. Beginning the story with curses drives some to see the world as too flawed for redemption. Others carry forward a false narrative of an angry, judgmental God, who enjoys punishing sinners.

Another way of seeing this passage is as a primer on how in our efforts to do life on our own terms, we often live like we’re cursed, denying ourselves (like Adam and Eve) the joy of intimacy and closeness with God.

As we journey through the season of Lent, we are reminded anew how it is incumbent upon us to step out of the shadow of these self-imposed curses, and embrace our God-given blessedness.

PRAYER

May it be so for you today and every day. And may the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you now and always. Amen.

Rev. Leon Bloder, MDIV (2005)
1 Peter 5:6 NIV
"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time."

DEVOTIONAL
I am from the Baby Boomer generation, so I am seasoned, some say well preserved, and content. But there was a time when I was not so content. I started working for the State about eight years ago and when I started, I was not content with the salary or position. So, I applied for other jobs to better myself financially and to obtain a more challenging role. I kept getting denied, but I knew I was qualified because my application was selected each time to get to the interview process and skills test, but I was never selected.

After many attempts and feelings of unworthiness, I decided to pray to God and ask Him what do you want me to do? I know you have better for me. I always pray each time I applied for a job position, but afterwards I would hear God say, “no or not yet. Kay, you keep performing your job as doing it unto me. Do not get disgruntled, depressed, or envious. Continue to look to me for ALL your provisions.”

Then one day after five years of diligent praying and observing Lent every year, I received a phone call from my supervisor about a salary increase. She said, “we would like to bring you in line with all the other employees. In addition, we are giving you a merit raise to reward you for all the hard work you do.” I could hardly contain myself. I ran out the building into the parking lot praising God, with my supervisor still on the phone.

Another version of this verse I like from the Message says, “So be content with who you are, and don’t put on airs. God’s strong hand is on you; He’ll promote you at the right time."

PRAYER
My prayer for you; love and appreciate the position God has you in, do your best like God is watching, and He will reward and promote you in due time.

Kay Coney, MADD (2011)
Isaiah 58:6
*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?*

**DEVOTIONAL**

The people were complaining that despite all their wonderful and pious fasting, God was ignoring them. God responds, “So you want my attention? Well, this is what your fast should look like.” Your religious practices should not be focused on showing the world how pious you are. Instead, your fast should seek justice. It should free the oppressed. Your fast should extend the love and mercy of God to the world. Your inward facing fasting was falling short because it failed to look outward, to extend your vision upon God and your neighbor.

As incredible needs appeared this year, it was difficult to navigate how to be an outward facing person when ordinary avenues of service and action were not advised or available for the best interest of my household and community. I found that while immediate action is needed, so too was outward facing discernment. To brainstorm. To idea share. To pray. To have conversations. To experiment. Some of my best actions this year, have come through fruit-filled conversations with beloved members of my communities. Through their ideas. Through bouncing ideas off them. Through failed actions and new pathways.

Our world has changed and will surely look different on the other side. This Lent, I wonder how we as a body of Christ, can contemplate and discern with an outward focus? To think about what is to come and creatively and passionately navigate what breaking the yoke might look like for our churches, our cities, our nation, and our world. How can we more closely be disciples of Christ?

**PRAYER**

Loving God, help us sort out how to be outward facing people. Allow us to set time aside in self-care so we can fill ourselves up, grant us time to discern what your justice looks like, and grant us wisdom as we seek to prioritize the needs and concerns of the oppressed. Amen.

Lamentations 3:25
*The Lord is good to those who hope in him, to the person who seeks him.*

**DEVOTIONAL**
In a book filled with lament, these are some of the only hopeful words we find, nestled among words of pain and sorrow; words from an individual who would remind others to put their hope in God when the world around them is crumbling. We undoubtedly live in a country where hope can feel so distant, almost unreachable, particularly for those who aren't the cis-gendered, white, male Christians who have taken to believing that this country was built solely for them. Is the Lord actually good to all those who turn towards and hope in God, or just the few who wield the power? Because it feels like you could make a case that the Lamentist got it wrong here and really, only some people get to know God’s goodness and mercy should they have enough resources and rights. There are many who have put complete trust in God, only to find themselves suffocated at the hands of a capitalist society devoid of any presence of the justice-filled God that lives within the Hebrew scriptures.

How do these few words ring true for each of us in such a time as this when children in cages have yet to be reunited with their families? How can those of us in places of privilege say these words with confidence to others when we cannot place ourselves within their pain and suffering? How can we sit with these words when those who spend their days toiling on behalf of others, and have cried out for assistance, still live below the poverty line?

**PRAYER**
God of mercies, may we cling to hope in you when the world crumbles. God of lament, may we give others hope in you when they lack the resources and rights so many others take for granted. God of all things good, may we make your goodness manifest in all the world for all who truly seek you. Amen.

*Shelley Donaldson, MDIV (2012)*
Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God?

DEVOTIONAL
God has sent many prophets to warn His chosen Ones about their sinful ways. In this passage the prophet Joel prophesied and described that the coming of the Lord would be like a swarm of locusts that destroyed everything in sight. We see that this was a dark time in the lives of God's people. The locusts destroyed harvest and crops that they depended on to survive. The Lord was trying to get their attention then, just as He wants our attention today.

Since the beginning of 2020 until now the COVID-19 pandemic has been sweeping through our nation destroying our lives and disrupting the ways we have been accustomed to living. Death and sickness are penetrating and invading the lives of many family and friends. Today, many people forget about the true God and begin to worship other gods such as: spouses, children, houses, cars, and money. The Children of Israel had put other things before God also, and Joel warned them to repent. I believe God is calling us to repent. God wants us to come back. He wants us to give Him our whole heart. God is looking for His people to empty themselves.

For me fasting, weeping and mourning is an emptying out that allows me to think more clearly and to give more of my heart to God. Offering my heart to God invokes His Grace and Mercy towards me.

PRAYER
Loving God, the One who sees and knows all things, hear our prayer. Search our hearts as we seek the path to stay in right relationship with you. Amen.

Rev. Denise Plair, MDIV (2007)
Isaiah 30:18
Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him. (NRSV)

But God's not finished. He's waiting around to be gracious to you. He's gathering strength to show mercy to you. God takes the time to do everything right—everything. Those who wait around for him are the lucky ones. (The Message)

DEVOTIONAL
Isaiah is musing on those who would rather return to Egypt, which represents consistency and stability, than go forward to a new place full of unknowns that God is leading them too. Egypt is longed for by people whose entire lives have been upended, because it is familiar - even if Egypt is also the place of enslavement, trauma, and torture, a complete lack of freedom. How often do we choose consistency over newness? How often do we fail to trust God with our lives?

I wonder what life will be like when this health pandemic is “over.” What will “over” look like? I hear many people talking about, longing for, “going back to the way things were before...” But do we really know what that will be? I don’t think that we do.

Haven’t we heard this story, this warning before? Hasn’t God already told us so many times about this temptation? Don’t we know that going backwards is never what God intends for God’s people, that returning to an “Egypt” never works out in the end?

I do not want to go back to the way things were before the pandemic. It wasn’t healthy, it wasn’t sustainable. We were not living as God intends for us to: in harmony with the Creation, joyfully and worshipfully accepting, protecting, sharing, and celebrating its many divine gifts that flow from God’s abundant love. We are a wandering people, stuck somewhere between what we remember, how things are now, and what might be possible in the future.

The Good News is, we’ve been here before. The Good News is that God loves us and seeks us no matter what. The Good News is we can still figure out how to align ourselves with not just God’s desires and commandments for us, but God’s invitation for our lives and for the Creation. The Story is still being written.

These are Lenten questions. They are not new, they are ancient. We are a wandering people. But we are also God’s people. And the expectations are deep.

