



Lenten Devotional

We hope you'll follow along daily, be deepened in your faith through the words of your brothers and sisters in Christ, and prepare your heart to celebrate at Easter the new life he made possible for all.

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**PITTSBURGH
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY**

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2015

Written by Dr. Helen Blier, director of continuing education, and brought to you by the Continuing Education Office at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Luke 18:9-14

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

DEVOTIONAL

It's hard to read anything in Luke's account of the Good News without risking a sense of social vertigo; the accepted order of things has been flipped upside down. Business as usual has been suspended in favor of a glimpse of God's reign. Animals bear witness first to the incarnation. Samaritans become social workers. And... a tax collector surpasses a Pharisee on the holy-meter? How utterly shocking and scandalous!

The repentant pause we are called to during this purple season is more than just an internal audit of personal responsibility. Rather, Lent underscores what Luke's gospel challenges us to do in what the tax collector practices in particular. He repents. It is not just for personal behavior, but for participation in a way of life organized around taking advantage of people. Not just him but the system, too. Now, I'm sure he had a family to feed, kids who needed to go to college, maybe payments to make on the family donkey. Don't we all? And it's not like he created the system or even wanted to take advantage of people day in, day out. After all, we all have to make a living, don't we?

Don't we?

There's the rub. We are called to repent even if we just participate in (and benefit from) unjust systems that we did not create. We aren't let off the hook. Echoing the prophets who came before him, Jesus reminds us again of our call to act kindly, love justice, and walk humbly with God. Friends, we've got a long road ahead of us.

PRAYER

God, help us remember. Help us remember the dangers of self-righteousness, the myth of privilege earned, the brokenness of a world in which people are still oppressed. And help us remember your call to act kindly, live justly, and walk humbly with you. Without any of this, our worship is hollow and our lives meaningless. We ask this in the name of your crucified Son. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2015

Written by Lori Liller Arnold, administrative assistant to the director of continuing education, and brought to you by the Continuing Education Office at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Titus 1:1-16

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

4 To Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

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

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

13 That testimony is true. For this reason rebuke them sharply, so that they may become sound in the faith, 14 not paying attention to Jewish myths or to commandments of

those who reject the truth. 15 To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are corrupted. 16 They profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

DEVOTIONAL

Paul provides elaborate directions to Titus about what he is to accomplish in Crete. Many of Paul's instructions can be summed up in his reason for leaving Titus, "put in order what remain(s) to be done." This strikes me to the core since most of my days, at home and at work, involve putting things in order and making lists of what remains to be done. I am sure many of you have similar experiences. And, if you are like me, there are one or two things pushed repeatedly to the end of the list.

Rather than dreading those items day after day, perhaps we can reorder our lists. Try bumping the remains of yesterday to the top of today's list and then taking care of it. I know getting things done sounds simpler than it is but the reward is joy, fulfillment, and relief(!). Go for it!

PRAYER

Three in One, even as there is order in your creation, continue to reveal to us not only what remains for us to do but also the manner that you would have us do it in. Be with us as we have courage to change. Amen.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2015

Written by Tyler Bayless, senior MDiv student, and brought to you by the Continuing Education Office at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 130

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

8 It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

DEVOTIONAL

As we travel through this Lenten season and are going about our lives it is easy to be weighed down by the burdens that we each face. It is easy to get discouraged and in this Psalm we see that this is where the psalmist is crying from. He is crying "out of the depths" to the Lord that his voice may be heard. But yet at the same time we are also reminded that as we wait out this dark season of Lent that there is hope in the end, and that in hope there is forgiveness, love, and redemption. Our hope is found in no other but our Lord, Jesus Christ. When we come to the end of Lent as we celebrate the resurrection on Easter morning, there is no other that will hear our voice or "redeem Israel from all its iniquities" but the one who went to the cross on our behalf, Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Almighty God, we thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ who, as we cry out, is there to hear our voices, and that in hearing our cry's responds with love, forgiveness, and redemption. We thank you for all the blessings of our lives and lift up our highest praises to You as our God. We do all of this in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2015

Written by the Rev. Dr. James E. Davison '69, former director of continuing education, and brought to you by the Continuing Education Office at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 1:43-51

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

these.” 51 And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

DEVOTIONAL

Throughout Lent, as we travel the road toward the cross, we focus on our shortcomings, faults, and weaknesses. We seek to humble ourselves before the eternal, holy, righteous God whom we have so often failed. That is right, for Lent encourages us to take an honest look within ourselves.

Still...as this lectionary reading reminds us, during Lent it's also wise to look up, that is, to look beyond ourselves. After Nathanael left the shade of his fig tree, much of his life resembled one long Lenten journey to Jesus' cross, with plenty of grief, anxiety, pride, and suffering along the way. Yet along that same way, Nathanael saw why his journey was worth the struggle. For, as Jesus promised, Nathanael got to look beyond his circumstances and to see “angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

As we look within ourselves this Lent, may we also look up to the One who bridges heaven and earth and who, in the process, provides forgiveness for our failures, uniting us securely to the eternal God, forevermore.

PRAYER

Gracious God, in your Son you have brought heaven into our midst. As we seek to recognize more fully our own shortcomings and our need for that forgiveness which you have made available on the cross, make us also to know more fully the glorious truth that we are united to you through Jesus for all eternity. Amen.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2015

Written by Michelle Synder '09, executive director of Pittsburgh Pastoral Institute, and is brought to you by the Continuing Education at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 9:23-24

23 Thus says the LORD: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; 24 but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the LORD.

DEVOTIONAL

“Let not the wise boast of their wisdom, the strong boast of their strength, or the rich boast of their riches.” These words from Jeremiah echo down through the ages, for who among us has not succumbed to these, from time to time, for the sake of maintaining the illusion—even to ourselves—that we are in control and safe in the world? Our society frowns on boasting outright.

But the cars we drive, the words we use, and the numbers that we allow to define us all point to this alluring trap that Jeremiah cautions us to avoid. All of us have trusted in such fleeting things that inevitably let us down, leaving us with the raw truth that our safety and security rest in God and God alone. In this Lenten Season, how might you let go of these illusions and place your trust in whom it belongs?

PRAYER

Holy One, I am tempted to find my sense of safety in the things of this world: education, privilege, money. Teach me instead to entrust my lot to you. Amen.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2015

Written by the Rev. Sharon Dennard, dean of the Mount Ararat Theological Academy at Mount Ararat Baptist Church, and brought to you by the Metro-Urban Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Today we depart from the Daily Lectionary to explore Matthew 16.

Matthew 16:15

15 “He pressed them, ‘And how about you? Who do you say I am?’”

DEVOTIONAL

What about us? Our perception is important. Ignorance and error breeds confusion, fear, dread, panic. Our souls are disquieted. Untrue, unhealthy, and unproductive conclusions transmitted through cultural background noise and negative internal self-chatter must be cast aside. So it is only fitting that we, without reservation, echo Peter's confession: Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, the Son of the living God.

