



Lenten Devotional 2025

We hope you'll follow along daily, be deepened in your faith through this year's ministry of our community, and prepare your heart to celebrate at Easter the new life that Jesus Christ made possible for all.

Use this devotional resource in the way that best enhances your Lenten thoughts and practices:

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**PITTSBURGH
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2025

The Rev. Dr. Steve Shussett '93

SCRIPTURE

Luke 18:9-14

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

DEVOTIONAL

With Ash Wednesday beginning the forty days of Lent, many Christians undertake a spiritual discipline to connect with Jesus' time in the desert. This can mean prayer practices that take them out of their comfort zone, just as Jesus was taken out of his. Perhaps fasting from a favorite food, or more intentional devotional reading.

But what if you could pray just as meaningfully by simply remembering who God is and who you are? Instead of avoiding alcohol or reading a long book, you can just repeat a twelve-word phrase. From a handful of verses comes a handful of words that have changed the lives of many, particularly, but not only, of our Orthodox siblings.

Jesus' parable tells of a Pharisee celebrating his own goodness, crowning his self-congratulatory prayer by thanking God that he isn't like other people. Meanwhile, a nearby tax collector beats his chest, begging God to show him mercy.

This parable is at the core of the Jesus Prayer, frequently prayed as "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." A repetition of twelve words that acknowledge who Jesus is, who we are, and what we desperately need.

Unlike more challenging spiritual disciplines, this simple prayer is like the widow's two mites: few words spoken faithfully that mean so much. An experienced practitioner might pray this hundreds or thousands of times daily, until it is prayed with every heartbeat, as in *The Way of a Pilgrim*.

You're not there. But starting today, you might get one step closer. Begin hourly, and increase day by day, until it becomes

a more natural impulse. Anytime, especially when your mind wanders to where angels fear to tread, these twelve little words are a faithful response to our God who in Christ first reached out to you.

PRAYER

"Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Jesus, I can't begin to understand your depths, but you know me better than I know myself, and still you show me mercy. May I know myself and every sibling as a sinner, yes, but forgiven all the more. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 2025

Jon Mathieu '21

SCRIPTURE

Titus 1:1-16

1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness, 2 in the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised before the ages began— 3 in due time he revealed his word through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior,

4 To Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share:

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

5 I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you: 6 someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious. 7 For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; 8 but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. 9 He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.

10 There are also many rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision; 11 they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for sordid gain what it is not right to teach. 12 It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said,

"Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons."

13 That testimony is true. For this reason rebuke them sharply, so that they may become sound in the faith, 14 not paying attention to Jewish myths or to commandments of those who reject the truth. 15 To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are corrupted. 16 They profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

DEVOTIONAL

On the one hand, let's not make too much of religious leaders. There is enough hero-worship of certain pastors, and pastors are no more important than anyone else. On the other hand, a clergyperson holds outsized influence in the particular community they shepherd, and sometimes a congregation will either soar to new heights of love or endure shipwrecks of crisis at the hands of its leader. This has seemingly always been the case, and so the first chapter of the letter to Titus gives ample attention to the qualifications of a pastoral leader.

Some of these strictures may seem outdated and draconian, and they certainly aren't followed by most traditions today. At least in my experience, synods or vestries aren't firing pastors who are married for a second time or whose adult children don't practice Christianity. But other items on this chapter's lists of dos and don'ts feel timelessly wise, as relevant in late-stage U.S. capitalism as they were in Rome-occupied Crete. Avoiding leaders who are arrogant, greedy for gain, deceivers. Choosing and forming leaders who are hospitable, self-controlled, lovers of goodness.

Lent is a time when all of us—not just clergy—are invited to reflect on our ways. These lists might help guide that work. Are there any seeds of arrogance, greed, or deception in our lives? How have we, and how will we, show hospitality? How will we love goodness?

PRAYER

God, you have shown us in Jesus what a life can look like when it is hospitable, self-controlled, and loves goodness. May our lives show more and more of your ways as your Spirit guides us. Allow us and our communities to soar to new heights together. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2025

The Rev. Robin Sharp '18

SCRIPTURES

Psalm 22

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

4 In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.

5 To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

6 But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people.

7 All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

8 "Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"

9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast.

10 On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near

and there is no one to help.

12 Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

13 they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint;

my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;

15 my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws;

you lay me in the dust of death.

16 For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me.

My hands and feet have shriveled;

17 I can count all my bones.

They stare and gloat over me;

18 they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.

19 But you, O Lord, do not be far away!

O my help, come quickly to my aid!

20 Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog!

21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

22 I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

23 You who fear the Lord, praise him!

All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

24 For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted;

he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.

25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation;

my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord.
May your hearts live forever!
27 All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
28 For dominion belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.
29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.
30 Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
31 and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

Psalm 130

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
2 Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!
3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
4 But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.
5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
6 my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.
8 It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

DEVOTIONAL

Psalm 22 begins with the raw and familiar cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” These words, echoed by Jesus on the cross, speak to the dark nights of the soul we all experience. When I faced the devastation of a major loss recently, my prayer was raw: “Please, God, not this, not this death.” Although I didn’t feel forsaken, the silence was heavy. Still, the psalmist declares, “you [God] are holy.” Even in the pain I felt, I saw glimpses of God—like a stranger in an airport bathroom saying, “It’s gonna get worse, but you’ll get through it.”

The psalm’s further lament, “But I am a worm, and not human,” reflects the deep pain of feeling unseen and rejected. Yet even amid those feelings, the psalmist remembers: “You [God] kept me safe on my mother’s

breast.” This duality of despair and trust resonates deeply. God’s past faithfulness reminds me that even in my hardest moments, I am not abandoned.

Psalm 130 offers a similar hope. It meets us in the depths of our sorrow, where we cry out to God, not as perfect people, but as those upheld by mercy. “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand?” These words assure us that God’s love is unending and unconditional. In this season of grief and waiting—waiting for healing, clarity, and renewal—my soul longs for God. God’s steadfast love is constant, and in God’s presence, I know we find hope.

These psalms remind us that God is present in our deepest struggles. They show us that our pain is not the end of the story. As Psalm 22 concludes, “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord.” Even (and maybe especially) through suffering, our lives can proclaim God’s faithfulness and deliverance to future generations.

PRAYER

God of steadfast love, meet us in the depths of our sorrow. When silence feels heavy and hope seems distant, remind us of your faithfulness. Sustain us through the pain, and help us trust that you are present, redeeming our struggles for your glory and our renewal. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 2025

The Rev. Tara Woodard-Lehman '03

SCRIPTURE

John 1:43-51

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” 46 Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” 48 Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” 49 Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 50 Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” 51 And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

DEVOTIONAL

Today's passage opens with Jesus inviting Philip to "Follow me." Philip, in turn, finds his friend Nathanael and tells him about "the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

At first, Nathanael is skeptical and asks, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip seems to brush off Nathanael's low view of Nazareth and responds, "Come and see."

Philip doesn't clapback or correct Nathanael. He doesn't bombard him with information, bludgeon him with facts, or blame him for doubting. He refrains from heated debate and soaring rhetoric. Philip doesn't seek to proselytize or persuade. Instead, Philip simply invites Nathanael to "Come and see."

But before Nathanael has a chance to see Jesus, Jesus sees him. Jesus declares, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Here, Jesus sees with a kind of holy double-vision. It's not merely sight. It's also insight. Jesus doesn't just look at Nathanael; he understands him. Once he is seen and known, the once-skeptic declares, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."

Today's gospel reminds us of whom we follow: a savior who sees us fully, knows us deeply, and loves us beyond what we can imagine. Because of Christ's immense love for us, we are encouraged to invite others to simply "come and see" for themselves.

PRAYER

God of Grace,

Thank you for seeing and understanding us. Lend us clarity and vision as we seek to follow Jesus these Lenten days. Show us how to serve our neighbors in a way that makes them feel seen, known, and deeply loved. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 9, 2025

The Rev. Dr. Graham D. S. Deans '06

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, 29 so that no one might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

DEVOTIONAL

It seems decidedly odd that such a brilliant scholar as the Apostle Paul should appear to be so disparaging of wisdom. The truth is, however, that he had realized that what often passes for wisdom amounts to mere intellectual snobbery, such as he had previously encountered amongst the Athenian intelligentsia, who had a reputation for seeking out the latest novelty for discussion and debate (Acts 17:21).

Following in that tradition would be Scotland's King James VI, who was said to be "possessed of an overweening intellectual arrogance...as though he had been over-educated." No wonder that he was described as "the wisest fool in Christendom." He seems to have known too much, but to have understood too little.

While the Church has always valued an educated clergy, it should be alert to the problem of highly qualified ministers who empty their churches by degrees! Preachers who regularly get carried away with the sound of their own rhetoric—which few can understand—will only succeed in driving people from the pews, while the gospel of the Cross of Christ is emptied of its power.

What the Apostle deplored at Corinth was the pretentious attitude of those intellectuals who spent too much time providing clever answers to questions that nobody was actually asking, or who were meddling in affairs that were none of their concern, thereby making their supposed wisdom irrelevant. Scholarship should never be paraded

shamelessly. As Alexander Pope reminds us, “A little learning is a dangerous thing!”

Like the prophet before him (Jer 9:23), Paul knew that boasting about the extent of one’s wisdom was inadvisable. As a positive virtue, it remained highly elusive (Job 28:12). It begins only with the fear of the Lord (Prov 1:7), Whose perfect wisdom, as the apostle concludes, really is something to celebrate!

PRAYER

God of all truth;
guide us through each perplexing path of life,
that we may grow in wisdom and understanding,
until we reach full maturity of faith,
that at the last,
we may enter into the joy of our salvation
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 10, 2025

The Rev. Sarina Odden Meyer '07

SCRIPTURE

John 2:1-12

1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” 4 And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” 5 His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. 9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

12 After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

DEVOTIONAL

It is no surprise to anyone that in the first few centuries following Jesus’ earthly ministry and before the canonization of Scripture, women’s leadership in the early church was a hotly contested topic. The journey of my recent research has led me into the realm of New Testament redaction criticism, specifically asking questions about gender. There is substantial evidence that women’s stories have been redacted out of many early Christian texts. In a context when redactors erased women’s names, silenced their voices, diminished their actions, and erased their leadership, the Gospel of John kept this story. John 2:1-12—about a named woman who speaks and leads others—is a treasure. Mary’s words and leadership were recorded in this story. Because of that redactional choice, her voice and leadership remain important to this day.

This story, and the choices of its redactors, remind us of the importance of listening to the voices on the margins. Mary is the miracle-maker in this story. Sure, Jesus is the one who changed the water to wine, but Mary noticed the problem, implored Jesus to act, and directed the servants to act as well. Without her, we would not have this miracle. Often, it is the people silenced by the dominant culture who, like Mary, understand the needs in our communities and how to solve them. Just like Mary, they know how to make miracles happen. One of the lessons of this passage is to listen to people on the margins and to follow their lead.

Who in your community is marginalized and ignored? How can you build bridges to give them a voice? What internal reflection do you need to do in order to open your ears and listen to them? What would it take for you to learn how to follow their lead?

PRAYER

Gracious God, at a time when women’s stories were being erased, we thank you that this story was not erased from the Gospel of John. Thank you for the reminder that the people on the margins have important voices and leadership skills in our communities. Just as Jesus and the servants listened to Mary and followed her lead, transform our hearts and minds to listen to and follow marginalized people in our own communities. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2025

The Rev. Kristen Renee Barner '97

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 25

1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
2 O my God, in you I trust;

do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.
5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.
6 Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast
love,
for they have been from of old.
7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my
transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O Lord!
8 Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
9 He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.
10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and
faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.
11 For your name's sake, O Lord,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.
12 Who are they that fear the Lord?
He will teach them the way that they should choose.
13 They will abide in prosperity,
and their children shall possess the land.
14 The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him,
and he makes his covenant known to them.
15 My eyes are ever toward the Lord,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.
16 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
17 Relieve the troubles of my heart,
and bring me out of my distress.
18 Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.
19 Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.
20 O guard my life, and deliver me;
do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
21 May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.
22 Redeem Israel, O God,
out of all its troubles.

