

Trinity Church
Daily

Devotions for Lent



Epigraph

Lent invites us to make our hearts ready for remembering Jesus' passion and celebrating Jesus' resurrection. ... As a period of preparation, Lent has historically included the instruction of persons for baptism and profession of faith on Easter Sunday; the calling back of those who have become estranged from the church; and efforts by all Christians to deepen their piety, devotion, and readiness to mark the death and resurrection of their Savior. As such, the primary focus of the season is to explore and deepen a "baptismal spirituality" that centers on our union with Christ rather than to function only as an extended meditation on Christ's suffering and death.

- Emily Brink and John D. Witvliet, *The Worship Sourcebook*, pages 551-552

Introduction

What happens when we make time for a daily devotional? Richard Foster says it well when he writes, “A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He cultivates the ground, he plants the seed, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up comes the grain. . . . This is the way it is with the Spiritual Disciplines - they are a way of sowing to the Spirit. . . . By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done.” (Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, page 7.) You are holding in your hand something to help you get to the place where it is easier to be attentive to Christ's voice.

I would like to take this moment, as you begin the Lenten journey, to thank all of those who have contributed to Trinity's Lenten Devotional 2020. Susan Bastnagel served again as our editor and Alysia Badskey once more oversaw the formatting and production of the devotional. We owe them deep thanks. I also would like to thank the chair of the Adult Ministries Committee, Elder Larry Miller, for his support and continued reaching out to our members, inviting people to write a devotion. We owe Larry and the entire AMC (Elder Kim Windt, Eby Banas, Stacey Blackmer, Joan Cohen, Barb DeSanto, Margaret Gammie, Michele Strobel and Linda Thorpe) our gratitude for their good work. This is our eighth Trinity Lenten Devotional and each year we have had more writers preparing a devotion and that is the case this year, which is a wonderful gift that our sisters and brothers have given us—a help to our “sowing to the Spirit.” Finally, I would like to express my thankfulness for being part of this project. I have been inspired and moved and gratified to read the expressions of our members’ faith, hope and love; as I'm sure can be said by every contributor, I found in preparing devotions that my own spiritual life was deepened.

As you move through this devotional, you will find that, on weekdays (Monday-Saturday), the devotion follows the common format of Scripture passage, devotional thought, and closing prayer. In the Western Church, Sundays are not part of Lent since Sundays are always days of celebrating the Resurrection and are technically exempt from Lenten observance. For our Sunday devotional time, I have given the Epistle passage suggested by the Revised Common Lectionary for this year in the church’s three year worship cycle. This means that a passage from the writings of the Apostles is offered to help “provide the right conditions for the growing” of our lives in Christ.

I hope that each devotion will be a gift for you and that you will make time to slow down and to read, pray and meditate, “sowing to the Spirit.” I am sure that all those on the Adult Ministries Committee join me in praying for all of us at Trinity: May the Lord use these devotions and your time with them to help “get us to the place where something can be done” by the Holy Spirit.

With My Prayers for You and Asking for Yours,
Gregory

Day 1

ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2020

Matthew 17:18-21

And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not cast it out?' He said to them, 'Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there", and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.'

How much faith does it take? How much faith does it take to love God, to follow Jesus, to live in the power of the Holy Spirit? Sometimes it seems like it takes more than we are able to muster, right?

During our Ash Wednesday worship, I gave everyone a mustard seed. There are several varieties of mustard that are native to Israel/Palestine with differing types of seeds. The seed that worshippers received today was a small, round ball of a seed; it's not much larger than the eraser at the end of a #2 pencil. In other words, it's pretty small...or so it seemed to me when I bought the seeds in the streets of al-Azariya—the village the Bible calls Bethany. To bring these seeds from the village where Lazarus was raised from the dead added to my thoughts about having a mustard-seed-sized faith. Jesus clearly—as God-in-the-flesh—had an incredible amount of faith to stand before a tomb and cry out: “Lazarus, come forth!”

How much faith does it take to love God, to follow Jesus, to live in the power of the Holy Spirit? If you are feeling fairly low on faith, the good news is that Jesus says that just a little is enough to bring incredible results. “Move, mountain!” and the mountain moves. Maybe you and I need to entrust whatever amount of faith we have to Christ and see what might be accomplished through his compassionate power at work within us. The Lenten season is a good time to give attention to such entrustment.

Prayer: Faithful God, however much faith I have right now—a mustard-seed's worth or a mountain-moving amount—I entrust it to Jesus to use it for your glory and the good of me and my neighbor. Amen.

Day 2

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2020

Ecclesiastes 3: 1

There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens.

It's January. It's time to put away all the Christmas decorations and prepare for Easter—to move from the Birth of Jesus to the Resurrection of the Savior! The “between time!” One of the first things I do is go through my Christmas cards again ... re-reading news, remembering happy events, and sometimes, writing encouraging notes or, too often, notes of sympathy. After living in Barclay for well over 50 years, my “between time” this year is being extended! I am nearing the end of my first year at Wiley, making friends and getting busy with new activities. Now I need to review how I am spending my time and make choices. What do I keep, what do I add, or what do I discard? Some choices are easy — read the Circle Bible study and our Small Group booklet and attend the Sunday morning discussion groups. (Obviously, I'm keeping things that pertain to Trinity!) Some other choices, I am still considering!

Do you have choices you need to make? What is your “between time?” May I suggest that we all take time this Lenten Season to read more of the New Testament, mainly the Gospels that tell of Jesus as our Savior, walking and talking to people. He took time to meet people (like us!), healed the sick, fed the hungry, and answered their questions. And then He sacrificed it all—again, for us!

Prayer: Jesus, my Savior, I pray that I may consider the time I have for this season and each activity I undertake. Let me be aware of the needs of others, and act as you would have me do. In your Holy name, Amen.

Day 3

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2020

1 Corinthians 9:24

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.

In 490 B.C., the mighty Persian army invaded the Greek mainland in hopes of conquering and subduing the city state of Athens. The two armies clashed on the Marathon plain, just 25 miles northeast of the famed Greek city. Despite being woefully outnumbered, the Athenians were victorious, utterly defeating the invaders.

Immediately, a courier was sought to bring the news of victory to Athens. A Greek named Phidippides was chosen to deliver the message and with great speed, ran the course from Marathon to Athens. When he arrived, he found the leaders of the city desperately waiting for news of the battle. "Rejoice!" he cried. "Rejoice! We conquered!"

In the excitement of the good news, however, many in the crowd failed to notice that the messenger was exhausted from his trip. And, as soon as he uttered the message of victory, poor Phidippides collapsed and died. Despite the loss, Greeks found a real hero in Phidippides and celebrated his effort.

He had given his all for Athens, sacrificing everything to accomplish his mission. Indeed, the story of Phidippides later inspired the modern Olympic and Boston Marathons.

This Lenten season, let us remember the example of Phidippides and emulate his dedication and persistence in our Christian walk. Let us "run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2). Like the famed ancient hero, let us run the race to win.

Prayer: Gracious, Lord, I pray for your mercy and strength this Lenten season. As we approach the celebration of the Resurrection, empower me to fight the good fight, to finish the course, to keep the faith. In all that I do, allow me to honor you as I run the race. May I run that race to win. In Your Name, Amen.

