



## LENTEN REFLECTIONS 2021

Reflections on the Days of Lent  
and Holy Week

Written by the People of  
St. John's Episcopal Church

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# LENTEN REFLECTIONS

The Holy Season of Lent, 2021

Dear St. John's Family,

Welcome to our first edition of Lenten Reflections! This series of reflections represents the thoughts of over 30 St. John's parishioners who accepted the challenge of reading Biblical passages and interpreting them for us in unique and meaningful ways. The thought, prayer, and reflection that went into the making of this devotional is testimony to the Spirit that moves among us here at St. John's.

I hope you will use this book to guide and nurture your own thinking throughout this holiest of seasons. Perhaps you'll read each reflection in the silence of the dawn each morning or read them during dinner each night. However you choose to use this material, I trust it will inspire you to think more deeply about the journey Jesus took on our behalf.

As we begin our journey towards the cross, may your hearts and minds rediscover the presence of Christ through the words that follow...

I remain faithfully yours,

*Amanda*



**ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17**

**MATTHEW 6:20-21**

*"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Friends,

While preparing to write this reflection I read four different interpretations of these two verses. I have to admit, I was put off by some of the words used in all of those readings; vermin, moths, thieves, robbers, etc. but such is our yearly dive into Lent, I suppose. There is no sugarcoating the somber and extremely contemplative season we're about to experience. So, much like our entrance into Lent, let us dive right into our text and not pull any punches, Jesus sure didn't.



This verse comes from somewhere in the middle of Matthew's three-chapter summary of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Showing up in text just a few short verses after perhaps the most universally recognized and recited words in all of Christianity (the Lord's Prayer) we cannot overlook the importance of these words. "Store up your treasures in heaven... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." This verse reminds me of the old saying "you can't take it with you when you go." If we take these words to heart, Jesus wants us to focus, not on earthly things, but on heavenly things, the things that please God. So I end my reflection with two questions:

What treasures do you plan to store up this Lent?  
Where is it you plan to store them?

*John Knouse*

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18**

**DANIEL 9:4-6**

*‘I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, “Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.”*

In Daniel 9:4-6, we discover that an adult Daniel has been reading the word of the Lord as revealed to Jeremiah the prophet and it is not pretty. It was a time of desolation and 70 years of punishment for the king of Babylon and his people for their sins. This was the world Daniel grew up in! A world God describes as devoid of happiness, absent of joyful voices and a wasteland without light.

Can you imagine how Daniel felt reading or reliving such a dark history which was not necessarily his fault? Not his doing? I don't about you but I would be pointing my finger at those who I believed were the major league sinners, who messed everything up for everybody, who didn't do what was right when they had a chance. Why should I suffer? Bring it on God! Smite them!

But, Daniel doesn't do that. Thankfully. Rather than playing the blame game he does a very Lenten thing. He turns to the Lord in prayer, fasting and confessing. He covers himself with the ashes of a very painful story not of individual repentance but corporate.

Yesterday, was Ash Wednesday and here we, too, sit with Daniel in mournful prayer for a past filled with the sins of violence and hate. Whether or not we participated directly in these sins we still must sit with them because we have been living with the consequences of them.

Moving through the pain of the past Daniel's prayer evolves. Reading further than verse 6, we will notice Daniel takes on a more hopeful tone as it reminds us how God continues to love us through His/Her abundant mercy and forgiveness. Daniel intercedes for his people, not as me versus them but as us and we. Corporate confession of sin is an act for confession by or on behalf of an interconnected community that assumes corporate solidarity in sin and leads to humility, repentance, unity and by God's grace... restoration. I can't think of something more needed in our modern times.

*Deacon Stacey*

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19**

**2 TIMOTHY 4:1-2**

*“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.”*

In this last letter from Paul to Timothy, Paul knew that he was probably not going to survive his imprisonment, so Paul was reminding Timothy to hold strong to his faith in the tough times ahead. Timothy had been raised in the young church, worked with Paul in the past, and had a strong relationship with him.

I immediately saw how this was related to me. I was raised in the church, knew how to pray, and could remain strong in my faith. I had been faithful during a search for a priest, a pandemic, personal loss, medical challenges, and through financial difficulties. It was like Paul was talking to me, and I was glad that I felt I could measure up. Beyond that, as an elementary school teacher for more than 30 years, I could correct, rebuke, and encourage others. Isn't that what I do every day, and hopefully, I do it with patience and careful instruction? No sweat!

I could have felt accomplished and comfortable with all of that, but unfortunately, I read more of this chapter. Paul reminded Timothy to make sure he was preaching the word and not preaching about himself. Boy, did that strike a blow! I know that a story helps students to remember a fact, and I am quick with a personal story; I just need to make sure that when I talk about God, Jesus, and the Bible, the emphasis is on the words of God, rather than my own story. My take-away is that I need to remain humble, remembering that unlike in the classroom, I often don't have the answers. I need to be okay dwelling in the silence. I need to be sure to listen twice as often as I speak. I need to be prepared in a different way than I usually am. That's the way that I can let God be in charge when I so desperately want to be.

*Leslie Morgan*

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20**

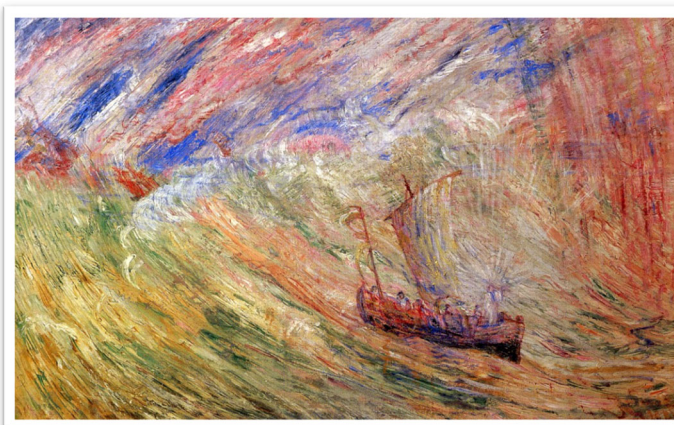
**PSALM 32: 6-7**

*“Therefore let all who are faithful  
offer prayer to you;  
at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters  
shall not reach them.  
You are a hiding-place for me;  
you preserve me from trouble;  
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.”*

*The only time we should worry is if a hurricane decides to head directly up the York River. It was September 2003 when Hurricane Isabel lunged for our river with gusts of 114 mph. We didn't have time to worry. Bob loaded the pick-up truck with the generator and chain saws. I grabbed files, water, food, and the family pets. Not knowing what we would find when we returned, our caravan of two steered towards safety.*

When the vagaries of life seem overwhelming, when we struggle to keep our head above water in a world full of undertows and currents, all it takes to survive is to have a stable footing, a sense that we can make it through the worst and come out on the other side. Christ provides that. He calms the storms of life. He provides us shelter in turbulent times. All He requires of us is that we have faith in Him and that we rejoice in His presence. Thanks be to God.

*Sally Goodhart*



**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21**

**MARK 1:12-13**

*“And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.”*

What does your mind conjure up when you hear the word "wilderness"? A place fraught with danger? A respite from the craziness of society? A place to get lost or a place to find yourself?

I love Scotland, a land I have had the privilege to visit three times. There are so many opportunities to find oneself alone on a mountaintop or on a vast moor. The weather can be unpredictable, unless being unpredictable is predictable. There is the possibility of losing your way in this wilderness that is so beautiful, yet so stark.

This scripture tells us that the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness where he encountered wild beasts and angels. I imagine that the Spirit knew that the wilderness provided an opportunity for reflection and encounters with the Divine as well as testing and temptation. I have had many moments of experiencing wilderness without leaving the comfort of my home. Seasons of despair, depression, confusion and temptation. But also seasons of joy, peace, gratitude and knowing that I am loved. My desire is to not fear the wilderness. To embrace the opportunity to be changed when I leave. To know deep down that I will be upheld by those angels who come in many forms. Look for them.