Psalm 91

1 You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
2 will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."
3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
4 he will cover you with his pinions,

and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
5 You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
6 or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.
7 A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
8 You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.
9 Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling place,
10 no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.
11 For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
12 On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
13 You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.
14 Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
15 When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.
16 With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.

DEVOTIONAL

The question of theodicy comes up regularly for me. I had a spinal stroke in 2017. I'm partially paralyzed. Life is tricky.

People often presume: "You must be angry with God!" To all of this, I say, "I am not angry with God. All kinds of people are subject to a hard time. I am not excluded from this."

They ask, "Why did this terrible thing happen to a good person?" To this, I say, "You presume I am good. I am as human, as fragile, as faulty as the next person. (I just really hope God isn't keeping score.)"

People offer, "I shall pray for your recovery." To all of this, I say, "I am deeply grateful. I will take all the good will that is offered. But I don't think science and biology work quite that way."

My Dad, as retired PC(USA) minister, asked me once, "What does it mean to you when people say they are praying for you?"

I explained how the history of applause comes from the ancient Greek theater—or so I've been told. The audience wanted to reach out and touch the performers, but this was impossible. Instead, they reached their hands together and clapped. Prayer felt to me like clapping. It was a way

for people to reach out, to touch God, to touch me, to touch whatever was the subject of their prayer. Knowing that the intent was to connect with me, I was strengthened, empowered, buoyed. The action of prayer didn't/doesn't necessarily feel like miracle-making, but rather, Community. A reminder to me that we all, regardless of how we worship, share the same God, the only God. Therefore, we are connected.

My hunch, from the community that we live in, the global community of citizens of this world, we seek the same things: comfort, forgiveness, grace, strength, courage, support, community, love, kindness.

PRAYER

O God of All of Us, whatever my failures—whatever our failures—let us applaud one another, clapping and praying for one another, recognizing that we are merely creatures inhabiting one space. For better or worse. God forgive us. May we forgive one another. May we strive to do better for ourselves and for one another. Let it be so. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2025

The Rev. Connie Bennett Hoeke '94

SCRIPTURE

John 2:23-3:15

23 When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." 3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things

be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus knows all about human nature. Therefore he knows how we think, judge, mistrust, love and care. He knows everything about us.

Enter Nicodemus. Jesus decides to impart spiritual things to him—a Pharisee who dared to interact with Jesus in secret. He did not want to ask questions to trip him up; rather Nicodemus wanted to learn from him.

Nicodemus knew that Jesus could not be doing miraculous signs without being sent from God. What he didn't understand was that Jesus was the Son of God and had been with God before he was sent by God to live on the earth. Jesus explains that in order to understand his reason for coming to earth, he must be seen as more than a miracle worker. God desires for us to be baptized by water, as John the Baptist was doing, but there was more. We must be born of the Spirit, and therefore be spiritual beings, as this subdues our worldly nature. Nicodemus cannot understand this because he was too much of the world. He couldn't understand the heavenly things that Jesus knew, and he was stuck.

Jesus speaks of the freedom of the Holy Spirit to go wherever it wills and enter into human beings. Then Jesus foretells the way that he will die and how that brings to humans an eternal life with God, which begins while we live on earth.

How important it is for us to be open to receive the Holy Spirit and be involved in spiritual practices that lift us up to know heavenly things. We are lifted up to be with Jesus and let him love us and care for us. In this way, we are drawn closer to Jesus Christ and drawn away from the worldly nature which dares to bind us. Let us receive the Holy Spirit and know ourselves in a way we cannot know without God's deep presence. Let us live our spiritual lives and love Jesus Christ, praising him for each day of our lives.

PRAYER

Almighty and ever-loving God, we praise you for your Son Jesus, who desires to lift us up to be in your care. You love us

in a deep and powerful way and care for our souls. May we dwell in our spiritual lives, given to us by the Holy Spirit. Wrap your loving arms around us and fill us with your Spirit and truth. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 2025

The Rev. Dr. Cindy Parker '10

SCRIPTURE

John 3:16-21

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

DEVOTIONAL

Have you ever attended a candlelight service? The warmth and coziness of the darkened space illuminated by the soft, flickering glow of the candles, seeing the candlelight reflected on the faces of the folks holding the candles—everywhere one looks, one can see the LIGHT has come into the world!

But once the candles are extinguished, and we leave the coziness, the softness of that surrounding light, and enter the darkness of the real world . . . it's us against them, me versus you—divisiveness abounds everywhere in this darkness. Families divided over election results, those attempting to cross borders because the horrors they leave behind are worse than the dangers that lie ahead, those being persecuted because of who they love. With such pervasive darkness, it is sometimes difficult to believe in a God who so loves the world.

And yet there are glimmers of light . . . a diverse group of volunteers working together to eradicate world hunger, a smattering of pastors officiating weddings for couples others have turned away, an employer who gives those impacted by incarceration a second chance. You see, Beloved, God is not where people often say God is—God doesn't thrive on human darkness and dread. God is found in the light and

love we share in the midst of the darkness in the world God so loves.

Thankfully, we are reminded that God's love for the world is not dependent on the world's response. Even from a cross. Especially from a cross.

PRAYER

God of wondrous presence, how grateful we are that your love is not dependent on the world's response. Continue to shower your light and love on us, so that when our capacity to love is spent, others may experience your love through us. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 2025

The Rev. Daniel Voigt '11

SCRIPTURE

John 3:22-36

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized 24 —John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison.

25 Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. 26 They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” 27 John answered, “No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. 28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.’ 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.”

31 The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. 33 Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. 34 He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.

When I was a student at PTS, there was, roped off in the library, Karl Barth's desk, with a depiction of the center section of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* by Matthias Grünewald mounted on the wall behind it. You should look up this piece of art to see it for yourselves, but in it, Jesus hangs on the cross in the center. On the left is a woman weeping, with the beloved disciple holding Mary. On the right, anachronistically placed, is a messy John the Baptist, holding the New Testament and pointing at the crucified messiah.

This image of John the Baptist in particular is said to have left a significant mark on Barth. And, if I'm honest, on me too. An image exemplifying that the whole point of John's work and/or the New Testament is only any good as long as it points toward Christ. I suspect Barth felt the same.

In the passage today from John 3, we find what seem to be people coming to John expecting him to be jealous of Jesus' success. But nothing could be further from the truth. The news that people are finally looking to Christ fills him with joy—a joy he chose to express in words that must have sounded strange to those who came to him, “He must increase, and I must decrease.”

We must admit that for us, too, the part that longs to be recognized for doing important work finds this phrase disheartening. But for John, his greatest joy was in knowing that people weren't getting caught up in him or his message but were (hopefully) directed by these to go further until they found the source of the good news.

Could there be a better mantra for our lives of faith? Or the church?

It is worth noting that Grünewald, of all the words in the New Testament, chose these from John to inscribe on his work—choosing to make the desire of John's heart his own.

PRAYER

Holy one, we confess that we love to have our egos fed. Something deep in us loves to be noticed and feel important. But John the Baptist reminds us that our most purposeful role is when we make a pathway for you. By your creative hand, you have given me many gifts, breath in my lungs, and a mind of my own. May they be used for more than just getting people to think highly of me. May they be used for their highest good. May they, in their best moments, point others to you. And may that desire be my joy.

Suzanne C. Hager '24

SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 11:18-28

18 You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 20 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, 21 so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.

22 If you will diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving the Lord your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, 23 then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and mightier than yourselves. 24 Every place on which you set foot shall be yours; your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the Western Sea. 25 No one will be able to stand against you; the Lord your God will put the fear and dread of you on all the land on which you set foot, as he promised you.

26 See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today; 28 and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn from the way that I am commanding you today, to follow other gods that you have not known.

DEVOTIONAL

I live in Squirrel Hill, a historically Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Pittsburgh. I live across from a Yeshiva school, and most of my neighbors are Orthodox or Hasidic. So, it came as no surprise to me to see the old outline of a mezuzah on the doorframe of my apartment. I see them all over my building. The mezuzah is typically set to each doorframe of the home. The ancient Israelites would place them on the jams intended for the door, which swings into the threshold of the home.

The mezuzah (מְזוּזָה), meaning “doorpost, doorway, posts, jams,” dates back all the way to the command in Deuteronomy 11 to place the Shema (שְׁמָע) prayer on the doorframe. The Shema, “Hear O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one,” is first mentioned in Deuteronomy 6:4 and later hinted at in 11:13. God is instructing the people on the importance and implications of the Shema and how to grasp it as a commandment.

Commandments are not rules; they are connections to God. They are opportunities to learn and to grow in our faith. Though we Christians do not practice using a mezuzah or practice tefillin (binding the Shema to the head and hands), we are in a baptismal covenant with a God whose commandments allow us to build on our relationship to God. The covenant relationship we have with God allows us to have a lasting relationship. We are given commandments that will help secure our faith and keep our faith communities alive and well. We are to place the words at the center of our hearts and minds (11:18). We are to love God and to walk in God's ways, holding fast to him (11:22). We are to teach our children the Shema and the other commandments (11:19).

As the church, we affirm and receive these promises from God for our communities today. In a growing secular world, church attendance is declining—especially the Protestant denominations. In teaching the love of God, we need to show the world God's love through loving our neighbor. If we continue to follow in Christ's likeness, keep the commandments, and teach our children the love of God, the world will see the true meaning of our faith: love.

PRAYER

God of all ages, thank you for the teachings you have given us to build up our relationship with you. Teach us to hear ("shema") your words, that we may be formed into Christ's likeness and shine your love to all. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 16, 2025

The Rev. Dr. Trevor Jamison '01

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 3:11-23

11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. 14 If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with

God. For it is written,

"He catches the wise in their craftiness,"

20 and again,

"The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

21 So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

DEVOTIONAL

I live in the North of East of England, less than one hour's drive from the city of Durham. Prominently positioned in its historic center is Durham Cathedral. The religious community associated with it began a thousand years ago. The present building was substantially completed a century later. It is vast, beautiful, and awe-inspiring. It attracts thousands of visitors each year, though how many as pilgrims and how many as tourists is a good question.

The Apostle Paul, had he ever travelled this far north, could have used Durham Cathedral as a visual aid to speak not only of church buildings, but about church institutions, about human leadership, about congregations, and even about individuals like you and me.

The Corinthian congregation, he writes, is a living temple, as long as God's Spirit resides within it and its members. That temple's foundation is Jesus Christ, not admired leaders such as Paul, Apollos, or Cephas. As long as such leaders build upon the right foundation, though, their work becomes a beautiful adornment, like the columns, arches, and glasswork in Durham Cathedral.

Two thousand years after Paul, many of us live in settings where the spiritual climate has become less hospitable to faith and belief. It is tempting to focus on religious traditions (including impressive cathedrals), still-powerful church institutions, talented leaders, and lively church activities to see us through.

We should be grateful for them all, but Paul reminds us that if we substitute any one of them for Jesus Christ as the foundation of church life, rather than recognizing them as an adornment, they will not sustain us. How helpful, then, to have a period such as Lent, when we focus upon Jesus and his journey to the cross, remembering who and what is foundational for our faith.

PRAYER

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of the Church, with all that is good in its traditions, institutions, leaders, and activities. Fill us with your Spirit, we pray, so that we remain focused upon your Son, Jesus, the foundation of that faith we hold and share. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 17, 2025

The Rev. Dr. Jennifer L. Stroud '18

SCRIPTURE

John 4:27-42

27 Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" 28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" 30 They left the city and were on their way to him.