Totally innocent - though unjustly condemned.
Fully forgiving - though mercilessly persecuted.
Undeniably victorious - even while dying.
Eternally alive - and coming again.

His compassion has captured our hearts and inspired an ever-living hope and provided self-renewing mercy. When lonely, broken, weary, angry, empty, or afraid His sustaining presence revives our souls. Because of Him we are new, whole, and free.

The unique God-man standing before His disciples in Caesarea Philippi more than 20 centuries years ago is God's incomparable Christ— our Savior and Lord! He will never bail out, give up, give in, or let go. Enthroned in heaven and alive in our hearts, His realm encompasses our every thought, word, and deed. Our prayer is to daily choose to live to honor His enduring sacrifice and appreciate our own priceless redemption.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, give us ears that hear, and eyes that see, and hearts that hold compassion, that we may participate in your will until you come again. Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2015

Written by Lynn Holden, counselor, spiritual director, and a graduate of PTS's Spiritual Formation Certification program, and brought to you by the Continuing Education Office at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 3: 1-11

1 Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, 2 was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also "was faithful in all God's house." 3 Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. 4 (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) 5 Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. 6 Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.

- 7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,
"Today, if you hear his voice,
8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
as on the day of testing in the wilderness,
9 where your ancestors put me to the test,
though they had seen my works 10 for forty years.
Therefore I was angry with that generation,
and I said, 'They always go astray in their hearts,
and they have not known my ways.'
11 As in my anger I swore,
'They will not enter my rest.'"

DEVOTIONAL

"Holy partners in a heavenly calling" ...that's us! How did you hear those words when you read this passage from Hebrews? (Or did you even really hear them?) Linger here for a moment. Attend to the thoughts, feelings, and desires these few words evoke in you:

Holy...

Partners...

In...

Heavenly...

Calling...

Take note, also, of the images and bodily sensations that surface when you are addressed as a "holy partner in a heavenly calling." Do you believe that the interior movements you experienced are unique to you, and are valuable? Do you believe that the Holy Spirit is revealing something to you, through these distinctive and involuntary responses of your heart, mind, body, and imagination? Do you believe that this is worthy of your attention? Are you open to receiving the message? God's counting on it!

PRAYER

Christ Jesus, you know, better than anyone, that the needs are great. What are you counting on from me? What is mine to do? I want to be your holy partner in a heavenly calling. Give me the gift of discernment and a willing heart so that my energies are directed toward my part, and not dissipated on the work that you have for others. Holding firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope, I pray, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2015

Written by the Rev. Liddy Barlow, executive minister of Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania, and brought to you by the Continuing Education Office at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 27:1

1 "The Lord is my light and salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

DEVOTIONAL

In the dystopian novel *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, young people must enter a "fear landscape" as part of an initiation

ritual. With group leaders monitoring their brain activity, they must endure a simulation of each one of their fears, one after another.

If I had to enter a fear landscape, I might never come out: my list of fears goes on and on. Snakes and spiders, house fire and plane crashes, failure and pain. Every time I turn on the news, I hear new reasons to be afraid.

But the Psalmist reminds us that the bright salvific light of God, like a flashlight to a spooky corner, sends each one of these fears packing. What indeed shall we fear, when we know Christ is with us? Five hundred years ago, a monk scratched these wise words into the wall of a Scottish abbey: "The wise fear nothing but God."

PRAYER

God my light and salvation, assure me of your presence and free me from my fear, so that I may trust in you with my whole heart, and in that trust find joy and peace. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2015

Written by the Rev. Brenda Barnes '07, pastor of Aspinwall Presbyterian Church, and brought to you by the World Mission Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 126

- 1 When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.
- 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."
- 3 The LORD has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.
- 4 Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.
- 5 May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.
- 6 Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

Revelation 21:22

I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

DEVOTIONAL

For the pilgrims who traveled to the Temple mount of Zion, the songs of ascent were a comfort. As they traveled, dreaming first of going to that place where the Lord dwells, through the Mount of Olives, down into the Kidron Valley, and then up through the walls of the city to the very gate of the Temple, the pilgrims of the day knew they were called to go "home."

So it is with us. We can always come home to Christ. Even as we journey, first realizing our need for the Savior, and then through the experiences of mountain top and valley, we know we are moving to a better place. This movement through tears, weeping, and carrying seed to sow, to that place called joy and laughter, always starts with the Lord. The Lamb has indeed done great things for us and we are home in "Joy."

PRAYER

Lord God, we cannot comprehend how much you must love us. You release us from the firm grasp of sin, and you bring us back to you. Thank you for your great love; bring us even closer to you in this season of Lent. For the Lamb's sake. Amen

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2015

Written by the Rev. Dr. Titus Presler, adjunct faculty in missiology, and brought to you by the World Mission Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 4:11-16

11 Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.

12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

DEVOTIONAL

Probably collating stories of Jesus being tempted—the wilderness, a talk with Peter, anguish in Gethsemane—the writer to the Hebrews insists that Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, so our “great high priest” can sympathize with our weaknesses.

Temptation to sin is not temptation unless the tempted one can succumb to temptation. If Jesus could not have sinned, he would not be human and his incarnation would not save us humans. But, as Paul writes to the Philippians, Christ was emptied of divine prerogatives in becoming human. So, the very nature of God hung in the balance of Jesus’ response to temptation.

Jesus did not sin—not because he could not, but because he remained faithful. So, truly God in Christ is our companion, our empathetic priest, our savior.

PRAYER

Friend Jesus, as you were tempted, come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find your might to save. Amen.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2015

Written by the Rev. Don Dawson, director of the WMI and New Wilmington Mission Conference, and brought to you by the World Mission Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 43

- 1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
against an ungodly people;
from those who are deceitful and unjust
deliver me!
- 2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge;
why have you cast me off?
Why must I walk about mournfully
because of the oppression of the enemy?
- 3 O send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling.
- 4 Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy;
and I will praise you with the harp,
O God, my God.

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

DEVOTIONAL

The persecution of Christians headlines the news. ISIS fighters have killed 10,000 Christians. The Boko Haram have martyred thousands more. It seems like Christians are under assault like never before—in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, etc.

If many of us who are insulated from the persecution feel the offense, think how those who are caught in the middle of the violence must feel. Where are you, God, when your people are suffering so much? Why do you abandon the faithful?

The Psalmist expressed this same sentiment in his lament. “Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” Yet, the Psalmist did not pray for the death of his enemies, nor for freedom from persecution. Instead, he prayed, “Send out your light and your truth....” In a similar manner, oppressed Christians today pray for God to give them strength in the midst of the persecution, not deliverance from it. “Hope in God” is their motto.