Jack Gilliland

Day 4

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2020

The Elder Brother's Side of the Parable of the Lost Son

Luke 15: 25-32

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. Your brother has come, he replied, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because the brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

In October 1999, my brother called my office on a Friday afternoon. I was completely surprised. I had not spoken to him for many years – perhaps over a decade. Our relationship had become strained; in fact, he pretty much separated himself from the family. In a 20-word exchange, I learned that his marriage was over, and he wanted to visit for the weekend to reconnect with me, my family, and Mom and Dad. Of course, I said yes! And he started his drive north from Virginia to New Jersey.

One of my friends called later in the afternoon to check on my weekend plans; the Eagles were playing, and he was wondering if we could catch the game together. I told him David called and I wanted to spend as much time with him as possible. His reaction was very negative--"You mean the same guy who dissed your family for all these years? You should make him grovel!" He called me a fool for being so "soft" on him. He even called me a second time to double down on his opinion.

Thankfully, the Holy Spirit prevailed. We had a great visit. David and I reconnected; I had my brother again. I wound up being his best man at his second wedding three years later. We have a full family again. We love his wife. We don't discuss those years of distance – we are grateful that we are reunited.

What if I had taken a secular approach? A harder approach? What if my response had been full of arrogance and I had turned him away?

The ending of the parable of the Lost Son is striking to me. The story ends without revealing whether the older son ever joined the celebration. The older son was so angry with this lack of fairness – heck, he was a good person, he never embarrassed his father, he never got this kind of celebration. The father pleaded with him to join the celebration; Jesus chose to let the story end there.

How many times have we acted like the older son and stood firm without trying to mend a broken friendship because we were correct and “they were wrong?” How often do we let our pride get in the way of healing?

Prayer: Lord God, life *isn't* fair and many times life isn't easy with all of its complexities. We are grateful for the wisdom that can be gained in following your way. Thank you for showing us how to live and love. Amen.

Day 5

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 1, 2020

Romans 5:12-19

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— sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.

Day 6

MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2020

Shine Your Light

Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. - New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

It was an unusually warm Sunday in January. The weather had everyone remarking, even Dr. Faulkner during his welcome remarks. As I sat through the service, I felt joy as the sunshine shone through the beautiful colored glass windows that I've admired for decades.

The Deacons were ordained and installed, charged with the mission of the church, to minister to those around them within Trinity and beyond its doors. I recalled my terms as a Deacon and how serving brought me closer to God and to my fellow congregants. They say, "Once a Deacon always a Deacon." I certainly believe that's true and would like to think I have been a part of something so much bigger than just the basic duties that I performed at Trinity.

I have tried to share my Trinity activities with others over the years, whether a co-worker, visitors to Trinity, or maybe even in line at the grocery store. I share not to boast, but to say, "Hey, if I could say yes, anyone can," even to the smallest thing. Whether it's serving as a Deacon, bringing coats or gloves, adopting a family at Christmas, helping at the food pantry, etc., I'm lucky to be part of Trinity with its amazing members who do so much all the time. I am going to challenge myself and others to say yes to something new this year.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Let Trinity's light shine anew in all of us. Amen.

Jen Dukelow

Day 7

TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2020

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 11:19

Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the day of your children may be many in the land that the Lord swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

Deuteronomy 32:45-47

When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, he said to them, 'Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you -- they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.

Proverbs 22:6

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Luke 9:48

Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all -- he is the greatest.

Matthew 22:38

The Greatest Commandment -- Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

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At the beginning of each monthly Circle meeting, one of us presents a brief devotion. It can be any small vignette or reading that we have found meaningful and want to share with one another. We take turns doing this small job. When it was my turn last fall, I struggled to find something to share from the devotions I had right in front of me and so I wandered to a bookshelf where I keep a collection of religious and devotional books. I began to look through these books and discovered that many of them had been given to me as gifts by my grandmother, aunt, and mother. These women were my family trifecta of spiritual support.

Not only was I able to find the perfect devotion to share with my Circle friends, but I experienced an overwhelming sense of love and gratitude for all the little ways these women supported me in prayer and action to help me grow in my own faith. They never gave up on me.

These feelings continued to grow and expand in my heart and mind, and I became grateful for all the Trinity members who have nurtured me along the way -- the members of the congregation who agreed to help raise me in the faith, the Sunday School teachers who showed up every Sunday, the Choir Directors who wrangled a room full of rambunctious kids, the Deacons who greeted and ushered every Sunday and prepared a vibrant coffee hour that sometimes had CAKE, the Elders who guided our congregation, our ministers who kept us focused on God's greatest commandment to LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

After experiencing all that love and gratitude, I was confronted by a call to action: HOW AM I DOING THIS IN MY LIFE? In what small and big ways can I support not only my child, but all the children around me to come to know God?

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for all those who have supported me on my faith journey. Help me to support others in coming to know you. Amen.

Barbara Clarke

Day 8

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2020

Do You Believe?

John 1: 40-41, 44

Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped in cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him and let him go."

*February 22, 1980, Lake Placid, New York ... Some of you might remember what happened on that date 40 years ago. Mike Eruzione, Captain of the United States Olympic Hockey Team, scored the game-winning goal to defeat the Russians in the semifinals. Many of you won't know or remember the name just mentioned, but you might know or remember the words yelled into a microphone by TV announcer Al Michaels (currently the announcer on *Sunday Night Football*) as the game neared its conclusion:*

"DO YOU BELIEVE IN MIRACLES?"

Jesus performed many miracles and people, both Jew and Gentile, believed in him because of those miracles. In these days of instantaneous answers and hand-held computers, the term miracle is losing some of its beauty. William Barclay, a gifted preacher and scholar, is one of the world's most popular religious authors. He writes: "There is a kind of rationalism which kills wonder. When wonder is dead, wonderful things cease to happen. We might receive more miracles if we stopped insisting that miracles do not happen, and begin expecting them to happen."

This past summer, an Emergency Room doctor at Lourdes Hospital in Camden told my daughters and me that he needed our permission to surgically implant a drain in my wife Linda's skull; he would maneuver the drain to a spot in her brain to relieve the pressure from the blood caused by a bleeding cancerous lesion. When the doctor explained the situation and that the outcome was not guaranteed, we paused. Pastor Greg was with us. We cried and we prayed. Finally, with tears in our eyes, we said, yes.

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Would you call what happened after that a miracle?

I believe...

I now must tell you that with five seconds left in that hockey game, after asking the question, "Do you believe in miracles?" ... Al Michaels screamed, "-YES!"

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to continue to believe that you will never leave me and that no matter how difficult the circumstances, you will be with me! Amen.

Jacket of the book, The Mind of Jesus, 1960, 1961: SCM

Barclay, William. The Mind of Jesus, 1960, 1961: SCM Press,

Day 9

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2020

John 10:9

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture.

On my trip to Israel, I was fascinated with all the beautiful but different doors. Wooden doors. Metal doors. Simple doors and ornate doors. Tall doors and short doors. Doors to churches, private homes, tombs. Interior and exterior doors. Mostly old and majestic doors. I couldn't stop taking pictures of them. Each one was attractive in its own way and came with a story of its existence.

