

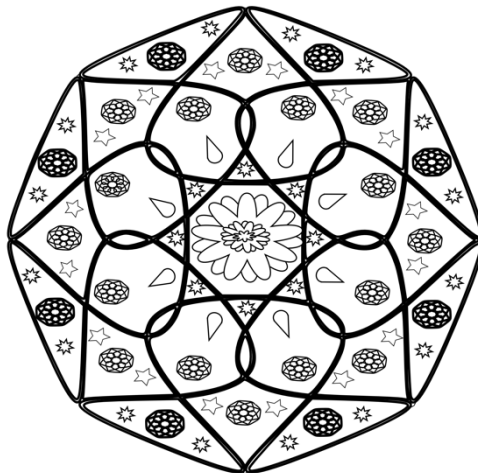
The Way of Love

*Moving Through Lent in
Scripture, Story, and Verse*

2026

*Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice,
here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word;
always doing the smallest right
and doing it all for love.*

~ Saint Terese of Lisieux



Susan Chesley

Lenten Poem ~ Ann Weems

Lent is a time to take time to let the power
of our faith story take hold of us,
a time to let the events get up
and walk around in us,
a time to intensify our living unto Christ,
a time to hover over the thoughts of our hearts,
a time to place our feet in the streets of
Jerusalem or to walk along the sea and
listen to his Word,
a time to touch his robe
and feel the healing surge through us,
a time to ponder and a time to wonder....
Lent is a time to allow
a fresh new taste of God!

Those of us who walk along this road
do so reluctantly.
Lent is not our favorite time of year.
We'd rather be more active,
planning and scurrying around.
All this is too contemplative to suit us.

Perhaps we're afraid to have time to think,
for thoughts come unbidden.
Perhaps we're afraid to face our future
knowing our past.
Give us courage, O God,
to hear your Word
and to read our living into it.
Give us the trust to know we're forgiven
and give us the faith
to take up our lives and walk.

Ash Wednesday

Matthew 6:17-21 *But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 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.*

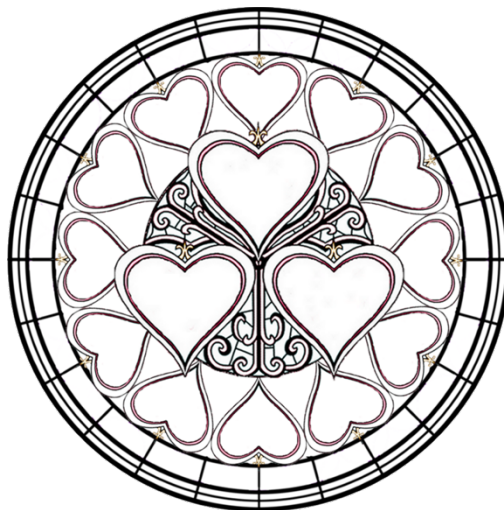
How many times have I knelt at the altar on Ash Wednesday? How many times have I received ashes on my forehead in the shape of the cross? I have lived a long life and for years have sat in evening worship on the first day of Lent, holding sorrow in my throat and feeling the weight of my meager repentance.

The ritual, liturgy, scripture, and hymns of Ash Wednesday connect me not only through the years of my life but through centuries of sacred gatherings. I am overwhelmed. Something takes place deep within my bones in worship, whether high holy observances or ordinary times, and I walk away changed. The change may be measured in a grain of sand, but I am different, slowly moving more and more with the rhythm of a benevolent creation.

Lent is upon us and will cover us through the cold days of February and March and into the fragile warmth of April. In my heart I am a resurrection person but the walk to daybreak is a mighty hike.

Along the Way: Throughout the day, trace the sign of the cross on the back of your hands and in your palms. Feel the power of God's renewable Love.

Prayer: *Lord God, you who breathed the spirit of life within me. Draw out of me the light and life you created. Help me to find my way back to you. Help me to use my life to reflect your glory and to serve others as your son Jesus did. Amen*



Thursday, February 19

1 John 4:7-21 *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and God's love is made complete in us. This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.*

Love. Love. Love. The word "love" appears twenty-five times in this passage. When lifted aloud it passes through our throats, ears, and hearts and starts to warm our spirits. We know this love, we know this promise, we know this power called love. Love your sister, love your brother, love the stranger, love the mean-spirited, love the confused, love the friend, love your enemy. Love those who need love most and those who seem to deserve it least. Love. Love. Love.

Along the Way: Compliment strangers with a simple phrase that shows you noticed them.

Prayer: *Holy God, thank you for loving me, for being patient with me, and for helping me. I believe that you know my troubles, and that you want the best for me. Thank you for never locking me out. Amen*



Friday, February 20

Romans 12:3-21 *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

In conversations about vocation, Christians often refer to Frederick Buechner's observation in his book *Wishful Thinking*: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

But what does this mean? Could "your deep gladness" refer to the God-given skills and gifts that energize you and bring you joy as you use them, and "the world's deep hunger" refer to the particular needs you are enthusiastic about addressing? For most people, it takes time and intentionality to discover their deep gladness and the needs they are passionate about meeting. It also takes a deepening relationship with God to be able to discern the voice of God tangled together with other voices. Enthusiasm comes from the Greek words "en" meaning "within," and "theos" meaning "God." We experience enthusiasm when the God-given design inside us connects with needs in the world.

Our human nature encourages us to focus on our own needs. God, however, calls us to direct our attention to the needs of others. Needs come in all shapes and sizes. Every job meets some type of need. Ask yourself: What needs, issues and/or causes do I find compelling and desire to address in my work?

There are different ways to understand your "deep gladness." Consider asking yourself questions of discernment: Who am I? What is my God-given design? What do I enjoy doing, what do I value, what motivates me, what brings me a sense of fulfillment and meaning? What gifts and abilities has God given to me to use in this world?

Along the way: Recognize the talents of others and let them know how much you appreciate their willingness to share their gifts.

Prayer: *Merciful God, help me to see your Creation as my family and to seek, always, peace and reconciliation with others that I may be a kind and faithful servant in your garden of Shalom. Amen*

Saturday, February 21

Luke 10: 25-37 *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.*

"Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind," and "Love your neighbor as yourself."

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

The parable of the Good Samaritan is a parable of verbs. It is filled with action words that draw the reader into the story from every direction. It is so familiar that its meaning has perhaps become lost to clique and triviality. But there are few words spoken by Jesus that more concretely point to the central message of love than this story of the man traveling on the road to Jericho. The beauty, the truth of this parable lies solely in the ability of one stranger to see himself in the life of another and then act out of compassion for the suffering he witnesses. In Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples that they will see him again and again. That he will be in the hungry, the wounded, the sick, the imprisoned, and the dying and as they bend to find fellowship with the least they will find fellowship with him.

Jesus commands that we act but not out of malice, anger, contempt, or even pity. He asks that our actions move freely from the core of our humanity generated by a deep and divine understanding of kinship with all people. Just as the suffering man on the road to Jericho, Christ calls us to become aware of our own suffering, our own vulnerability, our own captivity, and our own places of loneliness, shame, guilt, or sorrow. It will be from those places of recognition that compassion will be our guide.

Along the Way: When dining out, write a kind or encouraging message on a napkin for your server to find.