PRAYER
God of love, we know you are present. We know you are available. We know you are calling us to new things. We know you want us to go forward, not backward. We know the ways of “Egypt” were never acceptable and we must stop longing for them. Use this Lenten Season to once again turn us around and make us new. In your Eternal Love we pray. Amen.

Rev. Shannon Vance-Ocampo, MDIV (2001)
Psalm 42:2
My soul thirsts for God for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?

DEVOTIONAL
Sorry, Cats.
In summertime, water's necessity is very apparent, it's hot and humid and I'll always have a bottle or thermos within arms reach. If not, I'll go get one or grab the nearest hose or hydrant. In summer, water's just a way of being.

This wintertime has proven trickier regarding my fluid consumption. Coffee during the day and a spirit or two in the evening are sufficient and these are consumed more to satisfy my mental and emotional desires.

I've been suffering this winter. I've felt empty, waking up groggy and lacklustre, and my blood sugar has been off the charts with possible insulin dependency on the horizon. I've missed my church family as we've postponed services for the past 3 months I've been missing God, and have been troubled finding answers or even the right questions to ask.

I've been suffering, that is, until just a few days back. My answer came when I awoke around 3 a.m. Why was I awake? Then I realized my mouth and throat were like sandpaper and a deep thirst seized my entire body. I sprang from my nice warm bed sending my two sound-asleep cats flying and flew down the stairs straight to the sink. That water was the best thing I've ever tasted.

Water is life...Three days max without and almost any normal human will die. The Psalmist knew that thirst was the only way to relay our utter lifesaving need for God. I had forgotten my literal thirst for water, but more importantly my soul's thirst for God in my life. I needed water. I needed God.

Sugar is in check. Water is a priority. Church will be back in session starting Ash Wednesday. Glad for God's 3 a.m. wakeup call.

PRAYER
Dearest Lord, Your grace is an overflowing cup for our thirsty souls. May we be ready, responding when you call for us. May we rise up and come to the water. Amen

Rev. Matthew Downey, MDIV (2013)
Psalm 27:14 (CEB)

Hope in the Lord! Be strong!
Let your heart take courage!
Hope in the Lord!

DEVOTIONAL

In some translations, this verse from the psalm uses "wait" instead of "hope." Wait. Hope.

What is the difference between waiting and hoping? I struggle with finding hope, especially in the context of a global pandemic, especially in the context of anti-black racism, especially in the context of growing climate change. For what is there to hope when for so long, the work of many people to make the world safe and just has not brought us a better world. The world just feels so empty and hopeless, and it feels foolish to search out hope in these contexts.

Ah--but the text doesn't say hope or wait in the world. Instead, we wait by placing our hope, our hearts, in the Lord. In doing so, we find our strength in the one who created each of us with love and strength and courage... and hope.

In this waiting time of Lent, we wait in the wilderness for God to help us end the suffering of those with Covid, end white supremacy that has caused the suffering and death of so many, and end climate change that has decimated species around the world. We face each of these devastating parts of our reality with courage when we trust in God, when we put our hope in the Lord.

That courage does indeed help us take heart and then take action in order to right the wrongs of the world. With hope in the Lord, we can courageously face more time in isolation and quarantine so that front line workers and people who are the most vulnerable to Covid can be safer. With hope in the Lord, we can stand against the forces of white supremacy in the world and in ourselves so that all differently and beautifully made bodies matter--so that black lives matter. With hope in the Lord, we enact policies that protect and live out a love that cherishes all creation so that climate change does not have the final word. Instead, we are left with these words: Wait. Courage. Hope.

PRAYER

O God, help us place our hope in you, so that we can live in the world seeking justice and courage. Amen

rev. abby mohaupt, ThM (2012); MDIV (2011)
LENTEN DEVOTION DAY 10

Matthew 6:16-18, CEB

And when you fast, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They distort their faces so people will know they are fasting. I assure you that they have their reward. When you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. Then you won't look like you are fasting to people, but only to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

DEVOTIONAL

Fasting is something that I would not have put too much thought into before I began to break bread with my Muslim neighbors. As we became friends, I came to be convicted about Christian fasting. Our Muslim neighbors fast from Sun-Rise to Sun-Set for the Month of Ramadan, going about their daily business in the meantime. Whether they are a surgeon or roofer, they fast and they do so with quiet devotion. I have seen children struggle patiently through their first day of fasting for Ramadan. I have broken bread with my friends at Iftar Meals many times. Yet, this passage still convicts us for our actions and inactions. At our very best we, like our Muslim neighbors, use fasting to bring ourselves closer to God. At our worst, it is a banner that we run up the flagpole once a year so that we can show the absolute minimum devotion to God. When we fast this year make it more than just a pittance. Don't just "give something up!" In quiet devotion, draw closer to God.

PRAYER

Almighty God, we long to be near to you yet we do not know how to find our way. We hear your call to fast. O Lord, we ask that you use this time of fasting so that our hearts might be transformed. As we draw nearer to you in this time, help us to listen to the call of the Holy Spirit. Prepare our hearts so that we may go forth from this time and place equipped to shine the light of your transformative love in our word, thought, and deed.

LENTEN DEVOTION DAY 11

Isaiah 41:30
But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

DEVOTIONAL
I spent part of my elementary and all of my high school years in a Unitarian Church on Long Island. My mother had been raised as a Roman Catholic and did not want my religious education to be one in which women were not valued or allowed to be ordained.

I do not remember claiming any particular biblical verse as my own when I was growing up. Most of my friends were Jewish or Unitarian and we seldom talked about religion as an important part of our lives. But I think, if I had been tempted to claim a biblical verse as my own, this one would have been a good choice.

After all, the thought of God as my “strength” sounded really good, especially during a time in my life when I did not feel particularly strong or beautiful, and certainly not able to run without ever getting tired, or fly like an eagle.

At the same time, I'm pretty certain that I did not fully realize the deep power behind those verses during that period in my life. Which is what made it so compelling. To wait for the presence of God in my life was a compelling challenge.

And why not? Adolescence was less than satisfying. To think – and more important – to hope for a better time in my life kept me going. Without realizing it, I was beginning to rely on an inner strength that was more than my own.

Life can so easily overwhelm us; fears and difficulties can gnaw away at our hearts; self-reliance can make even the strongest among us feel faint and weary. We may stumble and fall because we too often rely only on our own resources; inner strength and human resources are not always a sufficient resource in the storm of life. Only the support of others and power from above are sufficient to sustain us. Our limited human abilities are not enough; ultimately, only God’s protective hand can shelter us from the storm of life.

PRAYER
Eternal and loving God, I know that my strength can only be found in Christ. Help each of us to trust in the power that we can only receive from our Lord, Christ Jesus, help us, we pray, to rise above all the difficulties of life, so that we can run with patience and endurance, the race you have set before us. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Christine B. Vogel, MDIV (1996)
Psalm 33: 20-22 (edited for inclusive language)
Our soul waits for the Lord; God is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in the Lord, because we trust in God's holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

DEVOTIONAL
My favorite thing to do with a scripture passage is what our beloved professor Ted Hiebert taught us to do...go back to the Hebrew. Something sacred happens in the midst of looking back to the original languages. “Our soul waits for the Lord” this artist, poet tells us. And yet, the Hebrew opens up a more full picture. Another way to translate this text is this, “Our soul longs for the Lord.” Longing, yes. And how incredible that it’s not just my soul, but ours, collective, communal. I can't help, but be reminded of that prayer from Augustine that reads: “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.” Our soul is indeed longing, isn't it?

Our soul longs for justice, for a world where we delight in our differences, for a world where black lives truly matter, for a world where our LGBTQIA2S+ community is valued, for a world where we don’t even need terms like “haves” and “have nots” because there is truly enough for all always.