31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33 So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. 36 The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus is exhausted by the thousands thirsting for God's presence. Our Lord sits by a well in shunned Samaria. A woman enters to draw water. Women were the least of society, unvalued and invisible, their only worth was found in bearing children for their masters/husbands.

When Jesus speaks to her asking for a drink, she replies, "Why are you talking to me? You are a Jew and I am just a woman—and a Samaritan as well!"

Jesus values women and enters into a theological discussion with her, even though both Samaritan and Jewish women were often prohibited from studying the Torah.

Christ tells the woman that if she knew Him, she would be asking Him for living water. She asks Him for this special water not understanding that what Jesus offers her, and all of us, sates us beyond our earthly needs. Christ offers us the gift of salvation and spiritual power.

Jesus then tells the woman to call her husband. The woman tells the Lord the truth. She has had five men in her life who have been her "Baali," which is Aramaic for husband but also for master. This woman's entire sense of self-worth was found in the man/master who possessed her as wife.

Jesus commends the woman for her honesty. He was not demanding a confession. Christ was testing her for her openness to truth. For if we cannot be honest with ourselves, we cannot be honest with God. Jesus tells her of the good news for all those who wish to "worship the Father in Spirit and truth." This woman, who has sought to know God, even though it has been forbidden her, tells Jesus a Messiah is coming, and Christ, in truth, tells her, "I, who speak to you, am He."

We, all of us, are the woman at the well. We have drifted from one idol, one master/husband to another, yearning to quench our need for self-worth in societies' mandates of success. But, even as we achieve them, we still find ourselves thirsting.

The Samaritan woman's honest heart discerns the truth and runs to tell the townspeople that she has found "The Chosen One!" The people cannot deny that something, someone has changed her. For standing before them is an empowered person—one whose sense of self-esteem is now grounded in her relationship with the Creator of all things. She has found her true Master—the One who elevates rather than subjugates. The people enthusiastically follow her to meet Jesus. May we do the same! Amen!

PRAYER

Lead us, Lord, to be honest and open as we lay our hearts bare to Your presence and truth. Fill us with the same excitement as the woman at the well. Transform us through Your living water, so all who see us will be drawn to You! In Jesus' holy Name we pray. Amen!

TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2025

The Rev. Ben Beres '10

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 2:1-13, 29-32

1 The word of the Lord came to me, saying: 2 Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the Lord: I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.

3 Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest. All who ate of it were held guilty; disaster came upon them, says the Lord.

4 Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. 5 Thus says the Lord: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?

6 They did not say, "Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?"

7 I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination.

8 The priests did not say, "Where is the Lord?" Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit.

9 Therefore once more I accuse you, says the Lord, and I accuse your children's children.

10 Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has ever been such a thing.

11 Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit.

12 Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the Lord,

13 for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water,

and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.

...
29 Why do you complain against me? You have all rebelled against me, says the Lord.

30 In vain I have struck down your children; they accepted no correction. Your own sword devoured your prophets like a ravaging lion.

31 And you, O generation, behold the word of the Lord! Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of thick darkness?

Why then do my people say, "We are free, we will come to you no more"?

32 Can a girl forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?

Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.

DEVOTIONAL

We grew up hearing, "You are what you eat." In the case of my household, my siblings and I really ought to be hot dogs and mac and cheese by now! It's not that my mom couldn't cook, but at the end of the work day, dealing with everyone else's children leaves one a little sapped for serving one's own brood with the most complex and nutritionally diverse menus. Honestly, I still like hot dogs and macaroni and cheese, so I'm not sure it's the end of the world.

Now according to Jeremiah, the Lord did better by his children, Israel. He gave them a land that overflowed in abundance, bringing them from a land of deserts and ravines to one with rich and fertile produce. They had an abundance given to them. They had every good thing to eat. They wandered away from the Lord anyway.

They weren't mistreated. They weren't overtaxed. They weren't in need of, well, anything. But as the prophet describes it, they defiled the land, started pretending they could meet their own needs, and forgot about the Lord. They stopped asking each other "Where is the Lord?" Even the priests stopped asking it. God hadn't made himself less available; they just stopped looking for him.

If they looked for him, they might feel compelled to follow. They might remember how good they had it, walking in his footsteps. The people might not go chasing after the idols their neighbors fashioned or be contented to watch the water trickle out of the broken cisterns they'd dug. And more than the truth of their history, their reality, and their hope, they wanted to do what they wanted to do. They valued freedom to roam over faithfulness.

They had the best stuff to eat, but it didn't make them good. Maybe, you aren't what you eat, but are a reflection of what you follow? This Lent, do you need to turn aside from the way you've been going? Have you been following all sorts of things, but forgetting to ask, "Where is the Lord?" You aren't what you eat, but your faithfulness reflects your following.

PRAYER

Holy One, there is none like you, and all we have ever needed is found in you. Forgive us for wandering away, for defiling good gifts, and for pretending that we can do what you alone are capable of. Help us to follow you better, beginning with our very next step. In your Name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19, 2025

The Rev. Dr. Rick Willhite '86

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 51

1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
5 Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
6 You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
11 Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,

and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

15 O Lord, open my lips,

and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;

if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;

a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;

rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,

19 then you will delight in right sacrifices,

in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;

then bulls will be offered on your altar.

DEVOTIONAL

Years ago, I regularly attended Sunday worship with a Christian fellowship that introduced me to Psalm 51. Often, as worship opened, we sang several simple hymns, including one composed upon verses 10-12, the beating heart of Psalm 51:

"Create in me a clean heart, Oh God
And renew a right spirit within me;
And cast me not from thy presence.
And take not thy Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,
And renew a right spirit within me."

The simple tune was catchy, the words too: plain, humble repentance and a prayer for refuge in God's presence. We'd sing the verses two or three times, letting the meaning sink in deeply. It becomes a meditation. I can hear it still.

Years later, I'm struck by how well the prayer speaks to different seasons of the human spirit. One whose choices and actions have created a sense of distance from God can relate to the prayer's longing for forgiveness, a welcoming home to God's grace. One lost in doubt might resonate with the restored faith and trust implicit in the prayer. The fearful might find shelter in the prayer's plea for the joy of knowing one's true ground in God's eternal love. The song, the prayer—they sound our depths of need.

All that seems required is the humility of admitting one's need for these gifts. The prayer at the heart of Psalm 51 sings from just that space, empty for God's love.

You can find almost anything on YouTube. I recently found the same Psalm 51 hymn that I learned years ago alive and well presented by several artists. It's still lovely, still speaks to me. "Create in me a clean heart, Oh God." It's a prayer for people like us.

PRAYER

"Create in me a clean heart, Oh God
And renew a right spirit within me;

And cast me not from thy presence.
And take not thy Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,
And renew a right spirit within me.”

THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2025

Margaret Owusu-Sekyereh '22

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 147

1 Praise the Lord!
How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.
2 The Lord builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.
3 He heals the brokenhearted,
and binds up their wounds.
4 He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.
5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.
6 The Lord lifts up the downtrodden;
he casts the wicked to the ground.
7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre.
8 He covers the heavens with clouds,
prepares rain for the earth,
makes grass grow on the hills.
9 He gives to the animals their food,
and to the young ravens when they cry.
10 His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;
11 but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.
12 Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!
13 For he strengthens the bars of your gates;
he blesses your children within you.
14 He grants peace within your borders;
he fills you with the finest of wheat.
15 He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.
16 He gives snow like wool;
he scatters frost like ashes.
17 He hurls down hail like crumbs—
who can stand before his cold?
18 He sends out his word, and melts them;
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.
19 He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.
20 He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his ordinances.
Praise the Lord!

DEVOTIONAL

David praises God and brags about His greatness, creative abilities, and compassion to heal the brokenhearted in this psalm. David is now ruling over a united Israel but a Jerusalem that needs rebuilding. However, God had “strengthened its gates and brought peace” within the Temple City.

Metaphorically, the human body represents Jerusalem as it houses God’s temple (1 Cor 3:16-17). God enters your city/temple when you lift/open your gates to Him (Ps 24:7) for spiritual ascension. As Christians, our gates include our five senses, hearts, hands, and souls (Ps 24:4). During this season, let us reflect on how we can strengthen our gates in this digital, information, and media age. We do so by having clean hands, pure hearts, and non-idolatrous souls. We are to apply kingdom principles, and the strong and mighty Lord of Hosts will strengthen our gates that we may ascend and come into His peace, blessings, and glory.

PRAYER

Lord, we acknowledge our need of your help to discern our closed gates and to not hide the Holy Spirit-revealed gates, and equally, we are deficient in using the opened ones to ascend. As we observe man’s world within your creation becoming progressively destructive, we appeal to you to equip our “inner man” with “tools” to strengthen the bars of our gates and experience peace within our borders in this season. Amen!

FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 2025

Roderick Mason '18

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 148

1 Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!
2 Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!
3 Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!
4 Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!
5 Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for he commanded and they were created.
6 He established them forever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.
7 Praise the Lord from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,
8 fire and hail, snow and frost,

stormy wind fulfilling his command!
9 Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
10 Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!
11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
12 Young men and women alike,
old and young together!
13 Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.
14 He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.
Praise the Lord!"

DEVOTIONAL

"Life moves fast—there's always another meeting, event, or errand to run. Some days, it feels impossible to keep up with everything.

But Psalm 148 invites us to pause and join the ultimate anthem of praise. This psalm is a breathtaking call to worship, where everything in creation—angels, stars, mountains, trees, animals, and even the weather—proclaims God's majesty. And humanity, as His image-bearers, is uniquely invited to lift our voices, too.

What strikes me is that worship isn't just about singing in church. It's woven into the world around us. The rustling of leaves, the glow of the stars, and the warmth of the sun—they all silently reflect God's beauty, power, and grace. As Psalm 19:1 reminds us, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands."

But while creation praises God simply by existing as He designed, we are called to something more. We are invited to worship intentionally—with our voices, choices, and lives. This means acknowledging God's sovereignty, showing gratitude for His blessings, and living in ways that reflect His love and character.

In a busy, sometimes harsh world, it's important for us as believers to reflect Christ. How can you join this universal song of praise today? Maybe it's through thanking a loved one, encouraging a friend, or simply pausing to notice the beauty around you. Even in small ways, you can reflect God's glory.

Take a moment today to look at creation and see how it praises God. Let it inspire you to add your voice to the symphony of praise. In the chaos of life, remember the simple truth: Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, in a world full of challenges, help us embrace the beauty of all creation praising You. Inspire us to join this vision daily, lifting our voices and lives in worship, from the depths to the heights. Let our praise reflect Your glory. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2025

The Rev. William Robbins '21

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 5:20-31

20 Declare this in the house of Jacob,
proclaim it in Judah:
21 Hear this, O foolish and senseless people,
who have eyes, but do not see,
who have ears, but do not hear.
22 Do you not fear me? says the Lord;
Do you not tremble before me?
I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea,
a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass;
though the waves toss, they cannot prevail,
though they roar, they cannot pass over it.
23 But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart;
they have turned aside and gone away.
24 They do not say in their hearts,
"Let us fear the Lord our God,
who gives the rain in its season,
the autumn rain and the spring rain,
and keeps for us
the weeks appointed for the harvest."
25 Your iniquities have turned these away,
and your sins have deprived you of good.
26 For scoundrels are found among my people;
they take over the goods of others.
Like fowlers they set a trap;
they catch human beings.
27 Like a cage full of birds,
their houses are full of treachery;
therefore they have become great and rich,
28 they have grown fat and sleek.
They know no limits in deeds of wickedness;
they do not judge with justice
the cause of the orphan, to make it prosper,
and they do not defend the rights of the needy.
29 Shall I not punish them for these things?
says the Lord,
and shall I not bring retribution
on a nation such as this?
30 An appalling and horrible thing
has happened in the land:
31 the prophets prophesy falsely,

and the priests rule as the prophets direct;
my people love to have it so,
but what will you do when the end comes?