What is your wilderness and what, or who, is your compass? Many prayers in the Celtic tradition are pleas for protection. Perhaps you would like to pray this one with me by J. Philip Newell.

*May Christ, my love, my encircler,  
Each day, each night,  
Be near me, uphold me,  
My treasure, my truth.*

*Sue Zuke*

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22**

**JOB 4:17**

*“Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can even a strong man be more pure than his Maker?”*

In Rite I, are the words for the Holy Eucharist, “We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy.”

In the Amish Community is a saying “Only God is perfect.” In the quilts that they make is a purposeful “mistake” that only the creator could find.

Take a moment during this Lenten season and reflect on how you have been forgiven for bad decisions or actions. We are not perfect, any of us. If you find you have been holding on to the issue, let it go. Instead of using the word “mistake”, think of what happened as “an unexpected adventure” and ask yourself what did you learn from what happened.

When the Community Breakfast is being served, NO questions are asked. If they've made a bad choice or action, in the moment we smile at them, wish them a great day and hand them a breakfast, a moment of non-judgement takes place and we pray that they feel our prayers for them.

As we are going through the Lenten season when we are being asked “to give up” instead of feeling deprived, allow yourself to feel filled with love, with caring, with well wishes to those close to us and those in our community who may have made some bad actions. Also take the time to look in the mirror and forgive the person looking at you for past issues and allow a loving future to enter.

*Barbara Landis*



**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23**

**1 PETER 3:8-9**

*“Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.”*

The apostle Peter’s words sure do apply to our modern times. Peter wrote this letter to encourage Christians who were being persecuted to not give up hope, to see light in darkness and to forge ahead — with faith — in difficult times. Today, in the midst of a pandemic and a country heightened by unrest and division, we can learn a lot from Peter.

His advice is so powerful: love one another, be compassionate and be humble. Every one of us is dealing with challenges during this pandemic — whether it be the death of family or friends, financial loss, juggling so many roles at one time, or just dealing with the sheer challenge of isolation. What a kinder world it would be, what a kinder local community we would have, if we would heed Peter’s advice and be more compassionate and humble.

Repaying evil with evil or insult with insult will get us nowhere. Repaying evil with a blessing is beneficial all the way around. Doing so offers kindness to the other person; it also softens our own hearts and the community as a whole. In these days of challenges and isolation, may each of us find the strength to be a light for others. With a little more love and a little more compassion, we all inherit a blessing.

May it be so.

*Marylee Sauder*

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24**

**MATTHEW 4:8-11**

*“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”’ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.”*

While writing a paper for my college lit class, I came across a quote by Mark Twain that resonated with me. “There is a charm about the forbidden that makes it unspeakably desirable.” Not a week before, my new roommate had offered me a cigarette. We were at the cafeteria, and I was surrounded by friends who put our dinner to rest each night with a cup of coffee and a cigarette. To this small-town girl, they look so sophisticated and worldly. I knew better; my mother had died from emphysema. Yet, in spite of this, I caved.

Jesus was subject to a temptation that went well beyond the norm. Mark reveals how, while he was alone in the wilderness, he was lured to a mountaintop by Satan. The devil’s goal was simple: compromise Jesus; reveal the weaknesses of his human side. He had already tried a couple of tactics, unsuccessfully. So now, gazing down at the world and all its splendors, Satan swept his arm across the view and declared that all the kingdoms before him could belong to Jesus. He was offering prominence, glory, and wealth. For this great prize all Jesus had to do was to bow down and worship Satan. And...who was to know? They were perched on the apex of a mountain, totally away from peering eyes. Jesus knew better. By this time totally exhausted, Jesus garnered his God-given strength and spoke the words Satan did not want to hear: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.” It is no wonder that in today’s world WWJD has become a verbal shield...What Would Jesus Do?

*Anonymous*

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25**

**GENESIS 15:1-6**

*“After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’ But Abram said, ‘O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.’ But the word of the Lord came to him, ‘This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.’ He brought him outside and said, ‘Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.”*

I have to confess that whenever I began reading the begat section of the Bible, I glossed over the names. “Let’s get on with the story” was my thought! In 2007 that changed when I developed an interest in genealogy. Jamestown was celebrating its 400th anniversary, and in order to join the Jamestowne Society, I had to prove my lineage back to the 17th century. Only through countless trips to courthouses, libraries, and cemeteries was I able to accomplish this. Suddenly I understood the significance of all those begats. They were as important in ancient times as they are now.

Abraham, a devout believer in God, had shunned the idols that those around him worshipped and had remained true to his God. Because of his devotion, God promised him that his descendants would create a great nation. As time passed and Abraham advanced to a great age, he despaired because his wife Sarah had not borne him a son. How, then, was God’s covenant to be fulfilled?

God recognized this and appeared to Abraham in a vision. He led him outside and requested that he look skyward. “Look up at the heavens and count the stars... So shall your offspring be.” God’s promise to Abraham was fulfilled when Sarah delivered the child Isaac. Isaac had children (Esau and Jacob), and his children had children. From there, families of descendants fanned out throughout their homeland. From Abraham to David were 14 generations. It was prophesized that the Messiah would be from the house of David. From David to Jesus, there were another 28 generations. The begats provide us with evidence of the fulfillment of God’s covenant to Abraham. Family ties are strong; God is stronger yet!

*Anonymous*

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26**

**PSALM 22:23-24**

*“You who fear the Lord, praise him!  
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him,  
all you offspring of Israel!  
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.”*

Praise! Honor! Glorify!

On first reading, this psalm makes me a bit uncomfortable. My relationship with the divine tends to be quieter, not as loud and showy as those these words (with all their exclamation points!!) seem to demand. But we can praise, honor and revere quietly too. And what this psalm really reminds us is that God listens.

Sometimes we want God to fix everything. That would sure be nice, but that’s not what it’s about. But God listens to us – to everyone, regardless of their “affliction” - and it’s good for us to acknowledge that and say, “thanks for listening.” And hopefully we can also say thanks for others in our lives that carry bits of God in them and listen to us, and don’t try to fix it all, but just listen. If we’re moved to loud thank yous and praise for them and to God, that’s great. But simply acknowledging the gift a listener gives us is a quiet form of praise and glorification.

*Sue Dodge*

**WHEN YOU CAN’T PUT YOUR  
PRAYER INTO WORDS,  
GOD HEARS YOUR HEART.**

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27**

**MARK 8:27-30**

*“Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ And they answered him, ‘John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’ He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Messiah.’ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.”*

*Listen, do you want to know a secret? Do you promise not to tell? The lyrics in the Beatles’ latest song grabbed my attention back in 1963. There was nothing more enticing than knowing something that no one else knew, but, oh, how difficult it was to keep that knowledge to yourself.*

After Jesus had journeyed with his disciples for a while, and after he had performed several miracles along the way, he asked his disciples who people believed him to be. *John the Baptist! Elijah! A prophet!* Then he turns to Peter and asks what he believes. Peter responded, “You are the Christ.” Four words that spoke volumes.....

Then Jesus made a request: Don’t tell anyone who I am. He was asking the disciples to keep his divinity a secret. They, who wanted to shout it from the hill tops, had to keep the greatest thing they knew under wraps. But why?

Perhaps Jesus was afraid that he would then be surrounded by so many people with needs that it would be impossible to continue his ministry. Maybe he thought that the message of his miracles should come from those who were on the receiving end of them. Looking to the future, could he have feared that it was too early in his ministry to be recognized as the Son of God? Jesus asked his disciples to keep a secret, but over 2000 years later we don’t have to do that. We have the joy and privilege of being able to proclaim the Lord as our Savior. We can shout it from those hill tops. The secret has been told....and what *Good News* it is!