PRAYER

Almighty God, come quickly to help all who follow you. Strengthen those who are oppressed, ostracized, beaten, and killed for your name’s sake. Abide with them by the power of your Spirit, so that they will not fail in their time of trial. Bring them through the floods and fire. May their testimony be an inspiration to all believers and a witness to those who persecute them. For the sake of Jesus, Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 2015

Written by Brian Lays, senior MDiv student, and brought to you by the World Mission Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Romans 4:13-25

13 For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

16 For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also

to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, 17 as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) — the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. 20 No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” 23 Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

DEVOTIONAL

Hope is a peculiar thing. The Christian life, I’m told, ought to be characterized and defined by hope. In many biblical passages, hope is given an exemplary status, described as something we retain. Christ’s work on the cross means that we have hope in the authentic reality that God is “for us.” While this reality goes beyond strictly ourselves, we can control our participation in it. The Christian does not sit around wishing for something, but instead actively lives into hope by allowing it to transform his or her life. Hope must be a possession—something we hold onto, indeed cling to, and wield against life’s slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. In this way, hope is not abstract and vague, but palpable and practical. It is something not to be studied or contemplated but embodied.

I want to contend that hope is something that we can possess constantly. Lent reminds us that life is finite, fragile, and, sometimes, quite difficult. Yet there is far more to hope than feeling positive and happy. Sometimes, when darkness surrounds us, we realize how deep-seated the hope within us really is. The temporary disappearance of positive feelings does not necessarily imply that we have no longer have hope. We can still possess hope when it is beyond our conscious recognition. Hope keeps pushing us, often kicking and screaming, back to God. And once in a while, its light flickers in our souls, offering us a reminder that deep inside of us, beyond our present experience, hope is still at work by power of the Spirit, making us whole and leading us onward.

PRAYER

Lord, give us a deep seated assurance that in life and in death, we belong to you. May this hope sustain us until we finish this race. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2015

Written by Katharine Campbell, administrative assistant to WMI and the Metro-Urban Institute and brought to you by the World Mission Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 121

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

Psalm 6

- 1 O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger,
or discipline me in your wrath.
- 2 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with
terror.
- 3 My soul also is struck with terror,
while you, O LORD — how long?
- 4 Turn, O LORD, save my life;
deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.
- 5 For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who can give you praise?
- 6 I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
- 7 My eyes waste away because of grief;
they grow weak because of all my foes.
- 8 Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.
- 9 The LORD has heard my supplication;
the LORD accepts my prayer.

10 All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror; they shall turn back, and in a moment be put to shame.

DEVOTIONAL

When reading these two psalms, what stands out most to me is the emphasis on God's benevolent power in our lives. We are not in control, but neither are we subject to a capricious or evil divinity. Whether things are good or bad, the Lord "will watch over your life." God hears our cries and sees our private pains—even more than that, as we look ahead to the cross and the resurrection. We see that this all-powerful God desires the ultimate good for us—a personal relationship with Him. When I read these passages, I am reminded again that God saves us because of His unfailing love. It is not up to us! God saves me, and you, because He wants to and because He loves us, not because of anything we do or say. What a comforting, liberating thought.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank You for this reminder that we are not in control of our lives, that You watch over us in every moment. We praise You for Your power and mercy and love, and we ask forgiveness for the times we forget and live our lives as if You are not there. We pray that You would give us ears to hear Your voice and eyes to see Your love, that we would then be able to share Your love with others. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2015

Written by Bradley Rito, senior MDiv student, and brought to you by the World Mission Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 1:1-10

1 The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiyah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 2 to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. 3 It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,
5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."
6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." 7 But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy';

for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you.

8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD."

9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth."
10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

DEVOTIONAL

In this passage, Jeremiah says to God, "I am only a child," to which God says, "Do not say that to me." Truly, God calls us to things we think impossible or unfitting for us. We tell God we cannot do it because we are too young or too old, we are unworthy, we are not skilled enough, we already have a "full plate" and can't take on any more tasks. Truly though, would God call us to service if God did not see us as worthy, as the right mix of youth and maturity, as able to take on this task? Also, would God leave us without the proper skills? Does God not provide for us all we could possibly need and more? God's calling us is not a sending, but an invitation to assist, to travel along God's side.

PRAYER

Almighty God, we thank you for all that you have given us. You never leave us high and dry or without the toolset that will help us to achieve your goals in the world. We pray that, as we do your work and fulfill your callings for us, we might never forget what you have done for us or your presence with us all the days of our lives. We pray this in the name of the Father through your Son, Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2015

Written by Benjamin Phipps, senior MDiv student, and brought to you by the World Mission Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 5:1-18

1 After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

2 Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. 3 In these lay many invalids — blind, lame, and paralyzed. 5 One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus

saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" 7 The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." 8 Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." 9 At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a sabbath. 10 So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, "It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat." 11 But he answered them, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Take up your mat and walk.'" 12 They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take it up and walk?'" 13 Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. 14 Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you." 15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. 16 Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. 17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father is still working, and I also am working." 18 For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus's question, "Do you want to be made well?" seems to have an obvious answer. However, I wonder how many of us spend excessive time and energy trying to prove that we are not in need of healing. Imagine Jesus asking you the same question. How would you respond? "Well, Jesus I really appreciate the offer, but I have everything in order, so no thank you."

Admitting that we need to be made well can be terrifying. When giving Jesus the opportunity to make things well, he may tell us to do something that seems ridiculous, like picking up our mats and walking. It seems too easy; such a simple command couldn't possibly lead to a changed life! Yet, somehow in the mystery of God's grace, humble obedience brings transformation. Where does it begin? Well, it begins at the pool where the invalids lay, at the place where we admit we need to be made well and cannot do it on our own. It begins not with our own pretexts, but with simple obedience and surrender to the commands of Jesus.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you long to make us well. Yet, too often in our sin and pride, we refuse your help. Forgive us for our stubbornness, and help us to surrender our lives to you so that you can transform us into new creations. Give us the

strength to serve you, the wisdom to obey you, and the humility to cry out to you. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2015

Written by the Rev. Melissa Goodman '10 and brought to you by the World Mission Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 27

- 1 The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?
- 2 When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh —
my adversaries and foes —
they shall stumble and fall.
- 3 Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.
- 4 One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.
- 5 For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.
- 6 Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.
- 7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!
- 8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"
Your face, LORD, do I seek.
- 9 Do not hide your face from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!
- 10 If my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will take me up.
- 11 Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.
- 12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.

- 13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.
- 14 Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!

DEVOTIONAL

In the season of Lent, we are challenged to wait upon the Lord once again. We are not a people who are any good at waiting. We tap our feet incessantly when waiting in a line at the grocery store. We grumble while waiting at a red light or in the often stopped traffic of the city. And we complain like Martha, when the Mary's of the world are sitting at the feet of Jesus while there is much work to be done. What if, during this season of Lent, we took time in the grocery store, while stopped in traffic, and in the midst of the busyness to wait upon the Lord? What if, we stopped the grumbling and offered a prayer of thanksgiving instead?