According to the dictionary, a door is a hinged, sliding, or revolving barrier that allows ingress or egress into an "enclosure." Until my trip, I always saw a door as a "barrier," holding me up from getting where I wanted to go. I never stopped to look at the beauty, individuality, or symbolism of a door. Until now! In life, we are faced with many different doors or choices. Knowing that Jesus is at this gate or door watching for us should bring a sense of comfort and peace. We should enter each door with expectation and caution, looking for hope and salvation. Jesus invites each one of us to enter his door.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for helping me to notice all the different doors. Thank you for waiting for me to enter a life filled with your love, devotion, and protection. Remind me not to barge through life without you, but to slow down and, as they say, "smell the roses" with you by my side. In your name we pray. Amen.

Day 10

FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 2020

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

For 18 years, nursing has been rated as the most ethical and trustworthy profession. With the World Health Organization (WHO) dedicating 2020 as the “Year of the Nurse” in honor of the 200th anniversary of Florence Nightingale’s birth, one starts to think, “What makes someone trust someone else?” We trust our parents instinctively because they clothe and shelter us. We trust our friends because we build bonds and relationships grounded in likenesses.

But how do we trust God? Trust is the firm belief in the reliability or strength of someone or something. We read the Bible, journal, attend church, and, most importantly, pray. During this time of Lent, of discernment, contemplation, and prayer, remember to trust the Lord because by trusting God our path becomes straight. We don’t have to do life alone because God is always walking beside us.

Prayer: My Lord, I pray that during this time of reflection, I remember that you are in control of my path, my future. I acknowledge with my whole heart that I cannot walk this path alone but lean on you for guidance and support. Amen.

Day 111

SATURDAY, MARCH 7, 2020

Love Fulfills God's Requirements

Romans 14:8

Owe nothing to anyone-except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law.

Everything is relative. I look at the moon and think "we are all looking at the same moon and sun no matter where we are on earth." And then I think of the many miles from one continent to the next and the world seems enormous!

As humans, we all share similarities, but we have many different backgrounds and cultures. As Presbyterians, we are very much "live and let worship as you see fit." We have one God (three in one for us). We need to be respectful of others and their beliefs. That is what this country was founded upon. We do need to stand up and give voice when we see others being abused and taken advantage of. We look back in history and hope that we do not repeat our mistakes.

We all want to be accepted for who we are. If people are treated equally and with dignity that is a step in the right direction for peace and tranquility in the world.

If you look at the animal world, creatures can get along fine until one is threatened or hungry. It is the same with humans. We all need food, shelter, **love**, and a purpose.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help us to understand that differences are okay. Just as our body is made up of different parts with different functions that work together, it's okay for people to have different backgrounds and beliefs and still work together as a whole. Help me to love my neighbor. Amen.

Linda Craven

Day 12

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 8, 2020

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations") —in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Day 13

MONDAY, MARCH 9, 2020

Jeremiah 29: 11-13

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future with hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

These are among my favorite verses in the Bible. I have turned to them multiple times in my life. Whenever I am frustrated with life, frustrated (foolishly) with God for not granting me everything that I pray for, I turn to these verses. I remind myself that God has guided me, sometimes without me even knowing it, and He will continue to guide me in the future. Why? Because He has the best plan for me.

These verses also remind me of what is so important about prayer. We can easily get caught up in asking God for anything that makes our life "convenient," and we forget to pray truly with our hearts. Do that and God will listen. He might not always grant what you ask for but trust His decisions and plan for you.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to speak with you with all of my heart when I pray. And most importantly, give me the strength and knowledge to trust that You always have the best plan for me. Amen.

Day 14

TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2020

Gratitude

1 Chronicles 22:19

Now set your mind and heart to seek the Lord your God.

The October/November issue of *Daily Word* included an article about gratitude. Gratitude is a synonym for thankfulness. The article said to take a challenge for 23 days and be grateful for three things each morning and night.

So, I took the challenge. It was easy in the morning, but by dinner time I had to come up with three more things to be grateful for. I would share my ideas with my husband, and he would find three things to be grateful for in response.

The challenge changed my outlook on my days and the future. Prior to taking the challenge, life seemed so mundane and, despite the holiday season, slightly sad. Yet, after 23 days, I could sense that a burden had been lifted off my shoulders. Life seemed happier.

I have continued with my morning gritudes to this day. If I forget or feel down, a thought appears, and I think of three things to be grateful about for that day. This morning, I was grateful that:

1. I woke up.
2. The sun was shining, so I could hang my sheets outside on the line to dry.
3. It had rained earlier in the morning but stopped before we needed to leave the house to go to church.

My challenge to you is to find gratefulness.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for blessings great and small. Help me to have a grateful heart. Amen.

Anonymous

Day 15

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2020

When I Was in the Holy Land

John 20:29

... "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

We've heard this phrase in a few sermons in the past few months. While these words may make us smile, the words have a deeper meaning to me since my trip to the Holy Land last October. What I saw was not only interesting, but I felt much of the trip was meant for me. The nativity story will never be the same to me after I stood outside one night overlooking the city of Bethlehem. In the quiet, I thought about the hymn *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. I can picture the shepherds, the angels, and the bright star shining in the sky. I saw baby Jesus reaching out to me with his tiny hands. When stepping into the muddy Jordan River to be re-baptized, I saw Jesus and John the Baptist smiling at me. While receiving communion on a small boat on the Sea of Galilee, I imagined looking out onto the sea and seeing Jesus walking on the water coming to be with me. While sitting quietly in the Garden of Gethsemane, I wondered if I could stay awake while Jesus prayed. While walking the Via Dolorosa and contemplating the various scripture passages that were read, I realized the tremendous suffering that Jesus endured for me.

Jesus is talking to me.

Jesus is talking to all of us.

Prayer: Jesus, as you continue to talk to me, help me not to be distracted and help me to listen to You. Amen.

Day 16

THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 2020

Musings on Impressionism and Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1:5

"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb, before you were born I set you apart and appointed you ..."

Genesis 1:1-3

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void and darkness covered the deep waters ... then God said, "Let there be light."

My wife is an impressionist devotee, an avid admirer of that type of painting. When we went to France a few years ago, she was not content with the sights and dazzle of Paris. We just had to go 45 miles northwest of Paris, to Giverny, where Claude Monet, the most easily recognized impressionist painter, lived and painted. She was reading impressionist literature during the trip. I was more interested in learning how Monet diverted a small branch of the Epte river, a tributary of the Seine, to form part of his water lily garden and Japanese bridge featured in his paintings.

The first time I looked at an impressionist painting, I saw a painting that was kind of fuzzy and blurred. To those who love painting, it is of course more than that. The impressionist painter, I later learned, is creating an impression rather than delving into concrete details. Light, after all, is the creative principle underlying appearances and in the impressionist painting even light is blurred. Contrast this with the sharpness of detail in classical painting, particularly those using the Tenebrism technique or the chiaroscuro method.

I remembered our Giverny trip when I was reading about Jeremiah's calling and also while reading the first three verses of Genesis. Before we were formed God knew us! In the beginning God created the world; the world was not only formless and void but also absolutely dark until God commanded light to appear. Questions have been asked why the impressionist paintings are "blurred." Theories abound: Monet had cataracts, which is true but before he had cataracts some of his paintings were already "blurred." Degas had maculopathy, an eye defect that affects central vision. Let me, however, explore this idea. We see objects because light strikes that object and carries its image to our eyes. The images that our eyes initially receive are completely unformed, unorganized and, yes, dark except for that initial spark when the light first hit the eyes. Our eyes then send these images to the brain where they are organized, labeled, and made logical and understandable.