DEVOTIONAL

Jeremiah 5 crosses the boundaries of polite piety. While we have a few passages from Jeremiah that we keep close for comfort, the rest is, well, too close for comfort. A pastor like me (one of a declining, politically divided, and aging church) would do well to keep these words outside the boundaries of worship, because, frankly, we need hope.

Of course, that is the thing with prophets like Jeremiah. They are not called to maintain comfortable boundaries.

In Jeremiah 5, the prophet speaks of boundaries crossed geo-politically and covenantally, socially and (look out!) environmentally. Here, we have the sense of widespread chaos that results from a way of being that knows “no bounds in deeds of wickedness” (5:28). And what is Jeremiah’s call but to “stay in your lane,” to respect the theologically defined boundaries of the created (5:22-24) and social order (5:28)?

Yet we get the feeling that simply returning to one’s lane, whatever, wherever, and whenever that is, will not be enough to make things right. Like Jeremiah, we have the sense that new covenantal boundaries are needed (33:31-34). Who will set them?

Do we have to read past the boundaries of Jeremiah’s text to find the answer? One could continue past Jeremiah to Jesus, the one who redefines the boundaries of neighbors and nations, the one who ultimately redefines the boundary between death and life. Yes, that’s more comfortable, but what if you stay within the lines of Jeremiah? Is there hope there? I think so. In Jeremiah, we find one called by God to speak across the boundaries of despair and instill hope. In Jeremiah, we find one called to speak of God’s faithfulness across time, beyond individual existence, to those yet to be. Might God be calling you to do the same?

PRAYER

O God, the one who through the Holy Spirit enables us to follow Jesus within and beyond our time, guide us to paths of gritty faithfulness. Lead us not into the temptations of quick solutions that betray Your truth, and grant us the patience and perseverance of Your eternity. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 23, 2025

Stephanie Backus '24

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 150

1 Praise the Lord!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty firmament!
2 Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!
3 Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!
4 Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!
5 Praise him with clanging cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
6 Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!

DEVOTIONAL

“Praise the Lord” the psalmist writes. “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.” It’s been a hard year. We’ve watched as students lost their lives in school shootings, as the nation became deeply divided in a particularly difficult presidential election, and as the increasing severity of weather from winter storms to hurricanes has left communities devastated by damages. In these moments, it can be hard to find the spirit with which one can praise the Lord. But after a particularly devastating hurricane, two communities showed us all what the Psalmist meant when they wrote “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”

Montreat, N.C., and adjacent Black Mountain, N.C., were devastated by Hurricane Helene as the onslaught of rain led nearby creeks and rivers to leave their banks and rush through communities in the western part of the state. Some towns were destroyed, and while Montreat and Black Mountain suffered considerable damage, it’s what happened after the storm that so aptly illustrates Psalm 150.

The Montreat Conference Center holds a particular place in my heart. Coming into seminary in 2021, I did not even know it existed, but after my first summer experience there with the Presbyterian Association of Music’s Worship Conference, I fell in love. I had found a place where everything that has breath praised God. Even the bears tried to come into the conference center’s worship space one Sunday morning!

After Hurricane Helene, the conference center became a place for information for the community. It became a place where people could come together to learn when power and water would be restored and what they could do to help their neighbors. Nearby Black Mountain Presbyterian Church

became a place where people found fellowship over a meal. Eventually, the church had to rent a nearby warehouse for all of the supplies being donated. It would have been easy for both to close for a period of time, so that they could evaluate their own damage and care for their own people. But they didn't. They opened to care for all people. What a beautiful example of praising the Lord, in unusual ways, outside of Sunday morning worship. We praise the Lord always—for God is powerful, and nothing can surpass God's greatness.

PRAYER

Good and gracious God, in creation, you gave us breath with which to praise you for all of our days. When times get tough, I pray you strengthen me in order that I may be able to continue praising you. I know tough days are to come. I pray you continue to pour your Spirit out upon me. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 24, 2025

The Rev. Mary Robin Craig '10

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 121

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
2 My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
3 He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
4 He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
5 The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
6 The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
7 The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
8 The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

DEVOTIONAL

As I write this devotional months before Lent, my eyes frequently pause upon news photographs of the mountains of western North Carolina. For those of us with ties to the southeastern United States, the plight of the Blue Ridge Mountains and all who inhabit them have been high on our list of concerns since Hurricane Helene. I don't know what other catastrophes will make headlines in the upcoming season, so I will stay with the mountains I know for now: Looking Glass Rock, Mount Pisgah, Chimney Rock.

How often have we looked upward for help? For some of us, snow-covered peaks—the Rockies, the Alps—set the scale. For others, the ancient Appalachians call, or perhaps rolling hilltops close to home are more likely possibilities. Some of us have to make do with the rooftops of urban skyscrapers. For anyone who has encountered mountaintops, they seem to have been constructed with proximity to God in mind.

If we have been to the Holy Land (as I have not) or searched maps and photographs for clues to the lives of biblical peoples, we know that Jesus, in addition to clambering up and around mountaintops on occasion, must have often looked upward to the heights that frequently surrounded him. Especially toward the end of his earthy life, he probably uttered these very words: "I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where will my help come?" We are in good company when we gaze upward and ask the same question.

Whenever I have hiked up a (very small) mountain, I look upward and imagine a minor personal triumph. Then, when I reach the top, with the immediate world spread below me, I imagine the Creator, delighted with the beauty of the view, and ready to respond to the prayers rising upward.

PRAYER

God of the Heights, hear our prayer. May we lift our gaze from our troubled and hurting world toward the help that drifts our way from the mountaintops, through the clouds and across the rivers, and reaches our comings and our goings. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2025

The Rev. Debbie Smith '18

SCRIPTURE

John 7:37-52

37 On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, 38 and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.' " 39 Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

40 When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, "This is really the prophet." 41 Others said, "This is the Messiah." But some asked, "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? 42 Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?" 43 So there was a division in the crowd because of him. 44 Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

The Rev. Greg Steible '14

SCRIPTURE

Romans 5:1-11

1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. 8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. 9 Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. 11 But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

DEVOTIONAL

I was 16 years old. You've been there? Everything is dramatic, everything is over the top, everything is either the greatest thing on earth or the worst reality imaginable. Come to think of it, that sounds about like my current reality, too. But I was 16 years old and I was new to the faith. I stumbled on this passage one Sunday morning, bored during a sermon, flipping through the blue pew Bible. To say this passage changed my life would be a little bit of an understatement.

We boast in our hope of sharing the glory, and we boast in our suffering. That dichotomous truth struck me as so deeply real, and good, and helpful. Few are strangers to suffering. This season is, in many ways, structured as a remembrance of suffering, and the idea that our friend Paul reminds us that this suffering has transcendent value is powerful. Suffering, endurance, character, and hope in Christ—these, each of them, are gifts. We revel in our suffering, not as masochists enjoying the pain, but as transformed and transforming beloved children of God. These sufferings are opportunities for the most poignant of love, the gentlest of grace, the rowdiest of justices, the fullest opportunities to glimpse Jesus. I didn't get that at 16, but as I've sat with these words in more tangible sufferings, I've come to see a much more full image of Jesus in a suffering world.

45 Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why did you not arrest him?" 46 The police answered, "Never has anyone spoken like this!" 47 Then the Pharisees replied, "Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? 48 Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? 49 But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed." 50 Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, 51 "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?" 52 They replied, "Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee."

DEVOTIONAL

What a vision! No one is thirsty! No one is hungry! Imagine no more news stories of starving children and refugees. Don't we all yearn for such a world? A place where every person of any ability can thrive with grace and dignity. A place where nothing stands in the way of God's reflected image shining forth from each one to bring him glory.

As compelling as that picture is, we see people responding in different ways. Some catch the vision and can't wait to jump on board. Some aren't sure what to think but are curious. Others find the notion of 'living water for everyone' to be ludicrous or even dangerous. Imagine all the changes in society, government, business, and politics that would be needed for this to happen. Some of those changes are complicated and difficult—isn't it just less disruptive to keep things as they are? If we can cast doubt on the messenger as a Galilean poser or an unrealistic rube, perhaps that gets us off the hook for considering how life might be different. After all, some of those changes might require giving up something. Is my loss worth this wild kingdom vision?

Lent offers us a time of lament and repentance. A time to yearn for Jesus' vision of the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. A time to notice what gets in the way of dignity and grace for all. Lent is a time to expand our imagination for what is possible, even if it requires letting go of what we are comfortable with.

PRAYER

Lord, your vision of the kingdom is lovely and yet feels impossible. But this is what you have promised and invited us into. And if you have promised and invited, then we can trust that your Spirit will lead us. Help us release anything that hinders our energy, imagination, intelligence, and love so that we can embrace the work of the kingdom you have called us to. Amen.

Friends, I'd like to invite you into that boasting—into moments of seeing Christ's hope this week. Even as we may see suffering all around, we know that Jesus is right there with us.

PRAYER

Holy Christ, suffering and glorifying Lord, sit with us. Help us to see the hope we have in you, which transcends all. Help us to be instruments of that hope in your beautiful world. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2025

The Rev. Paul Leone '90

SCRIPTURE

Romans 5:12-21

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— 13 sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. 14 Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. 16 And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. 17 If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

18 Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. 19 For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. 20 But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

DEVOTIONAL

Adjoining our home property in Baden is the convent and motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph. In caring for the 80

acres of land and facility, the Sisters "believe in a 'sacramental universe' of wondrous diversity—a gift that requires our care and respect. God entrusts these resources to us so that we may nurture and sustain them for our dear neighbors now and into the future."

As "a dear neighbor," I have the awesome freedom to walk and pray on this scared terra, to which the Sisters joyfully welcome all who come.

A pathway, marked with the stations of the cross, leads to the Sisters' cemetery. Overlooking the multiple rows of grave sites stands a thirty-five foot crucifix, engraved with the words, "Ego sum resurrectio et vita."

Whenever I pause beneath this graveyard crucifix, I pray aloud the words of Saint Paul: "For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore, all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them." 2 Corinthians 5:12-15

Anyone who has worshipped with the Sisters at Sunday morning Mass has experienced the gracious, inclusive welcome extended. The late Catholic priest, Henri Nouwen, has written words that call us to self-examination in this season of Lent:

"In the Eucharist, Jesus gives all. As God becomes fully present for us in Jesus, so Jesus becomes fully present to us in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Communion with Jesus means becoming like him. With him we are nailed on the cross, with him we are laid in the tomb, with him we are raised up to accompany lost travelers on their journey. Communion, becoming Christ, leads us to a new realm of being."

I believe, and so speak: this invitation is open and inclusive to all.

PRAYER

"We do not presume to come to this your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your abundant and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table; but you are the same Lord whose character is always to have mercy. Amen."

FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 2025

Karris May Jackson '22

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 105

1 O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.

2 Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wonderful works.
3 Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
4 Seek the Lord and his strength;
seek his presence continually.
5 Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,
6 O offspring of his servant Abraham,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.
7 He is the Lord our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.
8 He is mindful of his covenant forever,
of the word that he commanded, for a thousand
generations,
9 the covenant that he made with Abraham,
his sworn promise to Isaac,
10 which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,
11 saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan
as your portion for an inheritance."
12 When they were few in number,
of little account, and strangers in it,
13 wandering from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another people,
14 he allowed no one to oppress them;
he rebuked kings on their account,
15 saying, "Do not touch my anointed ones;
do my prophets no harm."
16 When he summoned famine against the land,
and broke every staff of bread,
17 he had sent a man ahead of them,
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
18 His feet were hurt with fetters,
his neck was put in a collar of iron;
19 until what he had said came to pass,
the word of the Lord kept testing him.
20 The king sent and released him;
the ruler of the peoples set him free.
21 He made him lord of his house,
and ruler of all his possessions,
22 to instruct his officials at his pleasure,
and to teach his elders wisdom.
23 Then Israel came to Egypt;
Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham.
24 And the Lord made his people very fruitful,
and made them stronger than their foes,
25 whose hearts he then turned to hate his people,
to deal craftily with his servants.
26 He sent his servant Moses,
and Aaron whom he had chosen.
27 They performed his signs among them,
and miracles in the land of Ham.
28 He sent darkness, and made the land dark;
they rebelled against his words.
29 He turned their waters into blood,
and caused their fish to die.