It is our soul, after all. Oh, we long for a world where we lived like that was true. And, as I’m sure you know, that longing for justice work can be weary making and exhausting. So, when it's hard to go on in that faithful work, this psalm is a place we can turn. We can remember that there is a place for our soul to rest, that we can fall back on God’s steadfast love that was with us all the way back to the beginning of time, before these beautiful Hebrew words were even a thought.

PRAYER
Loving God, may we be wrapped in your steadfast love and may that love inspire us to continue on. Amen.

Rev. Megan Cochran, MDIV (2012)
LENTEN DEVOTION DAY 13

Psalm 130:5-6
I hope, Lord. My whole being hopes, and I wait for God’s promise. My whole being waits for my Lord—more than the night watch waits for morning; yes, more than the night watch waits for morning!

DEVOTIONAL
Our Hope in God
As I am sitting to write this devotional a lot of emotions come to the surface. I have been reading this passage from psalms in multiple ways and the reason for that is because it is part of a project of the choir I am the chaplain of, “Coral Ecuménica Cántico Nuevo.” During our choir rehearsals we have been reading, praying, reflecting and finally creating our own prayer in song by connecting our understanding and experiences during the times we are living in.

While I was creating my own prayer in song through this passage, an image of me floating in the air with multiple colors came to my mind. While floating on the air I could not hide my relief to my distress. Even if the world might be falling apart God is there for me and that’s the reason I wait for God in hope. I have cried out aloud and in silence the last months. Knowing people that have lost their lives because of the pandemic or other health issues have made tears drop from my eyes. Knowing people who are really sick and fight with their whole being even though I have to give words of encouragement and keep them motivated have made me understand that there are different stages of love where I need to be grateful and thankful for every single minute I spend with them. Knowing people who I really miss and care for, but because I am not able to see them in person, because I cannot hug them or kiss them, I hope, my whole being hopes for the time when I am going to be able to see them again to share unforgettable moments. It’s going to come sooner than expected. It has been difficult but I still wait for my God.

Yes, my emotions have been in different places, but I am hopeful. When I think back to that image multiple colors surrounding me, I am hopeful because as part of God’s creation I am able to share how I feel without feeling shameful and through that process I am able to recover again and find energy like never before!

PRAYER
Thank you God for the opportunity you give us to pray to you in different ways so you can renew us in our daily lives. Continue giving us the motivation to be connected with you because it is in you that there is hope for a better tomorrow, creator of heaven and earth, Lord and Savior, we bring our whole being to you and in your name we pray. Amen.

LENTEN DEVOTION DAY 13

Salmo 130: 5-6
“En Dios he puesto mi esperanza; con toda el alma confío en él, pues confío en sus promesas. Con ansias espero a Dios; ¡con más ansias lo espero que los vigilantes a la mañana! Los vigilantes esperan que llegue la mañana.”

DEVOCIÓN

Al sentarme para escribir este devocional muchas emociones me arropan. He estado leyendo este pasaje de los salmos en diferentes maneras y la razón de eso es porque es parte de un proyecto del coro del cual soy capellana, “Coral Ecuménica Cántico Nuevo.” Durante los ensayos hemos estado leyendo, orando, reflexionando y finalmente creando nuestra propia oración en canción al conectar nuestro entendimiento y experiencias durante los tiempos que estamos viviendo.

Mientras estaba creando mi propia oración en canción del salmo 130, una imagen de mi, flotando en el aire con múltiples colores vino a mi mente. Mientras flotaba en el aire no pude ocultar el alivio a mi angustia. Aún si el mundo se estuviera derrumbando Dios está para mí y esa es la razón por la que espero a Dios esperanzada. He llorado en voz alta y en silencio en los últimos meses. El conocer a personas que han perdido sus vidas por la pandemia o por otros problemas de salud, han hecho que mis ojos derramen lágrimas. El conocer a personas que están enfermas y pelean con todo su ser, y aún así tengo que darles palabras de aliento y mantenerlas motivadas, me ha hecho entender que hay diferentes etapas de amor donde necesito estar agradecida por cada minuto que comparto con ellas/ellos. El conocer a personas las cuales extraño y me preocupan, porque no puedo verles en persona y no poder abrazarlas o darles un beso, espero, todo mi ser espera por el tiempo cuando pueda verles de nuevo para compartir momentos inolvidables. Esos momentos vendrán más rápido de lo esperado. Ha sido difícil pero aún así espero en mi Dios.

Sí, mis emociones han estado por diferentes lugares, pero estoy esperanzada. Cuando vuelvo a pensar en esa imagen de colores múltiples que me rodeaba, estoy esperanzada, porque como parte de la creación de Dios puedo compartir como me siento, sin sentir vergüenza y a través de ese proceso puedo recuperarme de nuevo y encontrar energía como nunca antes!

ORACIÓN

Gracias Dios por la oportunidad que nos das de orar hacia ti en diferentes formas y así podemos renovarnos en nuestras vidas diarias. Continúa dándonos la motivación que necesitamos para seguir conectados/as contigo porque es en ti que hay esperanza para un mejor mañana, creador de los cielos y la tierra, Señor y salvador, traemos todo nuestro ser ante ti y en tu nombre oramos. Amén.

Rev. Jeniffer Rodríguez, MDIV (2012)
LENTEN DEVOTION DAY 14

Micah 7:7
*But me! I will keep watch for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.*

DEVOTIONAL
This year, I have the honor of teaching confirmation to the youth at my church. We, too, write a Lenten devotional, and it is our tradition that the confirmands take part in this church wide experience. Part of my work is to make sure that each youth feels confident in their voice to write their entry. I, of course, turn to one of my favorite ways to approach a text; *lectio divina*. So as any good preacher does, I practice what I preach. And the word that struck me, that I have been unable to forget or get out of mind is “wait.” Wait. What exactly are we waiting for? ‘Normalcy’ a ‘New Normal’? Haven't we been waiting long enough? Shouldn't I always be working? Obviously, I am uncomfortable with unknowns and do not do well with inaction. I need to be doing, I need to be working towards an end.

In this time of the unknown and figuring out new ways of doing ministry, I often feel like I cannot stop. I cannot rest. I cannot wait. I end up spinning my wheels and accomplishing nothing but my own exhaustion and burn out. So, I need to learn to wait, not for the end of all of this but for the voice of God. Resting so I do not muddle those whispers of inspiration and renewal. Waiting so I do not tire as plans to fix everything on my own continue to fail. I need to get out of God’s way and wait. I need to rest in the very reality that God knows, and God hears, I just need to wait.

PRAYER
Creator God, as we continue to do you ministry during this time of unending unknowns, help us to open ourselves up to waiting for your voice. To rest in the knowledge that if we pause from the constant need to be doing that, we can hear your voice of inspiration and renewal. Amen.

*Rev. Sylvia Miller, MDIV (2012)*
LENTEN DEVOTIONAL DAY 15

Exodus 19:3-6
Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.”

DEVOTIONAL
Passages like this one prove the harsh truth of Hebrews 4:12a, “Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow.” Of course, God, how simple it is – it’s all right here in Scripture. All we need to do is obey you and keep your covenant to be your “treasured” possessions. If only we could!

I confess that my first thought when I read passages like this is an illogical one, “Thank God for Jesus because if I have to be holy, I’m in BIG trouble!” The adolescent Christian in me tries to cut deals with God – “Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, right? Jesus established a new covenant, sealed in his blood which was poured out for the forgiveness of sins, right? So Jesus has taken care of all of this for me, right?” The mature Christian in me already knows the answer – “Not exactly!”

The truth is that my attempts to be holy fall far short of the mark. I need a Savior. But I also know that I can't throw out the entire “Old” Testament like so much bath water. I can't decide that it was written for primitive, tribal people and has nothing to say to me. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, true. But he did not destroy it. All of Scripture must be interpreted with the power of the Holy Spirit through the paradigm of Jesus the Christ. Knowing that brings a new interpretation to God's words to the Israelites and to us. For who could be more obedient to God than Jesus? Who could be more holy?

