



A Daily Devotional for
Lent 2019

USING THIS DEVOTIONAL

– Four Simple Steps –

1. CENTER YOURSELF

Sit quietly for 30 seconds or so to calm your mind and settle your spirit. Take a few deep breaths and get comfortable.

2. READ THE QUOTED VERSE(S)

Each day's reflection begins with a few lines of scripture. Take a moment to read the passage through once or twice. If you feel so inclined you may want to find the passage in your Bible and read the surrounding lines to see it in its larger context.

3. READ THE REFLECTION

As you read the day's reflection, ask yourself, "How do these words connect with my life?"

4. PRAY

To end your quiet time, say a short prayer either aloud or to yourself.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

– Ash Wednesday –

Matthew 6:9-11

*Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.*

A *hapax legomenon* is a word that occurs only once in the Bible. The phrase comes from Greek and means "something said only once."

You may be surprised to learn that the word translated as "daily" in the Lord's Prayer is a *hapax legomenon* – it's found nowhere else in all of scripture or Greek literature. This makes its exact meaning hard to pin down. Over the years, a lot of different suggestions have been floated:

Give us this day the bread necessary for existence.

Give us this day bread for tomorrow.

Give us this day the bread that doesn't run out.

No matter which translation you prefer, this section of the Lord's Prayer is about going to God in prayer for even the most basic things in life: bread, water, shelter.

I find this interesting because most of the time when we pray, we focus only on big things like health scares and major world events and upcoming job promotions.

And we should definitely continue to pray about those things!

But here Jesus seems to be saying, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. You have to walk before you run."

Yes, we should we go to God in prayer for the big things in our lives. But perhaps before all that, we should be going to God in prayer for the small things too.

Because when we pray for small, everyday things – food, water, shelter, energy to open our eyes in the morning, courage to put our two feet back on the ground on hard days – we begin recognize them as the God-given gifts they truly are.

May neither our prayers nor our gratitude for the small things in life be a hapax legemonon, something said only once!

by Tom Hathaway

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

– The Second Day of Lent –

Proverbs 1:7

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

"When I first got sober and returned to the church I had a really hard time with the idea of "fearing God". I mean wasn't this image of God the reason why people ran away from church – the harsh Sky-Judge who stood apart from us, on high and sent 'His' minions to the pearly gates to determined who was in and who was out? In the 12-Step Program that introduced me to a "power greater than myself that would restore me to sanity" the people of the fellowship were talking about an unconditionally loving God who wanted me to be "happy, joyous and free". You bet that I wanted that kind of God! So when I discovered that the church celebrated the God-fearing amongst them – I was like, "Wait, what? Why would I want to fear God?" Yet, the bible uses the word fear at least 300 times in reference to God – and here – it attaches the word to wisdom and knowledge! So perhaps this idea is not something we get to throw out in order to fit our personal theology or sensibilities.

Well, it turns out that there are two kinds of fear. Martin Luther famously distinguished a servile fear from a filial fear. Servile fear comes from a clear and present danger represented by another person; such as a slave would have at the hands of a malicious master. Filial fear draws from the Latin concept of family and reflects the experience of a child who has tremendous respect and love for their parent and who dearly wants to please them. It is a fear and anxiety of offending the one he loves, not because he's afraid of punishment, but rather because he's afraid of displeasing the one who is, in that child's world, the source of security and love.

The focus of the wisdom literature's references to the 'gift' of fearing God is on a sense of awe and respect for the majesty of God. While we are invited to call God Abba, Father; to see God as a Mother Hen who gathers all of her chicks; and to have the personal intimacy and protection promised to us – we are not to be flippant with God. We are always to maintain a healthy respect and adoration and allow that to motivate and drive us!

But there is one more thing... If we really have a healthy adoration for God and God's Word, Wisdom and Way; if we are really going to allow that to influence our morality, relationships and choices; if we really turn ourselves, all of ourselves, over to the care of God – we will be changed! We cannot help but be changed, and for some of us, that change will be drastic. Let me tell you from personal experience, that is some scary stuff!"

by Wendy Miller Olapade

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

– The Third Day of Lent –

Psalm 51:17

*The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

"Sometimes the "scariest" or most "alarming" element of an unfamiliar passage from the Bible is the grammar. What is this passage trying to tell us? That when our spirit has finally been broken after many failed attempts at taking the non-Godly route to solving our problems, that God is waiting with an "I told you so" or "I knew you'd be back"? In a sense, perhaps yes. But God, knowing the limits of human nature, is more generous than the grammar or sentence structure of this passage would suggest. Fortunately, in the 21st century Bible readers have the benefit of a variety of translations of scripture. The Message translation sums of God's attitude toward we "well look who's back" Christians in words that we can understand:

*Going through the motions doesn't please you,
a flawless performance is nothing to you.
I learned God-worship
when my pride was shattered.
Heart-shattered lives ready for love
don't for a moment escape God's notice.*

Screwing up, trying things the wrong way or the easy way – holding onto our grudges or being just a little greedy or selfish – these things eventually lead to lost pride, broken relationships and an unhappy spirit. But while in many cases it may be too late to undo the damage our mistakes bring to our earthly relationships, God takes notice and is always ready to take is back."

by Shelley Scruggs

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

– The Fourth Day of Lent –

Psalm 139:1-4

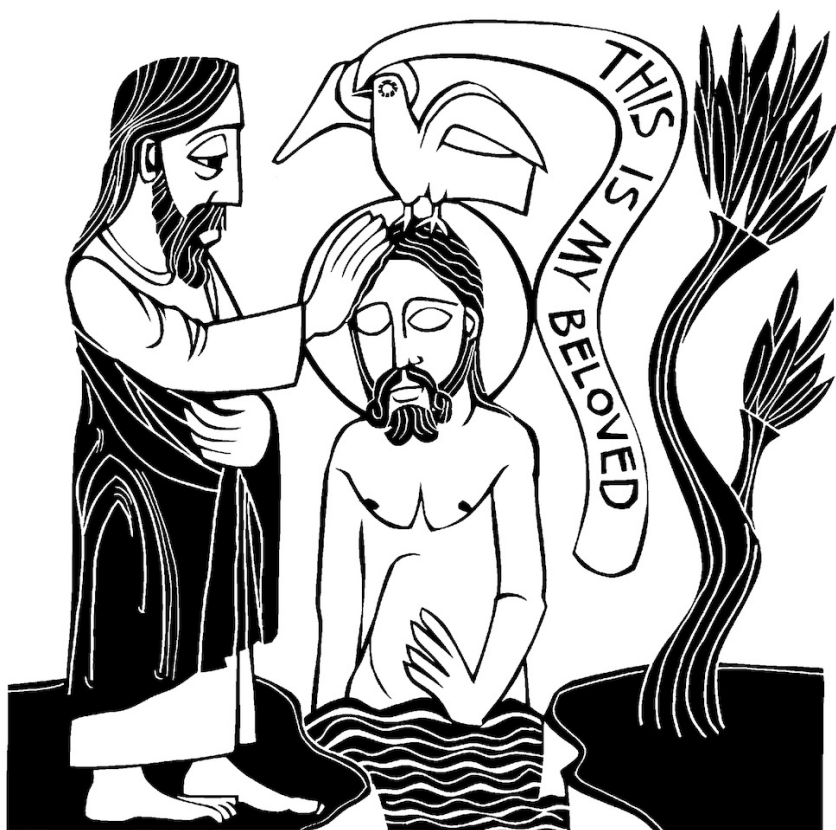
O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.