30 Their land swarmed with frogs,
even in the chambers of their kings.
31 He spoke, and there came swarms of flies,
and gnats throughout their country.
32 He gave them hail for rain,
and lightning that flashed through their land.
33 He struck their vines and fig trees,
and shattered the trees of their country.
34 He spoke, and the locusts came,
and young locusts without number;
35 they devoured all the vegetation in their land,
and ate up the fruit of their ground.
36 He struck down all the firstborn in their land,
the first issue of all their strength.
37 Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold,
and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.
38 Egypt was glad when they departed,
for dread of them had fallen upon it.
39 He spread a cloud for a covering,
and fire to give light by night.
40 They asked, and he brought quails,
and gave them food from heaven in abundance.
41 He opened the rock, and water gushed out;
it flowed through the desert like a river.
42 For he remembered his holy promise,
and Abraham, his servant.
43 So he brought his people out with joy,
his chosen ones with singing.
44 He gave them the lands of the nations,
and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples,
45 that they might keep his statutes
and observe his laws.
Praise the Lord!

DEVOTIONAL

When my daughter was six, she asked me, "Mom, how do you know there is a God?" I shared a story with her: When you were just a few days old, the pediatrician discovered a white, cloudy film in your right eye. It was determined that you needed surgery immediately. I was heartbroken. You were only weeks old, and the thought of you undergoing surgery was terrifying. A few days before the operation, we met with the doctor, who told us, "I've never performed this surgery before. There is a 10% chance I can do it without causing any damage to her eye." The day of the surgery was one of the hardest of my life—I was filled with fear. After the procedure, the doctor entered the waiting room, astonished, and said, "I removed the cloudy film from her eye and didn't damage the lens." The room erupted in joy and thanksgiving. I had witnessed a miracle. Every time I reflect on that miracle, I am reminded that there is a God.

In Psalm 105, David recounts the history of Israel and the miracles God performed in delivering the Israelites from the Egyptians. He reflects on the plagues God sent upon the Egyptians, which served as a reminder of God's faithfulness

to His chosen people. David also remembers how God miraculously provided for them, using a cloud to cover them by day and a fire to give them light at night. He concludes with "Praise the Lord."

Remembering, reflecting, and sharing stories of God's miracles—both in our lives and in Scripture—is a powerful way to honor Him, praise Him, and make His name known to others. It's a way to share His faithfulness with our families and friends.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank You for providing daily miracles. Help us remember the stories that reveal who You are and remind us of all You have done.

SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 2025

Raymond Pelling '23

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 13:1-11

1 Thus said the Lord to me, "Go and buy yourself a linen loincloth, and put it on your loins, but do not dip it in water." 2 So I bought a loincloth according to the word of the Lord, and put it on my loins. 3 And the word of the Lord came to me a second time, saying, 4 "Take the loincloth that you bought and are wearing, and go now to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a cleft of the rock." 5 So I went, and hid it by the Euphrates, as the Lord commanded me. 6 And after many days the Lord said to me, "Go now to the Euphrates, and take from there the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there." 7 Then I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. But now the loincloth was ruined; it was good for nothing.

8 Then the word of the Lord came to me: 9 Thus says the Lord: Just so I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. 10 This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own will and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing. 11 For as the loincloth clings to one's loins, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the Lord, in order that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory. But they would not listen.

DEVOTIONAL

Please don't be grossed out or offended; I'm just the messenger. I didn't expect to have underwear as a subject for Lent, either.

So, if my feet are uncomfortable, I know it all day. One day in shoes that don't fit, and I'm done with them. The same goes for other clothing. If my pajamas aren't a good fit, I know about it all night long. I'm miserable.

Two main points in this passage need our attention: pride and intimacy. God says that the pride of the people needs to be broken, because they have become as useless as underwear buried in the ground down by the river for "many days." God would have God's people close—as close as underwear. But the elastic quit. The underwear does what it wants.

This is what pride does: we do what we want. God says God loves people. We find ways to demonize them. God counts acts of love far more than any sacrifice, but we outsource our obedience, letting others serve on our behalf. We make excuses to do and think what we want, searing our conscience against the truth.

Where have we placed our pride this season? Do we grow in love or tell the scriptures what we want them to say? Can we face our issues of intimacy with God and tell the truth to our Lord, our loved ones? Will we soberly admit the truth to ourselves? The alternative is not the best use, like my old boxers in the rag box.

Thankfully, no matter how worn out we think we are, or may feel, God continually beckons us to redemption. Our Lord is quite taken with salvage, repair, and growth. God wants us close. Don't blame me, I'm just the messenger.

PRAYER

Lord God, our redemption; abide with us, even when we try to ignore you. Holy Spirit, work to keep our pride in check. Help us, Holy Spirit, pride in the God who is Love, and learn to look to Love first. In the name of Jesus we pray, amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 30, 2025

The Rev. Sara Lawson '18

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 84

1 How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
2 My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
3 Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,

my King and my God.

4 Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.

Selah

5 Happy are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

6 As they go through the valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.

7 They go from strength to strength;
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

8 O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob!

Selah

9 Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed.

10 For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.

11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
he bestows favor and honor.

No good thing does the Lord withhold
from those who walk uprightly.

12 O Lord of hosts,
happy is everyone who trusts in you.

DEVOTIONAL

Several months back, I started praying for a house. I wanted a place where people would gather and I could offer them hospitality. It would have a front house that a family I know could rent and a little cottage in the back for me. In the spacious backyard between the two houses, we could plant a church. Weather is nice in Southern California, so meeting outside would typically be a pleasant experience, but we could move inside if it rained or on scorching hot days. Maybe we could even plant a garden to give back to the community and steward the resources God gave us.

While that house hasn't materialized, Psalm 84 reminds us of a different house, one in which we are not the hosts, but the guests. The psalmist longed for such a house, longed to dwell in God's house. Similar to my dream, it's a house of hospitality and blessing. "Blessed are those who dwell in your house" (Ps 84:4).

But the psalm also reminds us that we are on a pilgrimage. We're caught in the tension between what we hope for and where we find ourselves. A longing for something better, something more, something dreamed of, and something that is still not yet. The journey is often challenging—treacherous, even. And as much as we long to be at the destination, or even a rest stop, we must continue on, relying on God alone to sustain us. "Blessed are those whose strength is in you" (Ps 84:5).

I don't know what the future holds—if God will give me the house of my dreams or if he will reveal other, better dreams. But I pray that my deepest desire will be not for the house—even the house of God—but for God himself.

PRAYER

Lord God, in you I place my hope and all my trust. I surrender the dreams that are too small to be worthy of you. Help me to be faithful on this journey and to place my trust in you that I may one day dwell in your house and gaze upon your face.

MONDAY, MARCH 31, 2025

Elizabeth Nicodemus-Creach '23

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 145

1 I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.

2 Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name forever and ever.

3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
his greatness is unsearchable.

4 One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.

5 On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

6 The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed,
and I will declare your greatness.

7 They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

8 The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 The Lord is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.

10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
and all your faithful shall bless you.

11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,
and tell of your power,

12 to make known to all people your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

The Lord is faithful in all his words,
and gracious in all his deeds.

14 The Lord upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.

15 The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.

16 You open your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing.

17 The Lord is just in all his ways,
and kind in all his doings.

18 The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
19 He fulfills the desire of all who fear him;
he also hears their cry, and saves them.
20 The Lord watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.
21 My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,
and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

DEVOTIONAL

Psalm 145 demonstrates for us the power of praising God. The text lists many of God's attributes and actions that define God's character. Ancient readers might have used this psalm to sing praises to God because of all that God brought them out of: death and destruction, loss and grief. Today, we might find comfort in remembering that, despite the chaos that surrounds us every day, God watches over all and knows what we are going through.

Even in the midst of life's chaos, the tumult of our world, God is there alongside us, guiding us through all the trials we experience. As James Luther Mays puts it: "God's power is good and God's goodness is powerful." By praising God, we are showing that we want to be in a relationship with the One who is all knowing and all compassionate, who understands us better than we understand ourselves.

As we come to this text during this Lenten season, may we come with open hearts, continuing to praise God even when it feels impossible. May we seek God when it feels like there is no way we can go on. When we feel that everything is crumbling beside us, may we cry out to God for comfort. May we proclaim the greatness of God in the midst of this season in which we await the death of the One sent to show us the powerful depths of God's love. May we realize that God loves us all, no matter what. May we seek the One whose greatness knows no bounds, who provides refuge and strength no matter where we are in our lives of faith. And may we forever seek a relationship with God that shows us the beauty of powerful, unconditional, and never-ending love.

PRAYER

God of creation, open our eyes to seek your power. Guide our hearts that we may praise you. Open our minds to your greatness. Teach us to guide others towards your everlasting love. Allow us to be open and loving to others, as Christ loves us. In your name, amen.

TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2025

The Rev. Carol Divens Roth '85

SCRIPTURE

John 6:16-27

16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

18 The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. 20 But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." 21 Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

22 The next day the crowd that had stayed on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there. They also saw that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone.

23 Then some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.

24 So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26 Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

DEVOTIONAL

If you are someone who observes April Fool's Day, today, you may already have been the prankster or the prankee. According to legend—and Rutgers University—the origin of the day goes back to 16th century France, when the Julian calendar (new year beginning April 1) was replaced with the Gregorian calendar (new year beginning Jan. 1). Word didn't get around to everyone in a timely manner, so some continued to celebrate on April 1. Hence, in that unkind time when name-calling was more prevalent, the label "April fools" came to be.

In today's passage from John 6, the sense of that label appears to come from Jesus, aimed at the crowds who followed him looking for a repeat of the loaves and fishes multiplication. They have experienced a miracle and, not surprisingly, want more of the same. They have missed the reset on the calendar of faith, failing to recognize that he is

the beginning and the ending, the Alpha and Omega. He is the Bread of Life, and by what he says and how he acts, he feeds us the Word of God. He defies gravity, sin, and death. He embodies the Kin-dom of God, which is the time and place where all are to live in rightness and love toward the other, where all are to be fed and all are to feed the other—a multiplication feat of miraculous proportions, where dehumanizing labels are supplanted by “neighbor.”

On the Lenten journey, today is a good day to reflect on what it may mean to begin a new counting of our days, daring to defy any status quo that turns us away from God and neighbor, or from daring to claim a proud label: Fool for Christ.

PRAYER

God of Grace and Glory,

Let this and every day begin with you. Give me courage to follow across uncertain seas, buoyed by your voice, saying, “Do not be afraid.” Fill me with the Bread of Life so I, in turn, may break holy bread with the Other and name them as my sisters and brothers. Claim me as your kind, devoted fool. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2, 2025

The Rev. Dave Dack '11

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 5

1 Give ear to my words, O Lord;
give heed to my sighing.
2 Listen to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.
3 O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.
4 For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil will not sojourn with you.
5 The boastful will not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.
6 You destroy those who speak lies;
the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.
7 But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house,
I will bow down toward your holy temple
in awe of you.
8 Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.
9 For there is no truth in their mouths;
their hearts are destruction;
their throats are open graves;

they flatter with their tongues.