For in the waiting, we may just be offered a glimpse of Jesus Christ bursting forth from the grave once again.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help me this day, and in the days ahead to wait upon you, to be strong in the midst of trial, to take heart in the midst of frustrations, and to wait upon your eternal goodness and everlasting mercy. In the powerful name of Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 2015

Written by Rebecca Dix, senior MDiv student, and brought to you by the Metro-Urban Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 5:1-9

- 1 Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,
look around and take note!
Search its squares and see
if you can find one person
who acts justly
and seeks truth —
so that I may pardon Jerusalem.
- 2 Although they say, "As the LORD lives,"
yet they swear falsely.
- 3 O LORD, do your eyes not look for truth?
You have struck them,
but they felt no anguish;
you have consumed them,
but they refused to take correction.

They have made their faces harder than rock;
they have refused to turn back.

- 4 Then I said, "These are only the poor, they have no sense;
for they do not know the way of the LORD,
the law of their God.
- 5 Let me go to the rich
and speak to them;
surely they know the way of the LORD,
the law of their God."
But they all alike had broken the yoke,
they had burst the bonds.
- 6 Therefore a lion from the forest shall kill them,
a wolf from the desert shall destroy them.
A leopard is watching against their cities;
everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces
— because their transgressions are many,
their apostasies are great.
- 7 How can I pardon you?
Your children have forsaken me,
and have sworn by those who are no gods.
When I fed them to the full,
they committed adultery
and trooped to the houses of prostitutes.
- 8 They were well-fed lusty stallions,
each neighing for his neighbor's wife.
- 9 Shall I not punish them for these things?
says the LORD;
and shall I not bring retribution
on a nation such as this?

DEVOTIONAL

The questions at the end of today's lectionary text from the prophet Jeremiah quite literally pulled me up short. Throughout these verses we are shown a city of people who have turned from the LORD their God. They have done any number of transgressions. Jeremiah is running through the streets, frantic, trying to find someone, anyone who acts justly and seeks the truth. But he finds none. So in verse 9, the LORD asks "Shall I not punish them for these things? And shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this?"

And then the scripture lesson ends. What a cliff hanger! Though we could read on, I think we are supposed to pause here and take a look around in order to answer the question. Take a good long look at the world around us—the injustice, the persecution, gentrification, violence, hunger, war. We should also look inside of us—the anger, the impatience, the hatred, the aggression, the apathy. In my own evaluation, my answer was that yeah, we have failed. After all these years, these many, many years, what redemption do we deserve to receive?

That's when the shocking reality sets in. I have already received it. We have already received it—God's act of faithfulness in and through Jesus the Messiah.

PRAYER

Almighty God, thank you for your faithfulness towards us. Help guide us to live into our call to be faithful and obedient witnesses to the Kingdom, in which all things will be made new through the One who cleanses us white as snow. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 7, 2015

Written by the Rev. Dr. Johnnie Monroe, pastor emeritus of Grace Memorial Presbyterian Church, and brought to you by Metro-Urban Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 43

- 1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
against an ungodly people;
from those who are deceitful and unjust
deliver me!
- 2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge;
why have you cast me off?
Why must I walk about mournfully
because of the oppression of the enemy?
- 3 O send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling.
- 4 Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy;
and I will praise you with the harp,
O God, my God.
- 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.

DEVOTIONAL

One of the lectionary readings for today is Psalm 43. It is a heartfelt prayer of the psalmist. In this prayer he tells God about a people who were laughing at him; he tells God about an ungodly nation made up of wicked individuals. He begins his prayer by saying, "Vindicate me, O God and defend my cause." Yet, through all of that he sees God as his stronghold and he asks for God's light to guide him and for God's truth to teach him. He sees God as his hope. In the last verse, verse 5, he raises a question, as if to himself; "Why are you cast down, O my soul and why are you disquieted within

me?" Then he answers his question "Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God."

Lent is the season, in the Christian year, when we look toward Easter, the Resurrection. During this season some of us will spend time in reflection, repentance, and self-denial. As we do these things, let us do so with a sense of hope which comes through the Risen Christ, the one who overcame death and the grave. He is our hope, our joy, our peace, and our salvation.

PRAYER

Eternal God, we thank you, no matter what happens we still have hope in you and for that we praise you. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2015

Written by Sue Thorn, lead organizer of the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network, and brought to you by Metro-Urban Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Mark 5:1-20

1 They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. 2 And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. 3 He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain; 4 for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. 6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; 7 and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." 8 For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" 9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." 10 He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. 11 Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; 12 and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." 13 So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake.

14 The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. 15 They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. 16 Those who

had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. 17 Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. 18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. 19 But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

DEVOTIONAL

The man who calls himself Legion, meaning an army of thousands, asks Jesus if he might work with him. Although in Mark 1 the disciples needed encouragement and attention from Jesus, the demoniac clearly understood what he was requesting and Jesus sent him on a preaching mission, which was extremely successful and unexpected by others. This scripture was a struggle for me, as it may be for many Christians, those of us who tend to spend little time focused on the role of Satan. Through Jesus demonstrating tremendous power in dealing with Satan, and the fear that the demonstration created among people, I was forced to reflect that Jesus is willing to free us from what controls us. The question is: Are we willing to part with the elements of our lives that keep us from accepting His love and the power He has to transform our lives?

PRAYER

Lord, please help us to understand the power you have to transform our lives and demonstrate to us our need to relinquish what holds us back from taking this step. We pray that you guide us so we may experience the power to live a life that is worthy of your creation. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 9, 2015

Written by Jon Chillinsky, junior MDiv student, and brought to you by the Metro Urban Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 7:14-36

14 About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. 15 The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?" 16 Then Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. 17 Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. 18 Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one

who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him.

19 "Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?" 20 The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?" 21 Jesus answered them, "I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. 22 Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. 23 If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath? 24 Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

25 Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? 26 And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? 27 Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." 28 Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. 29 I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me." 30 Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. 31 Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, "When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?"

32 The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him. 33 Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. 34 You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." 35 The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? 36 What does he mean by saying, 'You will search for me and you will not find me' and, 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

DEVOTIONAL

How easy it is to take credit where credit is not due. It is much easier to take credit in order to get ahead, to impress, or out of pure laziness, but Jesus shows a better way (7:15-18). Surely Jesus is not stating under whom he studied to merely one-up his opponents. As if he were saying, "Not Learned you say? You learn from men in lecture halls. I learn from God! What now?" Rather, when put in the position to easily be prideful due to his marvelous teaching, he humbled himself and gave glory to God. What an exemplary situation! If we, as believers, could learn to put aside our pride and give credit where credit is due then we would become people of integrity proving the very genuineness of our faith!