*Anonymous*

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28**

**MARK 8:34-35**

*“He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.’”*

What do you say when you meet someone that you are impressed with? Oh my gosh, I just love you . . . .

In Mark 8:1 you find Jesus in the desert with a multitude of people following him. They have been following him for three days without thought of food and drink.

I Love You . . . . I Love hearing you talk/teach about heaven, kingdom of God.

I Love seeing what you do . . . You healed the sick; You made the lame man to walk; You made a blind man to see; Why I heard you raised your friend from the dead. I would love to follow you.

What? What do you mean I don't understand? To follow me (Jesus) there is a cost? How much are you talking about? In your life, you will lose some things, friends, family your heart desires and your selfish opinions.

"Then He called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, "Whoever (will that be you?) wants to be my disciple must deny themselves (what? I got to change me) and take up their cross (**do you know how heavy that can be?**) and follow me. For whoever loses their life for me (Jesus) and for the gospel will save it.

The cost for being a disciple of Jesus is that there must be a change in me. I cannot stay the same: The way I walk (what will people see in me - hatred, bitterness anger or joy, love hope). The way I talk (my conversation and interaction with others). The question is will my actions speak for me that I am a follower?

Following after Jesus is a daily walk. It is not always easy, pleasant or even bearable sometimes. Life will intervene and slow our steps BUT I am glad of one choice that I made. I Have Decided to Make Jesus My Choice.

*Minister Maverlyn Wilson*

**MONDAY, MARCH 1**

**GENESIS 21:1-7**

*“The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Now Sarah said, ‘God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.’ And she said, ‘Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.’”*

Sarah says

All who hear my story will laugh—  
throw up their hands and sing their wonder,  
their question,  
their *how could this be???*

Sarah throws back her head

and lets the laughter praise and pray,  
doubt and fear...

Her laughter says *what are you thinking??*

*Are you sure??*

*Thank you, Lord God of all Creation!*

And

*Dare I trust you in this??*

Sarah laughs because God is speaking through absurdity,

Ignoring the laws of nature.

The Great Surpriser.

The Practical Joker,

The Granter of Wishes Out of Time & Place,

The Uprooter of Expectation

The Turner on the Head.

Sarah names the baby Isaac, “He laughs”

Because how could you not!?

Who would believe it!?

Who would not wonder at a God who puts life where life has no  
right to be.

Who makes endings a beginning.

*Maria Weaver-Hollowniczky*

**TUESDAY, MARCH 2**

**PSALM 105:1-6**

*“O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples.  
Sing to him, sing praises to him;  
tell of all his wonderful works.  
Glory in his holy name;  
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.  
Seek the Lord and his strength;  
seek his presence continually.  
Remember the wonderful works he has done,  
his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered,  
O offspring of his servant Abraham,  
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.”*

As I continue to seek him, he seeks me. As I face each morning, I am met with the miracle of a new day of purpose designed just for me. The wonderful work that have been assigned just to me. Regardless of what I may face, I sing praises unto him. I focus on the words as they resonate with my spirit. Through this moment, I am being strengthened and reassured of his goodness. Giving thanks to the Lord for all he has done while I am going through allows others to see him living in me. Valley after valley, I think of his presence. Valley after valley, I am encouraged through his presence. Valley after valley, I am revived by his mercy for me. Valley after valley, I am comforted by his grace extended to me.

Thank you, Lord, that I can rejoice in the midst of my troubles. It is in the midst of my difficulties, that I am reconciled to you. Thank you for the gentle reminder that as I praise you when I am going through that you have not only went before my need, but you are also comforting me. Amen.

*Equilla Curry*



**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3**

**JEREMIAH 30:22**

*“So you will be my people,  
and I will be your God.”*

Jeremiah is one of my favorite prophets. He did not let anything get in the way of his relationship with God. Sometimes he paid dearly for this relationship. In a day and age when everything seems to be upside down in our world and in our lives, we need to keep the lines of communication open with our God for we knows and hears us.

This past year, I have had a difficult time being away from family, friends and, especially, my church family. But through it all God has been my constant companion and has given me strength to cope with all this aloneness. I am far from home, actually some 10 thousand miles away, and due to the pandemic I cannot get home, even if I wanted to go.

The song that comes to mind in these dark days is “Through it all, I’ve learned to trust in Jesus, I’ve learned to trust in God.” And as Jeremiah assured his listeners through their exile and troubles, God promised they would be His people and he would be their God. What a wonderful promise and comfort to each one of us as we navigate the path through this dark time in our lives, our nation and the world.

God hears our laments and wants to comfort us....I’m leaning into this promise.

*Ruth McFarland*

**THURSDAY, MARCH 4**

**EXODUS 19:1-6**

*“At the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.’”*

“Mom loves me best!” I cried indignantly. “No, she doesn’t,” my sister replied confidently. “I’m the oldest. She’s known me longer.” With that I threw up my hands, shot a look that would have wilted a dandelion, and exited the room in a huff. What does she know anyway? In my heart of hearts I knew that my mother loved us all equally, but the great thing about Mom was that she made each of her children feel as if they were her favorite. Even still, I tried extra hard to be good...just in case.

After an arduous three weeks of travel, the Israelites reached the desert of Mt. Sinai. It was here that Moses relayed a message from God: You will be my treasured favorite if you obey me fully and follow my covenant.

How special they must have felt! God had forced apart the waters of the Red Sea for their passage and released it over the backs of Pharaoh’s soldiers. He had plucked them up from the miseries of slavery, set them on a path to a new life, and had now declared they were his favorites. All they had to do was obey. ALL...

We are God’s children, his favorites. With temptations abounding, with unchristian-like habits often accepted as the norm, we must remember to earn the title of “favorite.” If we travel life’s path with love for God and for our fellow man, we are doing just that. Each and every one of us can be God’s favorite.

*Sally Goodhart*

**FRIDAY, MARCH 5**

**ACTS 7:30-34**

*'Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning bush. When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight; and as he approached to look, there came the voice of the Lord: "I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Moses began to tremble and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, "Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have surely seen the mistreatment of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to rescue them. Come now, I will send you to Egypt.'*

In Acts 7:30-34, we find out why Deacon Stephen became the first martyred saint for the faith. His message on the presence of God outside of the temple ruffled the feathers of the power-hungry religious leaders so much so that they stoned him to death! Today we no longer stone our deacons, at least I hope not, so does Stephen's message of God's presence have any relevance in our day-to-day world? Absolutely!

God indwells churches as he indwelled the Ark of the Covenant. God indwells people just as he had first become human in Jesus. And God indwells in the gathering of believers, which we call the Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, the fullness of the Incarnation of God.

The truth is, God is everywhere we are! Our God, our loving, faithful and forgiving God is incarnational. Moses heard God's voice in the burning bush and taught Moses where he stood was holy ground. Therefore, holy ground can be the church building AND a work space, a street corner, or a backyard covered in toys. God's voice can also be heard from the pulpit, from the homeless, the incarcerated or in the song of a bird. God can even be heard in a Zoom meeting!

However, sometimes where God dwells isn't our cup of tea and our feathers get ruffled. God can invite us to experience Him /Her in some uncomfortable places or situations. Often times, we will discover we rather look away from all the trash that has piled up in the gutter or shoo the homeless gentleman away after handing him a bag of food. Who would want to get their hands dirty cleaning that up? Who wants to listen to all that babbling? Jesus does. He is there. In the mess. In the noise. In the fear and uncertainty of it all, LOVE is present. We can experience the love of Christ in the most excluded people and polluted spaces of our times IF we are willing to move past our fear and get our hands dirty. The practical application of Saint Stephen's wisdom in these verses is to listen and watch where God is, no matter how uncomfortable it may be. Oh, yes, and don't throw rocks at your deacon.