10 Make them bear their guilt, O God;
let them fall by their own counsels;
because of their many transgressions cast them out,
for they have rebelled against you.

11 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy.

Spread your protection over them,
so that those who love your name may exult in you.

12 For you bless the righteous, O Lord;
you cover them with favor as with a shield.

DEVOTIONAL

Waiting feels like a waste of time. I suspect that's why we're bad at it.

Airports have discovered it's no good reducing baggage wait times. People still complain. But if the airport can make it so people spend more of that time walking to the claim area than standing around the carousel, the complaints stop, even if the total wait time stays the same. People don't mind as long as they're moving, as long as they don't feel like they're wasting their time.

In verse 3, David shares his morning routine: “I plead my case to you and watch” (other translations say, “wait expectantly”). Hardly the best use of his time, we might say, especially considering the threat of bloodthirsty enemies. Prayer, yes, but watching and waiting? Isn't that a waste of time?

Unless David knows something we don't—or that we've forgotten. Ironically, our obsession with productivity has blinded us to the holiness God produces in us while we wait. Waiting on God makes us watchful. It keeps us attentive to the presence of God here and now, making every step righteous, every moment holy. Suddenly, our long walk becomes not only bearable, but blessed.

Isn't that what we're really after, to live every day in God's blessed company? Even with David's enemies still on the loose, he found refuge in God's house and rejoiced in God's righteousness. It was precisely in the waiting that he encountered God. Waiting for God to answer our prayers is its own spiritual discipline. It can transform any trial into a temple of worship.

Waiting on God is never a waste of your time; it is the holiest purpose your life could have. You could spend your whole life waiting on God, and it would not be a wasted life.

PRAYER

Gracious God, listen to our prayers for help. To you we plead our sad case and that of this broken world, wondering how long your salvation will take. Make holy our waiting with the

joy of your presence, that we would never tire of seeking your Kingdom. Through Christ, Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 2025

The Rev. Luke Farwell '18

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 27

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.

3 Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.

4 One thing I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:

to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.

5 For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

6 Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

7 Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!

8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"
Your face, Lord, do I seek.

9 Do not hide your face from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!

10 If my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will take me up.

11 Teach me your way, O Lord,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.

12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.

13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord

in the land of the living.

14 Wait for the Lord;

be strong, and let your heart take courage;

wait for the Lord!

DEVOTIONAL

What would you do if someone offered you the thing you've been desiring and dreaming about? Would you accept that gift if it meant radically changing your life and perhaps the lives of those you love?

The Psalmist describes God as "my light and my salvation," "the stronghold of my life" that banishes fear. His heart calls him to "seek [God's] face," his earnest request is "to live in the house of the Lord" and "to behold the beauty of the Lord," and he finishes the poem believing: "I shall see the goodness of the Lord." His earnest yearning for God as the utmost object of his desire is evident; he earnestly seeks a life dwelling with God as his treasure.

The gospels invite us to ponder the question: what would I do if someone offered me the thing I've been desiring and dreaming about? After all, Jesus proclaimed "the kingdom of God is at hand." The Psalmist's desire is within reach; God has come to dwell with us on earth.

If we are honest, we spend most of our lives focusing on what we believe will give us joy. When, in truth, Jesus tells us that we might be closer to that treasure than we can imagine. Regardless, we spend our time looking for that elusive treasure everywhere except where we are. Why is this? Could it be that we know in our hearts that the treasure is so real and within our grasp that we are afraid of what discovering such a treasure would do to our lives? And that is precisely why we persist in looking elsewhere.

This Lenten season, let us reflect on what the kingdom of heaven would look like if we were to find it. How would it change us? Are we ready for such an incredible gift? In his Letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul writes that through Christ, God has ". . . blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." With the knowledge of this revelation, are we prepared to accept such a gift? Let us pray that we dare to claim such a gift and to live with such joy that others would notice this day. Our discovery of this treasure could not only transform us but also inspire and bless those around us.

PRAYER

Help me, dear God, to look for your kingdom in the place where I reside, like the one who found a treasure buried in a field. Let me have the courage to dig into the soil of my soul to discover your grace and kingdom, which is as near to me as my very breath. In trusting you, I may find my true purpose and joy in life. Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 2025

Dr. Charles A. Borek '24

SCRIPTURE

John 6:52-59

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; 55 for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. 56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." 59 He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

DEVOTIONAL

To live in Christ—to abide, dwell, and remain in him, and for Christ to live, abide, dwell, and remain in us—that is the hope of every Christian.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus tells us exactly how to achieve this—we must eat his flesh and drink his blood! Jesus can't really mean this, can he?

And yet he's insistent: he repeats this admonition to eat his flesh and drink his blood no less than four times! Whatever this means, it's no off-the-cuff remark. Jesus wants us to hear this message loud and clear. There can be no doubt about what he's saying.

We should recall how Jesus taught Nicodemus three chapters earlier. There, Jesus invoked another seemingly preposterous notion (that we must be "born again"), and he repeatedly and explicitly tells Nicodemus how to achieve this. Belief is what is needed, he says (John 3:1-21). Now, Jesus goes about telling us just what that belief entails, and he does so in starkly concrete terms.

The belief Jesus describes is no intellectual exercise. It doesn't come about by thinking great thoughts. Rather, this belief comes by plunging our hands into the bowl, scooping up its contents, and ingesting the sustenance. Belief in Christ is something to be consumed like food. When we eat, we absorb nutrients from the food. What we eat becomes part of us; that which sustained its life becomes sustaining to ours.

And so it is with this radical belief Jesus is calling us to. It's an embodied belief, not just something we have, but something we are. It's a belief that must indwell.

If we are to be reborn, we must believe. If we are to abide in Christ, to dwell in Christ, to remain in Christ, and he in us, this belief means nothing less than eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

PRAYER

Jesus, help me to abide, dwell, and remain in you as you abide, dwell, and remain in me.

Nourish me with your very flesh and blood, so that it may become part of me.

Help me to indwell you as you indwell me.

Forever and ever, amen.

SATURDAY, APRIL 5, 2025

The Rev. Dr. Lee David Kricher '20/22

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 43

1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from those who are deceitful and unjust deliver me!

2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you cast me off?

Why must I walk about mournfully because of the oppression of the enemy?

3 O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me;

let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.

4 Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.

5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

DEVOTIONAL

There are many reasons that we understandably "walk about mournfully." It is wise during those times to ask God to send

light into our darkness. But the psalmist does not just speak to God. He also speaks to himself. "Why are you cast down, O my soul?"

God never calls us to ignore or bury our feelings. Godly counselors and caring friends can help us acknowledge and process our feelings. Yet there is an important insight found in the words of the psalmist. While openly acknowledging the reality and impact of his feelings, he made a choice to not surrender to those feelings.

Clinical Psychologist Dr. Gail Brenner writes, "Shining the spotlight of awareness on emotions changes everything. Instead of avoiding or trying to change your feelings, you become aware of them. Then, amazingly, you realize you don't need to follow them into chaos and confusion. They don't have to guide and define you."

The scriptures are filled with stories of people who became world changers, at least in part, because they did not let their feelings master them. Moses, despite his fears, chose to do what God called him to do. Elijah, despite his despair, chose to do what God called him to do. Peter, James, and John chose to follow Jesus despite their deep feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. All were guests on the Mount of Transfiguration, just before Jesus made the ultimate choice to go to the cross.

God created us to experience a wide range of emotions. But it is encouraging to learn from the examples of so many that the impact of our lives is not defined and determined by the rise and fall of our feelings, but rather by our choices.

PRAYER

Lord, you know the depths of my feelings. During this Lenten season, please send Your light into my darkness. And help me to say with the psalmist, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God."

SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 2025

The Rev. Christopher Brown '08

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

9 For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's

law) so that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

24 Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. 25 Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. 26 So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; 27 but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

DEVOTIONAL

It's 12:55 p.m. when I read the e-mail. A younger couple in our congregation tells me they are considering leaving the church. They don't feel like they can worship with integrity any longer if they're standing beside church members with whom they disagree politically. Actually, it's worse than that. The way some other members of the congregation voted has made them feel unsafe. So, this couple says they will take a break from our church and discern if God is calling them elsewhere.

I close my laptop and decide to go for a long afternoon run to work out my frustration. The Apostle Paul's words come to mind: "Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it" (1 Cor 9:24). What does it mean to "run to win" when pastoring a purple congregation in a small town? Our church has been one of the increasingly rare places where people on both sides of the aisle still share life together. Does running to win mean avoiding conflict and keeping the peace, "making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit" (Eph 4:3)? Or does it mean being prophetic, preaching more sermons that call for "justice to roll down like mighty waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24)? I lament the fact that in churches like ours, these feel like mutually exclusive options.

As I run alongside the lake at the north end of our town, it occurs to me that the first race I need to win is inside myself. That would be the race to master my anger and tame my tongue, to not yell and curse at the worshipers who are driving this couple away. Internally, I also race against fear and people-pleasing, against ego and pride.

Someday I will reach a finish line for all these races, but there's no end in sight today. I pray for strength to endure and wisdom to know which way to turn. Then I keep on running.

PRAYER

Holy God, you call us to run with perseverance the race that is set before us (Heb 12:1). Give us courage to continue and guide us along the way, enabling us by your Spirit to become faithful disciples of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 7, 2025

The Rev. Shannon M. Garrett-Doege '21

SCRIPTURE

John 9:1-17

1 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." 10 But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." 12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. 17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

DEVOTIONAL

During the Lenten season, Christians are called to a time of reflection, renewal, and reconciliation with Christ Jesus, with one another, and with oneself. One of the ways that we can participate in the work of reconciliation is through widening our lens and experiencing the world from another perspective. There is an approach to theology known as

Womanist theology, which is defined as an interpretative approach that centers the experiences of Black women in the biblical narrative. The Womanist approach prioritizes experience as a way of knowing.

In John 9:1-17, the disciples and the Pharisees both want to know something. The disciples want to know who sinned to cause the man's blindness, and the Pharisees want to know how the blind man's eyes were opened. Both the disciples and the Pharisees are seeking knowledge through facts and data rather than through experience.

Facts and data are imperative in most aspects of our lives, but sometimes, we place too much emphasis on who, what, when, where, why, and how and forget to feel, to be present, to experience. The gift of Lent is an invitation to feel. It is an invitation to reflect, renew, and reconcile. There is a wealth of knowledge in research and reading, but also in feeling and experiencing.

The Pharisees experienced Jesus performing a miracle. Instead of immersing themselves in the experience as a way of knowing, they launch an investigation. Instead of praise and thanksgiving, they offer skepticism and ridicule. From their place of privilege, the Pharisees protest Jesus' act of healing on the Sabbath, but for the blind man, even one more day of injustice was too many. Not only was the formerly blind man's vision restored, but his life and livelihood were as well. His life was changed in dramatic fashion. It should have been a celebration, but instead, they launched an investigation.

This Lent, I invite you to prioritize experience as a way of knowing. I invite you to widen your lens. Christ Jesus invites you into the work of reconciliation with him, oneself, and the world.

PRAYER

God of justice and love,
So often we are blind to everyday blessings and miracles.
We get so caught up in being right instead of being righteous.
We get so caught up in the investigation that we overlook the celebration.
We forget about the marginalized and seek to criminalize.
Cover our eyes in your miraculous mud, so that we may see again.
Wash us in your healing waters, so that we may feel again.
Strengthen us through the Holy Spirit, so that we may experience again.
So may it be. Amen.

TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2025

The Rev. Bill Quinn '21

SCRIPTURE

John 9:18-41

18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" 28 Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." 38 He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

DEVOTIONAL

"Spunky Faith"

There is humor in the Bible, and John 9:27 contains a snippet of sarcasm worthy of 2025:

"He answered, 'I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?'"

"Do you want to become his disciples too?" Awesome!

This guy has some spunk, and shouldn't we all possess such spunk when appropriate?