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The impressionist tries to capture those images that the eyes receive before the brain organizes them—hence, the first impression.

God is an artist. His canvas is the universe. He paints in whirlpools of galaxies and wisps of nebulosity. He paints humanity too. You and I and humanity were in that initial formless void. He captures us while we are still unformed, fluid, and impalpable. With His broad brush He molds us, smoothens the sharpness of our edges, and cleans us to be presented as atoned in the same way that an impressionist manipulates light and shadow so we will see beyond the fuzziness of his painting. But here is the difference: the impressionist aims to capture the temporary sensory essence of a scene; God abides with us in all our moments of sadness and jubilation, moments of action and ennui, and every moment of our transformation.

Prayer: We were formless and void and in darkness. You gave us substance and light. Thank you. We often approach you with fear and trembling aware of your justice without realizing that you have an infinite capacity to love. For this, we ask your forgiveness. Amen.

Day 17

FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2020

Matthew 6: 25-34

"...Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? ... So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."

A life without worry? What a wonderful thought! No cares, no anxiety – just give it all up to God, and all will be well. Is it that easy? What if your worries are not about the basics mentioned in the scripture above? What if your worries are BIG worries? Illness, grief, fear for yourself or for a loved one? Surely no human being escapes these worries, because that is the nature of being human – right?

In my life I've experienced many anxious moments, and to be honest, I probably have an issue with anxiety that stems from experiences in my past that I will never be able to forget. It comes and goes, as does my frequent problem with insomnia; maybe they're related? And yet, I am certainly blessed with a wonderful life and far fewer problems than the average human being must deal with. Still, being the control freak that I am (Yes, I admit it!), I seem to think that I should be able to handle the worry on my own. So how do we handle the inevitable worry that pervades all of our lives? Therapy? Maybe. Support from family and friends? Definitely! Drugs or alcohol? I hope not! Whatever seems like the comfort of choice, the problem is that these are all temporary fixes.

For me, the worst worry is that which I have for the people I care about. I've been known to lay awake all night long, worrying about family members – especially my children and grandchildren – even though these worries are usually nothing insurmountable. And sometimes the best medicine for worry is a good night's sleep! Rather self-defeating, isn't it? But so often, what seems like a serious issue doesn't seem so serious in the light of the next day. Perhaps that alone is a gift from God?

What I read in between the lines of the scripture above is more about trust. Trust in God and his ability to comfort; trust in God's love for us and those we love; trust that He can carry the burdens that we can no longer bear, be they great or small. Notice I didn't say that God would solve all our problems! Maybe yes, maybe no! Regardless, my best nights are the ones when I pray as I try to go to sleep, and by some miracle I literally fall asleep mid-prayer!

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The problem that was so overwhelming the night before somehow became manageable the next day.

I know that I will continue to have serious concerns about many things in the days, months, and years to come. And I have so often fallen short of God's instructions to us – trust in Him, and he will provide all that we need. It seems so simple, so logical, but so NOT human! Thank the Lord!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, be with us in our days and our nights. Give us respite from our worries, large and small. Help us to remember that you are there for all who trust in you, especially when life is too overwhelming to bear. Amen.

Betty Stockwell

Day 18

SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 2020

Mark 10: 46-52

... As He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus ... Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well."

In the time of Bartimaeus, the city officials would give the disabled cloaks to wear to signify they were entitled to beg as a means of survival. As Jesus was leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus called to Him so he could be given the gift of sight. Jesus told Bartimaeus to come to Him. Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, went to Jesus, was healed, and became a follower. Bartimaeus did not wait to be healed to discard his cloak but believed immediately that Jesus would restore his sight.

By saying, "Your faith has made you well," Jesus emphasizes the necessity of faith. Bartimaeus had the kind of faith that pleases God—a wholehearted trust in the Healer. He understood this truth. He earnestly sought the Lord, and his actions reflected the kind of faith that is pleasing to God.

Prayer: Father, We pray to have the faith of Bartimaeus. May our prayers and our faith be pleasing to you. Amen.

Day 19

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 15, 2020

Romans 5:1-11

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 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. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 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.

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

Day 20

MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2020

Luke 1:46

My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

On our trip to Israel, we visited the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth. This is where the Angel Gabriel supposedly announced to the Virgin Mary that she would conceive and bear the Son of God, Jesus. We climbed the many steps from town to the church and as part of our personal tour, walked the grounds. I found a picture of Mary and since I was dressed that day with a hooded dress and my always present shawl, I posed as a “Mary” with my hands extended as I remembered my “Mary” position in a church pageant many years ago.

Let’s backtrack a moment. I am the oldest of four girls and at a sisters’ weekend last year, my middle sister brought up the fact that I was Mary in the Christmas pageant and she was only a shepherd! My other sisters and I looked at each other in disbelief that she would harbor such feelings for almost 50 years! Anyway, fast forward a month after we returned from Israel, I was putting together a scrap book for my oldest son of his high school/college football days, and in the middle of all these old programs and newspaper articles, I found a church program with a nativity scene. I was astonished to find it was the Christmas pageant program where I was listed as Mary and my sister was listed as an usher, not the shepherd! In my hand was the actual program, dated December 19, 1971! Where did this program come from? MY SOUL MAGNIFIES THE LORD!

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes to your miracles knowing that you have an interest in each one of us no matter what our “job” - as a Mary, shepherd, or usher - may be. Angels appeared to both Mary and the shepherds and told them be not afraid. Let us not be afraid to listen and believe! Amen.

Louisa Coffin Tilsner

Day 21

TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2020

Wonder

I've come to love the annual Epiphany service tradition of getting a star as I leave church. That star has a word to be reflected upon, to see what meaning it can hold for me. I decided this year to see if I could turn my 2020 word into a devotional. The word I received is wonder. First, I looked up the definition.

Wonder:

(noun) A feeling of surprise mingled with admiration, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable.

(verb) Desire or be curious to know something.

Next, I looked to see how the word appears in the Bible. I was surprised that the most consistent use of the word was in reference to the wonders that God or Jesus has worked in the context of miracles or feats of astonishment. These are not necessarily the definitions described above and not where I thought I would be going with this.

During Advent, one of my favorite hymns is *I Wonder as I Wander*, credited to John Jacob Niles and published in 1934. He composed this song based on fragments of a song he heard from a young girl during his travels. In the context of this hymn, with its use of the minor key and the simplistic lyrics, wonder lends itself to the verb definition of questioning how and why Jesus came into our lives.

Thirty-eight years ago, I declared in Trinity's sanctuary that Jesus Christ was my Lord and Savior. In the years since, I think I've done all the things that a good Presbyterian should do as far as prayer, participation, tithing. I can admit at times, this can become rote and routine. The "wonder" of it all can be forgotten in the hustle and bustle of the Christmas noise. There is often a sigh of relief when Advent is over, then all too soon we're exclaiming, "Can you believe it's already Ash Wednesday" as we enter the Lenten season.

My two favorite services at Trinity are Christmas Eve and Maundy Thursday. In both services there are spaces of collective quietness, where in a crowded room of people the silence can be so loud that one can sit and be amazed at the wonder of it all. At Christmas, we wonder at the miracle birth of God's son as the prophets foretold; we ponder during Lent the sacrifice that Jesus makes so our sins are forgiven.