Prayer: *Dear God, you know all things and what I am capable of. Make me an instrument of your love. Allow me to put my faith into action to serve my brothers and sisters of the world. Amen*

First Sunday in Lent

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

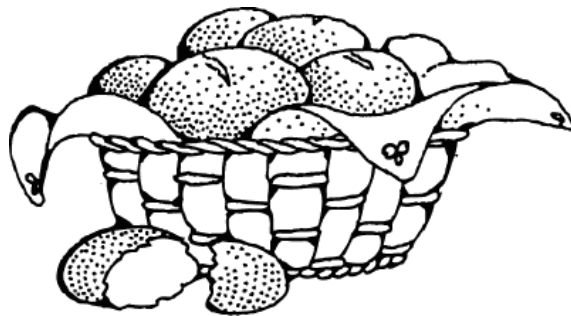
Prayer: *Almighty God, I am so often tempted to fall off your path and seek pleasures that do not feed my soul or body. You know my weaknesses and yet are always eager to guide me in the right direction. May I follow the lead and love of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen .*



Monday, February 23

Matthew 14:13-21: *When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. "Bring them here to me," he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.*

How many loaves have you got? Five. One loaf for every thousand people. Imagine Jesus and the apostles standing in a circle around these 5 loaves and 2 fish, staring silently. What hope is there that even one tenth of those gathered will be fed? And then Jesus acts, and he pulls the apostles into the action. "Tell everyone to sit down in the grass." Jesus takes the bread, looks up to heaven, blesses the bread, and breaks it. He gives the broken pieces to the apostles, and everyone eats and has plenty; in fact there is bread left over. Jesus took the loaves, and he broke them. He did not multiply the loaves but divided them. It was not in the whole loaf that the divine was experienced that day, but in the brokenness that the bread became holy. It was out of brokenness that hope arose. As we move through Lent, may we remember the broken bread and the apostles who were confounded by the humanity pressing in on them and may we see the figure of Jesus, steady and faithful. When the apostles asked Jesus to send the masses away so they might find their own food, Jesus said, "You feed them." And through Christ, they did. Use what you have because what you have is enough.



Along the Way: Contact a local food pantry and ask what their shelves need. Fill those needs the best you can.

Prayer: *Beloved Lord, thank you for opportunities to serve others. I ask that you bring people to my attention who are hurting and are in need. Give me the courage to pray boldly and the words that will resonate in their heart. Amen*

Tuesday, February 24

Luke 6:27-31 *But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

When I was young, my family camped for most vacations. We had a mantra that we held as almost sacred – leave the campsite better than you found it. And we always did. As we threw the last of our gear into the back of the station wagon, as my father started the engine and yelled for us all to get in the car, my mother would survey our abandoned site and silently decide if it were fit to leave. We all knew if there were one scrap of paper, one piece of evidence that a human had bedded down the night before, we would not be leaving! We left our site always better than we found it. No matter what the condition the campsite had been in when we arrived, we left the site the way we would want to find it.

I believe in so many ways this was the message God brought to us through Christ. The essential truth behind living a life that leaves creation better is the understanding that creation is a gift from God. A gift – a thing we did not get by our own efforts, a thing we cannot buy, a thing we cannot acquire through an act of will. It is bestowed upon us.

God's gifts to us never cease; they never stop moving toward us. They fall at our feet as manna from heaven whether we ask for them or not, whether we are worthy. Give to the Creator as you have been given, freely and without reserve. Do not ask what your reward will be but extend every gift as your own meager way of repaying to God that which cannot be repaid. Give generously to those who need you. And just as you want to be treated, treat others the same.

Along the Way: Go on a walk with a trash bag and pick up trash along the way. Let your steps and your attention create beauty.

Prayer: *Lord, I ask for the strength to endure the challenges that are waiting for me. Remind me there is no mountain I cannot climb, no river that I cannot swim. I look to the hills, and you give me hope. I look to the valley, and you show me strength. I look to the solid wall, and you show me a way out. At every turn, I see your grace. For every challenge, I see your mercy. For every bump in the road, I see your salvation. Amen*

Wednesday, February 25

John 4:7-8 *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

And in this he showed me a little thing, the quantity of a hazel nut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed. And it was as round as any ball. I looked upon it with the eye of my understanding, and thought, 'What may this be?' And it was answered generally thus, 'It is all that is made.' I marveled how it might last, for I thought it might suddenly have fallen to nothing for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and ever shall, for God loves it.

And so have all things their beginning by the love of God. In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it. The second that God loves it. And the third that God keeps it.

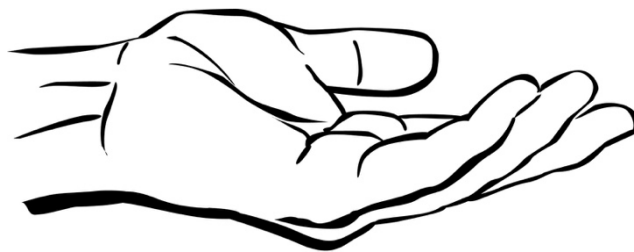
So it was that I learned that love was our Lord's meaning. And I saw for certain, both here and elsewhere, that before ever he made us, God loved us; and that his love has never slackened, nor ever shall.

In this love all his works have been done, and in this love, he has made everything serve us; and in this love our life is everlasting. Our beginning was when we were made, but the love in which he made us never had beginning. In it we have our beginning.

~Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love

Along the Way: Try to make sure everyone in a group conversation feels included and valued.

Prayer: *All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well. Amen* (Julian of Norwich)



Thursday, February 26

Isaiah 65:20-25 *No more shall an infant live but a few days, or an old person not live a lifetime. Anyone a hundred years old will be considered young, and to die younger than that will be considered a curse. My people will live in the houses they build; they will enjoy the grapes from their own vineyards. No one will take away their homes or vineyards. My people will live to be as old as trees, and they will enjoy what they have earned. Their work won't be wasted, and their children won't die of dreadful diseases. I will bless their children and their children's children. I will answer their prayers before they finish praying.*

This is the House that Love Built

~Susan Chesley

This is the child who slept in the bed that lay in the house that love built.

This is the child, who whispered a prayer and slept in the bed
that lay in the house that love built.

This is the book that spoke to the child who whispered a prayer,
who slept in the bed that lay in the house that love built.

This is the mom who sat in the chair and cradled the child, who opened a book and
whispered a prayer, who slept in the bed that lay in the house that love built.

These are the walls that sheltered the mom who sat in the chair and cradled the child,
who whispered a prayer and opened the book,
who slept in the bed that lay in the house that love built.

This is the well that held the rain that watered the earth that shouldered the walls that
sheltered the mom who sat in the chair and cradled the child, who opened the book and
whispered a prayer, who slept in the bed that lay in the house that love built.

This is the bowl all creamy and full, made sweet from the oats that sprung from the land,
that brought forth the well that held the rain, that watered the earth that shouldered the
walls, that sheltered the mom who sat in the chair and cradled the child, who opened the
book and whispered a prayer, who slept in the bed
that lay in the house that love built.

This is the world that first heard the cry from fields gone dry, and sought ways to teach
each one in reach to till the land and raise the grain that steamed in the bowl all creamy
and full, made sweet from the oats that sprung from the land that brought forth the well
that held the rain, that watered the earth that shouldered the walls
that sheltered the mom who sat in the chair and cradled the child,
who opened the book and whispered a prayer,
who slept in the bed that lay in the house that love built.

This is the house that love built.

Friday, February 27

Luke 1:39-45 *At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"*

When the child in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy at the greeting of Mary, we are shown what happens when two spirits meet and are connected in tenderness, appreciation, and compassion. The Holy from one life leaps from one heart to another in a wonderful cosmic movement. When we greet another person or any element of the universe with hospitality, we are bonded to the essence of life, and in that moment, however brief, I firmly believe we can do no wrong. To injure or insult or damage another part of creation during a Holy moment would be like cutting off your own arm.

So, the task, the Holy work before us, is to find ways to recognize often those leaps of life that stir the fires of gratitude and awe for all we have been given. During the days of Lent, can we find ways to slow down and embrace, nurture Creation's divine spark in our lives? The faster we move the more we miss, and the more we miss the more troubled we become. If I practice a slow down now, maybe by this summer I'll be sipping lemonade under a tree watching an inch worm move across a blade of grass. And in those moments, I will surely do no harm.