This is no casual relationship. To have been searched first, and known. You even know my thoughts - no matter how hard I try to hide them. There is no place to hide. You are acquainted with all my ways, even those times when I forget you - when I think I am alone making my way without you, when I am impatient or down right nasty or, ouch, self-centered. Even before I speak, you know what is in my mind.

This could be the scariest thought imaginable - or the most wonderful. Some days I feel like the first - I am scared of the ways I fail to measure up to what I think is expected of me. I'm always trying to be better! To be "good". But here there is no hint of condemnation for who or what I am. This is an affirmation - total - of everything I am, think or say, regardless of what I might think of it. Yikes! Can I stand it? Is there a choice? I have a feeling that this is for real. Now. And all I can say is "Thank You."

by Lisa Parker

SUNDAY, MARCH 10
– The First Sunday in Lent –



MONDAY, MARCH 11

– The Fifth Day of Lent –

1 Samuel 24:4

The men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hand.'"

Most mornings I pray the Lord's Prayer, including, "Thy will be done."

But I've come to realize that I don't very often check in with God as the day goes on to ask what God's will might actually be. I'm trying to change that.

The thing about David is that he did check. "Not my will, but thy will be done" was his m.o., at least at this point in his young life. Later not so much.

So here, the insanely jealous King Saul had been raging after David, hunting him down.

When Saul needed to "relieve himself," he took refuge in a cave. What Saul didn't know was that David and his men were already holed up in the same cave.

"This is your chance," urged David's men.

But David didn't take it. Why not? It's not that David was a pacifist.

Taking Saul out would have meant taking matters into his own hands – not trusting that the situation was in God's hands.

Sometimes people are skeptical that we can ever really know God's will. But maybe the real problem is that, if we ask, we often discover that God's will and our will aren't quite the same. It's not that we don't get an answer. We don't like the answer we get.

And even when you don't get an answer, sometimes just asking the question makes a difference."

by Tony Robinson

TUESDAY, MARCH 12

– The Sixth Day of Lent –

Galatians 5:22

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Of course you know that “by their fruits, you shall know them” comes from Scripture. And, there above is the list of the fruit of the spirit.

The thing that’s different about this kind of fruit is that not a one of them can be sought. Looking for any of these spiritual fruits means they’ll elude you every time.

What these fruits are is evidence, really.

Of what?

Evidence that the Spirit is at work in your life. The Holy Spirit.

What this verse teaches us is that what we are to seek is the Spirit, not its fruits. Oh, the fruits will come, to be sure. But they’re the icing, not the cake.

Author Alan Cohen advises, “Dance on the edge of mystery.” That’s what it is to live a life based in Spirit. We dance on the edge of mystery daily—because we never know what the Spirit will bring us, or ask us, or ask of us.

These fruits are for others to notice about our lives. They arrive when we live steeped in the Will of God.

The fruits are how we recognize the other Spirit-steeped people in our world.

by Susan Corso

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

– The Seventh Day of Lent –

Psalm 19:1-4

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

The word “firmament” comes from the vulgate “firmamentum”, which is used in the translation of the Hebrew *raki’a*. The Hebrew word means “expansion”. However, up to recent times “*raki’a*” was understood as a physical arch.

Today we learn that indeed the universe is expanding from astrophysicists. This cosmic sense of *raki’a* then takes on a new meaning, which is easier for me to absorb.

This psalm reminds me of what Paul wrote to the Romans in 1:20 “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been made so that people are without excuse”. Again God shows himself in nature without words or speech.

There is truth in Nature and I believe since love is built into God’s creation we have an innate knowledge of truths, such as love, if we are still as in Psalm 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God”.

by Ose Manheim

THURSDAY, MARCH 14

– The Eighth Day of Lent –

Ephesians 4:15-16

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

In an effort to unite people, Paul likens differences to different parts of a body. I love how he doesn't tell arms to be legs, or hands to be ears, or teeth to be toes. We cannot erase the differences between veins and arteries, even though they're similar. And if we require a heart to be a brain, we put ourselves in grave danger. Likewise, if we erase the HIV+ parts or the disabled parts or the homeless parts of Christ's Body, we cause trauma to the whole Body.

If it's true that we're one Body, then we're called not only to acknowledge the Body's many parts but also to honor the unique expressions of those Body parts. What if the Body of Christ unapologetically cared for its mentally-ill parts and youthful parts and its kinky parts and its rural parts and its non-binary parts and its parts of every language (spoken or signed)?

Whatever your color, race, ethnicity, and tribe may be, every ligament, bone, organ, and cell of your being is important to the Body's existence—to our shared existence. We cannot be whole and healthy if you are not whole and well and included as an indispensable part of this, Our One Body.

by Phiwa Langeni

FRIDAY, MARCH 15

– The Ninth Day of Lent –

Psalm 80:3

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

I am faith filled and fear-free because... God is always on duty!*

What is the number you use to call God? Is it 411? Or is it 911? Many of us are 911 callers. We don't call in for information. We only call in when we need an ambulance, someone to put out a fire, or a police car to take something or someone away. We are in the habit of only calling God at 911 for emergency treatment. We call when we are broken down, torn down or on the way down! We call frantically when we hit someone we can't handle, when we break something we can't fix or when some part of our lives isn't working the way we set it up to work. And if for some reason, we feel we are not being heard, or that the line is busy, we keep checking. We keep looking to make sure that what we need, what we have requested is on the way. Yes, most of us use 911 because we forget to use 411.

When you use 411 to call God, you get preventative treatment, long-term care and regular maintenance. You get local and long distance information. You talk to God about what is going on now and what is coming. When you call God at 411, it is an indication that you recognize yourself as a product with a lifetime guarantee. You call to insure that there is an open line of communication between you and your manufacturer. When you call 411 there is no need to wait. No need to fear. No need too great. Why? Because you have paid your life-care premium on time. You know where the trouble spots are and what precautions you need to take. The good news is, God is always on duty! When you call God at 411 you are less likely to need to call God on 911!

Until today, you may have placed God on your 911 emergency list. Just for today, try contacting God for information only.

Today I am devoted to asking God for the information I need to give my life a clean bill of health!

by Iyanla Vanzant

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

– The Tenth Day of Lent –

Matthew 6:25-26

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they are?