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This Lenten season, I challenge myself and others to wonder anew how our faith can be so everlasting if we don't let ourselves take God and his eternal love for us for granted.

Prayer: Lord, help us to keep innocent wonder in the forefront of our faith, instead of the background. Amen.

Jen Dukelow

Day 22

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2020

John 1: 29-42

... When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?"

"I believe in the Kingdom come. Then all the colors will bleed into one. You broke the bonds and you loosened chains, carried the cross of my shame ... You know I believe ... but I still haven't found what I'm looking for." - U2

"What are you looking for?" This is Jesus' first recorded question to the disciples in the book of John, and still a confounding question for all of us to pause and reflect on this Lenten season.

I appreciate the disciples chosen response to Jesus' question, a tool that I admittedly often resort to when I don't have an answer. They answered Jesus' question with a question of their own, "Where are you staying?" I can imagine the disciples had deeper questions: Will it be safe? Where exactly are you headed? What do I need to bring for the journey? What will I need to leave behind? What will it cost me? What will I gain by going?

Jesus' response is equally confounding and compelling: "Come and see." No itinerary, strategy, mission, packing list, or stirring speech is given, only an invitation to journey with him and trust his lead.

The challenge and the invitation to the disciples then, and for us today, is to see as Jesus sees. We can only learn to see this way by journeying with Him, by learning to see with His grace-filled vision. Jesus looks at Simon the fisherman and sees Peter, the Rock upon which he will build his church. Can we look at others with the same Grace as Jesus sees them? Can we look at ourselves with that same Grace?

This Lenten season, "what are you looking for?" May we take up Jesus' invitation to "come and see."

Prayer: Lord, we are so thankful that you have invited us to "Come and See." Grant us your grace-filled vision to see others and ourselves with your unconditional love and grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eric Waraas

Day 23

THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2020

Matthew 6:25-27

Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

Worry is one of the areas of my Christian journey that I struggle with the most.

There is a quote attributed to Mark Twain (and others) that goes something like, "I've lived through some terrible things in my life, some of which actually happened." I spend a lot of time, energy and sleepless nights worrying about things that never happen. Years ago, I heard a young woman talk about her husband's struggle to overcome alcoholism and drug addiction, the moments of false hope and the moments of crushing despair for herself and her family. She talked for 30 minutes or so. Every two or three minutes she would pause and in a haunting voice say, "Whatever happens, God and I will be okay." For many years, and probably still today, that mantra became one of the building blocks of my faith. When I find myself worrying obsessively, I try to remember that young woman and hear her say, "Whatever happens God and I will be okay."

Prayer: Good and gracious God, help me to remember that You are always there for me and that worrying will not add a single hour to my life. When I lack faith and start to worry about the future, remind me that whatever happens "God and I will be okay." In your Son's name I pray. Amen.

Anonymous

Day 24

FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2020

Acts 2:46-47

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

1 Thessalonians 5:8-11

But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

During our recent Prayer Vigil, I had the opportunity to once again spend an hour in the sanctuary by myself. I relished the time to gaze at the cross, read the Bible, pray fervently and sing with the resounding echos of my voice in that space. As I sat in the chair, I was moved to lay on the carpet and once I did that, I felt the immense power of the people who have worshipped with me in that space for decades. I am forever grateful that as a displaced New Yorker, I found Trinity in the early 1980s.

When I stop to think about the years since I became a member on April 17, 1983, I visualize all of the members who have come and gone from our congregation, the impact that many of them have had on my faith journey, and the support that they offered to me and my family both tangibly and in prayers. Serving as a Deacon, Elder, and Sunday School teacher, singing in the choir (and the pews), and ringing bells have brought me closer to the Trinity family. On Christmas Eve, welcoming those who rarely step into our sanctuary was a special event as it reminded me too of all those who have gone before, and the poignant return of many if only for a brief time. I truly hope that they benefitted from Greg's message about the light of the world. May it be so for them.

We have all been drawn to Trinity for different reasons, but the bottom line is that we worship together, sharing in the fellowship of this very special place. As we traverse the Lenten journey, look around you while you worship and give thanks for the warmth, love, and unique reasons that bring us together.

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Prayer: Our loving Father, thank you Holy and Mighty One for the gift of your love and the glory of your creation, the sacrifice of your Son and his resurrection. Through that resurrection, bring us closer to the presence of the Holy Spirit and instill in us compassion and companionship for those around us. Show us mercy and grant us a quiet mind so that we can abide by your commandments and share in the illumination of our hearts by your eternal presence in our lives. Amen.

Janet H. Cohen

Day 25

SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2020

Psalm 90:12 (NIV)

Teach us to number our days, that we gain a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90:12 (NLT)

Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom.

When last year's word-a-day Bible verse calendar offered me these two different translations of the same verse on January 31, and again on December 28, I took that as a sign. The Spirit was asking me to consider the verse.

Psalm 90 is attributed to Moses—a very long-lived and wise prophet, important to many faith traditions—who gave to his people without any expectation, in this life, of reaching the promised land.

The message in this verse is one that I know other members of the congregation have taken to heart. It's basically a variation on the bucket list: how can we make the best possible use of the wisdom we hope we've gained and of our remaining time on earth to do things in this life that give it meaning?

As we get older and retire—or sneak up on retirement—we tend to wonder about the meaning and value of our lives. Retirement can then become more than a time to sleep late, travel, and do anything we want. Instead, we recognize that every day is a gift, and we all have gathered life wisdom and experience we should be sharing with others. Even after a lifetime of service, now it feels even more important to use our short time on earth to give back. It's time to do the things that have meaning to us and others—without any expectation of reward in this life.

Isaac Watts' 1719 hymn *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past* paraphrases the 90th Psalm, reminding us that life is fleeting, but even more importantly that God is our eternal home.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, give us the wisdom to number our days so that we may grow in wisdom and ways to serve you and others. We pray in the name of your Son, who died to give us the promise of eternal life. Amen.

Margery Sly

Day 26

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 22, 2020

Ephesians 5:8-14

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Day 27

MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2020

Psalm 91:4

He will cover you with his feathers and under his wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

I love birds. It started almost 50 years ago when my father had a massive heart attack and my family got him a bird feeder to hang outside our kitchen window and a bird book to help him identify the visitors.

Years ago, my young children came bursting into the house to report that two baby birds were lying in the street and we needed to rescue them. We got them safely into an old gerbil cage and called a vet in West Collingswood to learn how to care for them. They grew and stayed in our yard all summer and would follow our youngest son, Brian, around the yard and eat from our hands. It was a terrific experience. We learned that a yellow line around the beak of a baby bird is a signal to the parents that they need to keep feeding it.

One late night years ago, I was feeling very unhappy and at a loss to cope with life. I remembered that in a study group at our old Massachusetts church, the ladies believed that if you were feeling lost you should just open the Bible and put your finger on a spot and God would make sure the words would speak to you. I took the Bible out of my nightstand and opened it and touched Psalm 91. Amazing! I felt immediately comforted.