Along the Way: While you are out, compliment a parent on how well-behaved their child is. If you see a parent who is struggling, give them a smile and provide a few simple words of encouragement.

Prayer: *Beloved Creator, I move too quickly through your blessed creation. Help me slow down; keep my eyes open and my steps deliberate. May your light shine upon my paths and guide my life to your glory. Amen*



Saturday, February 28

1 Peter 2:5 *You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

In Peter's letter, Christ is shown to be like a stone, a solid foundation on which to build one's life. But Christ is not a barren, cold stone. Christ is a living stone – alive and life giving. Furthermore, the scripture invites us to be like Christ, to be like living stones - allowing our lives to be built into spiritual houses. The scripture does not suggest that we build houses where spirit dwells, but that we let ourselves, our living stone 'beingness,' be built into temples of spirit.

The God who created us and creates us anew each day builds us into a spiritual house. Each one of us, one living stone upon another, is called to invite the hand of God into our lives, to reform our lives into the foundation of the Kingdom of God, a place, a real and tangible place of peace and community and reconciliation. A place of shalom.

As Christians we must live with Christ as our cornerstone, girding us against any storm, calling us to become alive in our faith and to be built up into strong witnesses to this faith. In this fragmented, broken world, becoming living stones means we need to learn to do mission better than ever before. It means serving as missionaries in the total sense of the word: not just with our mouths, but more so with our bodies and minds and spirits and hearts.

Along the Way: Set an alarm on your phone to go off at three different times during the day. In those moments, lift a prayer for someone in need of the spiritual power that comes when they are named and remembered.

Prayer: *Compassionate Creator, we are your people, chosen to proclaim your mighty acts. You have called us out of darkness and into your wondrous light. We ask, invite your Spirit to move through our lives, breathing on rocks stuck in rigid places, building us into a house of living stones. Amen*



Second Sunday in Lent

John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person."

Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"

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.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

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

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

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

Prayer: *Holy One, open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth you have for me; place in my hands the wonderful key, that shall unclasp and set me free. Silently now I wait for you, ready my God, your will to see; open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine! Amen. (UMH #454)*

Monday, March 2

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

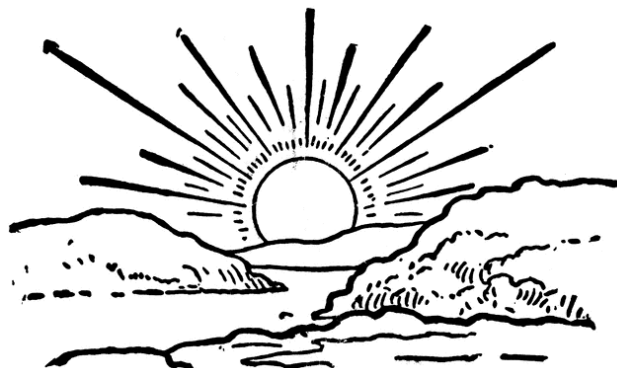
For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

*a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.*

Physicists working in the field of chaos theory are discovering a strange phenomenon. Beneath the uncertainty and randomness of the universe appears to be a deep and abiding order, which they call the “strange attractor.” This attractor pulls everything into a core, the Holy Center of all creation. No matter what distractions, confusions, and terrors confront us in daily life, if we pay attention to the restlessness placed deep within us, and then move deeper through breath and prayer and silence we may find ourselves miraculously drawn to the Center. And while we may never make sense of it all, we will find it possible to move back and forth between day and night, between light and darkness, and find peace.

Along the Way: Take time to appreciate the sunrise and the sunset.

Prayer: *Eternal Creator, help me embrace the sacredness of time, the patience to marvel and wait, and the divine understanding that in your Sabbath time all will unfold. Amen*



Tuesday, March 3

Psalm 100

*Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all.*

A Psalm

~Thomas Merton

When psalms surprise me with their music
And antiphons turn to rum
The Spirit sings: the bottom drops out of my soul.
And from the center of my cellar,
Love, louder than thunder opens a heaven of naked air.
New eyes awaken.

I send Love's name into the world with wings
And songs grow up around me like a jungle.
Choirs of all creatures sing the tunes
Your Spirit played in Eden.
Zebras and antelopes and birds of paradise
Shine on the face of the abyss
And I am drunk with the great wilderness
of the sixth day in Genesis.
But sound is never half so fair
As when that music turns to air
And the universe dies of excellence.

Sun, moon and stars fall from their heavenly towers.
Joys walk no longer down the blue world's shore.
Though fires loiter, lights still fly on the air of the gulf,
All fear another wind, another thunder:
Then one more voice snuffs all their flares in one gust.
And I go forth with no more wine and no more stars
And no more buds and no more Eden
And no more animals and no more sea:
While God sings by himself in acres of night
And walls fall down, that guarded Paradise.

Wednesday, March 4

Hebrews 13:1-3 *Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.*

Philippians 2:3-4 *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

An old Hasidic rabbi asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and day begun, for daybreak is the time for certain holy prayers. "Could it be," one student asked, "when you can see an animal in the distance and can tell whether it is a sheep or a dog?" "No," answered the rabbi. "Is it when you can clearly see the lines on your own palm?" another asked. "Is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell if it is a fig or a pear tree?" "No," answered the rabbi each time. "Then when is it?" the pupils demanded. "It is when you can look on the face of any man or woman and see that they are your sister or brother. Until then it is still night."

~ **Hasidic Tale**

Along the Way: When you are checking out at a store, notice the name badge of the cashier and use their name in conversation.

Prayer: *Holy God, give me the courage to walk into the places of darkness and believe that Christ has walked before me. Give me the wisdom to use my words to soothe the broken hearted. Give me eyes to see my own reflection in the face of another. Amen*



Thursday, March 5

Psalm 139:13-17

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together
in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
How precious to me are your thoughts, God!*

Listen to What God is Saying to Us:

You are my child.
You are written in the palms of my hand.
You are hidden in the shadow of my hand.
I have molded you in the secret of the earth.
I have knitted you together in your mother's womb.
You belong to me.
I am yours. You are mine.
I have called you from eternity
and you are the one who is held safe and embraced in love from eternity to eternity. You
belong to me.
And I am holding you safe and I want you to know that whatever happens to you,
I am always there.
I was always there;
I am always there;
I always will be there and hold you in my embrace.
You are mine. You are my child.
You belong to my home.
You belong to my intimate life and I will never let you go.
I will be faithful to you.

~ Henri Nouwen



Friday, March 6

Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-10 *Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.*

Paul says, "once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." Our world is so often a dark place. It's full of shards of broken justice and crippled compassion and we are often slow to admit to what we witness or even see what is right in front of us. When we honestly face the facts about our world and even our own lives, we can see that there's so much darkness. There is envy, jealousy, hatred, exploitation, greed, broken relationships, lust, drunkenness, pain, abuse, and worse. That is darkness. But when we welcome, invite Jesus Christ into our lives, says Paul, we become light. How are we light? It's not because we are good in ourselves. In fact, tragically, so often the darkness in the world is in our own lives as well. Yet, Paul says, we are light. Why? Because, we have been washed clean through the forgiveness of Christ. We have been changed by God from darkness into light. The Greeks called this change of heart *metanoia*. Feed the light within you through the small acts of kindness you do every day. Let the world know who you are and to whom you belong. Be a child of light and illuminate the darkness.

Along the Way: Make a commitment to find three times during the day that you can show kindness to a stranger. An act as small as a smile or a simple greeting may be enough to turn someone's loneliness or despair into a brief shining moment of shared humanity. Be a ripple of kindness in the life of another.