*Deacon Stacey*

**SATURDAY, MARCH 6**

**MARK 9:2-8**

*“Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!’ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.”*

When Jesus began his ministry, the devil tempted Jesus by taking him up a mountain where Jesus would see clearly all the kingdoms of the world. No ambiguity about it, if Jesus so chose, his future road to greatness and success was all laid out. Not so, when Jesus led his three closest disciples up a mountain before they started out on Jesus' final journey. When they got to the summit there was no panoramic view. Instead they had a surreal vision of Moses and Elijah with Jesus.

When Moses went up a mountain to receive the Ten Commandments, Moses was about to lead Israel to a homeland and future none of them ever had been capable of dreaming of. Because Elijah bravely offered hope to the beaten down remnant of Israel who had remained faithful to God, future generations saw Elijah as a harbinger of the age when the messiah would be revealed. Then, from out of a cloud, the disciples heard a voice, "Listen to Jesus; follow him to Jerusalem."

It is the devil's siren song of easy, but false choices that make things seem so clear. In contrast, revelations from God are far more probing and disclose possibilities much greater than ourselves; possibilities of a new earth, new age, and a fresh beginning of reconciliation, peace, and healing. What do you think this passage on the transfiguration reveals to us in Lancaster, PA today?

*Philip Snyder*

**SUNDAY, MARCH 7**

**JOHN 2:13-16**

*“The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, ‘Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!’”*

How quickly we forget that Jesus was human. He experienced rage, frustration, sadness, and every other human emotion we experience. I find great comfort knowing our Messiah felt deeply and was moved by the very same feelings we have.

In today’s reading, the gospel of John places us in the temple just before Passover. Thousands of people were making their way to that sacred space to lay their hearts and offerings before God. The temple was meant to a place set aside for worship and praise; a place to connect to the divine. And yet, when Jesus enters he finds not a sacred space to bow down before his God, but a den of robbers, a makeshift marketplace where people were being taken advantage of and exploited. It’s no wonder he got angry.

We live in a world where people are exploited and taken advantage of every hour of every day. Do we see it? Do we allow our hearts to be moved by the injustices that permeate our daily lives? Or do we walk around the money-changers minding our business not wanting to get involved, not wanting to draw attention to ourselves? When was the last time you flipped a table for the sake of the gospel?

Jesus was human. His emotion was not a weakness, but a strength and a resource meant to be used to build up God’s kingdom. Perhaps this lent, we are being called to feel more deeply and to be moved in word and deed by our shared humanity...

*Amanda Knouse+*

**MONDAY, MARCH 8**

**1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17**

*“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”*

In 1960 when Jackie Kennedy toured the Parthenon in Athens, Greece, she was amazed at the structure that had endured for over 2300 years, but also at the history of destruction that had occurred during that time. Even well-known temples such as this one had endured both glory and desecration.

When Paul penned his letter to the early Christians of Corinth, he created a metaphor of the body representing a temple. Just as Jesus had woven into his stories experiences of everyday life, so did Paul. Temples were well-known to the citizens of that time. In Egypt there were mortuary temples, where pharaohs were worshipped, and cultus temples, which housed a particular god. The Parthenon itself was dedicated to the goddess Athena.

Jews worshipped in temples. It is recorded that Jesus visited one in Jerusalem at age 12. Early Christians identified with these buildings, and the transition from the words of Paul as applied to their lives was not as far-removed as we might feel them to be in modern times.

Paul wrote, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” He was explaining that we humans house the spirit of God. There need be no visible building; there need be no pew to sit in or altar to kneel before. If Paul were here today, with COVID restricting us from gathering at St. John’s, there would be little doubt that he would remind us that we are each a saint in God’s family and, as such, God’s spirit dwells within us. No man, no virus can destroy our inner temple. God resides in our heart and in our mind. Glory be to God...

*Anonymous*

**TUESDAY, MARCH 9**

**2 CHRONICLES 29:3-7**

*“In the first year of Hezekiah’s reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east. He said to them, ‘Listen to me, Levites! Sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and carry out the filth from the holy place. For our ancestors have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God; they have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the dwelling of the Lord, and turned their backs.’”*

I think this reading invites reflection on the role of secular leaders in doing what is “right in the eyes of the Lord”. It is also a reminder not to lose hope, that God will send us leaders, like Hezekiah, who will set the proper example.

Present parallels occurred to me as I read this passage. Hezekiah is a political leader at the outset of his reign who unites the key players of the day, the priests and the Levites, charging them to restore the dignity and sanctity of the temple after it had been defiled by lack of proper practice. Recent events in our Capitol would suggest that the dignity and sanctity of our government have likewise been eroded by lack of proper practice.

The questions that occurs to me are: Can the the key players of our time unite to conduct the nation’s business according to a set of agreed upon ethical and moral principles, including retributive and distributive justice, that are right in God’s eyes? Will they do so? We may have a long way to go, but think I see that the light of Hezekiah’s example shining through our current darkness, and it gives me great hope.

As an aside, I wanted to recommend reading, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

*Liz West*

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10**

**JOHN 8:12**

*“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’”*



While it isn't something you want to do, reflect for a moment on 2020, reflect on the simplicity of the Lenten season and then think about the scripture above....

While we have had many moments this last year of feeling like we are “walking in the dark”, take a moment and think of what we have learned and then think how we have responded. How has a light shined?

We have come to be aware of how many people are hungry; how many are feeling alone and disconnected; issues of racial bias, gender inequality and lack of acceptance of everyone, have become more apparent.

The growth of those coming to the Food Bank, those needing shoes, a smile, a prayer, clothing, has not gotten smaller but rather more apparent.

When we are called to “follow in His footsteps”, reflect and then make a plan for action on how you can “be a light of life”, not just for this Lenten season but also moving forward.

*Barbara Landis*



**THURSDAY, MARCH 11**

**PSALM 42:1-3**

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

As a retired Music Minister, everything reminds me of a song (occupational hazard). Psalm 42 is no exception. At the church I retired from, we sang, "As the deer" fairly often as a communion hymn.

If we think about our daily "pandemic" existence over the last year, it has been a very challenging time. Loneliness, sickness, depression and financial hardship have become all too common in our lives and in the lives of those we love. Our "tears have become food day and night". Some people may say, "where is your God?" But if we recall the hymn, "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" in verse one we sing, "Our shelter from the stormy blast, And our eternal home." God is our shelter and our eternal home. In verse two we sing, "Sufficient is Thine arm alone, And our defense is sure." God alone is sufficient for all our needs and is our strong defender. He will never abandon us.

We may not "behold face of God" like Moses experienced with the burning bush, but as believers "we walk by faith and not by sight" 2 Corinthians 5:7. And as Jesus said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." John 20:29 But, we can see God's face in the poor, the lonely, the sick and the imprisoned. We only have to look.

Our relationship with God should be "as a deer longing for a flowing stream". God is our spiritual food and drink. We should "thirst for God" and can be fed by reading his Holy Word and by spending time in prayer and reflection. One day we can also go back to being fed by the Blessed Sacrament. As a Eucharistically centered community, we all miss that outward and visible sign of God's grace. But until then, we can satisfy our thirst by being still, allowing God to reveal His plan for our lives and then doing our very best to accomplish the task(s) we are given.

*Roy Keeler*

**FRIDAY, MARCH 12**

**ROMANS 6:1-4**

*“What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”*

Living in conservative Lancaster County we are surrounded by people who “know their Bible”. With that in mind it was refreshing for Mary and I to read Romans 6:1-4 which, to us, provides a bare bones explanation of the path to salvation. Christ died for our sins and through baptism we too have “died to sin”. That is the expectation, however we all fail to live up to that expectation no matter how holy we think we are or no matter how hard we try. But, glory be, through the grace of god we get to walk in God’s company anyway.

So our thoughts: Should we sin?