PRAYER
Holy God, forgive my arrogance and my irreverent deal making. I thank you for my Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. Help me to be, each day, more like him – sanctified for your purposes, holy and whole. In his name I pray.

Rev. Grayson Van Camp, MDIV (1992)
LENTEN DEVOTION DAY 16

Romans 12:2
Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

DEVOTIONAL
Paul's exhortation to the Romans seems aptly fit for Christians in the 21st century. Especially given the last year we have found ourselves wandering through in the face of a pandemic, heightened racial tensions and reckonings. Yet in a few small words, Paul gives us several weighty challenges. Do not be conformed to this world.

We are indeed a part of this world, but Jesus called us to stand out and shine in its midst, not to settle for perpetuating the status quo. Throughout the gospels Jesus said we are the salt of the earth, and we are the light of the world. Later in John's gospel he gifts us a commandment that says we ought to love one another as he himself has loved us. And he took it a step further saying that by this love, the world would know we are his followers.

To not be conformed by this world then, means we abandon our need to both perpetuate and be subjected to how the world unfolds around us. Rather we are called to be salt, to bring flavor to the world. We are called to be light – that is to say, to be the glimmer of hope where despair runs amuck. But be transformed by the renewing of your minds – much of our life of faith, when lived out following Jesus' examples throughout the gospel, leads to transformation. Paul suggest that when we allow ourselves to be transformed—our minds are constantly renewed. When we allow ourselves to be transformed and our minds renewed, we enable our ability, through love, to live lives that are not self-centered nor self-obsessed. Rather, we seek out those spaces and places where God's grace, love and redemption are needed most. It is there that we become agents of change the world.

Through this transformation and renewal of our minds, Paul says we are then able to discern God's will, what is acceptable, perfect and good. Transformation and renewal of our minds leads us to live our lives not steered by our own desires, rather guided by God's redeeming love.

PRAYER
Good and gracious God, may your Holy Spirit stir us to discomfort, so that we don't become complacent with the way things are. Move us. Transform us. Make us uncomfortable enough with injustice and inequity that we are constantly seeking ways not just to transform our minds, but also transform the world so that your will might be done on earth, just as in heaven. Abide with us and bestow upon us your grace, mercy and love this day and always. Amen.

Rev. Daniel Morales MDIV (2015)
LENTEN DEVOTION DAY 17

Hosea 12:6
But as for you, return to your God, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.

DEVOTIONAL
Widening this scripture selection by a few verses, we hear the prophet recounting some of the highlights, and lowlights, of Jacob. Jacob was a flawed man. Jacob struggled in life, and with God. Jacob’s life is also the example of repentance, of turning and becoming a better child of God. He also then became a lesson for us as well.

We are a flawed people. We struggle in life, and often, I suspect, we all struggle with God in our own ways. In this time of the pandemic and political challenges, it has become easy for us to think only of ourselves and our select few, to worry about what we need, to the extent that others are excluded from satisfying their needs. We hold close supplies, food, money, land, keeping from others what they need. Our circle of love can sometimes become quite small due to fear. But Hosea reminds us to think of the turnaround in Jacob as an example of how we should also turn around. We, too, after reflecting, or struggling through the night with God, can hope for the future, returning to God’s will for us all. When we simply wait and listen for the calling in our heart, we can return to God as the child God wants us to be: a child who clings, not to our wants, and ourselves, but rather clings to love of all. And when we cling to that love, that love God first showed to us, we then will be a people that cling to justice for all.

PRAYER
O God, our Creator and Giver of all life, let your light shine for us so that we may follow and return from our selfish ways to the ways that are yours. Grow in us the love and compassion for all people, and then give us the strength to work to bring about justice and equality for all. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

Rev. Doreen Sterba Dezur, MDIV (2014)
LENTEN DEVOTION DAY 18

Matthew 6:33
“Instead, desire first and foremost God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

DEVOTIONAL
As I write this, it’s winter in the garden at our house and snow is piled a foot high. But when the snow melts and the days warm, I’ll go eagerly out to the garden. I’ll pull back the fall leaves and tread gently, so I don’t crush any of the new life I’m seeking. I’ll make my way on hands and knees, with heart and spirit mindful of signs that God is resurrecting creation anew.

In today’s verse from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us to be mindful of what we seek and of how we spend our precious energies. He directs us to focus and prioritize our longing and our lives. He calls us to join in the raising of God’s already-here-and-still-coming kingdom. He calls us to be part of growing God’s household, marked by justice and mercy, where we are gathered into a grace-filled and generous communion with all creation.

Can we imagine it? Do we trust Jesus’ claim that it is already rooted in him and germinating between us? Even now, in the midst of such an anxious, unjust time as this? Jesus invites us to step into the freedom such ultimate trust in God brings.

Julian of Norwich, an English anchoress, mystic and theologian in the Middle Ages, wrote these wise words:

Be a gardener.
Dig a ditch,
toil and sweat,
and turn the earth upside down
and seek the deepness
and water the plants in time.

Continue this labor
and make sweet floods to run
and noble and abundant fruits to spring.
Take this food and drink
and carry it to God
as your true worship.

So here’s an invitation as we continue our Lenten journey. Live this season with heart and hands planted deep in God’s beloved world. To be mindful of what needs turning and re-turning to God — in our own hearts and in the world around us. To seek signs of God’s justice, mercy and generosity, germinating in the world - and ask how we can partner to help them grow. Then the words that Jesus taught us to pray in the Sermon on the Mount—“Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it’s done in heaven”—will not only be words on our lips, but incarnated, also, in our daily living. May God make it so!
PRAYER
Holy Creator, make our lives true worship. Refocus our minds and hearts as we journey through Lent. Realign our priorities with yours and reorder our living to more faithfully follow Jesus. Help us seek and live your justice, mercy and generosity, here, as it is in heaven. With thanksgiving and joy we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Linda Wygant, DMIN (2016)
1 Peter 5:6-7

_Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you._

**DEVOTIONAL**

1 Peter 5:6 and 7 remind us that humility is our appropriate stance with God. Humility is really a reminder of who we are in reference to God. It is not so much lowering ourselves below our normal status, but remembering that when it comes to God we are low anyway, God is the one with power, the one who knows when the time is right. When we remember this God can assist us, lift us up, we will be with God. Then comes the reminder that we can give our worries, our brokenness, to God because God cares for us. If we first remember God's power and your relationship to God's power, then God's care is available.

The parallel of God's power in verse 6 and God's caregiving in verse 7 tells us that God's power is characterized by care and not by dominance. This shows us the task of Lent, to right-size our expectations and orientation to God's power and care. It is ours to focus on what is true and what is available with God—when we focus well on who we are and who God is then God can do good things, what is right for us, because we are paying attention and ready for God's guidance.

**PRAYER**

God of power and care, I am humble not because I choose to be, but because I know I am weak and you are powerful. When I forget humility I hurt myself and my relationship with you. Guide me today toward remembering that you are powerful, and that with you my brokenness can be healed with your care. Your grace is mine because you care for me, and created me, it is a gift. Help me to pay attention to your guidance and presence with me today and every day. I am yours.

Amen.

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL DAY 20

Matthew 5:4  
“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

DEVOTIONAL
In January, we lost my 84-year-old aunt, Joyce, to the COVID pandemic. She died in a critical care room in Houston, on a ventilator, unconscious, with her two sons unable to be with her. Her twin sister, my mother, was able to have on-screen communication with her several times before she went to be with the Lord. Joyce and Joan, they were called the twin terrors... or as some have said the twin angels. My Aunt Joyce had God's love and power flow through her, all throughout her life. She and my mom were both nurses, and they married two men who were college roommates. There's that twin thing again.