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for the miracle of life. Thank you, God, for the miracle of love. Thank you, God, for the miracle of stillness. Thank you, God, for the miracle of peace. Amen*



Saturday, March 7

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

"Transfiguration is living by vision: standing foursquare in the midst of a broken, tortured, oppressed, starving, dehumanizing reality and yet seeing the invisible, calling it to come, behaving as if it is on the way, sustained by elements of it that have come already, within and among us. In those moments when people are healed, transformed, freed from addictions, obsessions, destructiveness, self worship or when groups or communities or even whole nations glimpse the light of the transcendent in their midst, there the New Creation has come upon us. The world for one brief moment is transfigured. The beyond shines in our midst – on the way to the cross."

~Walter Wink

Along the Way: Pay attention to the changing landscape. How does the coming of Spring transform your spirit? Send an encouraging card, email, or text to someone who has struggled through the cold months of Winter.

Prayer: *Loving God, sometimes my heart turns in every direction except toward you. Please help me to turn my heart toward you, to gaze upon you in trust and to seek your kingdom with all my being. Soften my hardened heart so that I might love others to glorify and worship you. Grant me this with the ever-present guidance of your Spirit. Amen*



Third Sunday in Lent

John 4:5-15

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

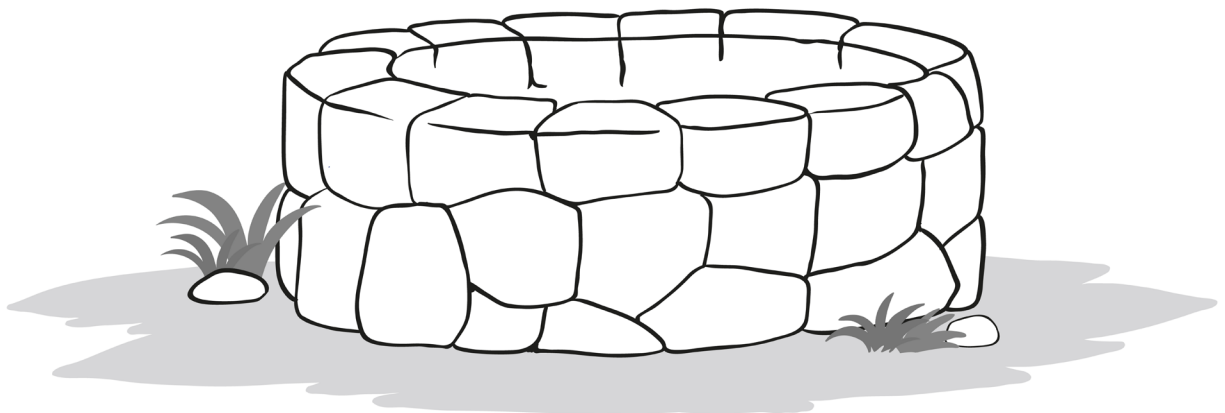
Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Prayer: *Father of my soul, Mother of my heart, I know your love for me is limitless beyond imagining. You care for me as a loving parent. Through my smallest Lenten sacrifices, help me to become less selfish and more aware of your ways. Fan the flame of my desire to draw ever closer to you. Guide me to seek your love. Amen*



Monday, March 9

2 Timothy 1:3-7 *I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*

For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

Maya Angelou once said, “Your legacy is every life you touch.” Legacy is not a matter of monuments or money. Legacy is a matter of impact. It’s about the unseen ripples you create, even in the quiet moments you think do not matter.

Have you given thought to the legacy you are leaving? Whether you realize it or not, you are leaving a legacy. The question is, are you leaving the legacy you want to leave? Every day, what you say and what you do shapes a future in which others will live. Every decision you make is part of a story someone will inherit. The question is: what story are you telling?

Give God thanks for the people you met today. Were you aware of your words and actions? Who did you include in your love and care today? How did you work for the good of people around you? How will your community be different because of the presence of Christ in and through you? As you reflect upon and grow into the legacy you are leaving, what will you do differently tomorrow?

Along the Way: Remember those people in your life who have supported your faith and lead by example in the ministry of service. Resolve to continue to be spiritual companions to others in your life.

Prayer: *Dear Father, I give you thanks for your servants who have shown me how to live by faith. Help me to seek relationships that strengthen my own faith, so that I can be a servant who models a life of love that Christ intended for all of us to lead. Amen*



Tuesday, March 10

John 14:11-14 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

I No Longer Pray For Peace

~Ann Weems

On the edge of war, one foot already in,
I no longer pray for peace:
I pray for miracles.
I pray that stone hearts will turn
to tenderheartedness,
and evil intentions will turn
to mercifulness,
and all the soldiers already deployed
will be snatched out of harm's way,
and the whole world will be
astounded onto its knees.
I pray that all the "God talk"
will take bones,
and stand up and shed
its cloak of faithlessness,
and walk again in its powerful truth.
I pray that the whole world might
sit down together and share
its bread and its wine.
Some say there is no hope,
but then I've always applauded the holy fools
who never seem to give up on
the scandalousness of our faith:
that we are loved by God.....
that we can truly love one another.
I no longer pray for peace:
I pray for miracles.

Along the Way: Wave to children on a school bus.

Prayer: *Holy One, I seek the faith of a child who believes all things are possible and sees the miracle in the opening of a snow filled crocus. Shine your light on my tender doubts that I may see your power and glory in every star. Amen*

Wednesday, March 11

Romans 12:1-2 *I appeal to you therefore, sisters and brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so you may discern what is the will of God-what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Two thousand years ago, a power greater than our imagination came into this world through a miraculous man who did not gently pull aside the curtain of hate and fear but yanked it down, tore it up, and challenged us to do the same.

The world calls with a myriad of voices, pulling us quickly, asking that we come along regardless of what the still, small voice in our soul tells us to do. It is a trap. Paul understood the dangers of this 2000 years ago, and whatever difficulty the early followers of Christ had with Paul's instruction, they are multiplied 10-fold for us today.

More than ever, we do not want to appear odd or out of step with our contemporaries. We are shown a thousand times a day what the face of success and happiness looks like. We are tempted to cut ourselves loose from the mooring of our faith and we are adrift in foreign waters, frightened and possibly alone. Do not be bound to the patterns of this world. What if there were a place where people gathered bound not to the empire of the world but to the kingdom of God. What if there were a place that offered sanctuary and refuge and the promise that the way of Christ is filled with joy and fellowship, and as a group, the people who gathered found ways to be "odd" together, and they built a spiritual fortress that girded them when the world called louder. Paul called this place church and so do we.

Along the Way: Give yourself the beauty and rest of Sabbath time. Release yourself from the bounds of worldly obligations and go out into Creation to simply walk without purpose, to soak in all that God has placed on your path, and appreciate the sounds of nature, the sounds of silence.

Prayer: *Beloved Creator, help me to see myself as your child, blessed by your breath to walk in peace, joy and hope, carrying the light I have been given into the shadows of life. I am blessed to be a servant to all. Amen*

Thursday, March 12

Luke 6:27-31 *But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

When Jesus gathered his disciples for the first time, he began his ministry with an extraordinary request. He commanded them to love as God loves. To love those who

didn't deserve their love or want their love, to offer themselves unceasingly, giving away not only their outer garments but their inner garments as well. To give to everyone who asks and to never expect repayment. This is divine gift giving and Christ calls on us to also make it human.

The essence of Christian stewardship is reflected in the practice of gift giving. In the gift, the other's material needs become my spiritual needs. The gifts of stewardship bridge the kingdom of earth and the kingdom of heaven by moving between earthly economics and resources and heavenly grace.