We live in a time of constant worry and anxiety. Our political situation in our country is of great concern to many of us. Children taken from their parents, religious persecution, tax breaks for billionaires and none for the working poor. There seems to be a lot to worry about. Most of us don't have the misfortune (yet) to not have clothes or food but there are those who do. I have watched at length how some people in those situations are able to do what the rest of us cannot: they pray, they focus, take life one day at a time and do what needs to be done in that moment. Our personal problems can seem small and our complaints not insightful if you compare our lives to those of the hundreds of men and women who live at the Pine Street Inn. Our tendency to worry is based on one thing only: our inability to turn our lives over to God. Once we develop the capacity to accept responsibility for the situations that we put ourselves in and understand the grace with which we have been blessed, our lives become manageable and the solution apparent: worry or pray, you can't do both.

Precious Lord, we ask for your forgiveness for our lack of faithfulness and our deep misunderstanding of your love. As we struggle with the unkindness that the world presents, may we be blessed with the wisdom that with you all things are possible. Amen.

by Kathy Williams

SUNDAY, MARCH 17
– The Second Sunday in Lent –



MONDAY, MARCH 18

– The Eleventh Day of Lent –

Micah 6:7-8

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

When I began this (ad)venture I did not expect the challenge to take place so thoroughly in heart, soul AND mind. I saw it primarily as the discipline of setting down words that the Spirit provides the writer.

What I had forgotten is the blessing of doing some Biblical scholarship -- discovering again how much a familiar passage speaks its own language, new perspectives to the one who is reading. Sure, I know the words. I reckon the meaning of the the command to humans regarding what is good. What surprised me is the degree to which my understanding is deepened by reading the historical data. I only had to dig into the sidebars provided in my Access Bible, New Revised Standard Version, to realize this passage is a part of the Prophetic Wisdom tradition. Like Isaiah and Jeremiah who preached dire messages to the people of Israel during periods in which dishonesty and corruption in those with power and wealth led to injustices throughout the land, Micah's message is to the whole nation.

Micah is speaking to a people. Not only to one person -- the one who hears it is a member of a society and culture which has gone terribly wrong. The Prophet focuses on the ones at the top of the economic and political ladder -- call it a message to the 1%.

Today we tend to read passages such as this as meant for individuals and to ignore the larger context. But that misses the full meaning and simply plays into the hands of the rich and powerful. The Prophet Micah even addresses Israel in the form of a lawsuit brought against the entire society, and calls on the natural elements as witnesses to injustice and degradation of the culture. He makes it clear that his indictment is against the wealthy and powerful, businessmen who use false weights to shortchange customers -- protected by governing officials who turn a blind eye.

So, my take-away is this: God calls each of us within the context of our own times and abilities to seek the mishpat of justice, the hesed of mercy with integrity in such a way as to fulfill one's own social responsibilities, and the hatsnea 'lekhet of walking humbly, which is another way of saying be teachable. Together these elements create a way of life based in loving gratitude, including the realization that retribution does not create justice and the Divine Essence is directly opposed to the exploitation of others. These are the basis of personal integrity and the ground level of responding to the society in which one lives. Since the Creator of All does not require gifts from that which is Created, our challenge is to respond with goodness, mercy and generosity to these others with whom we share the world. As our God is the Loving Heart of Reality, we are constantly challenged to be a veritable reflection of That.

May It Be So.

by Branwen Cook

TUESDAY, MARCH 19

– The Twelfth Day of Lent –

Isaiah 6:8

Here I am; send me.

Here I am!!!! This is exactly what my 4-year old nephew yells as I approach him each time we play hide and seek. I won't suggest that my nephew is terrible at hiding, but I will report that he goes to the same spot.....every.....single.....time. Indeed, after the 20th round in a single afternoon the phrase "Here I am" loses any purpose of revealing his location and becomes about something else. In my nephew's case it is probably the joy of reveling in my feigned fright, something which my red-headed buddy never tires of. But, in scripture, what does Isaiah mean when he says, "Here I am"? Surely God already knows where Isaiah is, and why would he say it if he wasn't hiding? If Isaiah was hiding, was he any more skilled than my nephew? I think we all sometimes hide from God, but I doubt any of us are arrogant enough to think God cannot find us. Friends, if God already knows where we are, then I think that the declaration "Here I am" isn't about being found. It's about something else. Maybe "Here I am" is about surrendering the part of ourselves we'd rather not share, to a God who desperately wants to embrace all of who we are.

by Philip Balla

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

– The Thirteenth Day of Lent –

Isaiah 61:1-2

Here I am; send me.

What it anointing, anyway?

Well, if you're a priest or king of ancient Israel, it's having scented oil poured over your head, setting you apart for your high office. Like the ordination of a minister today, or the hand-on-holy-book swearing in of a president, anointing was a rite that placed the anointed over and above the people, to mediate between God and the people (priests), or to make laws and administer justice (kings).

Isaiah too claims to be anointed. But his anointing, he tells us, is not with oil. It comes from even higher up: from the Spirit herself!

Priests and kings were anointed by human hands. Prophets are anointed directly by God. Which makes them accountable to God and God alone. So watch out.

Prophets aren't called to hire pollsters or form focus groups to figure out what message is going to play best on voting day. Prophets are called to speak God's message, whatever it is—sometimes comfort, sometimes hope, and sometimes judgment: No! Bad! Wrong way! Change direction!

Prophets are sent to rock the boat, upset the apple cart, and overturn the money changers' tables. Or in the case of Isaiah, "to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners."

Wait. To bring good news to women being trafficked out of strip malls? to cleaners and warehouse workers? to the targets of racial profiling?

To bind up LGBTQ folks rejected by their families and churches? women demeaned and assaulted at home, at work, and in public? parents and children separated at our southern border, never to see each other again?

To proclaim liberty to the 2.3 million people locked up in the US on any given day?

Isaiah hasn't come to make nice. He's come to disrupt. Just like Spirit-anointed Jesus (remember the dove?), who stood up in the

synagogue, opened the Torah scroll, and read this very passage aloud. "This is me," he told the people listening. "This is what I've come to do."

Are you ready for Jesus to mess with your life? Because that's what's in store, if you decide to let him in at all.

Jesus is looking for you, and he's got disruption on his mind. He's got his gimlet eye on all those forces bearing down on you that you've tried so hard to compromise with, that are there to keep you small.

He's not accountable to your land Lord, your critical parent, or your boss. He doesn't care what Vogue is telling you about your clothes or your shape. He's not reading the mean comments on your posts and he isn't listening to the trolls.

Jesus the Disrupter is looking for you, and he wants to give you joy.

by Kate Layzer

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

– The Fourteenth Day of Lent –

Psalm 127:2

It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for God gives sleep to his beloved.

I pulled my first all-nighter in sixth grade, crafting an elaborate puppet show about the Middle Ages that I'd put off for months. The good grade created positive reinforcement, and I was hooked. I learned to lean on the twin forces of procrastination and adrenaline for the next 15 years. It seemed to serve me well, but it was eating me up inside.