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, when the temptations of pride arises, remind us of your Son in his ultimate act of humility. As he followed you until the very end, giving you the glory every step of the way, may we learn from him and give you the glory aligning our wills to yours. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2015

Written by Valerie McDonald Roberts, chief urban affairs officer in the Office of Mayor William Peduto (Pittsburgh) and brought to you by Metro-Urban Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Romans 4:13-25

13 For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

16 For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, 17 as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations") — in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. 20 No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." 23 Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

DEVOTIONAL

In the 70s, I purchased a sweatshirt with the Christian fish symbol, an *ichthys*, swimming against a wave of a school of many large ominous fish (the world), referencing Romans

12:2. Though this sweatshirt long ago entered "rag heaven", this image remains a reminder that though we are not of this world, we are fully in it, and should rely on God not to be transformed to the world nor consumed by it. As Abraham believed against all hope, we too are to be that *ichthys*, to swim with unwavering faith and strength in God against all odds, purposefully helping those in need along the way. The *ichthys* didn't swim with self-piety and judgment, but seemed to mingle love and acceptance with courage and principle. Abraham fully checked his ego at the door; then God blessed him. I bet that *ichthys* was swimming toward blessings too, but likewise had to first dump the weight of ego at his/her "door".

PRAYER

Lord, you are the source of my strength and the strength of my life. Help me to serve with humility and effectiveness, giving you the praise and honor. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2015

Written by Lisa Slayton, president of Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation, and brought to you by the Metro-Urban Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Romans 5:1-11

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

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

DEVOTIONAL

It is easy in this passage to focus only on the great hope that Paul writes of, the reconciliation back to God, because of what our Lord did for us on the cross. But, we often miss a very important response Paul calls us to—that we are to glory in our sufferings (v. 3). In our western culture, we have a poor theology of suffering. We do everything we can to avoid it and if we cannot avoid it, we muscle our way through on our own strength or wallow in self pity and lose sight of God's promises. Either way, we are lost to our own self sufficiency and put fear or pride in place of "Glory." As we look forward to the day when we celebrate the risen Lord, let us not forget that we are called to glory—to feel the full weight—in our suffering in Christ's name. Surely if he suffered the ultimate cost to reclaim our righteous standing before God, then we can embrace and even steward the suffering we face in this life. It may be our most powerful witness for the gospel of grace to a watching world.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help me to embrace and glory in my sufferings. As I reflect on the ultimate cost you paid to bring your people back into right relationship, I am aware of the times when I am suffering—in relationships, in work, in family, in health—that you are working in me to produce something far greater than my small mind can comprehend. So often, I want the hope and reconciliation without the suffering, and yet it is there that you do your best work in and through me. Please Lord, help me to feel the full weight of my suffering, knowing through it I will also find the ultimate hope, Jesus Christ. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 2015

Written by Rebecca Dix, senior MDiv student, and brought to you by the Metro-Urban Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 27

- 1 The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?
- 2 When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh —
my adversaries and foes —
they shall stumble and fall.
- 3 Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.

- 4 One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.
- 5 For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.
- 6 Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.
- 7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!
- 8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"
Your face, LORD, do I seek.
- 9 Do not hide your face from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!
- 10 If my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will take me up.
- 11 Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.
- 12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.
- 13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.
- 14 Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!

DEVOTIONAL

"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"

As I child I was very afraid of spiders. And the dark, because spiders lived in the dark along with the other monsters I was convinced were real, like the Chupacabra. Living in the Midwestern countryside, away from anything remotely close to being considered a city, meant there was a lot of darkness and a lot of spiders.

"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"

Now that I am grown up, my fears have grown up, too. I have ceased being afraid of spiders, but I am still terrified to walk home alone at night because of what or who could be lurking in the shadows. I am afraid of being alone. I'm afraid of being silenced. I'm afraid of the pain of watching the ones you love die. I'm afraid of being forgotten. I'm afraid of being powerless.

"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

PRAYER

Eternal God, we give to you our fears, trusting and believing that you are our light and our salvation. In You, we shall not fear. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2015

Written by Kimberly Gates Merrell, director of MUI, and brought to you by the Metro-Urban Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 22

- 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
- 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.
- 3 Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- 4 In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
- 5 To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.
- 6 But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
- 7 All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
- 8 "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver —
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"
- 9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
- 10 On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
- 11 Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.
- 12 Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
- 13 they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
- 14 I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;

- my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
- 15 my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
- 16 For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;
- 17 I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
- 18 they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.
- 19 But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
- 20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
life from the power of the dog!
- 21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!

- From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
- 22 I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
- 23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
- 24 For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.
- 25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
- 26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
May your hearts live forever!
- 27 All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
- 28 For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.
- 29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow
down; before him shall bow all who go down to the
dust, and I shall live for him.
- 30 Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
31 and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

DEVOTIONAL

Praise the Lord! Praise the God who is, who was and is to come! Our hope and trust is always in the Lord.

In this life we face devastating trials, anguish, betrayal, and pain. Sometimes it may even feel like the God who always felt so close is so far away. Many of us have struggled with the death of a loved one, illness, financial troubles, relational heartbreak, and personal addictions. In our despair we must lift God up above our problems. We must lift God up above our understanding. We must lift God up above our pain.

As we let go of the death grip of fear we have on our own lives and surrender to God, miracles happen. We open up our lives to victory as we set our eyes on the one who is Lord of all and with us through it all.

PRAYER

Lord we surrender our hurt, our pain, our control, and our fear. We lay our lives down before your throne. We confess that YOU ARE LORD. God, we receive your rest. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 2015

Written by Katie Galicic, junior MDiv student, and brought to you by the Church Planting Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 31

- 1 In you, O LORD, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.
- 2 Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily.
Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me.
- 3 You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,
- 4 take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.
- 5 Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.
- 6 You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols,
but I trust in the LORD.
- 7 I will exult and rejoice in your steadfast love,
because you have seen my affliction;
you have taken heed of my adversities,
- 8 and have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy;
you have set my feet in a broad place.
- 9 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also.

- 10 For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away.
- 11 I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.
- 12 I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;
I have become like a broken vessel.
- 13 For I hear the whispering of many —
terror all around! —
as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.
- 14 But I trust in you, O LORD;
I say, "You are my God."
- 15 My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and
persecutors.
- 16 Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.
- 17 Do not let me be put to shame, O LORD,
for I call on you;
let the wicked be put to shame;
let them go dumbfounded to Sheol.
- 18 Let the lying lips be stilled
that speak insolently against the righteous
with pride and contempt.
- 19 O how abundant is your goodness
that you have laid up for those who fear you,
and accomplished for those who take refuge in you,
in the sight of everyone!
- 20 In the shelter of your presence you hide them
from human plots;
you hold them safe under your shelter
from contentious tongues.
- 21 Blessed be the LORD,
for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me
when I was beset as a city under siege.
- 22 I had said in my alarm,
"I am driven far from your sight."
But you heard my supplications
when I cried out to you for help.
- 23 Love the LORD, all you his saints.
The LORD preserves the faithful,
but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily.
- 24 Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
all you who wait for the LORD.