Of all that we encounter in the world, in all the experiences we have, in all the people we meet, and in all the wisdom we learn from them, there is so little we earn. The world gives itself to us. People, as parents, friends, and communities, give themselves to us. There are so few things we have earned, and of them there is nothing we have earned alone. Stewardship starts with this initial humble realization: there is an essential element of grace in every aspect of our lives, our resources, and our communities. As such, we are called to give that grace a movement that bonds communities and individuals together. Remember all you have been given through Grace and give back to Creation as an offering of deep, unceasing gratitude and thanksgiving.

Along the Way: Leave a much larger tip than you usually would at a restaurant. Do not tip because of good service or because you had a pleasant experience. Leave your money only as a symbol of your desire to make the life of another a little better. Share your abundance without any expectation of thanks or regard.

Prayer: *Holy God, thank you for your constant presence. May I find the courage to speak up against injustice and to advocate for those who cannot speak for themselves. Help me to confront my own fears and doubts, trusting in your guidance and strength to see me through. Help me to be courageous in my relationships, and willing to be vulnerable and open with others. Strengthen me to live my life in service to you and creation. Amen*

Friday, March 13

Luke 18:1-8 *Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"*

I have always loved the Gospel story of the widow beating at the door of an uncaring, disinterested judge. She needs justice; he is capable of giving it but refuses to be bothered with her plight. But the widow is not disheartened and repeatedly, day after

day, pounds on his door. Each night she goes home empty-handed, prays persistently, and then rises the next day and seeks justice again. Ask, pray, repeat.

The widow has beaten down a path to the judge's door and the judge, worn down by the pesky presence of this nobody in his life, finally realizes that if he is to ever have relief from her unceasing knocks upon his door, he must grant her whatever justice she is seeking. She receives what she asks for not because the judge's heart has softened but because she has worn out his last nerve.

Prayer is our open invitation from God to call anytime. And don't become discouraged, pray persistently, be pesky in your praying. Listen for God's answers, even if they are not what you expected.

Along the Way: Sign the care cards in the Gathering Space and intentionally lift those names in prayer.

Prayer: *Holy God, help me to truly believe that through you all things are possible and that my days are filled with the miracle of new life. Help me to recognize with tenderness the suffering of others and understand that you have blessed me with the ability to bear the compassionate light of healing into places of brokenness and despair. Amen*

Saturday, March 14

Luke 9:28-36 *Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.*

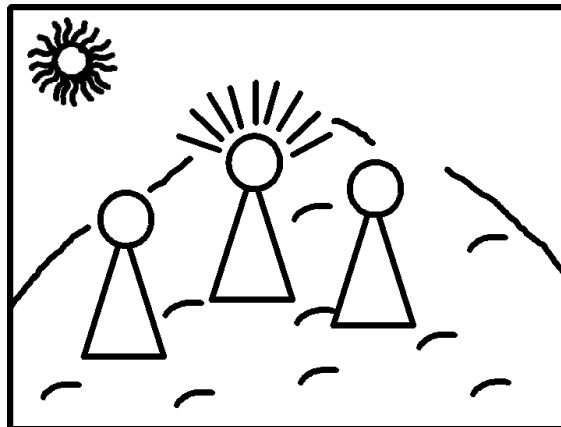
They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" – not knowing what he said.

While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

There was a man named Jesus, from the town of Nazareth, a man with brothers and sisters and a mother. A man just as tired and footsore as the companions who traveled with him up a mountain. But this man was also the Messiah, the Christ, and from the dust on his cheeks and the tangles in his hair a radiant holiness broke through and set fire to his face. He was encased in both his humanness and divinity and in his descent back down the mountain the world was transfigured. "This is my Child, my Chosen: to this One you are to listen!"

Along the Way: Send a note or card of thanks to a member of the church staff.

Prayer: *Loving God, sometimes my heart turns in every direction except toward you. Please help me turn my heart toward you, to gaze upon you in trust and to seek your kingdom with all my heart. Soften my hardened heart so that I might love others to glorify and worship you. Grant me this with the ever-present guidance of your Spirit. Amen*



Fourth Sunday in Lent

Ephesians 5:8-14

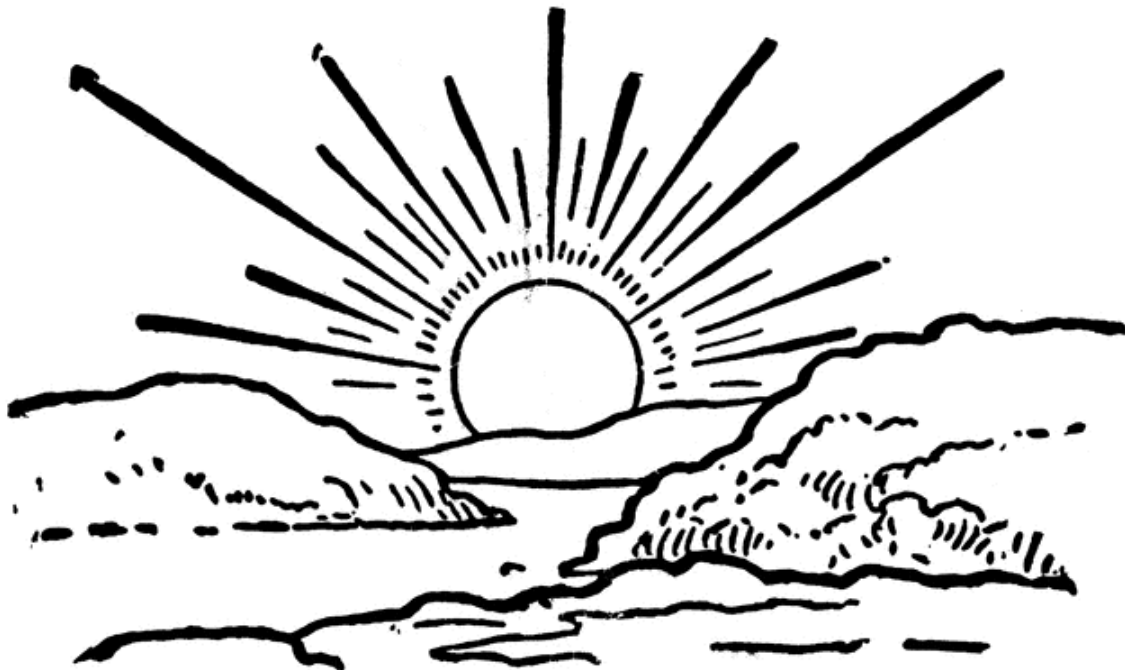
For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

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.”

Prayer: *Lord, your commandment of love is so simple and so challenging. Help me to let go of my pride, to be humble in my penance. I want only to love the way you ask me to love, to live the way you ask me to live. I ask this through your son, Jesus, who stands at my side today and always. Amen*



Monday, March 16

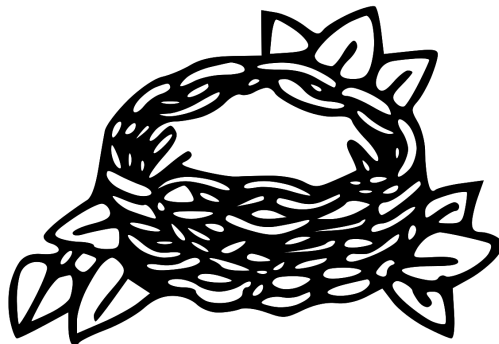
Matthew 6:25-27 *“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”*

The way we live each day is largely steered by who we believe we are and what we believe about our lives. We walk into each day with a set of beliefs and assumptions about the world. Some of us would be described by others as optimists, walking, skipping on the sunny side of the street. Others of us might be labeled pessimists, girded against a seemingly hostile world, always waiting for the next shoe to drop. But most of us live somewhere between the two extremes.