Our society loves to reward anxious toil. We wear our busyness like status symbols, tote our full calendars as security blankets, proof that we matter, and a ready excuse for all we overlook.

When we lean on other forces, like our own ego, achievement, the whirl of our own little chaos, we forget to lean on God. When we binge on the bread of anxious toil—even good toil for things that matter, from puppet shows to urgent protest—our labor can become so many spiritually empty calories.

But the Psalmist's voice comes calling up the stairs of our isolation like a parent in the middle of the night: "All that anxious toiling, over-functioning? It's vanity! And it's optional. Go to bed, sweetie."

When Jesus broke bread that last all-nighter with his friends, it wasn't the bread of anxious toil, but the bread of heaven, the bread of life. And it's still nourishing us now.

by Kit Novotny

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

– The Fifteenth Day of Lent –

Acts 9:31

Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and the confidence of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers

At first glance, it seems like this verse is sharing the perfect recipe for church growth: live in peace, worship God, and remain open to the Holy Spirit. Follow these three easy steps, and your church's membership will climb.

Keep in mind the book of Acts is a telling of how the church came to be - not as we know it today, but as the early Christ followers understood their common belief. Jesus wasn't a global phenomenon; the earth's population was small; and there was no formal religion like we know it now.

Nowadays we have countless denominations, all kinds of definitions of what it means to be Christian, and churches that look different from block to block. Christianity is a beautiful mural created by a diverse multitude of people over centuries, yet it is not the church. Christianity is a belief; the church is an assembly of like-minded believers. Church is what Christians make of it, depending on belief, sect, and tradition. One commonality between churches is that sometimes they grow; sometimes they shrink; and sometimes discord prevails over peace among members. The not-so-perfect recipe.

A perfect recipe of church might not make membership soar, but I don't think that's really the point of church. I think the best batch includes peace, love, worship, inclusion, and forgiveness which is a different way of looking at the ingredients. Put them all together and something wonderfully delicious is made. Instead of thinking about the numbers, we could focus on the reach – how many people can we feed with what we've been given, built, and sustained?

by Liz Douglass

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

– The Sixteenth Day of Lent –

Psalm 37:4

Take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

I am not a believe in the prosperity Gospel preached by infamous TV Evangelists like Joel Osteen and Creflo Dollar. You've heard, maybe even been attracted to, this twist of the good news of God's grace, promised by the likes of Joyce Meyers and Benny Hinn. They do it so well, with clever and expressive preaching, lovely stories about sin overcome, and practical advice about life. But there is always this twist – that financial blessings and your physical well-being are the will of God for you; and your faith, positive speech, and donations to their religious cause will increase your material wealth. I don't have the space to break down how many ways this is bad, bad theology. Suffice it to say that I cannot believe God assigns who gets what based on how much they donate to a creepy preacher's private jet fund. And one should always question a preacher who makes it all about themselves. So, this Psalmist's promise of God giving you "all the desires of your heart" makes me really nervous!

But here is the everyday difference. If I delight in God (not a flashy preacher or things of the world like money, property and prestige) then my heart does not desire the things of the world. If I delight in God my heart desires the things of God. If I delight in God I take pleasure in things of the soul and Spirit. If I delight in Jesus I get satisfaction through righteous choices. If I take delight in the Lord I relish being kind, loving, good, and faithful. If I delight in God I celebrate the wisdom and direction of the Holy Spirit and find joy in an intimate relationship with God, through Jesus. These become the desires of my heart – to love God and love my neighbor, God's beloved creation. It really is that simple. Mind you, it is not easy – it takes a lot of effort to resist the cheap grace offered by God's broken people and practice delight in the Lord. But when you do, the rewards are utterly, well, delightful! When you practice delight in the Lord you get prosperity in your heart - everyday good stuff that you cannot buy - like love that will not let you go, true partnership with your fellows, and care and kindness gushing out all over the place.

You know, everyday blessings. That's worth so much more than a private jet, don't you think?

by Wendy Miller Olapade

SUNDAY, MARCH 24
– The Third Sunday in Lent –



MONDAY, MARCH 25

– The Seventeenth Day of Lent –

Matthew 8:8

Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be healed.

When I was growing up in the Catholic Church, we prayed this verse at Communion. Slightly adapted, we prayed, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof; say but the word and my soul will be healed.” Church teaching in that era put heavy emphasis on unworthiness, and this small prayer never failed to remind me I was a worm. After all, I was an impressionable kid, and I took very much to heart the sin and guilt that my Sunday school nuns regularly told us we bore. In retrospect, of course, I wonder: how sinful could a ten-year-old really be?

In part because of this negative emphasis, I left the Catholic Church in my late teens, and I remained unchurched for ten years. During that time I tucked my hunger for God deep within myself. I kept busy by finishing college, getting married, teaching high school French, and starting a family. But in my late 20s, a totally surprise encounter with God practically knocked me to my knees. There were no bells or whistles, no choir of angels, yet suddenly I was profoundly aware of the presence of God. With me! What joy! Out of the blue I found myself on a new path as I began to passionately explore my new relationship with God, search for a different church home, and ultimately discern a most unexpected call to ordained ministry.

As I’ve hammered out my theology over the years (I find the hammering to be a never-ending process!), my original conviction that I was abjectly unworthy of God has morphed. The emphasis now is trust. Sure, everyone falls short of the glory of God! But it’s the second part of the prayer, “Say but the word and my soul will be healed,” that holds both trust and promise for me. The Roman centurion who first said these words trusted Jesus with all his heart. Now I trust God to take me, the whole messy mix of my humanity, and to heal me and remake me. Hurtful memories, negative thoughts, dumb decisions – nothing can separate me from God’s love. God grants me a new vision of my utter belovedness – all I have to do is ask.

“I am not worthy.” Of course I’m not! We are all dust, just as the Ash Wednesday liturgy says. But we are utterly precious dust! And I’d like to live a life that honors the precious dustiness of us all.

by Merrie Allen

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

– The Eighteenth Day of Lent –

Matthew 9:12-13

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.

In the verses immediately preceding these, Jesus recruits a tax collector named Matthew and then has dinner at Matthew's house with other tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees ask his disciples why Jesus associates with such low life and these lines are Jesus' response.

My first inclination was to view this as yet another instance of the authorities trying to put Jesus on the spot and Jesus replying in a way that shows up their shallowness. That seems too simplistic. I've listened to enough sermons to know the tax collectors were widely disliked. A more contemporary analogy would be people who collaborate with an occupying army such as the Vichy government in Nazi-controlled France.

With that in mind, Jesus' invitation to Matthew and his peers is radical: he saw the redeemability of the lowest of the low. That should give us assurance that we too are redeemable but also remind us that people we look down on are also redeemable.

by Bob Seiler

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

– The Nineteenth Day of Lent –

Mark 10:15

Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.

So, the disposition of a disciple is childlike. Well then how is a body to make any sense of the lessons that surround this one coherent thought?