DEVOTIONAL

It is so easy to read a scripture that reminds us of God's love and strength and power, and to think that 'I will do better, I will make my faith more apparent'. It is also easy to become distracted from God and living a Christian lifestyle, maybe even an hour later that same day. The coffee maker breaks. The car is covered in ice and snow. A loved one becomes sick. An assignment goes awry. Things little and big don't turn out how we want or expect and suddenly we are transformed from the spirit-filled worshiper in a church pew to the hopeless and burnt-out person with a flat tire on the side of the road, itching to post a Facebook status or Tweet releasing our frustrations. 'Why does this always happen to me? What did I do to deserve this?' It is so easy to ask these questions and more, to wallow in our hurt and frustration and self-pity, and to forget momentarily that we are Christians and we have God right there with us. We have God with the caffeine withdrawal, with the bitter ice and snow, with the diseased family member, and even in the hopeless assignment. We can look at all of the things that went so wrong, all of the sins we've committed, and all of the things that we were hurt by, and take refuge in our strong and forgiving God—our rock in good and bad.

PRAYER

Lord, in this season of repentance we ask you to surround us with your great presence and love. Allow us to see you in every aspect of our lives yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Teach us to turn to you in our good times and bad times, and forgive us for all of the times we try to exclude you from our lives. Lord, we are hurting from things self-inflicted and those brought to us by others. Relieve us of this pain. Lord, we forget to thank you for all of the ways you are there for us, and all of the ways you show us love. Help us to give better thanks to you, and to worship gladly. We especially thank you for the greatest gift you could have ever given us—your Son, who's death saves us from our sins and shortcomings. Thank you, God for thinking so much of your people, and extending to us a love that none could ever measure. From our humble lips to your mighty ear. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 2015

Written by Ryan Lucas, junior MDiv student, and brought to you by the Church Planting Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Mark 8:11-21

11 The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. 12 And he sighed

deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation." 13 And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side.

14 Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. 15 And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out — beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod." 16 They said to one another, "It is because we have no bread." 17 And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" They said to him, "Twelve." 20 "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven." 21 Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

DEVOTIONAL

Imagine carrying a week's worth of groceries in one big bag. Now imagine carrying that around for five months as you journey on a trail that starts in Georgia and goes 2,180 miles north to Maine. Backpacking along the Appalachian Trail is a treacherous expedition and requires you to carry a lot of food. Obtaining food is never an issue because you can stop in towns along the way and visit your favorite stores. Thousands of calories are consumed in a day and if you eat your supply before the next town there are always wonderful people to share their own provisions. In Mark 8, Jesus reminds us of the miracle in the feeding of the massive crowds and how he always provides for us as long as we have faith. I can assure you that Jesus will never let us be without food just as much that no one goes hungry hiking through the paths of life.

PRAYER

God of guidance, bless our feet as we travel down the paths of life. Lead us to be faithful travelers and encourage us to bask in the amazing beauty of your creation. Feed us when we are hungry and encourage us to go the extra mile for your glory which reigns forever. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2015

Written by Laura Bentley, middler MDiv student, and brought to you by the Church Planting Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Romans 7:1-12

1 Do you not know, brothers and sisters — for I am speaking to those who know the law — that the law is binding on a person only during that person's lifetime? 2 Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. 3 Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.

4 In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. 5 While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

7 What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived 10 and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

DEVOTIONAL

Self-improvement. It's our cultural answer to the nagging feeling that we are not quite good enough, that we are falling short of where we ought to be. We aren't doing enough, and we have to change that. Unfortunately, the season of Lent can take on this flavor of self-improvement rather than repentance.

But our repentance doesn't come from striving to do better and be better. We have "died to the law through the body of Christ." Jesus, in taking on our human nature and the consequence of our sin, has freed us from the striving to do and be better in order that we might freely bear fruit to God. When we realize the freedom we have in Christ, we also see the sin that holds us back from living out that reality. We see the sin that inhibits the intimate relationship God has initiated with us, and we turn from that sin. So what still holds you back from living as who you are in Christ? How might you

repent out of gratitude for what God has already done, rather than out of guilt or keeping score?

PRAYER

Lord God, thank you for who You have made me in Christ. Make me increasingly aware of this reality. And as I become aware of the sins in my life that hold me back from being who I truly am, give me the grace to repent, so that I may be open to serving in the new way of the Spirit. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2015

Written by BJ Woodworth '07, lead pastor of the Open Door, and brought to you by the Church Planting Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 34

- 1 I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
- 2 My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.
- 3 O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.
- 4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.
- 5 Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.
- 6 This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.
- 7 The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.
- 8 O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.
- 9 O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.
- 10 The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
- 11 Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
- 12 Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?
- 13 Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.
- 14 Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.
- 15 The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their cry.
- 16 The face of the LORD is against evildoers,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

- 17 When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,
and rescues them from all their troubles.
- 18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.
- 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD rescues them from them all.
- 20 He keeps all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.
- 21 Evil brings death to the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
- 22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be
condemned.

DEVOTIONAL

I have found one of the greatest promises in all of scripture in Psalm 34:4-5: "I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame." Brené Brown, in her March 2012 TED talk, said, shame is the intensely personal feeling that we are unworthy of love and belonging [and] an unspoken epidemic, the secret behind many forms of broken behavior. In the season of Lent as we seek the Lord we are assured that we will find deliverance from our fears. Our fears are often rooted in shame, fears of not being worthy, loveable, or belonging. But the Psalmist promises if we gaze upon the Lord, the brilliance and radiance of the favor and glory of God will overcome the dullness and disgrace of our shame.

So, I want to invite you into embodied prayer meditation.

When Ezra saw the sin of the Israelites he said, "O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.

Think over the past week. Did you ask the Holy Spirit to guide you? Is there anything you did or said or did not say or do that you are ashamed of? As a sign of humility and repentance cover your face with your hands speak openly and seek forgiveness from the Lord when you are ready. Stand and look to the Lord, for those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

We all, who with unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17-18).

PRAYER

O God, there are things before our eyes with which we are ashamed. Grant us the strength to open ourselves to humility and repentance, the courage to accept forgiveness, and the readiness to stand before your glory and be transformed. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2015

Written by the Rev. Christopher Brown '08, coordinator of CPI, and brought to you by the Church Planting Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 6:27-40

27 "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."
28 Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."
30 So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32 Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; 38 for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day."

DEVOTIONAL

In John 4, Jesus' disciples urge him to eat something. His response: "I have food to eat that you do not know about. . . . My food is to do the will of him who sent me." He had been speaking with the Samaritan woman, revealing to her that he is the Messiah. The Son of Man had been sent to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10) and fulfilling this mission was more fulfilling than any food Jesus' disciples could provide.

A short time later in John's Gospel, Jesus calls us to also seek this same nourishment from him: "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you." One works for eternal food not by the sweat of one's brow, but through "the work of God," which is "to believe in the one whom he

has sent." Those who believe are also sent, in the same way the Father sent the Son (John 20:21), and are nourished in the same way the Son was nourished—by fulfilling the will of the Father to seek and save the lost.

No matter how tantalizing our meals may taste, the fruits of the Spirit are more delectable, and they grow within us as we join in Christ's mission. This Lent, may we be filled with eternal food as we summon all whom Jesus came to seek and save to join us in the heavenly feast.