We are torn between believing, as Anne Frank did, that despite everything people are really good at heart, and the gnawing fear that our own safety and security are in constant jeopardy. Hundreds of times a day, every one of us, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear, are enticed into wanting more and made to believe that our possessions will bring meaning into our lives. And if what we own is a measure of our worth, then what we have must be guarded and locked away. If we believe that there is not enough to go around and that if we don't hold tight to what we have been given or earned, we may be left with nothing, then we create in ourselves a cold and hardened heart.

Along the Way: Find out what your animal shelter needs and take supplies of comfort and care for lost and abandoned animals.

Prayer: *Beloved Creator, there are so many things I don't understand, but I have faith that you love me and will never abandon me. Help me to accept your mystery, just as I accept that no matter how deep the winter snow may be, spring is on its way. Amen*



Tuesday, March 17

Luke 5:1-11 *While Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, many people pushed to get near Him. They wanted to hear the Word of God. Jesus saw two boats on the shore. The fishermen were not there because they were washing their nets. Jesus got into a boat which belonged to Simon. Jesus asked him to push it out a little way from land. Then He sat down and taught the people from the boat.*

When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Push out into the deep water. Let down your nets for some fish." Simon said to Him, "Teacher, we have worked all night and we have caught nothing. But because You told me to, I will let the net down."

When they had done this, they caught so many fish, their net started to break. They called to their friends working in the other boat to come and help them. They came and both boats were so full of fish they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he got down at the feet of Jesus. He said, "Go away from me, Lord, because I am a sinful man." He and all those with him were surprised and wondered about the many fish. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were surprised also. They were working together with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will fish for men." When they came to land with their boats, they left everything and followed Jesus.

In the Gospel of Luke, Simon Peter gets a glimpse of the power and knowledge of Christ, and falls before him in the profound grip of his own sinfulness, but even so, is called by Christ to become of a fisher of men and answers yes to the commission.

Jesus extends to Peter the chance to be a partner in bringing a new vision of God's Kingdom to the world. And all Peter must do is leave his boat. The miracle of the fish is followed by the image of Peter pulling his boat to shore and leaving everything he has known and loved for the miracle of walking with the Messiah into the unknown. And when Peter steps out of his boat, he is followed by James and John and the first disciples are called into holy service.

Are we willing to take the word that we hear in worship out of church and into our world? Are we willing to take the risks that are certain when you step out of your boat? And, most importantly, are we willing to take positions of leadership and have faith in the belief that people will follow?

We have a choice in life. We can choose to stay in our boats and accept things as they are, or we can step out of the boat and struggle with them. We can stay in our boats, surrendering to the maladies of our lives, or we can choose to step into the water and be part of the healing. We can turn away from Jesus's call to action or we can pronounce boldly and clearly, "Here I am Lord, send me."

Along the Way: Share supper with guests who come to the Monday Night Dinner. Sit in fellowship with those gathered and expect to recognize the face of Christ at the table.

Prayer: *Holy Creator, give me strength and wisdom to know when to speak and when to listen and give me the patience to accept that my path may be different from the paths of others but they all lead to you. Amen*

Wednesday, March 18

Romans 8:35, 38-39 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 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.*

This unwavering love offered to us affirms what C.S. Lewis wrote, “The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because he loves us.” Our culture’s first view of love is that it must be earned. We don’t earn God’s love; it is a gift. And if we can’t earn God’s love, we can’t “unearn” it either.

The kind of love that God has for humanity changes us — it changes everything. A love that has defeated every enemy and foe on our behalf and has guaranteed our eternal victory is a love that ignites a response, a change in heart. We are compelled to live for the One who loves us eternally. Not out of obligation. Not out of duty. But a life lived out of the joy and hope and assurance in knowing that the One who created us, who loved us before our first breath was taken, will never stop loving us. God, through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, has guaranteed that nothing in all of creation will ever separate us from this extraordinary love. This kind of love changes the one who is loved, and through that love the world shifts toward justice, peace, and reconciliation for all.

Along the Way: Place a post-it note on someone’s car that reads, “You are loved!” Many may just throw the note away, but someone may need those words to get through their day.

Prayer *Beloved Creator, I move too quickly through your blessed creation. Help me slow down; keep my eyes open and my steps deliberate. May your light shine upon my paths and guide my life to your glory. Amen*



Thursday, March 19

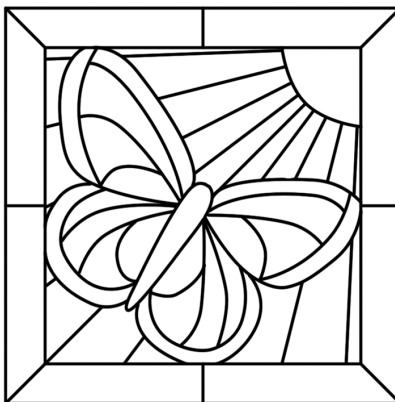
Ephesians 4:32 *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered;
 Forgive them anyway.
If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;
 Be kind anyway.
If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies;
 Succeed anyway.
If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you;
 Be honest and sincere anyway.
What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight;
 Create anyway.
If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous;
 Be happy anyway.
The good you do today, will often be forgotten;
 Do good anyway.
Give the best you have, and it will never be enough;
 Give your best anyway.
In the final analysis, it is between you and God.
 It was never between you and them anyway.

~ **Mother Teresa**

Along the Way: Send a silly card to brighten someone's day.

Prayer: *Father of my soul, Mother of my heart, I know your love for me is limitless beyond imagining. You care for me as a loving parent. Through my smallest Lenten sacrifices, help me to become less selfish and more aware of your ways. Fan the flame of my desire to draw ever closer to you. Guide me to seek your love. Amen*



Friday, March 20

Colossians 3:12-14. *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

An old Cherokee Indian chief was teaching his grandson about life.

"A fight is going on inside me," he told the young boy, "a fight between two wolves. One is evil, full of anger, sorrow, regret, greed, self-pity and false pride. The other is good, full of joy, peace, love, humility, kindness and faith."

"This same fight is going on inside of you, Grandson...and inside of every other person on the face of this earth."

The grandson ponders this for a moment and then asks,

"Grandfather, which wolf will win?"
The old man smiled and simply said, "The one you feed."

Along the Way: Set out today to seek ways to fuel the best in yourself and others. Encourage those you meet with smiles and kind words. Breathe deeply, often, and fill yourself with the spirit that will guide you in your mission to offer creation your love and attention. Believe that your presence and your words will be a blessing to all on your path.

Prayer: *God of infinite love, thank you for this reminder of your love and your call that I be more patient, gentle and compassionate with others. Here in the middle of Lent, I turn to you to beg for your help. Please soften my heart and help me to let go of judging others. I ask you this, in Jesus' name. Amen*



Saturday, March 21

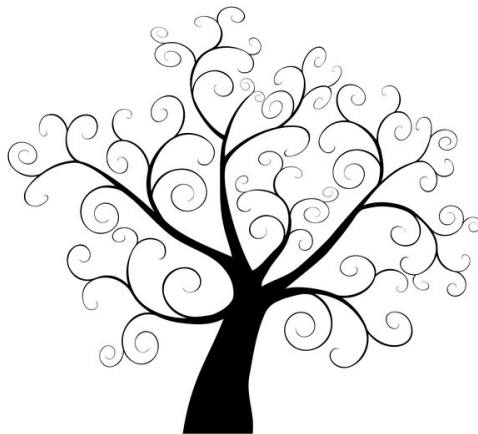
Ephesians 3:17-19 *Then Christ will make his home in your heart as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. May you have the power to know how wide, how long, how high, how deep God's love is. May you experience the love of Christ even though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.*

Paul used a picture from nature to describe our relationship to Christ's love. Just as the roots of a tree are to sink down deep into the earth in search of nutrients and stability, so the love of Christ nourishes and stabilizes the believer. Every person is in search of love, and this quest for love can cause the worst of behavior at times. But the believer who is rooted in the love of Christ has an endless supply of nourishment; love is perpetually theirs. When rooted in the love of Christ, one can walk through a drought of earthly love, but still be fruitful and alive because of a secret love deep below the surface, the love of Christ.