The preceding lesson presents a pharisaical test of Jesus; the question: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” Check out the rabbi’s response: “...the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh.” The institutional church and centuries of cultural development have complicated a central, profound understanding of human sexuality and gender identity that extends back to the earliest communities of faith. Every aspect of human nature emerges from One Divine Nature.

The lesson that follows is famous for its assumed (rationalized?) moral authority. It begins with a man asking, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”, to which Jesus immediately replies, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.” Yes, his response continues with elaboration on the commandments received by ancestors in faith, but he begins with an orientation to goodness.

One Divine Nature and an orientation to goodness. How do you think children comprehend life in the world? How do you receive this counsel from the Master?

by Tom Gerstenlauer

THURSDAY, MARCH 28

– The Twentieth Day of Lent –

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.

Recently, using a laptop computer, I put together a little ten-page booklet of bird photos taken by my nephew Stephen in Clearwater, Florida as a gift for his Uncle Bob, a lifetime birder. All was going along nicely. Identifications and clever captions accompanied each photo. Then came the task of printing out. I soon discovered the pages were not in the hoped-for order. So I had to create a preliminary test version in pencil to rearrange the placement of the photos.

Sometimes, we think we have the answer. only to discover it was something we had not considered. This passage from Ephesians reminds us to have faith in God's good plans prepared in advance for us, Rather than relying on our own perception of the way forward, God has provided the model of Christ's good works for us to follow faithfully.

by Rebecca Ramsay

FRIDAY, MARCH 29

– The Twenty-First Day of Lent –

Mark 9:24

I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!

I chose this verse particularly because I was carpooling into work with a coworker of mine some time ago and I couldn't help not to think of him when I read this verse in my head.

I do believe in God, but my coworker does not. He believes in logic and science and everything that happens is because of probability and chance. As we drive home after a hard days work we typically engage in some pretty in depth conversations sometimes about life and religion. He believes that its easier to see that logic and probability are a much reasonable answer to the unexplained things that happen in our lives where I believe miracles are an act of God and that He's always around us even though you can't see Him. As we sit in heavy traffic we constantly but heads rifling out different scenarios and life experiences to back up our own beliefs. As we get deeper and deeper into the topic of religion I can't help but feel a little doubt and unbelief as I start to think to myself "is there really a God?". The more I think about it the more confused I am and the more I feel conflicted with my own beliefs.

But then I remember the few times where stuff has happened to me and my family that can't be explained by logic and science. There are miracles I've seen that can only be done by God himself. As I ponder all this and try to stay true to my faith there's a dark spot in my mind where unbelief still dwells. And in these days with all the violence and disruption in the world its hard to suppress that darkness. But I know there's always light in darkness and with that light comes God, and I pray that He helps my unbelief.

by Jennie Galante

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

– The Twenty-Second Day of Lent –

1 John 4:16

*God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God
and God abides in them.*

Abide. While the standard dictionaries do not agree with me - I believe that abiding in love means living in love. And that by living in love we are living in God.

Come with me. Stay with me. Be with me. Abide in me.

We entreat God to be with us and in us. It is one of humanity's greatest desire - to simply be with God.

The classic hymn says it poetically:

*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.*

And so we sing this hymn/prayer: Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

by Kathleen Beyerman

SUNDAY, MARCH 31
– The Fourth Sunday in Lent –



MONDAY, APRIL 1

– The Twenty-Third Day of Lent –

Romans 14:14

I know and am convinced on the authority of the Lord Jesus that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat. But if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong.

If I was given a nickel for every time someone has looked at me, wide-eyed, mouth agape, offering well-meaning yet chastising words like, “You shouldn’t eat that, YOU’RE DIABETIC!” as I lean in for a delectable bite of a cookie or a donut or something else that has more than a moderate amount of sugar, well – I’d be a freaking millionaire.

My usual response is to do some diabetes education with these well-meaning folks. As someone living with type 1 diabetes, I have to give myself insulin anytime I eat anything (actually, I have to give myself insulin throughout the day, even when I’m not eating too!) If I decide to have something is especially sugary, I need to make sure to take enough insulin to “cover” the amount of carbohydrates, as with any other food. This isn’t to say I can go crazy and eat donuts and cookies at every meal every day – but one indulgence once in a while is totally ok (and medically approved), as long as I take that insulin.

Case in point: my husband took me to breakfast on Valentine’s Day and my eyes (and stomach) were drawn to French Toast. It’s my favorite breakfast option, and (for obvious reasons) is the kind of meal that’s going to require me to closely monitor my blood sugar over the next few hours and give myself extra insulin, if necessary. So, instead of the whole plate of French toast, I ordered just a few slices on the side (and only ate half of those) and added a little protein to balance out the plate. There’s nothing wrong with French toast – and there’s nothing wrong with me eating it! And, the truth is, it isn’t in my overall best interest to indulge in French toast more than once or twice a year.

So, I guess what I’m trying to get at is: French toast isn’t wrong for anyone to eat, including me. But I want to eat it in a way that reflects what a special treat it is, so that it doesn’t make me feel glazed over with sugary guilt, but fills me with delight and gladness for its goodness.

by Sarah Hathaway

TUESDAY, APRIL 2

– The Twenty-Fourth Day of Lent –

Leviticus 10:10

You are to distinguish between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean.

Lent is a season of preparation; let us proceed with caution. Stay focused, steer clear of diversions and interruptions. It's six and a half weeks from Ash Wednesday to Easter, a long season with plenty of distractions. We'd best be alert for signs that will guide us.

What is profane? Worldly, transient, mundane, impure, atheistic, vulgar, irreverent, coarse, abusive. Whew! Let me catch my breath. And... wearisome, undistinguished, mediocre, conventional, humdrum, trivial, routine, unclean. Signs of the profane are abundant.

What is holy? Virtuous, uncorrupt, reverent, just, devoted, upright, faithful, righteous, spiritual, humble, clean. Signs of the holy are not so common.

The quotation from Leviticus is an instruction to the priests of the Hebrew tribe. Yet the people had witnessed Holy presence and responded, falling to the ground with a shout, face down. It was as sharp a distinction as that between the commonplace and the Divine.

Could we witness this now? How will we know? These are matters of grace.

Lent is a season of preparation. Watch for signs...

by Tom Gerstenlauer

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3

– The Twenty-Fifth Day of Lent –

2 Peter 1:5

Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature.

Eugene Peterson's narration of this scripture is entitled, "Don't Put It Off." In The Message Bible, Peterson suggests that "Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. The best invitation we ever received! We were also given absolutely terrific promises to pass on to you—your tickets to participation in the life of God after you turned your back on a world corrupted by lust" (2 Peter 1:3-4).

The author of this letter is exhorting his readers to a life of holiness and faith and lets them know that they already have everything they need to be in a personal and intimate relationship with God. In fact, they have everything they need to please God. They have been invited and promised and given their own ticket to participate in the new life that God has promised. All they need to do is turn away from the hate and hurt and horror of the world and turn toward the grace and goodness and good-news of God and hand over their ticket to glory!