No, through baptism we promise to follow Jesus in all we do Will we sin? Absolutely. Despite our best efforts we will no doubt falter thru weakness, doubt, pride or a whole host of other ways. Is that ok? Yes, because as Christ died and rose from the dead, God thru grace and despite ourselves will save us. We all sin in different ways because we are all imperfect and that is ok. We have a God who brought Jesus to this earth to show us a way. And we will strive to follow that example. But when we fail, as we all will fail, it will be through God’s grace that we are saved.

*Bruce and Mary Waskowicz*

**SATURDAY, MARCH 13**

**JOHN 3:5-7**

*“Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.””*



At a bible study Duane was asked if he was “born again.” The question was asked by a man who said he could remember the exact moment and place when he was born again. Duane paused in thought, then replied, “For as long as I can remember I have felt God’s presence in my life. As the years have passed I have come to more fully appreciate that presence, Christ’s part in it, and my need to accept Jesus as my savior and guide.”

When we are conceived God gives us a human body, free will, and the Holy Spirit. At our baptism our church and birth families recognize this gift and promise to nurture it as we grow and mature. This represents our birth into this human world immersed in God’s love and creation. As we grow into our life through the years, hopefully we recognize and appreciate the Holy Spirit within us and recognize that God has given us our greatest treasure, which is his love through Jesus Christ. However, to take the next step we must willingly surrender ourselves to Christ in order to do those good things God has planned for us. This voluntary giving over of ourselves to God through Jesus Christ is when we are born again through the Grace of God into the wider universe of His undying love and eternal life.

*Bob Goodhart*

**SUNDAY, MARCH 14**

**JOHN 3:17-21**

*'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. 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. 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. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 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.'*

My refrigerator door is covered with "hit home" cartoons that provide a daily laugh and quotes that inspire me to do better. During the past year I have reread many, as one dreary week has flowed into the next. Humans around the globe have been dealing with darkness in their lives, not only since last March, but for many, their entire lives. Each person deals with one's own personal darkness, while simultaneously sharing others: the fear of the pandemic and the loneliness it produces; the loss of livelihood and the effect of not being able to provide the necessities for one's family; trying to find answers for one's predicament and scapegoats to blame; concentrating on one's survival and not on the good of others; allowing fear and anger to develop into hatred of the unknown.

A quote by Martin Luther King, Jr. was the center of a recent Mutts cartoon: "Only in the darkness can you see the stars." Lent provides us a chance to star gaze, to combat the darkness in our lives with something other than more darkness; an opportunity to search out and use the light from without and within to better ourselves and others. Today's reading gives us a good example to follow: the One who is truthful and loving and the light. King also said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." What acts can we perform today that exemplify heavenly light and repel the earthly example of darkness?

*Kluane Snyder*

**MONDAY, MARCH 15**

**HEBREWS 3:1-6**

*“Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also ‘was faithful in all God’s house.’ Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. Christ, however, was faithful over God’s house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.”*

This life is not a 100-yard dash; it is a marathon. I have to learn how to endure. Endure through the pain, endure through situations, and even endure through what things I afflict on myself. As my endurance is being developed; I am trusting the faithfulness of God is forever before me through Jesus.

“Consider” means to think about something by taking the time to observe it carefully. To consider something requires time and effort. It doesn’t happen automatically, especially when you’re busy. But if you take the time to do it, it usually yields rich rewards.

My rich rewards are in knowing that God is the creator (builder) of all things. The one who had hand in building the heavens and the earth. The one that comforts me in my time of need. The one that gives me hope when I feel hopeless. The one that gives strength when I am weak. HE is the potter, and I am the clay. I am because he is.

Thank you, Lord, for allowing me to see that you are the beginning and the end. You are the one that created and built all things. You are the one that goes before my physical and spiritual house. You are my refuge. Thank you for your faithfulness. Amen!

*Equilla Curry*

**TUESDAY, MARCH 16**

**1 CORINTHIANS 10:11-13**

*“These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”*

Many of my students abhor test day. Stress and anxiety are high, and so much is riding on that moment. Yet, I do my best to set it up as “a day of celebration and joy.” I tell this to my students. They groan. Some roll their eyes. And then I explain: this is an opportunity for you to show off, to brag about how well you’ve learned the material of this unit. This does little to minimize their discomfort. The truth is, to be tested is to be challenged.

Paul sets up his own test for the people of Corinth by reminding them of the trials of those who came before them, namely the Israelites who followed Moses to the Promised Land. He reminds them that the Israelites were tested as they wandered through the wilderness and that they stumbled hard at times. He tells them about all those good things God did in order to set them up for success during their journey. Yet, he says, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. He then proceeds to warn them of their own shortcomings.

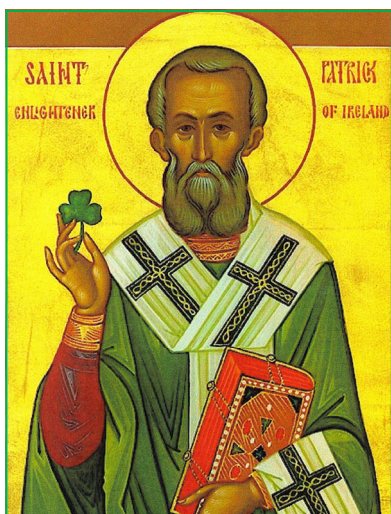
Then, Paul abruptly halts the flow of rebuke to offer words of grace and reassurance: we all have shortcomings and God remains faithful despite them. Take a moment to find those beacons of God’s faithfulness in your life, those reminders that you are loved and cherished beyond measure by the great Creator of the universe. And remember: this journey of spiritual examination during Lent is not meant to punish or rebuke or to guilt us but to sharpen us and encourage us, to remind us of the faithfulness of God in the resurrection of Jesus.

*Matt MacDougall*

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17

ISAIAH 60:19-22

*“The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land for ever. They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified. The least of them shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the Lord; in its time I will accomplish it quickly.”*



March 17th is the Feast Day of St. Patrick, a beloved saint known as the “Apostle of Ireland.” Among his most famous prayers is St. Patrick’s Breastplate. Patrick’s life really was in danger when he first prayed the breastplate, yet Patrick knew the biggest battles were the ones within—’fightings and fears, within, without.’

Come swiftly, O Lord, to the dark moments when we are lost. Make us aware of Thy presence. Strengthen us to resist the urges and pulls to deeper darkness. Stir us to move away from the dark moments of sinfulness toward the light of Thy forgiveness. Come quickly, O Lord, as we call—or forget to call—and keep Thou close to us and keep us close to Thee this day and night and as far as the days and nights stretch before us, through Christ. Amen.

*James W. Kennedy,*  
Holy Island—a Lenten Pilgrimage

**THURSDAY, MARCH 18**

**ISAIAH 30:15**

*“For thus said the Lord God,  
the Holy One of Israel:  
In returning and rest you shall be saved;  
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.”*

I feel the promise of rest is felt in the words that is said in this passage. In the stillness of the moment, the quietness of the Lord’s presence is consuming me. Through the strength that is extended, trust is being affirmed. The declaration that is said reminds me that as I take my concerns to him, he listens.



Thank you, Lord, for being attentive to my needs of rest. For allowing me to just breath and calm my mind as I trust in you and your way. Gracious Father, loving savior thanks for being my strength in my times of weakness. Amen.

*Equilla Curry*



**FRIDAY, MARCH 19**

**HEBREWS 4:14-16**

*“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. 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. 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.”*

God is not far away in the heavens, unable to relate to human emotions. God’s son, Jesus, came to earth and was tempted in every way to understand our weaknesses.

Because of Jesus’ firsthand experience as a human, he can relate to us. He knows what it is like to struggle and to be tempted. When you are tempted, turn to Jesus. He has also been tempted. When you are discouraged, depend on him, he understands that feeling also. When you are tired, lean on him he knows exactly how you feel. He knows your desires, your dreams, your secrets, your problems. Not only does He know them, but He understands them. He knows life is difficult, but He is right there with you.