We now have several bird feeders of different kinds in our yard and I love watching the antics of the visitors. This past summer I was watching from the kitchen window and saw one large brown bird on the ground and another large brown bird flying back and forth feeding it from our feeder. At first, I was feeling sorry for the parent because the one on the ground looked plenty old enough to care for itself. Then I remembered that I am plenty old enough to take care of myself, but I constantly rely on my Heavenly Father to take care of and feed me. I have an invisible yellow line around my mouth and always will!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for being my loving parent. Thank you for reminding me of how much I still need your care and soul food. Thank you for the birds who come and teach me invaluable lessons. Amen.

Karen Kain

Day 28

TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2020

Martha and Mary

Luke 10:39-42

Her sister Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits while I do the work? Tell her to come help me." But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it. And it will not be taken away from her."

While visiting my mother and sister, whose names are Martha and Mary, I thought of the Bible's Martha and Mary.

The Bible story reminds me to help when necessary, but also to take some time to spend with others and listen to their stories. My sister has always been someone who has kept herself very busy. She graduated from high school early, went to college, and has been on a roll ever since. She is always thinking of the needs of others and has a hard time sitting still.

My mother just turned 92 and still has many stories to tell. She appreciates someone taking the time to sit with her and listen to her past. She has been telling stories to her granddaughters since they were very young. It's important to know where we came from and to learn of the experiences of the people who came before us, their struggles and their joys. Listening also shows a sign of respect and lets them know they are important in your life.

Prayer: Lord may I remember both to help when needed and to take time to listen. Amen.

Linda Craven

Day 29

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2020

Psalm 46:10

Be still and know that I am with you.

The world moves at a crazy pace. As soon as something happens in the world it is posted on Facebook, Instagram or the nightly news. The days start slipping by and you wonder where the year has gone - or even the last five years!

About four years ago, I discovered meditation. I wanted to see if I could get my mind to slow down and appreciate each wonderful moment that God has given me. And it works! I may not reach that calm mindset every time I meditate, but it happens more often than not.

Opening your mind to *just being* helps you to understand what a glorious world we do live in. You can learn to appreciate the little things that, without being able to live in the moment, you can miss. Feeling God's presence is so much easier when you are not rushing through your day, your year, and your life at warp speed. Make no excuses. Stop for five minutes every day and just be. You will feel God present in your mind and in your life.

Prayer: Dear God, Help me to stop and be still so that I will know that you are with me. Amen.

Day 30

THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2020

Musings on Temptation

Genesis 3: 4-5

“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

I remember the first time the cat caught my attention. It was early spring and I was looking through the glass enclosing our kitchen. The cat was sitting on the highest stone step of our patio: motionless, harmless-looking and nonchalant without even a hint of curiosity. It was there again the next day, then the day after and almost every day hence. My 5 and 8- year old kids finally noticed the cat and asked me if they could feed and pet the cat but their mother put her foot down with a loud “No.” The cat became a regular visitor and I noticed that every time it visited, it came closer and closer and by the middle of the summer it was rubbing its body against our legs as we played and ate outside. The kids named her Homeless and I would not be surprised if they were secretly feeding her. Our neighbors must have noticed the cat too. I got an anonymous letter telling me to put “my” cat indoors because it was always in their yard. “What a faithless cat,” I said to myself, “and I thought we were the only ones!”

I remember this family saga while I was musing about the nature of temptation, specifically on how the snake successfully tempted Eve. The snake knew Eve very well, promised her that she will be like God. Eve must have seen the tree numerous times before but only on hearing the snake’s mellifluous words did Eve realize the tree was indeed beautiful and the fruit looked delicious. Temptation does not come with a blare of trumpets. Like our cat, temptation quite often comes quietly and surreptitiously and lulls us into complacency. We don’t recognize it as temptation until it is too late. Carl Sandburg once wrote a haiku entitled *Fog*. If we replace the word fog with temptation, the poem will read: “Temptation comes on little cat feet, it sits looking on harbor and city on silent haunches then moves on.” Temptation lures us into familiarity knowing that familiarity breeds content. Temptation tickles our pride, flatters our ego and cultivates our envy. It would be a lot easier if temptation presented itself like the spider in Mary Howitt’s poem, *The Spider and the Fly*: “Will you walk into my parlor,” said the spider to the fly, “T’is the prettiest little parlor that ever you did spy.” We trust in ourselves so much that we fail to recognize the line that separates temptation and opportunity.

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Temptation from within us is a need that wants to be personified, a desire longing to be Expressed. Temptation from without appeals to our needs and our desires. How we fight temptation is a question that has been asked too often. The Scriptures tell us to pray, flee, quote a scripture or ask for guidance from our spiritual brothers and sisters and pastors. The famous writers Balzac and Oscar Wilde have their own way. "The best way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it." The best way to fight temptation, I believe, is to identify it and the only way to identify it is to be close to God. When temptation gets closer, get even closer to God.

Prayer: Father give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Day 31

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2020

Deuteronomy 26:11

And you shall rejoice in all the good the Lord your God has given you and to your house, you, the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.

Did you ever think that the calendar - something so useful, yet so taken for granted—could have such an impact on our lives? Over time, it has evolved from paper hung next to the wall phone, to blackberries, to accessible 24/7 on our phones and electronic devices. I use a large desk blotter calendar and carry a “year-at-a-glance” for my convenience. Others I know rely on their phones to get them in the right place at the right time.

As we leave Advent and Christmas behind and head into the Lenten season on the church calendar, the calendar reminds us of Ash Wednesday, Soup and Sound, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Easter. For those of us in the music program, the calendar helps us keep track of warm-up times, extra rehearsals, when the bells ring, and when to wear black. All are done on specific dates and times.

Our family has lived by a revised calendar for the past four years or so, since our daughter Amy got divorced and she and Doug share custody of Alanna. Holiday traditions for us, regardless of the time of year, fall on the Saturday before or after “the Day” to accommodate their schedules and travel. We have come to learn that what’s important is not the actual date, but the gathering of family. So often we hear that advice that life is what you make it. For us, family time, not the calendar date, is what we make important. Blessings to you as you share love and family time all year long, making each day special in its own way.

Prayer: May God watch over your family and those you love all the days of the calendar as you share joy, fellowship, and love. Amen.

Linda Flanary

Day 32

SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 2020

Colossians 2: 6 – 7

So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Paul urges believers to stay the course. In our busy lives, it can be difficult to stay the course. For many of us, keeping up with the demands of work, raising a family or even keeping up with technology and the news cycle can seem all-consuming – it can distract us from the big picture.

As Paul says, being rooted in Christ gives us strength and hope to take on the challenges of life. And getting beyond challenges and sorrows with God’s help can build our faith and help us be there for others going through tough times.

The way our members care for and support each other is one of the beautiful things about our Trinity family. Paul instructs us to be overflowing with thankfulness. I am grateful for our church family – both in good times and in times of challenges and sorrows.

Prayer: Lord, I give thanks for your Word, which is still true in these present days. Help us to find time for you every day and bring our joys and sorrows to you. Thank you for being for us and continuing to love each of us – especially during the challenging times of life. Amen.

Day 33

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 29, 2020

Romans 8:6-11

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Day 34

MONDAY, MARCH 30, 2020

Ephesians 4:29

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear.