John 9 is singularly devoted to the healing of the blind man—a miracle worthy of throwing a party; instead, the Pharisees stage an inquisition.

After interrogating the man who had been blind since birth, the Pharisees summon his parents who, fearing expulsion from the synagogue, implement damage control by throwing the matter back into their son's lap.

Maybe if the interrogators press him a little harder with manipulative questions, they will receive their desired answers!

The formerly blind man doesn't give an inch, and in fact, he pushes back.

"I have told you already and you did not listen."

He is fearless. They can't fire him—he's already quit; they just haven't gotten the e-mail yet. Then, for good measure, he throws their incredulity back at them: "Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

The fear of change in the authorities is no surprise. Institutions and their beneficiaries aren't interested in disrupting a status quo that works well for them. The fear of retribution in the parents is understandable: the synagogue centered community is all they've ever known. In their economy, expulsion = death.

But the blind man's life has been radically changed: "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see" (v. 25). This Lent, we have a choice: be a skeptical Pharisee, a terrified parent, or a spunky disciple asking others if they, too, would like to see.

PRAYER

God, open my eyes like those of the blind man, so that I see your glory, faithfully moving beyond whatever ails me. Give me the assuredness of faith shown by him, to stand boldly in the face of doubt, and to remember to invite others on this journey of discipleship. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025

The Rev. Ryan Lucas '18

SCRIPTURE

Romans 10:14-21

14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? 15 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written,

“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

16 But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says,

“Lord, who has believed our message?”

17 So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. 18 But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for

“Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”

19 Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says,

“I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.”

20 Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,

“I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.”

21 But of Israel he says,

“All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”

DEVOTIONAL

As a paramedic, I am acutely aware of emergency vehicles when I drive my regular vehicle. Upon hearing a siren, I quickly look for the vehicle before giving way to them. This common courtesy is invaluable to the crew's response.

During a shift on the ambulance a couple of years ago, we were responding with lights and sirens to a call for difficulty breathing, or so we thought. It was early in the morning, and I had been working all night, exhausted from running calls into the wee hours of the morning. After passing a police officer who was getting into his patrol car, my partner got a text from the police officer and he informed us that, indeed, we did not turn on our emergency lights and were

just driving through town with our siren on. It was slightly embarrassing, but there were not many cars on the road to notice our error.

So, how often do we hear things and immediately look for the source? Do we pay as much attention to God's voice as we do to things in our everyday environment?

In Romans 10:17, we hear: “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” God's voice is spoken to us daily in the people we meet and in the places we live. Loving our neighbor means that we must also listen to them and commune with them, even in their struggles. God calls us to love through the ministry of presence and through building communities that care for each other by listening and responding to each other's needs. But for us to hear these things, we have to be on full alert for God's voice in the ordinary and the extraordinary people and places.

PRAYER

O God, today we give to You our undivided attention as we wait for your voice to guide us. Whether it is through our neighbor's long-winded story or the care of EMS personnel tending to someone with an acute illness, may we hear your call to take part in your everlasting story. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2025

The Rev. Dr. Andy Bossardet '23

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 26:1-16

1 At the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came from the Lord: 2 Thus says the Lord: Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to worship in the house of the Lord; speak to them all the words that I command you; do not hold back a word. 3 It may be that they will listen, all of them, and will turn from their evil way, that I may change my mind about the disaster that I intend to bring on them because of their evil doings. 4 You shall say to them: Thus says the Lord: If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law that I have set before you, 5 and to heed the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently—though you have not heeded— 6 then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth.

7 The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the Lord. 8 And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, then

the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, "You shall die! 9 Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, 'This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant?'" And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the house of the Lord.

10 When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the Lord and took their seat in the entry of the New Gate of the house of the Lord. 11 Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears."

12 Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, "It is the Lord who sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. 13 Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will change his mind about the disaster that he has pronounced against you. 14 But as for me, here I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. 15 Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will be bringing innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears."

16 Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve the sentence of death, for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God."

DEVOTIONAL

"The truth will set you free, but not until it is finished with you." – David Foster Wallace

It is a difficult thing to accept the truth. The road to acceptance may lead through denial, but denial is a tough terrain to cross. In Jeremiah 26, the prophet laments over the state of Jerusalem and pleads for repentance. However, verse seven states that "the priests, the prophets, and all the people" rose up against Jeremiah's words and condemned the audacity with which he spoke against the status quo. The bad news about Judea was rejected by everyone.

For the initial readers of Jeremiah, those living after the exile, Jeremiah 26 is a stirring reminder of the power of denial. They lived in the aftermath of Jeremiah's original audience and of those people's rejection of Jeremiah's words. This passage reminded them how easy it is to ignore one's faults. The chapter served—and serves—as a warning to future generations that we ignore our sins to our own peril.

However, Jeremiah 26 also gives us reason for hope. The prophet is clear: if you are willing to heed the truth and allow

God to transform you, the default future of exile and pain is avoidable. For us today, telling the truth about our sin can open us to the life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Sin thrives in secrecy and shame. Sin cannot survive the intense and blinding light of the truth.

May Jeremiah's words stir in you as well. May they remind you that the purpose of self-awareness is not to drag us down but to release us from the burdens which have already dragged us down. May they remind you that the sting of recognizing our sin can also be the key to finding our freedom.

PRAYER

Creator God,

Shine the light of truth in the corners of our hearts. Illuminate the parts of ourselves which we would rather not be seen. May they be held in the gracious love and compassion of your Spirit. May we let the truth do its work in us, that we might be changed into people who can increasingly love you and our neighbor. In the name of the crucified and risen Jesus,

Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 11, 2025

The Rev. Kendra Buckwalter Smith '12/'13

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 29:1-14

31 These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. 2 This was after King Jeconiah, and the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. 3 The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiyah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said: 4 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. 8 For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are

among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, 9 for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord.

10 For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

12 Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. 13 When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, 14 I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

DEVOTIONAL

So often in life, we find ourselves in places we'd rather not be, whether due to our own choices or circumstances beyond our control.

In today's text, Jeremiah speaks to the Hebrew people who had been carried into exile in Babylon. It was not where they thought they should be, nor where they wanted to be. In the preceding chapter, a false prophet named Hananiah told the people exactly what they wanted to hear—that this exile would not last long. Into the false hope generated by Hananiah's words, the word of the Lord came through Jeremiah speaking a greater, if more challenging hope. While false prophets encourage mere optimism, Jeremiah encourages true hope that comes only through trust in the God who holds the future of all creation in an active, loving, redeeming embrace. It's a hope that allows us to be realistic about the immediate present—to admit the hardship, the injustice, the disappointment—and to discover the ways God is working in the midst of it all.

We don't know what the future will look like. But the word of the Lord assures us that it is filled with hope. And that's all we need to know. With that knowledge, we can get at the work of responding to God's call in the present—the call to seek the welfare of the families and communities that surround us; of society that is crumbling under injustice and violence; of creation that is groaning in travail. In seeking the welfare, even of the places we'd rather not be, it turns out that our hearts are seeking the Lord who promises to be found. For at the center of God's heart is not merely the future we imagine for ourselves, but the promise of welfare and hope for all creation.

PRAYER

God of promise, we are regularly reminded that the world has wandered far from where you have called it to be. Even still, you promise that the future is filled with hope. Help us

to trust in this hope and to respond to your call to settle into grateful living and actively seek the welfare of all, knowing that you are at work even in the places we'd rather not be, lovingly leading all creation to your promise fulfilled. Through Christ Jesus, the hope of the world. Amen.

SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 2025

Naomi Johnson '23

SCRIPTURE

Romans 11:25-36

25 So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,

"Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob."

27 "And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

28 As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. 32 For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

33 O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

35 "Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?"

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

DEVOTIONAL

Romans 11:33 is a breathtaking moment of declaration and praise in Paul's letter, and it draws my heart into awe-filled worship. The phrase "the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God" reminds me of the vastness of God's sovereignty and grace. It's a humbling acknowledgment that God's plans and purposes are beyond human comprehension, yet they overflow with mercy.

Reflecting on this passage, I am struck by the mystery of God's ways, particularly in how Paul frames the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles in God's salvation plan. Paul's argument that God's mercy extends to all, despite human disobedience, speaks to the boundless generosity of God. This challenges me to trust in God's wisdom, even when I don't understand the circumstances of my life or the world around me.

A personal story comes to mind when I reflect on this verse. There was a time in my life when I struggled to see God's hand in the midst of pain and uncertainty. I questioned how anything good could emerge from such confusion. But over time, I began to see the intricate ways God was at work—restoring relationships, deepening my faith, and drawing me closer to Him. Like Paul, I could only respond with awe, marveling at the richness of God's mercy.

This passage encourages me to surrender my limited understanding and rest in the infinite wisdom of God. It invites me to trust that, even when the path seems unclear, God's plans are rooted in love and designed for His glory. Truly, "to Him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom 11:36).

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the depth of your wisdom and mercy. Help me to trust in your plans, even when I cannot see the full picture. Teach me to rest in your infinite knowledge and surrender my uncertainties to you. May my life reflect your glory forever. Amen.

SUNDAY, APRIL 13, 2025

The Rev. Paul James Pfeuffer '12/ '18

SCRIPTURE

Zechariah 9:9-12

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

10 He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

11 As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

12 Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.

DEVOTIONAL

One of the questions I asked my congregation during advent was "What symbols do you most associate with peace?" There's the V Sign, adopted by 1960s anti-war activists, made by holding the index and middle fingers aloft. In Christian circles, there's the fish associated with Jesus. There are also the dove, the olive branch, and the symbol designed by the 1958 British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—so ubiquitous that it became known as the peace sign.

Peace is the inescapable subplot echoing thematically across Jesus' story, as well as the entire metanarrative of scripture—often in the places least expected. For Zechariah, that peace stems from the image of the Divine Warrior, who demilitarizes the nations under his dominion. While many Christians tend to shy away from the image of God-as-warrior, certainly, this is one that even the most uncomfortable of us can get behind, no? The Warrior is making war...on war. The Warrior comes riding not on a warhorse, but on a donkey, a symbol of peace. No more chariots. No more warhorses. No more battle bows. From sea to sea, to the ends of the earth. War never again. Never again war.

Peace can be found in the strangest, the most mysterious of places, and scripture invites us to see peace where there is conflict in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. He brings peace in the days and weeks leading up to his death, always the subversive character turning the image of what we expect on its head.

I invite you during this time to look for moments of peace in the war of the everyday, recognizing the presence of Jesus, reminding us to look for him riding in to calm the storm.

PRAYER

Prince of Peace,

Abide with us, remain with us. Even while we live in a war-torn world, we look forward to the day on which conflict shall cease and all that remains is your deep wellspring of peace.

Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 14, 2025

The Rev. Tom Harrison '24

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 121

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?

2 My help comes from the Lord,

who made heaven and earth.
3 He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
4 He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
5 The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
6 The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
7 The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
8 The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

DEVOTIONAL

In January 2023, my wife, Cherie, and I found ourselves in Bethlehem for 10 days, thanks to Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's World Mission Initiative.

We stood atop the Mount of Olives, gazing east from the Ha-Masu'ot Lookout across the Judean wilderness, where two days earlier we had eaten lunch in the home of Bedouin shepherds. Beyond the desert, we could make out the northern tip of the Dead Sea, where a day earlier we'd bobbed about like corks on wind-driven waves. Before that, we helped prepare the dinner we shared with residents of a Palestinian refugee camp.

I thought of all the history and drama that had unfolded on these hills—how Jesus fasted and met the devil in the wilderness before us, how he'd descended the slope behind us, riding a donkey. I thought of his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection—and of the endless antagonism that has played out ever since on that lower hill behind us, the Temple Mount.

What does it mean? How will it end? And to what purpose? God could easily get along without the bother of humanity. God doesn't need us.