PRAYER

Almighty Father, thank you for giving us the bread of heaven, your Son who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Let our food be to always do your will, to believe in your Son, and to proclaim his reign and his glory. Give us this bread always, that we may be nourished to do your will and that our world may know your life. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2015

Written by Vera K. White, associate for 1001 New Worshipping Communities, PCUSA, and brought to you by the Church Planting Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 22:21

21 I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, "I will not listen."

Romans 8:12-27

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — 13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ — if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the

whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. 27 And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

DEVOTIONAL

When my son Alex was a little boy one of his favorite books was Judith Viorst's *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. Poor Alexander! He woke up with gum in his hair, and his day just got worse – stubbing his toe, going to the dentist, no dessert in his lunch box – sheesh! While my son may have outgrown the book, no one outgrows the experience of having that kind of day. In fact, I've been feeling as if I swallowed an extra-large dose of terrible-horrible lately. Poor me! But guess what: There is a special gift that comes with suffering. While I am often tempted to go it alone during times of smooth sailing, suffering brings out the cries of "Abba! Father!" an acknowledgment that I am weak and powerless, a realization of my need for God, a reminder of God's suffering on behalf of the world.

PRAYER

Abba, Father, hear our sighs for the suffering of the world you love. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2015

Written by the Rev. Brian Snyder '05, pastor of Bower Hill Community Church, and brought to you by the Church Planting Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Romans 8:28-39

28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own

Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33 Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

DEVOTIONAL

Plants, animals, microbes—all manner of living organisms must die each day so that I can live. Of course, if I lived more simply, it would mean fewer deaths. But even a vegan's life means death to kales and parsnips. It's the way of God's world. At a visit to PTS, Walter Brueggemann bemoaned the fact that Romans 8 has been relegated to funerals. And yet, the text speaks to the pervasiveness of death in our world. Besides, it's just two weeks to Good Friday, and Jesus' impending death is on our minds. This is the bittersweet truth of Christ's gospel: There is no life without death. It's a hard truth that occasionally catches us sideways. But, our comfort is the question: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" Even death cannot, for death is the means by which life is achieved.

PRAYER

Spirit of life, nothing can separate us from you. You bring renewal even to those places where we see only death. Give us the fresh eyes of faith to see life breaking out anew, both around us and within, through Jesus your Child. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2015

Written by Matthew Morris, middler MDiv student, and brought to you by the Church Planting Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Today we depart from the Daily Lectionary to explore Mark 1.

Mark 1:14-15

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

DEVOTIONAL

I've always hated waiting for something and not knowing what to expect with a passion. Tell me we're going to be trying something new, and I will attempt to do enough research on the things we'll be doing or what we'll be eating to write a short essay. I am very much the product of a Post-Enlightenment education.

Considering this, at least once a week I find that me being a Christian today is rather ironic because our walk with God is full of deep mysteries: Where will He send me? What will I do when I get there? Who, if anyone, will be there with me?

However, we must give up the comforting sense of control that foreknowledge grants us and trust God.

This act of trust begins with baptism, for in baptism we are not just made clean, but utterly remade in the death and resurrection of Christ. It is a dying to our love of control, and there is no mystery more frightening than death. The fact that Christ goes ahead of us into the waters is our only comfort, and in accepting baptism we proclaim that His guidance and love is enough. So committed, we join Him in the wilderness, and await the appointed time for our work to begin, progress, and eventually end.

I find myself deeply afraid in the midst of the uncertainties of my walk, but I can look back and know that my life would be tragically less had I never entered the water.

PRAYER

Abba Father, thank you for meeting us here and leading us forth in a new way. Guide our watching and anxious wanderings, and may they lead us back to the deep mystery of your baptism this Lent. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 22, 2015

Written by the Rev. John Magnuson SYI '05 / '13, associate pastor for youth, young adult, and family ministries at ShadySide Presbyterian Church, and brought to you by the Miller Summer Youth Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 150

- 1 Praise the Lord!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty firmament!
- 2 Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

- 3 Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!
- 4 Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!
- 5 Praise him with clanging cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
- 6 Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!

DEVOTIONAL

We are now almost through Lent, feeling the progression of this holy season as the days and weeks pass by from the dark cold days of February to the mild end of March. Our very bodies search to soak in the fragile rays of light that sneak through the dreariness that often complement the mood of Lent. Our bodies feel Lent. The ashes placed on our foreheads a few weeks ago once embedded into our pores, are long washed away. Although the physical marker is gone, perhaps the words, which accompanied those ashes, have stuck with you, "...you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19).

During this long 40 day season, our entire being, body, and mind feel the strain of Lent. With Psalm 150, we are reminded that our entire being is created to praise God at all times. The end of the Psalms is also our beginning. As we hear the words, "Let everything that breathes praise the LORD," we are reminded of the breath of God that flowed into the dust to give us our life. Take in a deep breath today, and remember that in life and in death, in darkness and in light, from dust to dust, we are God's.

PRAYER

Holy God, giver of life, we pray that you would breathe fresh upon us your Spirit so that we may continue in our days praising your name. Let everything that breathes praise the LORD. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2015

Written by Brian Lays SYI '06, senior MDiv student, and brought to you by the Miller Summer Youth Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Today we depart from the Daily Lectionary to explore 2 Corinthians 2.

2 Corinthians 12:10

"For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

DEVOTIONAL

Many people tend to think about life in terms of categories. It helps us make good decisions, plan for the future, and make sense of the world around us. Yet, when it comes to understanding the depths of God, the weight of mystery blurs our categories, and we reach a dead end. The most weighty moments of our lives—disappointments, losses, transitions—defy our neat and clean understanding.

There is no better example of an event that defies our categories than the cross of Christ! Jesus' journey toward Good Friday is "good" in that it is "for us and our salvation," yet "bad" in that it is tragic, violent, and filled with despair. The cross is a "strength" in that it is the culmination of God's plan for our salvation, yet it exhibits the depth of "weakness" God was willing to adopt on our behalf.

The cross forces us to hold together conflicting perceptions of reality: joy and sorrow, peace and fear, immanence and transcendence. Paradox is essential to our understanding of God and God's work in our lives. It allows us to think in "both/and" categories rather than only "either/or" categories. The Lenten journey is one of paradox. Rather than thinking about Lent as a time of happiness or sadness, perhaps the two can be held together in a kind of "bright sadness," to borrow a term from Richard Rohr. Such thinking allows more room for mystery in our thoughts as we ponder the old rugged cross.

PRAYER

Lord, the depths of your work for us go beyond our capacity to understand. Yet, let us rest in and drink deeply from the flow of your grace in all that we do. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2015

Written by Bradley Rito SYI '08, senior MDiv student, and brought to you by the Miller Summer Youth Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Today we depart from the Daily Lectionary to explore 1 Corinthians 3.