For the last decades of her nursing career my aunt became somewhat of a folk hero in the Houston Community. As a women's health nurse, she helped found, and attain funding for, an organization called Project Mammogram. It seems that some women, especially in the Latinx community, could not afford the test, and were experiencing greater levels of cancer. Joyce's work with these underserved women provided thousands of mammograms for those who would not have otherwise had access. She would hold hands and reassure many of the ladies when they were having the test. I often wondered if the exposure to radiation is what caused Joyce to be wheelchair-bound later in life. Also due to COVID, like so many families, we could not have a celebration of her life until sometime in the future. So this is a testimony to God's power in her life. And in ours, as the God of Love and Comfort equips us to love and comfort one another.

PRAYER
Comforting God, may we not only comfort one another in our times of mourning and loss, but also reflect your love to others as we walk this Lenten journey. Amen.

LENTEN DEVOTION DAY 21

Galatians 5:5
For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.

DEVOTIONAL
I recently did a spiritual exercise that asked us to see which words in a Scripture passage “shimmered.” The word from this verse that “shimmers” for me is “hope.” Reflecting on hope recalls the story of Christian author, singer and songwriter Dawn Smith Jordan. Her background is that when Dawn was a college student in 1985, her 17-year-old sister was kidnapped and murdered. In her memoir, Grace So Amazing, Dawn describes the abduction, killing, manhunt and trial, but focuses above all on how God brought healing to her and to her family in the aftermath of the catastrophe. Dawn not only stayed strong in her faith, but was able to forgive the killer. Later in life, Dawn went through a divorce and lost her mother to cancer, and wrote a second book, Thus Far, in which she again discusses her faith and how it gave her strength to keep living. One of her songs is titled Hope has a Name. Dawn sings,

I've abandoned childish notions, for I know life's not pretend;
Now my hope is Jesus and his name I will defend.
I've never grown old enough to leave my hope behind,
I'll never turn my back on the moment I might find
The kind of hope that heals my wounded heart and gives me peace of mind. Let life come, my resolve will be the same, for hope has a name (Its name is Jesus) For hope has a name.
For all who suffer, where does our hope come from? Does hope have a name? Is our hope's name Jesus?

PRAYER
Dear Jesus, we live in a world plagued by grief and loss. You are the One who can understand, given what you suffered for us on the cross. Please remind us always that no matter what we go through, you will be there with us, for your grace is amazing and infinite. May our hope always have your name. Amen.

Rev. Elizabeth B. Dickey, MDIV (2009)
LENTEN DEVOTION DAY 22

Jonah 3:4-5

Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

DEVOTIONAL

The podunk Hebrew prophet arrives at the monumental Gentile city-gates, sopping wet and smelling of fish guts. Sea-grass still hangs ‘round his ear, sandals squishing-and-squashing as he steps into the city declaring its doom: “Forty Days and everything you have built up will come crashing down around you…”

Jonah appears laughable, but he utters this one-sentence oracle with a smile on his sun-burnt face. Jonah hopes to God that this “great” city will go up in smoke. God is merciful, but these ungodly Assyrians are oh-so-wicked. The sea-soaked prophet dutifully speaks of the city’s destruction and against all odds (who actually heeds the prophetic???) the ungodly population believe it. The Assyrians, whose reign of terror has them living rich and fat, begin...to let...it go. The sofas are burned and the people sit in ashes. The fruit of empire will no longer be consumed. Even the animals are made to wear sackcloth. Jonah watches in horror as the city that was supposed to burn violently, now actively seeks to “turn from the violence that is in their hands.”

During the course of the Pandemic(s) I wonder how many Jonah’s God will keep sending into the city with the one-line oracle: “If you don’t change your ways, your violence will destroy you!” What will it take for people who consider themselves white (from the least to the greatest) to wear sackcloth? How should the fully-employed (from the least to the greatest) fast for this season?

Can people shaped by empire and for empire “turn from the violence that is in their hands?” At a distance, Jonah waits to see what will become of the repentant city. Simmering rage at the unfairness of it all, turns to a hot boil as even the small grace of noon-time shade withers away.

Jonah is “angry enough to die,” but God loves our satirical prophet too much to allow for such tragedy. Under the hot sun, God sits, stays, and speaks with the prophet who smells like fish guts.

This Lenten season, you may find yourself sitting in a heap of ashes or you may be sitting next to a withered tree, but in your sitting rest with the God who is willing to sit with you and stay in conversation with us.

PRAYER

The prayer of Jonah, from the belly of the great fish: “I called to the Lord out of my distress, and God answered me… The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head at the root of the mountains... Yet you brought my life from the pit, O Lord my God. As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to you… Deliverance belongs to the Lord.” Amen.

Rev. Derek Elmi-Buursma, MDIV (2018)
Psalm 33:20-22
We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.

DEVOTIONAL
The year 2020 was challenging. It began with the coronavirus pandemic. The Center for Disease Control suggested that we wear masks, wash our hands often, and keep social distance. We might have been able to keep it somewhat under control if we had followed their guidelines; however, many people did not feel that it was a true threat and refused to listen. So the disease got worse, spread further and mutated. Worldwide 2.32 million with 463,000 losing their lives in the United States. People lost jobs and schools closed in an attempt to slow the spread. There was other evil in the world at the same time. Racism flourished along with white supremacy.

It was an election year and a new president was elected. Not everyone agreed with the results. At the end of the year there was a collective sigh of relief that the year was over. Then came 2021 with more covid deaths and an insurrection at the capitol that caused five people to lose their lives.

However, Psalm 33 can be a comfort in times such as these. We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and shield. No matter how much evil we see in the world, with the Lord there is always hope. We have only to trust in the Lord. May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.

PRAYER
Most gracious Lord, we trust in your holy name as we continue to live in this most difficult time. Our hearts rejoice in you as we look to you for help and hope.

Barbara E. Vinson, MDIV (2012)
LENTEN DEVOTION DAY 24

Jeremiah 29:11-12
For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

DEVOTIONAL
Despite a great amount of debate, America is a land of immigrants. Even those indigenous natives already long settled when the Europeans arrived, were former immigrants. Today a debate rages around who has the primary rights to the land. Today those last immigrants want to exile those immigrants who came before them. Some want to deny civil and human rights to those deemed unworthy of the land, exiling them to anyplace but here. Sadly there are too many of us who often struggle for a place in this world. There are too many of us feeling homeless in so many different ways. But God is still speaking to us...in every situation.

God walks beside us across every battlefield. And always there is our God leading and guiding us to our destination; home, a place God has prepared just for each of us. A place our Lord has planned for us since before we were born, since before we arrived anywhere.

PRAYER
Precious Lord, thank you for being a God who hears our cries. A God who made plans for our lives even before we entered the land. Help us to be faithful and steadfast as we listen for your loving guidance. Give us the courage and the strength to be all that you have created us to be, anywhere! Amen and Ashe!

Marvis L. Hardy, MAM (2015)
Psalm 62:5
For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from God.

DEVOTIONAL

Thought: The world in front of us seems to be nothing like the world behind us. Since the pandemic of Covid-19 had taken place in each zone of our world, life has become an uncharted territory. No one seems to be fully certain of the future. We all deal with the ambiguity of the time as if we collectively canoe the un-familiar mountains of the world around us. In these circumstances, the term HOPE (in Arabic: أمل) becomes an imminent search for every individual, family, organization, and institution. Reading Psalm 62, the word “hope” is anchored in the vulnerable self, not a simple intellectual process; it springs out of the heart with a foundation that transcends itself beyond the changing circumstance of life. Hope is to be found in the inner self with an affirmative action of resistance to the outer troubles; it is indeed the challenge of our time.