Speak to God daily. You are speaking with one who understands you perfectly and knows what is best for you. Prayer is personal, Jesus is sympathetic and caring. He knows what you are going through and what it is like. He is there for YOU!

*Mary Ellen and Bob Kilp*



**SATURDAY, MARCH 20**

**HABAKKUK 3:2**

*“O Lord, I have heard of your renown,  
and I stand in awe, O Lord, of your work.  
In our own time revive it;  
in our own time make it known;  
in wrath may you remember mercy.”*

Our ancestors and their prophets were taught that God is good.  
We, too.

Our ancestors and their prophets struggled to find the goodness of  
God's creation amidst the violence and injustice around them.

We, too.

Habakkuk cries out a prayer for mercy despite his people.

We, too. Sometimes.

And sometimes we stand up for healing the wounds of our unfin-  
ished world.

Our prophets warn to not

"Love the quick profit,  
the annual raise, vacation with pay.  
Want more of everything, ready-made.  
Be afraid to know your neighbor,  
and to die."

Instead,

"Love the Lord. Love the world."

"Love someone who does not deserve it."

Habakkuk asks that God's work is revived in his own time.

But know that God's work is forever.

"Invest in the millenium. Plant sequoias.

Say that your main crop is the forest

that you did not plant,

that you will not live to harvest...

Call that profit. Prophecy such returns."

"Practice resurrection."

\* Quoted passages are from Manifesto - The Mad Farmer Libera-  
tion Front, by Wendell Berry, 1973.

*Brad Zuke*

**SUNDAY, MARCH 21**

**JOHN 12:20-26**

*Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.'*

As I was reading this passage, many things came to mind. As a result, this may be more of a rambling of my mind, than a reflection, so bear with me. "Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit". This is actually one of our lessons in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd about the Mystery of the Kingdom of God. We invite the child to "wonder at how they continue to grow and change, to transform. Even as our bodies stop growing at a certain point, inside us there is a capacity to become greater that continues for our whole life. Our life is to make real this kingdom within us, up to and beyond death. Death is nothing more than a new, more important passage from a less to a more" (*The Religious Potential of the Child 1992*).

I found myself thinking back over the past year. We have seen the demise of many things beyond human life. Life is no longer what it had been. It has gone through darkness and has brought forth new shoots. A seed is placed in the ground where there is no light. Yet, it has everything it needs to be able to transform into something greater and bring forth new and different growth that burst through darkness into the light.

We have seen the 'demise' of traditional church as we are not able to worship together in person. This came about suddenly, our clergy was thrown into 'darkness' where they had to transform traditional worship and fellowship. Look at all that has grown from that darkness. We have found new ways to worship, new ways to have fellowship, new ways to connect and help the community around us, near and far, we have grown new shoots that will bear great fruit. When the time comes, we will need to decide what to prune from this new growth and what we will continue to nurture to grow new fruit.

We have seen the 'demise' of the traditional ways of teaching our children. Education was thrown into 'darkness' and has transformed. It will no longer be what it was, but something different. Here we must also decide what to prune and nourish and allow to continue to grow.

Maybe you have seen the ‘demise’ in some relationships in your life. Relationships that may have been superficial or toxic. What new growths have you experienced as a result? Maybe you have lost your job only to find another one that you may not have even considered before. What new growth has come from this experience?

I then find myself wondering if this pandemic is continuing because we have not learned that we cannot go back to ‘what was before’, because what was before no longer exists. It has been transformed. We need to stop looking backwards and marvel at the new growth that has emerged from this darkness and transformation. We need to move forward and nurture that growth so that we can produce great fruits.

What has transformed in your life through this pandemic? What will you prune? What will you nourish to continue to grow and bear fruit?

*Jennifer Hreben*

**MONDAY, MARCH 22**

**2 CORINTHIANS 3:4-6**

*“Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”*

We are the hands and feet of Jesus. We have been charged in the earthly realm to minister, console, be compassioned, spread joy, and show love to others. By us demonstrating these attributes, we represent Christ in the most earnest way. Some will only encounter Christ because of the lives we live. Be a good representative for Christ. Give him honor in all we do. His spirit dwells in us and we in him. Ministering to others through action and not words is the experience of this new covenant and space we are in with him. We are the hands and feet of Jesus.

Thank you, Lord, for this opportunity to be encouraged through the ministry that is working in me. Thank you for the ability and confidence to see and feel your presence as I engage others. I affirm today, I have been equipped and empowered to be your witness as I minister to your people. Through every experience, I learn how to be your hands and feet. Through every moment, you are my hands and feet. Through every encounter, I begin the work of being your hands and feet. Blessings to God. Amen.

*Equilla Curry*

**TUESDAY, MARCH 23**

**ACTS 2:17-21**

*“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*



Joel was one of the twelve Minor Prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures. Though a Minor Prophet, Joel’s writing took center stage on Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. On that day, Peter preached the first sermon of the Church, and quoted Joel.

On that day, Joel’s ancient prophecy was fulfilled. Today, as then, the Holy Spirit is pouring out dreams, visions, prophecy, signs, and wonders to all people, young and old, men and women.

What shall be our response? Shall we take seriously this extravagant promise of God? Shall we eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit? Shall we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us?

There is a side of me that says, “Yes, yes, yes!” There is another side that wants to crawl into a comfortable burrow. The Holy Spirit likely has ideas for us that we haven’t considered.

It can be scary, but I pray that you and I will say yes to God!

*Penn Glazier*

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24

HAGGAI 2:5-7

*“My spirit abides among you; do not fear. For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts.”*

How many times as a child did I hear my parents say, “Wait and see!” I found that answer to be exasperating, for I was eager to know NOW what would happen. The French author Alexandre Dumas wrote that “All human wisdom is summed up in two words; **wait and hope.**” Waiting was the hard part; hope sprung eternal.

Christians around the world have long waited for a second coming of Christ. Yet, no one knows for certain when the end of days will come. Some feel there are signs of that now. Yet it has been predicted countless times over the centuries. Remember the concern over the millennium change, or when the Aztec calendar predicted the end of the world in 2012?

In the era of the prophet Haggai, the Israelites had just returned from exile in Babylon. God, speaking through the prophet, encouraged them to rebuild his holy temple in Jerusalem and reassured them that He was with them. God also used Haggai as a vessel to predict the future: “In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth.”

Some believe this a prediction of the second coming of Christ; others view it as a reference to the quake that shook the earth as Christ took his last breath. There are many interpretations of this passage, but all lead to one conclusion. We mortals, surrounded as we are by turbulent times want answers to our uncertainties. God himself will provide for us. We must only have faith that He is watching over us....and wait and hope.

*Anonymous*

**THURSDAY, MARCH 25**

**PHILIPPIANS 2:1-5**

*“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”*

My friend Byron Borger (who co-owns Hearts and Minds Bookstore in Dallastown Pa with his wife, Beth) likes to say, "For Christians, I believe that reading can be an act of worship, an act of discipleship, an act of mission and an act of community building." And he isn't talking about reading Holy Scriptures but whatever we choose to read. I agree with him as I tend to get nourished by all my reading choices and it builds bridges with others. I think this Lenten exercise is Pastor Amanda's sneaky way of nudging folks like me (who rarely read the Bible on their own) to dig into God's Word. So here I go.

In these 5 verses we are being challenged to help make Christ's joy complete by acting as one community of love and not just tending to our individual or selfish interests. This is quite the challenge to contemplate in our current polarized country. But, this is being asked of the church, not for society as a whole. The closer our or any church can strive to be one body, it will be an amazing counter-cultural example for the world to witness. And this is possible when we are open to receiving Christ's encouragement, comfort, tenderness and compassion.