Do you hear that!?! You already have everything you need. You already have a ticket to glory. You have been promised and invited and handed the keys to the kingdom. All you need, is to turn. And, oh my goodness, will God be pleased. Seriously, don't put it off.

by Wendy Miller Olapade

THURSDAY, APRIL 4

– The Twenty-Sixth Day of Lent –

Matthew 26:42

He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

"In this passage we meet a very human Jesus. He can see the handwriting on the wall. The horrific events he had told his disciples would happen now loom large. And Jesus, like any of us who stands on the threshold of things we wish would not happen--sickness, death, divorce, losing a job, foreclosure and more--prays that he does not have to drink from this cup. And yet, like us perhaps, Jesus recognizes that there are forces at work that he cannot stop. It is at this point, as they would say in AA, he realizes that he must let go and let God. He can't have the end he wants, and so he turns to God trusting that God's will, in some mysterious way, will not only prevail but also be good. In a day and age when many can get away, at least for awhile, with the idea that they can control their own destiny, submission to God's will, instead, can sound passive and defeatist. But the truth is, the illusion of control is ultimately unmasked in every life. It is then that we stand naked before God with a choice: we can submit to despair or we can submit to the gracious mystery of God. Is it not that the first is the defeatist one and the second an act of courage and faith?

Someday, and for most of us far more than once, we will have opportunity to say, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." May the prayer allow us to open our arms to the will and love of God.

by Dudley Rose

FRIDAY, APRIL 5

– The Twenty-Seventh Day of Lent –

Psalm 37:4

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Take delight in the Lord and s/he will give you your heart's desire...

To me, this passage appears at first as an agreement -- you do this and that will happen. On further thought I realized a deeper meaning was there for me if I dug a bit for it.

How we take delight in the Lord is different for each one of us. I love nature and I sense God better through the lens of nature. Others may prefer meditation and/or good works and prayer to experience God's presence in their lives.

When I watch birds and collect images of birds for my own enjoyment, I am reminded of the playfulness and beauty that is present for us in this world. Touching leaves as they fall and appreciating the crisp, colorful miracle in my hand, I know that all living things are here to enjoy life as they go about their business. Sun, ocean, and sand restore in me a sense of well being. The wind and rain and even the snow and ice have a wonderful tactile, bracing quality that reminds me to be aware and alert and know for sure that I am HERE NOW on this amazing planet.

My senses become alive through nature. Find whatever beckons to you and brings you delight. You will have your heart's desire.

by Nancy Sartanowicz

SATURDAY, APRIL 6

– The Twenty-Eighth Day of Lent –

Psalm 37:7-8

Do not fret over those who prosper in their way, those who carry out evil devices. Do not fret – it leads only to evil.

"Do not fret," the psalmist proclaims three times in eleven verses. That's like telling someone, "Don't think of elephants." And they immediately think of elephants. No wonder one Biblical commentator wrote of Psalm 37: "The Psalms are of different qualities and this is not one of the greatest."

Besides, we have a lot to fret about in our 24/7 world. Just turn on the news or read the paper or scan Facebook. We have real problems. All the psalmist had to worry about were evildoers, exile, disease, crop failure, and famine.

All kidding aside, Psalm 37 offers much-needed wisdom for our time. It doesn't just say "don't fret." It provides a way to deal with our fears: "Trust in the Lord and do good. Take delight in the Lord. Commit your way to the Lord. Trust in God and God will act."

Trust. Do good. Take delight. Commit to God's way. The psalm is filled with action verbs to break out of the paralysis that our anxiety produces. Take the next step, the psalmist says, and trust that God is with you.

The psalmist also knows that sometimes the best antidote to anxiety is not to do anything—with intention. "Be still before the Lord, wait patiently for God." In a word, trust that God is at work in the world, even when we're not. Try to take a break today from your work and the news to remember that truth.

by Talitha Arnold

SUNDAY, APRIL 7
– The Fifth Sunday in Lent –



MONDAY, APRIL 8

– The Twenty-Ninth Day of Lent –

Galatians 3:28

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Do you ever think you're better than others? I compare myself to others often. Sometimes I say to myself that I'm better than others, and other times, I put myself down by thinking I'm not as good as others. It's a continuous cycle of up and down, back and forth, elation and despair.

My shoes are cooler than his. She is so much smarter than me. He makes way more money than me. My garden looks amazing compared to theirs. I'm so much better at presenting than her. She's such a better Christian than me.

You get the idea.

Our minds are constantly flooded with comparisons, entitlement, feelings of worth, and desperation. The author of Galatians tells us that none of these things matter. Through Jesus, there isn't either/or, this or that, black or white. The binary that we created doesn't exist – one thing or another without a middle ground, but in categorizing ourselves and others in this way, we're missing the "all are one" aspect.

Being one in Christ Jesus is freeing. Being one in Christ Jesus is a responsibility. Not only are we free from our negative comparisons and self-worth, but we're also responsible for how we categorize others. Being one in Christ means just that – we are one, whole, bound together by something far greater than ourselves, our binaries, and our perceptions. We are connected by Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, regardless of differences, prejudices, or status. We are the body of Christ – completely, imperfectly, and beautifully. Live and love in that freedom.

by Liz Douglass

TUESDAY, APRIL 9

– The Thirtieth Day of Lent –

Psalm 56:8

*You have collected my tears in a bottle;
you have recorded each one in your book.*

Each Sunday in church, I am struck anew by the power of the “Joys and Concerns” portion of the hour we spend together in the sanctuary. It is one of the simpler parts of our service ; it is not one that requires a lot of practice or preparation. No materials need to be purchased or arranged ahead of time, except for a microphone (which is optional) and an inviting pastor. And yet, it is a time when we move beyond moments of personal reflection to a shared group connection. Each of us has the opportunity to feel the support and caring of those seated around us, while also extending that same embracing warmth as our neighbors lift up their joys and concerns.

Maybe you are a churchgoer who feels the weight lifted just a little bit (or a lot!) by sharing aloud, or perhaps you are someone who prefers to privately share these joys and concerns through silent prayer, or even with a kind, listening friend. Whichever way it is for you, Psalm 56:8 reminds us of what a gift it is that we can be truly heard and held in community, that we can feel in our souls that we are not alone with the weight of the moment or our worries for the future.

by Jenn Young

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10

– The Thirty-First Day of Lent –

Jeremiah 13:15-16

*Hear and give ear; do not be haughty, or the Lord has spoken.
Give glory to the Lord your God before she brings darkness.*

My son and I were hanging the mirror ball for our New Year's Eve party. We messed around with the spotlight, shining it on a dark fluffy blanket and watching the light disappear, then pointing it at the ball and watching the light blossom around the room. He asked me where the light was when the spotlight wasn't on; was it stored inside somehow?