I was sitting in church on Epiphany Sunday, tears running down my face again. I haven't been able to control the tears that have reached the surface this whole Advent season. As some of you may know, Tom and I traveled to Israel this past summer with Pastor Greg and the other "Hot Pilgrims." Since we returned, scripture readings, sermons, and songs have vividly jumped out of the Bible or down from the pulpit and "attacked" my core. I haven't known what to do with my feelings because trying to put my experience into words has been difficult. When Pastor Greg mentioned that only 38 more Advent devotions were needed, I realized that maybe putting my words down on paper would help.

Exiting the church, I picked up my yellow star for the year, and found the word "Edifying." I had never even heard the word before! The second man I asked, offered to "google" it for me and we found that edifying means providing moral or intellectual instruction. My new "friend" used the word wise and told me not to be afraid to share what I know! He asked if that fit into my life and then he looked at the word on his star. We saw that the word "Helpful" was written on his star; we knew the Lord was working his magic. So here I am, taking the first step to finding my voice and trying to EDIFY!

Prayer: Lord, show me how to build up my soul so that I can continue to grow spiritually. Let me learn to be "wise" in my speech and actions by staying humble, encouraging, and sensitive to all those around me. In his name we pray. Amen.

Day 35

TUESDAY, MARCH 31, 2020

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

There have been times in my life that I have lived with regret, and not just as a short-term experience, but long-term as well. The regrets have led me to think about the past and wonder, instead of living in the present and planning for the future. Just recently I came across these two verses. They have stayed with me and until writing this devotional, I wasn't certain why. In the margin of my Bible is a short statement about these verses. In it, Patsy Clairmont, the author, states "There is no guarantee that if we had done a part of our lives differently things would end up any different."

This led to an epiphany for me. I had quite often thought that my choices led to the regret and there was no way around it. Instead, it is apparent that I need to trust in the Lord with all my heart more often. If I do this, then the regret goes away, thoughts return to the present, and the purpose behind everything becomes clear, in God's time. When I lean on God instead of my own thoughts and feelings, my life should become lighter and more of what was intended for me.

Prayer: Lord of all, help me to remember that you are in charge, you hold me in your hand, and you know best. Help me to lean on you and to let go of the regret, since holding onto it does nothing but weigh me down. Amen.

Michele Strobel

Day 36

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 2020

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

The past two years have been difficult for me and my family. In May 2018, Jim's brother, Chuck, passed away and a week later my sister, Janet, passed away. Then in August 2019, Jim, my husband, passed away and a week later my sister-in-law's mother, Dot, passed away. It is only with the strength from God that I have been able to get through these past years. I have been given strength and support through my family (which includes Jim's family), friends, and Trinity. The people of Trinity, including Greg and Sarah, have been such an overwhelming presence in my life. I believe that God has been with me and has worked through all of these people. Through them, Christ has helped me and I believe that He will continue to give me strength to face whatever the future holds.

Prayer: May God give me and others strength through difficult times. Amen.

Nancy Roberts

Day 37

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2020

1 Corinthians 10:13

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

I have often heard the first part of this passage as kind of a bumper sticker slogan: "God gives us nothing we can't endure." I'll admit that that hasn't been very helpful when I'm going through hard times. It sounded like, "Buck up, it could be worse."

It wasn't until I had heard the entire verse that I understood the infinite love God has for us, that we will be set on the right path simply by asking. It's God's GPS... Glory Positioning System.

Prayer: Lord I Pray that I recognize temptation in all its forms and see the escape route that You have provided. Amen.

Day 38

FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 2020

Deuteronomy 33:27 TNIV

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemies before you, saying "Destroy them!"

Romans 8:39 TNIV

Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus Calling – A 365-Day Devotional

I want you to be all Mine. I am weaning you from other dependencies. Your security rests in Me alone-not in other people, not in circumstances. Depending only on Me may feel like walking on a tightrope. but there is a safety net underneath: the everlasting arms. So don't be afraid of falling. Instead, look ahead to Me. I am always before you, beckoning you on-one step at a time. Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, can separate you from My loving Presence.

This passage is from the devotional, *Jesus Calling*, by Sarah Young. I received it as a Christmas gift in 2011. (Thank you, Kristine). I didn't read it for several years and then one day, I couldn't put it down. I have been reading the passages daily for several years now. Each time I read a passage, it is as if I am reading it for the first time. I am amazed and filled with joy by how many times it seems like God is actually sending me a message, and it is exactly what I need to hear at that time. There are so many beautiful and powerful devotions.

I chose this passage because it is at the heart of my life in Christ. As long as I keep Christ at the center of my life, and I depend on and trust Him with everything, I seem to be able to move forward bravely but humbly and joyfully through life. Are there setbacks? Of course. But that "Safety Net" is always there to catch me and set me back on my feet again. Praise God for His UNCONDITIONAL LOVE and GRACE! May I always be in His Presence and trustingly reach out to Him for all my needs.

Prayer:

May the Holy Spirit touch our hearts and open them to the light of God. May that light help us to see life through His eyes and open our minds to His wisdom. In this transformation, and in His presence, may we know, trust and love Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Praise God. Amen.

Roberta Ritchie

Day 39

SATURDAY, APRIL 4, 2020

Psalm 100:2

Worship the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs.

The Bible tells us to make a joyful noise to the Lord. I do, but it is not a pleasant sound. Fortunately, I have found a church family with an abundance of talent and great voices. I look forward to worshipping with such gifted people.

This year on Epiphany Sunday the music was fantastic as always. During the communion service, Brian Kain sang *A Christmas Hallelujah* with such emotion. The words he sang went right to my heart.

At one point, the congregation joined in singing the chorus, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" The singing was absolutely magnificent. At the conclusion of the song, most people were wiping the tears from their eyes.

While Brian sang, I actually thought my heart would burst with joy, a feeling I have never experienced before. I have always imagined what it will be like to kneel before the throne of God and worship Him face to face. That Sunday I received a glimpse into the future and know the joy we will all feel when we spend eternity praising our Lord.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for the gift of music so that we can worship you and show our love to you and feel your love in return. We look forward to spending eternity worshipping you! Amen.

Day 40

PALM/PASSION SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 2020

Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Day 41

MONDAY, APRIL 6, 2020

Musings on Mountains, Hills, and God's Faithfulness

Psalm 121: 1-2

I will look up to the mountains – does my help come from there? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. (from The New Living Translation)

As mountains go, the mountain close to my old village in the Philippines was neither massive nor formidably high. It was shaped like a crawling caterpillar with its head about 6000 feet high followed by a tail of lesser elevations. But to my 10-year old eyes it was massive and formidable. I looked at the mountain with a certain awe and respect. The mountain fully filled one's visual panorama because the surrounding plain was flat for miles around. I felt a kinship with that mountain and when I told my mother this she said, "Of course you do. You were born in that mountain." My parents and some friends were avoiding the Japanese who occupied the towns during the war, and they built a small settlement at the base of the mountain. That is where I was born. A small river ran along the base of the mountain. The locals named the river Palanog, meaning the river that echoes. No one in my village, to my knowledge, has climbed to the top of the mountain but tales abound—there is a lake on top of the mountain; there are 12 stone chairs arranged around the lake like sitting stools for unknown gods. It has also been said that whatever one wishes will be granted if one is brave enough to stay overnight alone sitting on one of those stone chairs and succeeds in counting 12 falling stars.