The love of Christ has breadth, for Paul has taught us it is wide enough for the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike. No one is beyond the scope of God's love. The love of Christ has length, for Paul has shown us it is as long as eternity, having been established from the creation of the world. The love of Christ has height, for Paul has taught us it has raised believers to be seated with Christ in the heavenly places. The love of Christ has depth, for Paul has shown us that, though we were dead in sin and followers of the flesh, the world, and the devil, we find escape in Jesus. There is no sin too deep from which Jesus is unable to grant us grace and mercy.

Along the Way: Go to the library and place notes of kindness inside books for people to find.

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, fill me with the bold courage needed for me to recognize where I am being called and how to open myself to the miracle of your movement through my bones and sinews, knowing that the ripples of my compassion will flow out into the world, making it a happier, gentler place. Amen*



Fifth Sunday in Lent

John 12:1-8

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.

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said,

“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?”

He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.

Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.

You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

Prayer: *Loving Creator, I know in your great love for me, you see the deep sorrow in my heart. Hear my prayers, which are offered with such trust in you. Be with me in both mind and heart as I renew my life in your Spirit. Amen*



Monday, March 23

Matthew 25: 31-45 *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’” They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’”

More or Less

~Susan Chesley

Let me give you some of what I have
So you will have a little more than nothing

Let me give you half of what I have
So we will both have plenty of what we need

Let me give you most of what I have
So I can feel the pleasure of wanting less

Let me give you all of what I have
So I am empty enough to be filled

Along the Way: Send a friend or family member a card on their half birthday.

Prayer: *Loving God, may I see the face of Christ in all I meet. May I feed the hungry Christ; may I console the grieving Christ; may I wrap my arms around the lonely Christ. Amen*

Tuesday, March 24

Philippians 2:1-8 *Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

*Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

Humility

~ Wendell Berry

If there are a “chosen few”
then I am not one of them,
if an “elect,” well then
I have not been elected.
I am one who is knocking at the door.
I am one whose foot
is on the bottom rung.
But I know that Heaven’s
bottom rung is Heaven
though the ladder is standing
on the earth where I work
by day and at night sleep
with my head upon a stone.

Along the Way: Introduce yourself to at least one person you don’t know at a church worship service or gathering.

Prayer: *Holy One, I pray for humility in my heart. Help me to see the value in others and to recognize my own limitations. May I approach life with a humble spirit, always willing to learn and grow. Let humility guide my actions and relationships. Amen*

Wednesday, March 25

Romans 8:25-28 *But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit intercedes for us through wordless groans. And the One who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to God's purpose.*

What is hope?

It is the pre-sentiment that imagination
is more real and reality is less real than it looks.
It is the hunch that the overwhelming brutality
of facts that oppress and repress us
is not the last word.
It is the suspicion that reality is more complex
than the realists want us to believe.
That the frontiers of the possible are not
determined by the limits of the actual;
and in a miraculous and unexplained way
life is opening up creative events
which will open the way to freedom and resurrection –
but the two, suffering and hope,
must live from each other.
Suffering without hope produces resentment and despair.
But, hope without suffering creates illusions, naïveté
and drunkenness.
So let us plant dates
even though we who plant them will never eat them.
We must live by the love of what we will never see.
That is the secret discipline.
It is the refusal to let our creative act
be dissolved away by our need for immediate sense experience
and is a struggled commitment to the future of our grandchildren.
Such disciplined hope is what has given prophets, revolutionaries and saints,
the courage to die for the future they envisage.
They make their own bodies the seed of their highest hopes.

~ **Rubin Alves**

Along the Way: Cheerfully greet someone in an elevator.

Prayer: *Lord, I lift all those who are struggling to find hope. May your light shine in their lives and dispel the darkness. Use me as an instrument of hope to encourage and support those in need. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen*

Thursday, March 26

Matthew 13:31-32 *He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."*

Matthew 17:20-21 *"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."*

A mustard seed is tiny – between one and two millimeters. You would hardly notice it because it is so small but, incredibly, it can grow into a huge plant, commonly over three yards tall. It's understandable that Jesus described it as a tree. Inevitably, a mustard plant attracts huge attention from birds who love to feed on the little black seeds.

Jesus' point is clear. When we see God at work in the world, it may not look impressive. It may appear incredibly small. But the kingdom of God is always in the growth business and so, even though it might seem tiny, it will keep growing. Sometimes a mustard seed is all you need.

If we are enough just as we were created to be, if we have faith that we are developing into the kind of people God intends for us to be, then we are free to serve the way Jesus served – simply, beautifully, without degradation, with grace and mercy. If we have even a pebble of faith in our inherent self-worth and value, a faith strong enough to level our steps even as we stumble, then we can embrace humility without any threat of humiliation. We can do our part, regardless of its size and weight, by giving our simple offering back to our Creator and Creation, trusting that in the Maker's hands it becomes exactly what it should be.

Along the Way: Fill bird feeders and enjoy whatever creatures come your way.

Prayer: *All creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful:
The Lord God made them all. Each little flower that opens, each little bird that sings,
God made their glowing colors, God made their tiny wings. May I carry these words in
my heart all day. Amen (UMC Hymnal #147)*



Friday, March 27

Psalm 121

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;
the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.*

Go Now in Peace

~Don Besig and Nancy Price

Go now in peace. Never be afraid.
God will go with you each hour of every day.
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.
Know God will guide you in all you do.
Go now in love, and show you believe.
Reach out to others so all the world can see.
God will be there watching from above.
Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.

“Go Now in Peace” was sung as a benediction every Sunday in my church in Iowa. May the sacred words of Psalm 121 and the promise of the benediction make you brave and bold today. Walk in the certainty that God’s love shadows you wherever you go and that in each place you enter, Christ Jesus went before.

Along the Way: Whether in shopping lines or in traffic, consider letting others go before you. You never know what challenges another may be facing, and your kindness may be just what they needed.

Prayer: *God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen*
(Serenity Prayer, Reinhold Niebuhr)

Saturday, March 28

Luke 19:28-35 *After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'"*

So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it."

What does Jesus need from you? Is Jesus hungry? Feed him. Is Jesus lonely? Reach out to him. Does Jesus need you to walk into places where you can serve as a servant to others? Go there and believe Jesus is walking ahead of you.

All of Creation trembles with opportunities to make straight the path toward peace and reconciliation. Never doubt your power to bring comfort to the least of these and always be ready to respond when you hear the small, still voice of God calling you into service. Each day brings an opportunity to extend to others "the peace that passes understanding." What does Jesus need? Jesus needs you!

Along the Way: Reach out to someone you haven't spoken with in a while. Invite them out for coffee and take something to share to their home.

Prayer: *Loving God, guide my mind with your truth, and strengthen my life by the example of Jesus. Give me courage this week to lift my voice with words of compassion, justice and mercy. Help me to feel how close you are and to live in union with you. Amen*



Palm Sunday

Luke 19:36-40 *Now as Jesus was going, they were spreading their cloaks on the road. And as soon as Jesus was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, shouting:*

*“Blessed is the King, the One who comes in the name of the Lord;
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

And yet some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” Jesus replied, “I tell you, if these stop speaking, the stones will cry out!”