It is a peculiarity of light that it stops being itself if it stops moving. Unlike most things, light literally becomes something else if it's not radiating. Light isn't any use (to a human, anyway) unless it's bouncing off something and hitting you in the eye. Next time the power goes out, try just carrying an unlit flashlight around the house and see how much good it does you. Or shine a spotlight straight up into the night sky, or into a black fluffy blanket, and see how useful that is.

Glory's like this, too. Probably that's why in paintings it's always depicted as light: halos, beams, nimbuses. Unascribed glory isn't glory; it isn't anything. Glory just isn't itself unless it's traveling, unless you're giving it away. Keep it to yourself, and it is nothing, does nothing, cannot signify. Shine it at an unworthy target, and it just dies.

Focus it, however, shine it on the right thing, and it can light your path all the way home. Give it to God, and the whole world will blossom with beauty.

by Quinn Caldwell

THURSDAY, APRIL 11

– The Thirty-Second Day of Lent –

Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

There's a comment in the Harper Collins Study Bible about this verse: "The heart was considered the region of thought, intention, and moral disposition". Much more than the touchy-feely sort of organ we've come to celebrate on Valentine's Day, eh?

So, a couple of thoughts about the heart. American poet Jack Gilbert wrote, "The pregnant heart is driven to hopes that are the wrong size for this world." Not too little and not too big, but "the wrong size for this world." A pregnant heart full of... what? Thought, as in reflection? Intent, like purpose? How do these coincide with moral disposition? The poet continues: "Love is always disturbing in the heavenly kingdom. Eden cannot manage so much ambition." The poem's title is "Trouble".

Here's a second thought. In his book *Open Mind, Open Heart*, Father Thomas Keating wrote, "The chief thing that separates us from God is the thought that we are separated from God. If we get rid of that thought, our troubles will be greatly reduced. We fail to believe that we are always with God and that God is in every reality."

Thoughtful reflection and purposeful intent have an impact on our moral disposition. The contemplative practice of centering prayer practice begins with an expression of intent to consent to God's presence. As a matter of faith, prayer is a practice that eliminates, or at least greatly reduces barriers between the pray-er and the Divine. Prayer helps us to re-integrate our dis-integrated hearts. It may seem complex, but it just takes practice. Begin with intent, and allow your reflection in the presence of God reveal your true nature. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" is not an exclusive statement. It is an invitation to intimate relationship with God.

by Tom Gerstenlauer

FRIDAY, APRIL 12

– The Thirty-Third Day of Lent –

Jeremiah 17:7-8

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by the water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when the heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green. In the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

I live in Northern California, a place of paradox: land of drought and wildfire, and also some of the most beautiful fruit orchards and forests you have ever seen, including trees that are older than Jesus.

The winter after I moved here, the 7-year drought finally broke, as the rain decided to raineth every day. But now a new catastrophe was on our hands: everywhere, trees started toppling, massive root systems upended.

The wind didn't bring them down. The rain did. Sudden rains after a long drought can result in "soil failure," as the soaked earth releases its hold on the root system that normally holds a tree steady.

Trees need a steady supply of water, not a deluge every 7 dry years. And so do people.

In these go-go, driven and anxious times, it can be hard to just stay put. To plant yourself by a stream, and let your roots soak up water and nutrients so that you can keep bearing fruit. The commandment to sabbath urges us to rest and soak up refreshment one day in seven—not one week in 7 years.

Of course, sabbath is a privilege for those with paid sick leave and money in the bank, who don't have to go to their side-hustle when the first workday is over. But that doesn't change God's intention for us. And God will work to offer us the gift of living water no matter what weather is arrayed against us.

What streams can you plant yourself beside, where can you stop and set down roots, so that you can be evergreen, and fruiting?

by Molly Baskette

SATURDAY, APRIL 13

– The Thirty-Fourth Day of Lent –

1 John 1:5

God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.

There is so much darkness in the world that it is difficult to see the light, but if we believe in God, and have Faith in Him, he will show us the way to the light.

by Nancy MacKinnon

SUNDAY, APRIL 14
– The Sixth Sunday in Lent –



MONDAY, APRIL 15

– The Thirty-Fifth Day of Lent –

Psalm 42:1-3

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, Where is your God?

I love the physicality of this plea. It's so down-to-earth 🤔. I really 'get' the experience of longing, especially when I am broken (which is kind-of-like all the time, cos, you know, I am a human being). There is a lot of longing here – for water, for life, for my soul to connect. There's so much earthliness packed into these three little lines: Nature, animals, streams, thirst, tears, heartache, food, light, dark, people. And searching (aren't we always searching?). I really 'get' this psalmist's cry because it is not just an idea of brokenness, it is a desperate plea about a corporeal, emotional and spiritual need*. Dang – can I ever identify – whether it was asking for relief from the chronic pain of arthritis in my hips; seeking a break from the deep sadness engendered by the death of my daddy; wanting an easier, softer way to solve the soul sickness of my addictions; or just needing a break from the stress of my vocation – I can feel the muscle memory of this kind of brokenness. Can you?

The psalmist prays in verse six: "My life is thrown down around me; that is why I remember you from the land of Jordan and the mountains of Hermon, from Mt. Mizar". The poet feels this deep despondence; her very body and soul, her life, has been broken down around her; and she needs a new place in which to stand, a new location from which to contemplate her God. She acknowledges the majesty and amazing power of God's Creation, the natural world, to inspire within us relief and connection. The land of Jordan and the mountains of Hermon are fine places, but the physical places are not enough. Something fresh is demanded, now.

And so, the poet turns to that new place, where "deep calls to deep..." We all appreciate how inspired we can be by the splendor of God's handiwork where the "waves crash over" us, we recognize how small are our problems and needs, and this new perspective right-sizes us. But – there are other times when that just does not relieve me and something fresh is demanded – times when an even deeper need cries

out from a space within me where my soul longs for the one-on-one direction that is just for me; where the “still small voice” of the Holy Spirit shows me how to get relief from my humanity; where an intimate, loving, grace filled God-moment changes Every. Thing.

I wish I could say that it is an easy trip for me to make it from the land of Jordan to that new, quiet, deep-calls-to-deep, God-Centered place – but it is not in my nature make that journey on my own! I almost always need help to turn from the physical to the spiritual so that I can quench my thirst for the living God. I need psalmists, preachers and prayer partners to remind me, regularly—that God’s most fabulous gift to us is the love that passes all understanding, the love that outlasts mountains and rivers and outworks faith and hope, the love that sustains us in our pain and despair and longing and grief, the love that offers again and again the hope we need to truly ‘be’ children of the living and loving God; children who find lasting and unbreakable hope that we too can love others as God has so freely loved us. May it be so for you.

*The Hebrew word nefesh, translated as “soul” is deeply misleading, suggesting some division of soul and body that the Hebrews did not hold.

by Wendy Miller Olapade

TUESDAY, APRIL 16

– The Thirty-Sixth Day of Lent –

Luke 3:23

Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work.