I am reminded of a quote in Jeremy Courtney's book, LOVE ANYWAY, that Pastor Amanda called our attention to in our January book study. He said, "I don't lean left or right. I lean in I lean forward, because that's where love lives." He and his non-profit, Preemptive Love, is doing just that as they work in war zones in the Middle East with a variety of religious people, not just Christians. It's exciting when we can see this scripture become reality amidst the blood and foolishness of our current world.

My next contribution to these Lenten reflections on March 31st continues to confirm and explain how we might do this.

*Sue Heilman*

**FRIDAY, MARCH 26**

**JEREMIAH 33:1-3**

*“The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still confined in the court of the guard: Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it—the Lord is his name: Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.”*

I’m struck by the context of this passage. The prophet Jeremiah is confined- imprisoned, really- to the court of the guard in Jerusalem. Although he is regarded as one of Israel’s greatest prophets and often mentioned by biblical scholars alongside Moses, his message to the people of Israel was unwelcome. While the people followed Moses to the Promised Land, albeit with the occasional grumbling and spiritual missteps along the way (the golden calf incident was cringe-worthy), the people of Jeremiah’s time actively persecuted him for the messages he proclaimed. His ministry occurred in the years before, during, and after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, so tensions were high to begin with. The last thing the people, including King Zedekiah, wanted to hear was how the great City on the Hill would fall because they had strayed from God. Yet Jeremiah continued in his faithfulness to God, trusting in the hope of redemption and restoration that would surely follow this time of great trial.

Each of us is surely confined- restricted- in some way by the ongoing pandemic. But is that all that confines us, and are we only confined by external forces? I often realize that those things which restrict me tend to come from within. Yet the hope of new freedom and possibility, often heard in the small, soft voice of God, helps me move beyond those internal barriers. Take a few minutes to consider those things which confine you- imprison you - these days. As you do, remember the words from the One who is stronger than all that confines us: Call to me and I will answer you.

*Matt MacDougall+*



**SATURDAY, MARCH 27**

**PSALM 118:1-2**

*“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
his steadfast love endures for ever!  
Let Israel say,  
‘His steadfast love endures for ever.’”*

In 1964 on a class trip to New York City a senior in high school sat mesmerized in a darkened theatre as she watched Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton portray the immortal love story of Anthony and Cleopatra. Later, back home in her English literature class, she was drawn into another tale of passion as Romeo ardently declared, “It is the East, and Juliet is the sun.”

The sun may have risen with Juliet, and the world of Rome may have once lain at the feet of Anthony and Cleopatra, but theirs was a star-crossed love, one that would end with their unexpectedly abrupt deaths.

The psalmist in Psalm 118 speaks of a different love, one that “endures forever.” This is a time-tested love, one that has flowed to God’s people since the creation of the world and which will remain with us until the end of time. The Greeks have distinctive names for love, from Agape, a selfless love, to Pragma, an enduring love. Yet each form of love encapsulates the message of the psalmist. “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.” Love is a God-given gift. Like that of grace, we do not earn it. It is freely given and all-encompassing. The greatest of us recognize it; the smallest of us sing its praise. Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

*Sally Goodhart*

*“Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’ Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”*

An ancient Moslem legend claims that as Jesus and the disciples were walking through a village, the inhabitants began throwing insults at them. But Jesus answered by repeating prayers on their behalf. Later one of his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, you prayed for those people and wished them well. Why did you not invoke a curse upon them instead?" And Jesus replied, "I could only spend what I had in my purse."

It likely started with a few who recognized Jesus. "Look, there is the one everyone in Galilee is talking about, the one who did all sorts of miracles, and people from Bethany even said he raised a friend from the dead. Now he is coming to Jerusalem. How much he reminds us of the young King David. Hosanna!" "Lord save us!" that's what the greeting of Hosanna means. All who traveled to celebrate Passover carried their own baggage. The disciples had purses of apprehension. Many struggled with worn, heavy duffels of exhaustion. Some were lugging grungy bundles of revenge and hatred. Most, I suspect, longed for deliverance from misery and oppression, and hoped for the dawn of a new age of reconciliation, justice, and basic decency.

Among irony, pathos and political complexities Jesus still enters the heart of our world, be it, Jerusalem, Washington or Lancaster. Jesus still travels light. As this week reminds us, to the very end, Jesus gives us only what he has in his purse: his very self.

*Philip Snyder*

**MONDAY, MARCH 29**

**JOHN 12:1-3**

*“Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ”*

I must admit, this accounting has always made me uncomfortable. I really don’t like feet, do not like to touch other people’s feet and certainly not wipe them with my hair. That being said, it has also brought to mind that this is an extremely intimate moment, imagining this moment also brings discomfort. I am not sure why, maybe because it forces me to face my relationship with Jesus. Can I say that my relationship with Jesus is this intimate? I would have to say, no. There is no way I would wipe my hair across his feet! What does it take to have this kind of intimacy with Jesus? What about you? Do you have this kind of intimacy in your relationship with Jesus? If so, what practices do you use to foster this kind of relationship? I would love to know!

In searching for images of this moment, I had a difficult time finding one that I felt truly depicted the love, devotion and intimacy of the moment. Then I found this one. Look at the expression on her face. Is it overwhelming love and devotion? Is it pain? I choose to say, both.



The perfume that Mary anointed Jesus with, is a perfume used for burial. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Mary has replaced the stench of death in the house, with the beautiful fragrance of the perfume, also a scent associated with death. Did she know that Jesus would soon die? How did she know? By the look of pain on her face, I would say she sensed that his death would soon be coming. What would you have done? Perhaps I would have done the same, what about you?

*Jennifer Hreben*

**TUESDAY, MARCH 30**

**ISAIAH 42:1-4**

*“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.”*

Madame Underwood strode over to our classroom window as she did each afternoon. Without missing a beat, she adroitly repositioned the blinds and then launched into her focus for the day. “Déjà vu,” she explained, is a French expression that relates a feeling that we might have when we think we’ve already experienced something that just happened. Mais oui, I thought. The blinds....

Years later I had just such a revelation when I came upon Matthew 12, verses 17-21. I paused after reading the passage. The words sounded hauntingly familiar, but why was that?

Centuries before, Isaiah had foreshadowed the coming of Christ and the deeds he would perform. The prophet’s goal was to ready the world for the son of God. The chosen one, he declared, would calmly speak his message of justice to all who would listen. This included the wounded or outcasts of society, as seen in his reference to a bruised reed and a smoldering wick. Isaiah refers to the chosen one as a servant, yet he places his trust and his spirit in this miracle that is to happen well in the future. Difficult times are portended for the coming one, but Isaiah has confidence that Christ will not fail in his mission to serve all people and to provide hope for the hopeless. His law, the law of God, not man, will reign supreme.

*Sally Goodhart*

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31**

**HEBREWS 12:1-2**

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

I must admit that this is one of my favorite Bible verses. I placed a framed print with this on it (and pictures of all different kinds of sporting balls) in my son Zachary's bedroom when he was a child. When he grew up and left it behind, I put it on the window sill in the basement of St. John's outside the All Purpose Room, hoping that not only our church kiddos but all the folks that attend the Anonymous groups might find some inspiration in it. There is so much richness in these 2 verses. Imagining all the folks that have gone before us, both family and throughout history as a great cloud of witnesses.... I find such great comfort and support in that vision... One of the reasons that I enjoy our Wednesday healing services is that we often learn about Saints of the church from all walks of life and centuries.

And HOW do we run with perseverance the race set before us? By fixing our eyes on Jesus ! Who also blesses us with our faith and continues to work with us as we grow in faith.. By getting rid of the sin that weighs us down and entangles us....

This is also how we can become one community of love as the reflection on March 25th talked about. Both that reading from Philippians 2:1-5 and this one mentions Christ's JOY...when I think of joy, I usually think about what brings me joy. But in both these readings, Christ's joy is noted. In Philippians we are asked to contribute to Christ's joy by being one in God's Spirit. In Hebrews, it talks about Christ's joy as the way he endured the cross and followed God's plan for his life. Contemplating how we can contribute to Christ's joy and realizing how essential joy was for Christ to fulfill his mission is humbling, empowering and a new awareness for me.