During Holy Week, Jesus spoke to those who wished to silence his disciples saying, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out," Well, the stones are shouting now! The stones shout each time a meal is delivered to those who are hungry. The stones are shouting every time someone challenges the rush to war and the need for more weapons. The stones are shouting when we offer sanctuary and comfort to those whose very worth is challenged. The stones are shouting each time we welcome someone into our sanctuary who has felt neglected somewhere else. And the stones are shouting when parents bring their baby up to the altar and place her willingly and humbly into the arms of the church, naming her as a beloved child of God, and asking to be built up into strong witnesses of faith.

God's story of living stones is a story about us. We are like living stones, forged by the power of the Word, given life and breath so that we might testify to God's all-inclusive and unconditional love. Stones are strong and steadfast, but dead stones can also become ruins. Use your voice and your passionate energy to rock our world in troubled places and lift up those whose voices have been lost.

Along the Way: Use your voice to recognize kindness in others, injustice when witnessed, and abundant gratitude for your grace-filled life.

Prayer: *Holy God, I humbly ask that your power and wisdom fill my voice so that through my words others will know your compassionate ways. Amen*



Monday, March 30

1 John 3:16-18 *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

Prayer of St. Teresa of Avila

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Along the Way: Send a note, email or text to three people who have shown you how to walk on the path of love. Be specific as you offer your thanks for their servanthood.

Prayer: *Holy Father, watch over the meditations you have planted in my heart. Let your word take root and produce blessings and beautiful things in the lives of others I meet. Help me to walk in your love and be attentive to your movement in my soul. In Jesus' name, I believe and pray, Amen.*



Tuesday, March 31

Isaiah 58:6-8 *I will tell you the kind of fasting I want: Free the people you have put in prison unfairly and undo their chains. Free those to whom you are unfair and stop their hard labor. Share your food with the hungry and bring poor, homeless people into your own homes. When you see someone who has no clothes, give him yours, and don't refuse to help your own relatives. Then your light will shine like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your God will walk before you, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.*

Fasting seems to be an uncommon practice. In this passage, Isaiah shares a different kind of fasting. One that we could all practice. It involves self-reflection and response. Rather than for meditative purposes, it is practiced so that we can recognize the needs before us and respond through our faith. Fasting can be useful in denying our own bodily appetites so we can focus instead on God, drawing us closer to God. Staying mindful and focused on God can be difficult with so many distractions teasing away our attention. However, it is well worth it.

The fasting Isaiah is talking about is giving what you would ordinarily spend on yourself to those in need. To use fasting to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and clothe the naked. Rather than going out to eat, buy a gift card from a restaurant and give it to a person struggling with food and shelter. Instead of buying a new item of clothing, go through your closet and joyfully give away clothes you have enjoyed that others might now love. According to Isaiah, this is the kind of fasting God wants us to practice: a fast that is pleasing to God.

Along the Way: Practice tithing in your closet or pantry. Make the hard and deliberate choice to give away at least 10 items from your closet or pantry. Do not only give to others what you no longer want or need. Make the difficult choice to offer to others what you still love. Give the best of yourself in generous celebration of all you have been given.

Prayer: *Gracious and generous God, I come before you today with a heart full of gratitude. Thank you for your countless blessings and your unwavering love. Thank you for the gift of life, for the air I breathe, and for the strength you give me each day. Your grace and mercy sustain me, and I am deeply grateful for your presence in my life. May my words and actions reflect my love for you and all creation. Amen*



Wednesday, April 1

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

These ancient words have given comfort to those most in need of the reassurance of God's eternal care. They have been whispered in hospital rooms, prayed in prison and foxholes, and lifted from memory in the midst of gut-wrenching sorrow. Between shadow and light, still waters and green pastures, the promise of comfort swells in the heart. This cherished Psalm has fallen from lips for three thousand years and will continue to be spoken until words no longer exist. As you move through the encroaching darkness of Maundy Thursday, remember the bread and wine of Jesus' supper and sit silently in the expectation of the coming Light.



Prayer: *Holy God, You are everything to me. You protect me, guide me, and heal me. Under your care, my life is at its best. You provide for all my needs and bring peace to my soul. With you, I flourish. Amen*

Maundy Thursday

John 13:12-17 *When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

Allowing someone to wash our feet can be profoundly uncomfortable. When we allow others to perform this service, they see a part of ourselves that we usually keep covered because it is not as pretty and clean as we would like to be. Our willingness to humbly sit while someone gently washes our feet might just be a manifestation of how willing we are to allow them to tenderly gaze into our heart.

Yet here is Jesus: about to have his final meal with his disciples before he is arrested, beaten, and killed; knowing the betrayal that comes from one of his own, and that the rest will desert him. At this moment, Jesus takes a towel and a bowl of water and washes these dirty feet.

This is not simply a symbol. This is a very real act of humility and service. Jesus cleans off the dirt and stink; the dust and mud that cakes the disciples' feet, absorbing into his own hands the dried, cracked soles of their weariness, and making them clean once again.

Is there a way in which Jesus is calling you to humble yourself this Maundy Thursday and allow him to kneel at your feet, to wash away whatever is preventing you from receiving a fresh outpouring of his love? Are you able to place yourself in Christ's loving hands and allow him to wash you through and through? Are you willing to take the vulnerability of others into your hands as an act of sacred servitude and provide the touch of hope and release?

As we solemnly move through these heavy days toward the glory of Easter morning, may we come to a new appreciation of this great act of humility and service - for us, for our neighbor, for the stranger, and for our world.

Along the Way: Greet a stranger on the street with a smile and a message of consideration, such as "I hope you have a good day" or "Good morning! Peace be with you." Be especially mindful of people who are usually ignored or avoided.

Prayer: *Merciful God, help me to see your Creation as my family and to seek, always, peace and reconciliation with others that I may be a kind and faithful servant in your garden of Shalom. Amen*

April 3, Good Friday

John 14: 25-31 *"All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*

"You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me."

"Come now; let us leave."

Whether Jesus can clearly see what lies ahead of him, he does know that his disciples and beloved followers are moving closer to the edge of his life on earth and his ability to sit with them in parable and instructions. Jesus knows he must equip his disciples for when their world shatters. I imagine Jesus looking into the faces of his companions and seeing the terror that will soon mark their expressions. So, he promises them two things: the compassionate guidance, companionship, and wisdom of the Holy Spirit and the peace only he can give. Jesus offers this peace repetitively. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." This is no ordinary peace; it has been claimed and possessed by Christ. It is the peace of God, freely available to God's children. The disciples will need this extraordinary peace as they will surely encounter an abundance of conflict, both among themselves and in the world.

Jesus trusts that the love the disciples have for him will transcend his physical absence. Christ doesn't leave them an army outfitted with military tools and weapons of war. He leaves them companionship and peace. He leaves them not with a reminder of his love. After all, he will vividly demonstrate that. He leaves them with a reminder that their love of him should manifest in certain ways. Their love of him demands something of them. This relationship is mutual if unequal. He has prepared an inheritance for them to receive but he has also prepared them to be a people who can give, who can lead, and who can live in peace, with eyes wide open.

Along the Way: Find opportunities during the day to say to someone, "Peace be with you."

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust. Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace. Let peace fill my heart, our world, our universe. Peace, peace, peace. Amen*

Holy Saturday

Matthew 27:57-66 *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.*

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

~ St. Francis of Assisi



Easter Sunday

John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Now remain in my love.

*If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.*

*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you
and that your joy may be complete.*

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

*You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants,
because a servant does not know his master's business.*

Instead, I have called you friends,

for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go
and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the
Father will give you.*

This is my command: Love each other.