I was reading Psalm 121 when I remembered "my" mountain. A few of us, I'm sure, admire mountains. Mountains project stability, permanence and sheer persistence. Have not some of our problems gotten clearer when viewed from a higher perspective, say a mountain? I remember a professor of mine who told me that we know a lot about medicine because we stand on the shoulders of giants. I love mountains and the mountains inspire me. There is, however, a disquieting ripple that bothers me. Quite often I focus on the mountain rather than on who made the mountain. The original King James Version of the Psalm says: "I will lift up mine eyes into the hills from whence cometh my help." The New Living Translation added a pause and a question mark. "I will look up to the mountains—does my help come from there?" What a difference! Mountains inspire us but only the mountain-maker can help us. Mountains project timelessness and permanence but only God is changeless.

When I returned to the Philippines 15 years ago, I planned to climb the mountain...

(Continued on the next page)

But things have changed. Big sugar plantations cultivated the plain around the mountain and cut the trees along “my” river. The river no longer echoed. The Philippine Telephone and Telegraph Company built a broadcasting and receiving station on top of the mountain. The mountain that once stood like a monarch surveying his realm has been chained and his realm subjugated. They did find a body of water, though not large enough to be a lake, and 12 boulders surrounding the water. As for a wish coming true--well, I still plan to climb that mountain someday and, amidst the tangle of wires and discarded telephones, I will count the falling stars.

The Psalmist is right. We all look up to the mountains for inspiration and for a better perspective but does our help come from there? Our help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Prayer: Thank you God for being our rock and our mountain and for your faithfulness. Amen.

Eby L. Banas, M.D.

Day 42

TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 2020

Psalm 4:8

I will lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me to lie down in safety.

Anxiety is defined as uneasiness of mind caused by fear of change or misfortune. In today's ever-changing world, do you ever feel anxious, whether because of a national or world happening or a personal or family issue? Is your mind uneasy because of fear of change or misfortune?

It seems that bedtime is a good time for anxiety to hit me, even though I thank God for the good of the day and His loving care.

There are many places in His word that speak of turning over our anxieties to Him. Psalm 4:8 has positively spoken to me over the past year. David is feeling anxiety over his people being attacked and his personal troubles. I have chosen to use Psalm 4:8 as a nightly prayer to put anxiety aside, to trust in God for a peaceful and restful sleep.

Prayer: Dear God, how great to have a faith, general and personal, to know that you are with me in all things great and small. You are God beyond belief. Amen.

Day 43

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8, 2020

Room at the Table—For Me?

Luke 22:19

...This is my body, which is given for you.

There is room at the table, a place at the feast.
There is room for each burden you long to release.
Every heartache you carry, each private despair;
Bring them all to the table, surrender them there.
-- David Lantz, *Room at the Table*

Sometimes it seems like I must be smacked “upside the head” before I can recognize the obvious. I have been taking Holy Communion since my baptism and our choir has been singing *Room at the Table* for quite a few years. Still, I’ve been locked into the Atonement concept as it relates to Communion; my heart aches every time because of the great sacrifice of Jesus’ life in place of ours. I realize my own sinfulness, my guilt, when I go to the Table and I’m left with a sense of unworthiness.

But I’ve always stopped my confessions there. Was there something about that unworthiness that I felt comfortable with, maybe a self-fulfilling prophecy? I think, in some ways, I might have taken it as an excuse to not confront the reasons behind those feelings.

Or maybe it’s just me, being egocentric, failing to face the embarrassing fact that I am not, nor will I ever be, the master of my own fate. I guess I can check my romantic hero baggage at the door—that ship sailed long ago.

Whatever the reasons, *Room at the Table* hit me in the heart this year when I realized that the Table requires a non-heroic (but still brave enough) effort on my part to step up to the Table and face my burdens, my pain, and guilt and leave them in His hands.

Prayer: Dearest Lord and Savior, forgive me for my hubris, my lack of faith, and for not having the courage to fully believe your words: for Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Joe Bechtel

Day 44

MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2020

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Each time Communion is served, and especially on Maundy Thursday, I am reminded of the significance of the Lord's Supper. Bread is broken and ground into mush by our teeth. Wine (grape juice) is poured over our lips. Even in the face of being betrayed, the Lord nourished the disciples' bodies with the Supper. Holy Week makes this passage even more important as we remember Christ Jesus.

Prayer: God help us to understand the significance of Jesus's Last Supper each time we take communion at Trinity. Amen.

Day 45

GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 10, 2020

How Heavy the Cross? Seventh Station: Jesus Bears the Cross

John 19: 6, 15-17

So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." ... So they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified. They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.

Observing and reflecting on the Stations of the Cross was an important part of my early Christian upbringing. To a young Catholic girl, the Good Friday Mass—a dark and quiet service—amplified the horror of Christ’s sacrificial gift. As a child I focused on the violence of his death.

Years and years later, with an adult mind and heart, I prayerfully explored the internet to expand my understanding of the Stations of the Cross. I undertook this in preparation for a Holy Land pilgrimage. The message of one site spoke to me and I copied it out in long hand. (The great thing about writing is that it makes you slow down and pay attention. That’s probably why prayer journaling is so popular.) Unfortunately, I didn’t bookmark the web site, so I can’t credit the source.

The prayer before meditating on each station is ***"We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You. Because of Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world."***

Each of the 14 stations has a Bible verse foundation. For the Seventh Station, it is John 19: 6, 15-17. And the station prayer is ***"Lord, grant me strength of purpose that I may faithfully bear my cross every day."***

This simple prayer helps me realize that Lent isn’t about reliving the death of Jesus, but about renewing and examining my life in Christ. By the time Jesus was lifting the cross, he had already accepted and drank from “the cup” His Father offered Him at Gethsemane. He was faithful and carried His cross. And when it got too heavy, when Jesus was depleted of strength, there was help, real, earthly help from Simon the Cyrenian...

(Continued on the next page)

And every day, Jesus is here with me, holding the heavy end. Prayer helps me remember this.

Finally, after each station we pray: ***Lord Jesus, help us walk in your shoes. Amen.***

Day 46

HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 11, 2020

Matthew 27:57-61

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Holy Saturday is the interlude between the abysmal pain of the death of Jesus and the joy of His glorious resurrection. In the Western branch of the Church, no liturgy is celebrated during the daylight of Holy Saturday. In silent expectation, the Christian community—in some small way—attempts to relive the profound sense of sadness and loss that the disciples of Christ experienced. It is a day silence.

Silence marks this day because on that long Saturday that stretched from here to eternity, that stretched from the clouded darkness of Friday afternoon till Sunday's bright dawning, all creation held its breath, for the Son of God had entered death. All is silent...even in the Church, for we wait the alleluias of Resurrection hope. But . . . for now . . . we remain quiet, prayerful, meditative. For now, the Lenten journey has entered the stillness of death and all we have is hope . . . hope that the morning will break with glory and wonder and joy.

Prayer: O God our Father, help me not to turn away from the silence of the Lord's tomb. Let me watch here and pray. Let me keep vigil in the stillness of my heart and the quietness of my mind, so I might be awake to greet the Resurrected Lord with joy. Send the Spirit to help me; for the sake of Christ Jesus I ask it. Amen.



A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain.

He cultivates the ground, he plants the seed, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up comes the grain. . . .

This is the way it is with the Spiritual Disciplines - they are a way of sowing to the Spirit. . . .

By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done.

~ Richard J. Foster