Action: Do you have an image of “Silence”? If so, where could you locate “hope” in such an image? I invite you to think of any symbol (just one) that reminds you of “Hope”; it could a written prayer, any religious ritual or even an image of nature. I encourage you to hold it in your hand for a couple minutes to feel the sensation of the symbol/the object. Then, I invite you to read Psalm 62:5. On a piece of paper, write down the troubles, fears, and worries that may have concerning your during last week or at the present time. After you write it all, re-read the scripture again and check your feelings again.

PRAYER

The Holy One, it is hard, God, to find hope in moments of silence. It is hard to walk in uncharted territory with no torch in hand. But your voice come in the unknown, whispering through the unfamiliar winds and calling our souls to wait and watch. Help us, God, to accept the silence of life and graciously walking through it in hope and Love. Help us, the Holy One, to accept our vulnerability and transcend it in Hope and Grace. Amen.

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL DAY 26

Matthew 6:21
For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

DEVOTIONAL & PRAYER

Click to Buy

a callous grows on my pinky finger
on the inside at the top joint
beneath my freshly painted nail

an odd place for a rough patch of skin
jarring, unsettling in what it means

what it tattles on me to me

a callous grows where my phone gently rests
propped up by the smallest and weakest
in front of my face and my eyes

a perfect way to scroll mindlessly
through products, stories, posts, images

painting a picture of what might, could be

they call out to me 25 Products that Will Change Your Life
1-Click Buy4 Must Haves that Will Make Your Day
2 Day Shipping
21 Finds You Never Knew You Needed, Until Now

click to buy

click to be

purchase history defining identity and purpose

a callous grows on my mind and my heart
making places hard that once were soft
by covering up pains and hurts and holes with stuff

a cynical path to stroll along aimlessly
making a path through chaos and worry

as if one more thing could make it somehow fine

a callous grows where one should not be
as I seek peace and comfort and joy
in places and ways it cannot be found

a growing reminder of where my treasure is found
and my heart beats also

calling me to adjust my focus and gaze
and make it right

Rev. Leanne Masters, MDIV (2005)
Psalm 25:4
“Make your ways known to me, Lord; teach me your paths.”

DEVOTIONAL
So often in life we try to choose our own paths. We feel that we know what is “best” for us. We think we have all the answers figured out when it comes to deciding how to handle conflicts that arise, how to manage certain crises, how to deal with the unexpected surprises that present themselves to us, and the windfalls of good fortune. We think we know what we are doing, as we try to manage each of these situations, good and bad, on our own, not ever really checking in with God. More often than not God’s will is different than our way.

It took me many years to figure that out. I keep chasing my dreams and desires, but I never felt complete. It always seemed like something was missing. Promotions and advancements came easy, but it just didn’t feel right inside. What was missing? I always felt a void in my life, and I couldn’t really pinpoint what it was.

I realized what was missing was interaction with God. God was patiently waiting for me to accept him, to accept his ways and to follow him more closely. He was trying to lead me and teach me the way, but I was too caught up in my way. I knew what I wanted and never gave a thought to what God actually wanted.

It wasn’t until later in life that I fully realized that “the God factor” had been missing in many of my life decisions. I didn’t leave room for God to lead me, let alone guide me. I was too busy running a fast-paced life to slow down and recognize what God was calling me to do.

How will you slow yourself down this Lenten season, to pay attention to where God is leading you?

PRAYER
Dear God, walk with me on this journey in this complicated life. Show me your will and show me the way. Be patient with me as I stray and bring me back into your fold. Amen.

Rev. Christopher Mergener, MDIV (2014)
**Romans 3:19-20 (The Message)**

*This makes it clear, doesn't it, that whatever is written in these Scriptures is not what God says about others but to us to whom these Scriptures were addressed in the first place! And it's clear enough, isn't it, that we're sinners, every one of us, in the same sinking boat with everybody else? Our involvement with God's revelation doesn't put us right with God. What it does is force us to face our complicity in everyone else's sin.*

**DEVOTIONAL**

If COVID has shown us anything, it is that the project of white supremacy will stop at nothing to push a narrative of fear, lack, hate and selfishness—contributing greatly to the spread of the virus and the nearly half million lives lost.

If COVID has forced the church to discover anything, it is the realization that we have been complicit in the sin of the system.

If COVID has reminded us of anything, it is our need for connection. Our need for each other. Our interdependence.

COVID has caused us to slow down as we face nearly a year of social distancing, isolation, and remote engagement.

What if instead of giving up chocolate or wine or Facebook this Lenten season, we take up the work of understanding and naming our privilege, engaging in anti-racist analysis and practices, fighting for immigration reform, supporting a living wage, gender equity, health care for all, affordable housing, ending childhood poverty, defunding the carceral system, and investing in free higher education for all... Just to start.

What if the gift of the moment is to reflect and to repent as we accompany Jesus on the road towards Calvary? To let die those things that prevent us from being in right relationship with God and with one another. To hear God calling us back to God and into community. The beloved community.

**PRAYER**

Gracious God, thank you for your living Word that calls us back to you. Forgive us for what we have done and for what we have left undone. Grant us wisdom and clarity, compassion and courage as we take up our cross and follow you. Amen and ashé.

Mark 1:12-15
And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

DEVOTIONAL
Jesus understands our weariness from this wilderness year – one we’re still experiencing. In approaching the anniversary of COVID’s shut-down, at least in the United States, we feel bare to the bone. So many lives ended. So many jobs lost, especially for women and people of color.* The landscape still feels foreign even as it grows more familiar every day.

Like us, Jesus didn't choose the wilderness, yet God prepared him for it. God anointed Jesus with a close, powerful, and tangible experience of God’s love for him in baptism right before Jesus faced the struggle of his soul laid bare. God enveloped Jesus with a promise of his belovedness, then asked him to trust that promise in a desolate echo chamber of doubt.

Jesus had to believe the promise like his life depended on it. And because he did, he committed the rest of his life to helping us believe it too.

I find such hope in the sequence of Jesus' experiences. His ministry didn't begin after the glorious breakthrough of God's voice and joy at baptism. It starts after the struggle and stripping away of the wilderness.

It seems crucibles can become critical catalysts for what's to come. I wonder how Jesus felt the roots of his identity seep into that dry desert soil – how he found the deepest form of nourishment there; how a sense of urgency and clarity of vision crystallized when he claimed his true treasure found best when all else is gone.

What if the wilderness you're experiencing right now is working the same, hard miracle in you? What new ministry ahead is being quietly shaped and strengthened because of your faithfulness right now? What if one of your hardest struggles becomes one of your most beautiful invitations?

PRAYER
Jesus, I take your hand in my wilderness and will trust the timing in my life. Amen.

Rev. Arianne Braithwaite Lehn, MDIV (2011)
I Corinthians 6:19-20
Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? For you are not your own, you were brought with a price. So, glorify God with your body.

DEVOTIONAL
Like many of us, I have worried about the impact the pandemic will have on my two churches. I have sat at my study desk and brooded: Will my people return? Can both congregations survive financially. Do my folk know that I am working even though I cannot yet, get to the hospitals or practice any type of home visitation. And the list could go on and on. This week it hit me as I grappled with a stomach virus that I had not been taking care of myself. A recent article in an Anglian publication said that clergy in their traditional had not been taking care of themselves. On average church officials had seen a rise in clergy burnout and a simple fact that they felt paralyzed unable to do anything. They missed their parishioners and felt unable to grieve at a loss of someone they hold dear.

The list could go on and on. Yet, as Paul reminds the church at Corinth: Our bodies are temples. The Holy Spirit dwells in us. We must take care of ourselves. Our bodies, and our minds. We must take time for ourselves. We can and should be selfish enough to take time to take care of us and our families. When I was a student at McCormick the winters were brutal. But one of my colleagues used to go to the grocery stores and have her name paged. It lifted her spirits she would tell us and gave her strength for another day. I hope you will do whatever you can to keep well and safe and above all take care of your body which is not our own but a temple of God. Amen.