*Sue Heilman*

## MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 1

## JOHN 13:3-5

*“During supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.”*

Only the Gospel of John tells the story of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet at the Last Supper. The timing is curiously out of order. Jesus does not wash their feet when they first show up at the door. Instead, in the middle of the Passover feast, Jesus removes his cloak, wraps himself in a towel, pours water into a basin, and one by one washes the disciples’ dirty feet. Jesus catches them off guard. Clearly, there is more to this foot washing than practicality, this is an act of tenderness, of loving servanthood.

I imagine the disciples squirming in their seats. They are not comfortable with the idea of being served by love. In fact, Simon Peter was profoundly against the Lord washing his feet, to which Jesus responds “unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (John 13:8).

Perhaps, Peter who made a living with his hands, Peter the trash talking, impulsive, Harley riding, will cut you in a New York minute, Peter... wasn’t comfortable being the recipient of love because LOVE after all, requires vulnerability.

In her book, *The Power of Vulnerability*, author, professor and fellow Episcopalian, Brene Brown teaches that vulnerability is a necessary part of love. For us to enter into a loving relationship it is necessary to put down our walls and allow ourselves to be fully seen, transparent, broken bits and all.

“Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path” (p11).

And oh, my goodness, can that be scary! Usually, we deal with vulnerability by hiding or avoiding it. The word vulnerable comes from the Latin word vulnera, which means wound. We fear if we are wounded, we can no longer appear strong and self-reliant. We falsely convince ourselves to never allow our wounds to be seen and we will be better off. But nothing can be further from the truth. If we don't allow ourselves to feel vulnerable, we will never experience authentic loving relationships. Why? Because what we all have in common is our brokenness and Jesus understood that.

The third Saturday of the month has become my favorite Saturday of the month. St. John's community breakfast is full of loving service. People get up at the crack of dawn to cook, stand, pray and feed many a hungry soul. Recently, I witnessed a holy moment on an especially cold winter morning. A young man was shivering in a hoodie and after receiving his to-go breakfast, a Saint John's saint walked him to her car. She handed him a coat out of the back of her trunk and gratefully he put it on. It fit him well. Her eyes teared up and so did his. She later shared, "That young man blessed me when he let me give him that coat. It was a hard thing to do because it once belonged to my husband." Imagine if that young man refused her gift because he was embarrassed to be in need of a coat. Immediately, I was reminded of the woman who anoints and washes Jesus' feet, Jesus paused and allowed her to love him. The young man in the hoodie, at the very moment of receiving the coat, received love like Jesus and the woman, who parted with her husband's coat with such tenderness, served love like Jesus.

Jesus knows this new direction he's calling us to take involves a total relearning of a deeply ingrained habit of self-protection. It isn't easy and it certainly doesn't happen all at once. It involves a lifetime of trying to choose in any given moment what it means to be more open, vulnerable, trusting the grace of God to be with us in every situation. It means tolerating the anxiety of not always having the answers, of admitting we can't do it all, of being fearful or frustrated, it means possibly looking foolish and it means being fully human and fully in love with and by God.

*Deacon Stacey*

## GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 2

## PSALM 22:1-4

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.”*

We are all familiar with the words Jesus cries out in his final hour, his body hanging from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me”. It is easy to recognize the distress in his voice, to identify the pain he is enduring, to name the injustice of the crucifixion of this person we claim to be followers of, especially knowing the example Jesus set for us through his life of healing, feeding, teaching, visiting. It is easy to think of this as something that happened over 2000 years ago. It is hard to see the ways that people continue to be crucified among us, crushed under the weight of systemic racism, locked away by the carceral system. It is hard to think that this is something that happens today. Dr. Eboni Marshall Turman helps me to make this connection as she hears Jesus’ cries on the cross in the cry of fourteen-year-old Dejerria Becton “Call my mama!” as she “was thrown to the ground as well as physically and verbally assaulted by [police].” Turman calls for us to see Christ’s body hanging on the cross in the black girl being kicked around on the pavement. And perhaps, we invoked this image in the words that filled the streets this summer as crowds of people chanted “I can’t breathe.”

May we sit with what it means to follow a crucified Christ.

*Emma DiPace*



## **HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 3**

## **1 PETER 4:8**

*“The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.”*

Pandemic is not a word I ever believed we would be using with the frequency we have for the past year. During that time, I am sure we have all struggled to adapt to the new reality we are living in. To get through quarantines, lockdowns, and social distancing, we have been forced to limit the amount of people we spend our time with. Other hateful and hurtful forces at play this past year have led us to be even more socially and politically isolated. Peter tells us that above all things, have FERVENT LOVE for one another. The end is near and we should with a passionate intensity, double-down on our commitments to each other.

Our job as Christians is to build each other up when we fall down and forgive each other when we fall short. Love should always be a dominant force in our lives. Pandemic has added obstacles to sharing the healing love of God with others. Sharing the peace via text messaging or phone calls has been a simple, pleasant way of reaching others outside our bubble. The simple grace of a text or phone call shows that even though we are separated by pandemic, we will find a way to continue to share the love of God with one another. We must keep loving each other, using God’s grace to heal, spread love, and serve our community.

*Joe Way*

## EASTER DAY, APRIL 4

## MARK 16:1-2

*“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.”*

Expect the unexpected...isn't that what Easter is all about? When the women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with oil, on that very first Easter morning, they weren't expecting to find an empty tomb. They weren't expecting angels, folded up linens, or a living Messiah. They were expecting to find their friend Jesus—lifeless, breathless, cold. But Jesus proved them otherwise. Jesus had something else in store for them entirely!

That first Easter morning should be a constant reminder to expect the unexpected. Expect to find Jesus in people and in places you would otherwise write off. Expect to encounter the holy during times of sorrow just as much as you would in times of overwhelming joy. Expect to find love, grace, and mercy from the most unlikely of sources. Expect the unexpected...and in doing so find life. St. John's, are you ready to be surprised?

*Amanda Knouse+*



**LET YOUR GOD LOVE YOU**

*by Edwina Gateley*

Be silent. Be still. Alone. Empty. Before your God.  
Say nothing. Ask nothing. Be silent. Be still.

Let your God look upon you. That is all. God knows.  
God understands. God loves you with an enormous love,  
And only wants to look upon you with that love.

Quiet. Still. Be.  
Let your God—  
Love you.



Thank you to all those who contributed to this year's Lenten Reflections. Your words have enriched our journey towards the cross and have inspired our hearts!

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<i>John Knouse</i>	<i>Roy Keeler</i>
<i>Marylee Sauder</i>	<i>Sue Dodge</i>
<i>Leslie Morgan</i>	<i>Barbara Landis</i>
<i>Matt MacDougall+</i>	<i>Stacey Catigano+</i>
<i>Equilla Curry</i>	<i>Maria Weaver-Hollowniczky</i>
<i>Sally Goodhart</i>	<i>Ruth McFarland</i>
<i>Bob Goodhart</i>	<i>Maverlyn Wilson</i>
<i>Jennifer Hreben</i>	<i>Mary and Bruce Waskowicz</i>
<i>Joe Way</i>	<i>Mary Ellen and Bob Kilp</i>
<i>Philip Snyder</i>	<i>Penn Glazier</i>
<i>Kluane Snyder</i>	<i>Liz West</i>
<i>Sue Zuke</i>	<i>Emma DiPace</i>
<i>Brad Zuke</i>	<i>Amanda Knouse+</i>
<i>Sue Heilman</i>	<i>Anonymous</i>

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**PLEASE JOIN US FOR WORSHIP:**

Sundays at 10:00AM (*YouTube*)  
Wednesdays at 12:00PM (*Facebook live*)  
Wednesdays at 7:00PM (*in the courtyard*)