But God does love us.

I remember a quote by Elie Wiesel, a Nazi concentration camp survivor and Nobel laureate. In the forward to his novel *The Gates of the Forest*, Wiesel wrote: "God made man because he loves stories."

God doesn't need our prayers or praises but does desire them. God doesn't need our help but desires partnership. God is not impressed with our attempts at righteousness but loves our confession. God's pure love compels and inspires us to strive for righteousness that we can't achieve. And when we confess our faults and failures, God gladly forgives and exhorts us to keep trying.

That's the makings of a great story. That's God's story. We are God's story.

PRAYER

Divine Maker of heaven and earth, you watch tirelessly over your holy city. You shield us by day and stand guard by night. You direct our footsteps along the hills and highways of your creation, even as your son, our Messiah, walked this earth and showed us the way. Continue to lead and protect us as we humbly walk with your son, Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 2025

The Rev. Rebecca McGee '09

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 91

1 You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
2 will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."
3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
4 he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
5 You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
6 or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.
7 A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
8 You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.
9 Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling place,
10 no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.
11 For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
12 On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
13 You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.
14 Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
15 When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.
16 With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.

DEVOTIONAL

An unusual thing happened when I began serving a new church. As I would randomly walk through the sanctuary, I would find a Bible open on the communion rail. It was there every time I just happened to be in the sanctuary. So, each time, I would put the Bible back in the pew where there was an open spot. It was a bit of a mystery to me. By about the third time, I realized that the Bible was always open to Psalm 91, a beautiful Psalm calling on God for protection—protection from “the hunter’s trap,” “deadly sickness,” the “terrors at night,” and “arrows that fly in daylight.” And, of course, God does protect and save us, giving us all refuge, serving as our “protective shield” from anything which threatens to harm us.

A month or two later, I shared the “mystery” of the open Bible during a leadership meeting. It was then that the lay leader shared that he has keys to the church (something I had not known) and that ever since his youngest child, a son, who was a member of a special forces unit of the Army, had been deployed to Afghanistan, he had been starting his day in the sanctuary praying Psalm 91 on behalf of his son. He continued to do this every day, for about a year and a half in total, until his son returned safely to the United States. What incredible faithfulness this father demonstrated in praying fervently for the safety of his son!

Hopefully, we all know we can trust our heavenly Father to protect us, like this earthly father trusted God to protect his son. For God tells us in Psalm 91:15,

“Whenever you cry out to me, I’ll answer.
I’ll be with you in troubling times.
I’ll save you and glorify you.”

We aren’t always spared from the hazards of life, but we are promised the presence of the One who will serve as our refuge, the One who will save us, the One who will always answer us when we cry out.

PRAYER

Almighty God, we are so incredibly grateful to you for protecting us from those things which could endanger us. Help us to trust you and to know that whatever circumstances may arise in our lives, you will always hear our cries and accompany us.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16, 2025

The Rev. Rebecca Hickok '93

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 4:1-13

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

10 I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. 11 Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. 12 I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

DEVOTIONAL

Well. My head’s all over the place with this. It’s Wednesday of Holy Week. Holy Week. You know, “Tis Midnight and On Olive’s Brow.” Not “Ode to Joy.” Who in the name of the sweet baby Jesus picked these readings? Look up “clueless” in the dictionary and I think you’ll find a picture of the culprit.

But. Hmmm. Wednesday of Holy Week. Day before the Big Day. Passover. If I were a first century Jewish woman, what would I be doing that day? Same thing I do now as a Christian woman before a big holy day, I expect. Shopping, cooking, cleaning, anticipating the arrival of family, and

singing. Joyfully. My family will be here, all in one place all around one table, all remembering and celebrating the grand story of Exodus, holding the empire at bay for one day. And I know what I wouldn't be doing. Listening to the news. I'd be way too busy to hear the argle-bargle about the troublesome itinerant preacher who was giving the Romans and Herod a run for their money. Good on him if he was, but I have potatoes to peel and beds to get ready.

So let's not do that thing we do. Putting 21st century expectations on our first century ancestors and getting our knickers all in a knot because they're singing for full-throated joy in the midst of our Holy Week.

Because, honestly, I'll take any glimmer of joy I can get any time I can. This day, April 16, marks seven months to the day that my husband of 30 years died. So, when I read this passage some clueless genius picked for today, it makes me want to – if not sing – maybe hum softly – at the possibilities for the healing balm of joy.

So, whether you are a first century woman just trying to bring joy into her family circle in a place where life was hard and the Romans were harder or a 21st century woman searching through the darkness for that one spark that gives you the wherewithal to carry on: we cling to the words of Paul, who was no stranger to hard times either:

Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.

PRAYER

Sweet, loving God, sometimes joy and sorrow course through us at the same time, and we're not at all sure what to do. Help us to embrace both. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 17, 2025

Brandon Anthony Shaw '19

SCRIPTURE

John 17:1-11

1 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

6 "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

DEVOTIONAL

Two things come to mind when I read this prayer of Jesus, especially as I zero in on verse 3: namely, that "eternal life," which is to "know" Jesus, is now, and that we are called to "know" Jesus, not in some distant or abstract sense, but personally.

First, eternal life is defined as knowing Jesus, and we can do that now. We don't have to wait to expire from this sin-cursed world to know Jesus. Sure, post-mortem eternal life is the best, because there will be no more destructive cancers to torment us. There will cease to be places of terror, like Auschwitz or the Gulag. Tears will be wiped away forever by the Lord, and the former trials of life will be in the rearview mirror. However, eternal life is to "know" Christ, and that is something we can very much do now as we wait for God's kingdom to come in fullness.

Second, eternal life is to "know" Christ. To "know" Christ is not simply intellectual acknowledgment or assent of him; it is actual, relational knowledge and experience of him. The demons, after all, know about Jesus but do not "know" Jesus. To "know" Jesus is to trust in him as the one who lived the perfect life we could never live, to embrace him as the one who died in our place (and thus saved us from everlasting ruin), and to rely on him and his resurrection as what gives us hope that we, too, might be raised from death to everlasting life one day. To know Jesus is to be in relationship with this risen Savior-Lord. We are called to "know" Jesus in a deep and intimate way. We must not be content to merely know about him but experience him as friend.

PRAYER

Father, may we comprehend that eternal life in Jesus is now. Furthermore, may we not be merely content to know about Jesus but actually experience him daily. May we share his gospel so that others might know him, too, and thus glorify you. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 18, 2025

The Rev. Erin Morey '22

SCRIPTURE

John 19:38-42

38 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. 39 Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. 40 They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. 41 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. 42 And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

DEVOTIONAL

Last year, during Holy Week, my pet rabbit Lilly developed an infection that led to severe neurological symptoms. She was unable to eat or drink, so I developed a routine of syringe-feeding her and giving her subcutaneous fluids several times a day. I was heartbroken to watch her life slip away while simultaneously doing my best at work to prepare for the beautiful liturgies of Holy Week and Easter. I also felt guilty that this care might distract me from having a meaningful Lenten practice.

One afternoon, as I was feeding Lilly on my lunch break, she gently licked my fingers, and I felt more connected to her than I ever had. I realized then that the rhythm of caring for my dying pet had become a meaningful spiritual practice, and I treasured this time with her. When she finally died, I realized how much I missed this time, caring for her, and truly being with her.

As a clergy person, I spend a great deal of time caring for people who are dying and who have died, as well as the people who love them. I have also lost people I love to death. I still don't know whether death is a normal part of life or a terrible violation of God's will for this world. What I do know is that, eventually, all life dies, and grief is hard. I have watched people care for their dying loved ones and witnessed love that is profound and sacred.

It is tempting, I think, to run from death, and to avoid being present with sickness, suffering, and death—including our own! How astonishing that our God became vulnerable, and not only died, but allowed others to care for Him when he did.

PRAYER

God of love, help us never to lose sight of the promise of Easter and resurrection. And when we inevitably find ourselves at the cross and tomb, let us respond not with avoidance, but with care and compassion. Amen.

SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 2025

The Rev. Dr. Alyssa Bell '11

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 4:1-16

1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

*"As in my anger I swore,
'They shall not enter my rest,' "*

though his works were finished at the foundation of the world. 4 For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows, "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." 5 And again in this place it says, "They shall not enter my rest." 6 Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he sets a certain day—"today"—saying through David much later, in the words already quoted,

*"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts."*

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day. 9 So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; 10 for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. 11 Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.

12 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; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is

unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

DEVOTIONAL

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?” The heart-wrenching words of the psalmist have resonated with me over the past five years as I have navigated some difficult times: the death of my dear mother; a pandemic which snatched away a sense of well-being; and then a season of disaffiliation in the United Methodist Church in which colleagues and churches willingly left the connection in which I had invested my life and ministry. The psalmist gives voice to the desolation, brokenness and anxiety which often maneuvers its way into my spirit.

On this Holy Saturday, I am sure the followers of Jesus experienced disquieted spirits. Their beloved teacher, Jesus, had been denied, betrayed, and brutally murdered. When his body was laid in the tomb, all of their expectations for a new reality of love and peace had been buried. The faithful community of believers for whom Jesus brought good news had been shattered and scattered, their souls cast down, their spirits disquieted.

On this “quiet day” on the liturgical calendar, we have space to consider that the psalmist’s cry did not end with pain; the desperate cry to God led instead to a word of hope: “Hope in God; for I shall praise him, my help and my God.” The psalmist trusted in the provision of God, the one who would carry him through the present pain and uncertainty. As well, the gospel story does not end with the brokenness of the cross and tomb—it concludes with the startling hope of resurrection, restoration and reconciliation.

Today’s psalm is a powerful reminder that God’s light and love shines through the darkness of our lives, even in the moments when our disquieted spirits ache and yearn for a better day. May the God of disquieted days give you hope as you wait for tomorrow to come!

PRAYER

God of creation and rest, thank you for the gift of your scriptures drawing us to yourself this Holy Saturday, and for Jesus Christ, who accomplished our salvation on the cross. Through the presence and power of your Holy Spirit, we ask for your help to rest. By your grace, we pause and let go. Amen.

SUNDAY, APRIL 20, 2025

Dr. Jodie Eckenrod '20

SCRIPTURE

Luke 24:13-35

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” 19 He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” 25 Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

DEVOTIONAL

One of the most memorable and well-told narratives in the gospel accounts, the walk to Emmaus, continues to spark our imaginations. Readers have questions about Cleopas and his companion (perhaps his wife?). Why did they not recognize Jesus, who prevented them from knowing who he was, and why did he vanish at the very moment they did recognize him? These two followers were not present at the Last Supper a few days before, so why were their eyes opened when he gave them the broken bread? Why was this moment significant to them?

We can easily identify with these followers in their moment of devastation over what they thought had been lost. We can remain focused on our personal grief or on communal tragedies in the world instead of on the amazing ways God is working. Jesus interprets the scriptures in a new way for his followers, but it wasn't just head knowledge that Jesus conveyed. Their hearts burned as he retold the story, given the events of the previous three days. When was the last time our hearts burned as we reflected upon scripture?

It can be tempting for us to focus on our personal struggles or on the doom and gloom of the 24-hour news cycle. It can even be easy for us to remain merely intellectually engaged with scripture or focus on the never-ending tasks of ministry or day-to-day life. But what if during this season we allowed Jesus' interpretation of scripture to make our hearts burn? What if we truly experienced Jesus on the road to wherever we're going?

As bleak as things may look in our lives, the world, or even in the church, God is in fact working in history and will redeem all things. Jesus is King and in his mysterious ways will set things right in our broken world.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, please help us to recognize your presence in our lives even in the darkest of times. Give us the eyes to see you; allow our hearts to burn within us as we experience the scriptures in light of your amazing work and your boundless love. Amen.

The Scripture quotations contained in the lectionary readings are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

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