PRAYER
As we minister in these times, give us the strength that we need to take care of ourselves. In Christ Amen.

Rev. Bradley Palmer, MDIV (1983)
Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

DEVOTIONAL

The devil chooses a vulnerable time to tempt Jesus. He is hungry and tired, incredibly vulnerable, now being asked if he is really the son of God. We know vulnerability in exhaustion. We are vulnerable these days, more than usual. We are vulnerable to disease, poverty, boredom, isolation, financial desperation, and entitlement, false information and conspiracy theories.

The devil goes after Jesus, trotting out Scripture, which might teach us something about the use of the Bible; as it turns out, Scripture drips easily from the mouths of homophobes, racists, Christian nationalists, and the devil.

Jesus did not choose to exercise his divine power. He didn’t get defensive in his fatigue and opt to prove he was the Son of God through a spectacular show, grabbing for power or cheap tricks. Instead, he chose his human vulnerability, remaining hungry, tired, and faithful. This is how he begins his life as one baptized, before he begins his ministry. He chose what must have seemed like the hard way out.

Jesus’ restraint in that moment expresses who he would be, the path he would choose. Perhaps Jesus taught us there is something to be said for the dignity of being true to one's humanity. This might feel like a lot. After all, our humanity is all we have been in touch with during the pandemic: pandemic fights in our homes about nothing but the stress of being confined to a small space together 24 hours a day, altercations with strangers over mask-wearing, days in which we are the best and the worst of humanity.

We will still have hard days and sleepless nights. Contemplation, reflection, and sacrifice during this Lenten season seems awfully redundant when we have been living Lent for a year. But remember that after 40 days of fasting, Jesus still chose the vulnerability of humanity. With all our frustrations, humanity might not be so bad after all. We were created by God, holy and beloved, and we, too, can choose faithfulness in difficult times.

PRAYER

Holy One, we are so weary. Spark in us the hope of what we know is true: even in our vulnerability, we have faith and dignity. Be with us and with all those who are afraid and mourning. Amen.

Rev. Laura M. Cheifetz, MDIV (2005)
John 16:33
*I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!*

DEVOTIONAL

The poets are the ones who usually get it right. Perhaps there was a poetic lilt to Jesus’ voice every time he told the disciples to not be afraid, like a song was coming on or the whole world was about to rhyme. After all, in the face of persecution—war, hatred, white supremacy, insurrection, domestic violence, poverty, cancer, death—the “radiation of warm confidence” requires a certain Sacred art.

To be “aflame and unafraid” in the face of all that is senseless and violent is to believe and behave, even as evidence mounts to the contrary, that a God-breathed overcoming has indeed taken place. It is to conspire with poets, prophets, allies, activists, and angels in a revolutionary reality that is always breaking through the cracks of our personal and collective dysfunction. It is to sense and celebrate a goodness emerging through the rubble of worn-out forms, broken power structures, and crumbling institutions.

Put simply, taking courage means practicing wholeness, even in the midst of brokenness. This “good cheer” is not mere optimism, but rather a call to boldly step out of the shade and (as poet Wendell Berry might say) practice resurrection.

PRAYER
God, we align our being and becoming with poets and prophets in our past and in our midst, calling us from fear to courage, half-truth to truth, brokenness to wholeness, death to life. Embolden our shade-bound parts, that, aflame and unafraid, we might step more abundantly into the lives we’ve been given. Amen.

*Rev. Ben Johnston-Krase, MDIV (2002)*
John 10:10
The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

DEVOTIONAL
Here in John’s gospel, Jesus is addressing the Pharisees who have questioned him about healing a blind man on the Sabbath. Jesus compares himself to a thief, an allusion to Satan, who only wants death and destruction for humanity. The phrase “life...abundantly,” is undefined by the writer. In the original Greek language of John's gospel, the word Jesus used for “life” is quite specific, not meaning a living thing, but more properly a life belonging to someone. With the Greek expression “have abundantly,” it indicates life more full than normal, life overflowing, if you will. It reminds us of the title of Joel Osteen’s best-selling book, “Your Best Life Now.” This is what Jesus meant by this phrase.

How do we get this life?

Jesus answers this question in this chapter of John: by following him, the Good Shepherd. Trusting and following Jesus leads to an exceptional life, with a quality beyond ordinary living.

Does this mean, as Joel Olsteen’s book at times seems to suggest, that our lives will be happy and free, and all our desires fulfilled, if we believe in Jesus? I don't think so. Abundant life does not always equal happiness. There is still sorrow and pain and loss, even to followers of Jesus, as Jesus himself tells his disciples in chapter 15 of John's gospel. We are not spared, and eventually we die. But we experience an authenticity of life, a fullness, which the rest of the world, with their striving and ego-driven agendas, does not experience.

I read a fortune-cookie fortune which said, “The difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary is the extra.” That's what Jesus offers – the “extra” in life, life in full.

PRAYER
Let us pray: Lord, let us have this life, and be a source of it to others. In following Jesus, let us give fullness of life to your world. Amen.

Rev. Jeff Courter, MDIV (2014)
Hebrews 9:14
How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

Devotion

The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power

Vocal/Piano: Andrae Crouch
Choir/Vocal: Kristle Murden
Choir/Vocal: Linda McCrary
Choir/Vocal: Alfie Silas
Choir: Phyllis St James
Choir: Sandra Crouch
Choir: Howard Smith
Bass: Walton..?
Guitar: Wayne Brasel
Drums: Bill Maxwell
Organ: Harlan Rogers
Percussion: Alex Acuna
Piano: ?
1984

https://youtu.be/eiNlbawTMDw
Mark 11:1-11
When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

DEVOTIONAL & PRAYER

PALM SUNDAY, that is the name we give the beginning of Holy Week.
It was a seven day experience of Jesus and disciples not for the meek!
It began with triumph, joyous crowds, adulation, shouts of praise.
Symbols of royalty, a new King, voices of anticipation did raise.

Jesus in Jerusalem, capitol city, center of prestige and religious power.
His ministry converged with popular hopes for freedom in that hour.
His years of speaking, healing, teaching and kingdom call were dramatic.
Jesus captured the imagination of his people, ‘Hosanna’ was dynamic.

We have just witnessed a very different kind of populism for change.
In USA, a leader captured hordes of followers with a promise to ‘rearrange’.
As in Jerusalem they went to the capitol with intent to dispute the new order.
Encouraged by power, anger, disillusionment, they caused major disorder.
In Holy Week 2021, we will remember Jesus and the challenge of his time. He chose against the political and economic, which crowds saw as sublime. His was a message of love, a kingdom of caring, justice, living compassion. And yet, before this week ends, the crowds turned ugly, full of passion.

Disappointment held sway; Hosannas of praise can easily transform. Violence to the author of love was a traumatic reversal of every norm. Years of pent up frustration with oppression gave way to an angry mob. How could Jesus deny them their dreams which his type of kingship did rob? Oh, we've seen it with a frightening display when a mob becomes violent. Our own capitol desecrated, abused, rent asunder, hardly ‘heaven sent’. So in Jerusalem and Washington, anger spills over with human disregard. In support of very different visions of leadership, how easy it was to discard.

Holy Week then and now, is a reminder of the fragility of human aspiration. But the lingering hope and encouragement for our time is ‘divine inspiration’! The ultimate cries of the crowds do not hold final say in the realms of life. ‘Hosanna’; our shouts of praise for his kingdom of caring can overcome strife!

Rev. David Bebb Jones, BD (1962)
Mark 11:15-19
Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, 

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a den of robbers.”

And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

DEVOTION & PRAYER
Micah 5:4
He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

DEVOTIONAL
Reaching for greatness...