Luke doesn't mean that Jesus lazed around for twenty-nine years and then, upon turning thirty, got off his duff and went to work. It's true, no one knows for sure what Jesus was up to before his thirtieth, but Christians have traditionally imagined him knocking out tables and benches in Joseph's shop. In other words, working.

So it's not work that Jesus begins at thirty. It's his work. Work only he can do; work that fits him; God-imagined, God-bestowed, Jesus-shaped work. A purpose so persuasive that he stops filling orders for dining room chairs, picks the wood curls out of his hair, and leaves his mother calling after him at the door. His work.

Each of us has our work, too. A purpose we find in the overlap of who we are, what we're good at, what we love, and what our human neighborhood is needing. Work that generates motivating joy as we lend ourselves to it. Work that makes us more fully who we were created to be as we give ourselves away in doing it.

Sometimes our work coincides with our jobs. Sometimes it doesn't: it disrupts and uproots us. Sometimes it leads to great public achievements. Often it's as hidden as Jesus was in those first twenty-nine. Whatever it is, we're meant to seek and find this work that is seeking us. We're meant to turn thirty, which we can do at any age. The important thing isn't how old we are when we find it. The important thing is that, like Jesus, once we find it, we step out in trust and do it.

by Mary Luti

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17

– The Thirty-Seventh Day of Lent –

Jeremiah 29:11

*""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.""*

Lord, when all of my well laid plans have been thwarted or changed, through no will of my own, or through my own failing, when I cannot see a direction or plan for my life, help me to remember that You, always, have a Plan for me, one that has been in place from the beginning, one that no matter mysterious to me, is known to You, and is developing steadily and well under Your supervision.

Lord, no matter how strongly my pride insists it knows what is best for me, and no matter how desperately my woundedness demands it needs precisely what my pride has determined, help me to rest in faith that Your plan is always the best plan, one that has my welfare and hope at center.

by Tony Amato

THURSDAY, APRIL 18

– Maundy Thursday –

2 Corinthians 12:9

My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.

No believer needs to be under any fear. The grace of the Lord is sufficient. Sufficient for me and you, always available no matter if we fail to represent our faith “faithfully.”

Charles Spurgeon, a well-known UK preacher said, “It is easy to believe in grace for the past and the future but to rest in it for the immediate necessity is true faith. Even in the moment it is enough for thee.....You believe in God for your soul. Believe in him about your property. Believe in God about your sick wife or your dying child, your losses, bad debts and declining business.”

Grace is not weak or wimpy. It is the power of God to fulfill what we lack. Are we pulled into the American ideal of “self-made person?” If I’m lost in my pride, seeking praise for my actions, I am unable to recognize the power of grace. Somehow I need to admit to being insufficient for the challenges I face. Power is so often expressed in terms of harm and destruction, but God shows power through goodness and grace. We worry. Struggling to manage things ourselves delays us relying on our faith and accessing God’s grace.

I found a song by MercyMe, a Christian rock group that represents being embraced by Grace. Here are the lyrics to *Grace Got You*. To get the full benefit, I suggest finding them on YouTube:

Have you ever met those who keep humming when the song's through?

It's like they're living life to a whole different tune

And have you ever met those that keep hoping when it's hopeless

It's like they figured out what the rest haven't yet

The second you realize what you have inside

It's only just a matter of time 'til you

Sing, so the back row hears you, Glide, 'cause walking just won't do,

Dance, you don't have to know how to ever since, ever since grace got you

Laugh, 'til your whole side's hurting, Smile like you just got away with something

Why? 'Cause you just got away with something,

ever since, ever since grace got you

by Kate Eshelman

FRIDAY, APRIL 19

– Good Friday –

John 19:30

Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Just what is so good about Good Friday?

In my town, we do well to draw 100 people to our ever-soulful, always-provocative ecumenical service. I like to think that's because it happens in the middle of the day and most folks prefer an evening service in their own church, but . . . those services aren't so well-attended either.

Many of us simply recoil from any focused consideration of the torture, execution, and death of Jesus, not to mention the accompanying grief, guilt, and tortured theology.

And that's a shame.

How can we fully celebrate the Word become flesh if we are unwilling to acknowledge the vulnerability of that flesh? How can we realize the reality of God-with-us if we refuse to engage the powers of oppression, injustice, and violence that are also with us, always and everywhere?

Good Friday shows me the power of surrender, how Jesus freely gave what the powers of empire and death were determined to take. It reminds me that Jesus calls me not to die, but to live—and that truly living and loving as God loves means standing with God's people through hell and high water.

For me Good Friday takes all our high-churchy words about God and love and makes God heartbreakingly human and love utterly real. I leave a Good Friday service newly aware of how far God is willing to go with me, for me, for us—and that makes me want to give more and go further.

So why not find some way today—at a service with others or in your own meditations—to spend some time at the cross with Jesus? Discover for yourself what is so good about this dark day.

by Vicki Kemper

SATURDAY, APRIL 20

– Holy Saturday –

Matthew 27:1, 3

A rich man from Arimathea... took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and placed it in his own new tomb.

Joseph didn't have to give Jesus his tomb, but he did. What moved him to such an extravagant gesture? I think he didn't have to do it and so he did it. He was so upset that he needed to do something. He did what he could with what he had. He raveled what had been unraveled for so many.

Without any intent to trivialize Joseph, let me tell you about my rubber band balls.

I make these balls because I don't have to. Most of what I do I have to do—in the same way that our family budget is usually determined long before we take a look at it each year. The student loans. The mortgage. The insurance. Discretionary is not a word that applies to my time or my budget.

But the rubber band balls are different. I don't have to make them and therefore I do.

The balls are a parable or a ritual about networking. It takes the abandoned and turns them into community. It forms the random. The very action of adding a band relaxes me a lot more than the actual building of community. Real raveling is hard; discretionary raveling is easier.

Joseph and his community were destroyed by the murder of their leader. What could they possibly do? They could find a linen cloth. They could rebuild and re-ravel their network. They could give away their own tomb—on the grounds that they really wouldn't be needing it any more anyway.

by Donna Schaper

SUNDAY, APRIL 21

– Easter Sunday –



WHAT IS LENT?

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday (March 6th) and ends on Holy Saturday (April 20th). Lent comes from the Anglo Saxon word *lencten*, which means “spring.” The forty days represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness being tempted by Satan and preparing to begin his ministry.

Lent is a time of repentance, fasting, and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. In the early church, Lent was a time to prepare new converts for baptism. Today, Christians focus on their relationship with God, often choosing to give up something or to volunteer and give of themselves for others.

WHAT IS A DEVOTIONAL?

A devotional is a publication that provides a specific reading for each day. Christians use devotionals as a way to grow closer to God and learn more about the Christian life. They are not meant to be read in one sitting; they are designed for you to read a bit every day and pray on the passages.

This devotional offers you a Bible verse and reflection for each of the 40 days of Lent.

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