As a Chaplain in a prison, certain stories make a significant impact in how I do ministry. There was a incarcerated man who suffers from Polymyositis a rare inflammatory disease that causes muscle weakness. Long story short, had service with the brother as he laid in his bed. Had testimony service with him, praise, worship, sermon and prayer. He asked me to pray for him and then he asked to pray for me. What struck me was a man close to my age laying in bed, weak, can't lift a limb, barely breathing, and still said “Chaplain, let me pray for you.” This brother had hardly any activity of his mouth to speak and used what he had left in him to pray for an able body.

Messing me up. When the weak pray for the able bodied, in his weakness he was stronger than me. But the lesson behind that moment, together we stood as one leaning on the strength of the Lord. In that moment, we experienced the majestically nature of God's greatness. God reaches us in places we least expect.

PRAYER
Dear God, as we take our place in time together to live in the abundance of your majesty, as we lean on you for strength and encouragement, we ask that you continue to remind that we can't do what we do alone. With your steadfast love, reveal to us our shortcomings and lead us in the path of greatest. As we move forward in life, without hesitation or reluctance give your name to praise, glory, and honor, in Jesus' name, amen.

Chaplain Damien Davis, MDIV (2009)
Zechariah 9:9
Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you! He is righteous (Hebrew: saddiq), and having salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

DEVOTIONAL
In our day of troubling times, the man Zechariah enters our faith journey. A powerful clue is in the meaning of his name which means “THE LORD REMEMBERS.” How often we forget! On the doorpost of our Presbyterian homes why not a Mezuzah to call us at all times to REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD WHO DELIVERED YOU! We cry out for Deliverance. Save us: from this pandemic, this civil unrest and unbridled daily attacks on our democracy and decency.

“Remember” is a Hebrew word one should not forget! It is zakar. Its meaning is to employ your hands and feet and lips to engage in whatever action that remembrance requires. It calls one to PAY ATTENTION at every point, in every situation, when each challenge comes, at the times of crisis and joy. REMEMBER, PAY ATTENTION, to the Lord your God. Remember how God came to us and how God send us, as “servant leaders” not with symbols of power and prestige but with a basin and towel. You know the Biblical scene, coming to us on a lowly donkey, not a powerful stallion The question is how does he come to us today and most important how and where does he send us today.

As Lent opens we are drawn into Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19 and John 12, and we join in the words of the people who have gathered “Hosanna! SAVE US Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD.

We are not just drawn into the salvation story we are sent out in the same spirit and manner of this “servant leader” who arrived on a donkey, into an unprecedented time to serve God’s people with “energy intelligence, imagination and love” a vow many of us have taken.

PRAYER
Sing and pray in these words of by colleague and friend Rev Carolyn Winfrey Gillett
One Day as Jesus Reached a Town FOREST GREEN 8.6.8.6 D

“May we who sing "Hosanna! Praise!" be mindful once again
That Jesus came to bring God’s peace, and peace is found in him.
May we who follow Christ RECALL his gentle, humble way
And work (LITURGIA) to build a peaceful world to honor him today.

Dr. Robert D. Nicholson, DMIN; MDIV (1958)
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

DEVOTIONAL
In my mind, I hear the minister encouraging us to come to the table, to the joyful feast of the people of God. And yet, when we gather together on Maundy Thursday, the Thursday before Easter, it is anything but a joyful feast. It is a meal laden with dark foreboding and betrayal. It is a meal doused in doubt and uncertainty—precursors to the denial and grief that is to come.

Some of us may have experienced a service of Tenebrae - where we follow Jesus’ walk through the finality of his life, each event marked by the extinguishing of a candle or a light. As all the lights go out, we are left sitting in somber darkness and quiet. And we leave—without talking, without greeting one another, without the fellowship we long for in our families of faith.

It is as if we leave without hope—even though we have shared the bread and drink. But we know something the disciples did not that night. We know that even though the lights have been extinguished and voices are muted, hope still lives in our hearts. For we do proclaim the Lord's death until he returns.

PRAYER
God of grace and God of glory, I hear this great hymn in my ear. To me, it speaks of these three days when we feel abandoned by your presence, when your light has gone, leaving the word in shadow. Pour on us your power, free us from our fears, forgive us our longing for things and our poverty of soul. Most of all, O God, grant us wisdom, grant us courage that we may face these hours as we search for our own salvation. May we come to serve you, and love you through the gift of your son, our Savior, Christ Jesus.

Barb Vaughan, MDIV (2011)
GOOD FRIDAY

John 18:1-19:42

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him.

First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people. Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself. Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)
GOOD FRIDAY
Continued

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew. You are from your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?” After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, “I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” They shouted in reply, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.” So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!” When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.” Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.” When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge’s bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” They cried out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.”

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”
GOOD FRIDAY
Continued

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.” And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

DEVOTIONAL
It was my first trip to the Shrine of Christ's Passion. If you are unfamiliar with this place, it is a prayer trail with life-sized bronze sculptures retelling the story of the last days of Jesus' life. With journal in hand, I lingered at every station, meditated on each scene, and recorded what the Spirit would place in my heart. At my usual hasty pace, a half mile trip would not take long, but I took my time. After all, I was here to pray.
I made my way through and finally arrived at the Crucifixion. The master artists managed to capture and depict details of pain, suffering, and sorrow onto the bronze sculptures. The two thieves hung to the left and to the right, and Jesus’ mangled, half-naked body nailed to the middle cross. The skilled sculptors depicted Jesus in his final moments, his head bowed, eyes closed. His lifeless body broken for you and for me.

“After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished... when Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

“Is it finished?” I asked with great disappointment. “This cannot be the end of the trail. Don't they know that the story does not end here?” I sensed my level of discomfort and angst rising. I wanted to hurry up and finish here. I wanted to skip the pain and suffering and get to the victory scene.

I did not want to linger here, so I did what came naturally; I picked up my pace. I abandoned the trail, but quickly realized that my hasty decision led me to a desolate lot behind the shrine. As I stood at the edge of the empty lot, I heard the Spirit say, “there were no shortcuts to death's defeat.”

PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for not abandoning the path. Forgive our hasty ways. Remind us that death's defeat came at too great of a cost. Teach us to remain in your presence and appreciate your sacrifice. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Leslie Diaz-Perez, DMIN (2012), MDIV (2006)
Isaiah 12: 2-6
Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

DEVOTION & PRAYER

Assurance

John 20:1-8

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;

DEVOTIONAL

One of the important and unique concepts of Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus. However, what is the true meaning of resurrection? If we simply understand resurrection as a concept of resuscitation, there will be no fundamental difference between life before death and life again; thus, there will be no change in life.

Then, what does the meaning of resurrection in the Bible? Greek terms, ἀνάστασις (anastasis) and ἐγείρω (egeírō) mean resurrection and “to stand up” and “to kick” from a certain state and jump up (Mark 3:3; John 20:26). This goes beyond the meaning of the body being revived but means that “people who die like they stopped breathing” will live again.

When Jesus died, his disciples, who were following Jesus, were afraid that they would die. Thus, they locked the door and could not come out of the house. This is what the dead look like. However, after a while, the disciples who reflected on Jesus’ teachings and held the spirit in mind, came to the world to deliver Jesus’ teachings. This is the message of resurrection that is through the life of the disciples who changed from death to life.

If we believe that the biblical story is the story of Jesus’ disciples and our story today, the story of resurrection should be our own story beyond Jesus’ disciples. In other words, if the disciples who were in fear experienced resurrection that Jesus’ spirit has revived in their hearts, our dead hearts and lives can also experience the resurrection through Jesus’ spirit. As we remember Jesus’ life and death in this Lent season, I hope and pray that our hearts that had been directed toward our ego and the world, will be able to experience a new resurrection in the spirit of Jesus.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, we will remember that resurrection is our story that can be happened here and now when we return to your will, your love, and your spirit.

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