1 Corinthians 3:11-23

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

survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If the work is burned, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire. 16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. 18 Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." 21 So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future — all belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

DEVOTIONAL

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him." These lines are some of the most powerful I have ever read. It invokes so many undoubtable truths that every person needs to carry with them. We are sacred in God's sight because we have been made into a resting place for the Spirit. Should anyone cause us harm, we need not seek revenge, for that resides in God's hands. We must do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Also though, we much respect ourselves in body, mind, and spirit, and practice self-care, a practice that, for caregivers in general, gets pushed to the backburner in an attempt to remain selfless or to remain more available for those we care for. Honorable though our intentions may be, we are sacred temples for God and the Spirit, and therefore must do unto ourselves as we do unto others.

PRAYER

Almighty God, you make our bodies into a most-holy place for the Spirit to reside. You give us the promises of safety. You give us lessons by which we can shape our lives, in word and in deed. We pray that, as we live the blessed lives you have given us, we might respect these holy temples and live by the lessons you have taught us. This we, in the name of the Father through your Son, Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, pray. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25 2015

Written by the Rev. Laura Blank SYI '01 / '13, pastor of Colver and Ebensburg Presbyterian Churches, and brought to you by the Miller Summer Youth Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 10:1-18

1 "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7 So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away — and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

DEVOTIONAL

The neighboring farm has the most unusual flock of "Jacob Sheep". These spotted sheep, with the rams often having four or even six large horns, are descended from an ancient Middle Eastern breed. Their name is a nod to Jacob selecting the spotted sheep from Laban's flock, and their looks quite literally stop traffic. One frigid day in lambing season, the flock's giant Great Pyrenees guard dog was fiercely protecting a tiny newborn, claiming it as her own. (Not to worry! After a game of distraction, the lamb was returned to its mother.)

We are tempted to do the same. Forgetting the flock belongs not to us, but to the Good Shepherd, we exhaust ourselves with our efforts to corral, control, and direct. Thinking we

know best, we fiercely guard our own ideas and plans for the Church. However, we need to be open to hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd telling us to “Heel!” and let Christ lead the flock!

PRAYER

Guiding God, true shepherd of the flock, help us to hear and answer to your voice above all, that we may follow your leading and respond to your calling, through Jesus Christ our Good Shepherd. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2015

Written by the Rev. Nathan Leslie SYI '02 / '10, pastor of Bessemer Presbyterian Church, and brought to you by the Miller Summer Youth Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 10:19-42

19 Again the Jews were divided because of these words. 20 Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?” 21 Others were saying, “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

22 At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. 24 So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” 25 Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; 26 but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. 27 My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. 30 The Father and I are one.”

31 The Jews took up stones again to stone him. 32 Jesus replied, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?” 33 The Jews answered, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.” 34 Jesus answered, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods?’” 35 If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’ — and the scripture cannot be annulled — 36 can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? 37 If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. 38 But if I do them, even though you do not

believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” 39 Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.

40 He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. 41 Many came to him, and they were saying, “John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.” 42 And many believed in him there.

DEVOTIONAL

I was blessed to grow up on a small dairy farm that has been in my family for 200 years. Although I was never much the farmer, I did help to take care of my family’s 35 dairy cows. My job was to go out into the fields and call them home each evening for milking. I remember when my parents first had me do this, the cows did not respond. My dad explained that they probably didn’t recognize my voice. As he called them for me, I noticed the way he made the call and how they suddenly came. When I imitated him the next time, the cows came with little problem. They knew the farmer’s call and didn’t listen to another. It’s no wonder they respond to the farmer alone; the farmer is the one who knows them by name and who cares for them each and every day.

As I hear Jesus’ words today, I cannot help but remember this episode from my childhood. It is a reminder to listen, on our Lenten journey and always, for the voice of the one who by his incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension, is leading us through this life, who knows us by name, who provides and cares for us, and gives to us eternal life.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the great Shepherd who laid down your life for your sheep. Though we, like them, are often wayward and stubborn, may we by your grace be attentive and responsive to your call above all else, even with all that competes for our attention and devotion. To you be praise, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

Written by the Rev. Derek Davenport SYI '97 / '05, director of enrollment and co-director of SYI, and brought to you by the Miller Summer Youth Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 11:1-27

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 Mary was the one who

anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4 But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. 10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." 11 After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

DEVOTIONAL

This passage is fascinating. We usually focus on the end of the chapter, but there is something shocking in this first part.

Jesus let Lazarus die.

Jesus is told what will happen, and refuses to rush to help. Elsewhere we've seen Jesus heal from a distance—but not this time.

Jesus let Lazarus die.

Awful things happen. We get the news we dread. We lose those closest to us.

Jesus let Lazarus die.

Ultimately, whether we feel it or not, this is good news—not because bad things happen, but because Christ doesn't just temporarily slow pain or alleviate suffering. Jesus does not simply postpone death.

Jesus reverses death.

We worship a God of resurrection. As we head to Good Friday, we know that Jesus even refused to postpone his own death. The good news of the gospel is that he rose.

PRAYER

Lord, we thank you that you are a God of resurrection. Weep with us in our sorrow, and assure us of your promise of joy and life. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 2015

Written by the Rev. Catherine Craley SYI '00 / '07, pastor of Round Rock Presbyterian Church, and brought to you by the Miller Summer Youth Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 43

- 1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from those who are deceitful and unjust deliver me!
- 2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you cast me off? Why must I walk about mournfully because of the oppression of the enemy?
- 3 O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.
- 4 Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.
- 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

DEVOTIONAL

Is it wrong that as a pastor, I find great comfort in psalms like Psalm 43? After a long week that makes me feel like I work for the complaints department rather than for Jesus Christ, reading Psalm 43 is a balm to my soul. Whether we are leaders or members of a Christian community, as much as we love those we serve with, there are days when “vindicate me O God” and “deliver me from these people” are the words that ring truest in our hearts. It is on those days, that we can rant along with the Psalmist saying: “Lord, get your light and truth down here and lead me out of this gloomy state! Express-lane-me into your presence!” For we know that it is only at the altar of the Lord that the exceeding joy of Christ can be found, even in the midst of our frustrations.

PRAYER

Lord, today the people you have asked me to love are getting me down. Send me your light and your truth. Lead me to higher ground. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 29, 2015

Written by Joy Pedrow SYI '11 and brought to you by the Miller Summer Youth Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Zechariah 9:9-12

- 9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
- 10 He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
- 11 As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant
with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
- 12 Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.

DEVOTIONAL

We desire to rule over our lives as king, but following Jesus includes giving up that control. There can only be one king—you or Jesus. Thus, we have to take off our crown.

Let's look at the importance of the word crown. Crown is mentioned 57 times in the ESV Bible. Here are three of those verses and the importance of the crown mentioned in each verse:

1. “And he took the crown of their king from his head” (2 Sam 12:30). David took off the crown and placed it on his head. David knew that there could only be one king.
2. “He has stripped from me my glory and taken the crown from my head” (Job 19:9). If we don't remove our crown, Jesus will.
3. “You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God” (Isa 62:3). When you give Jesus your crown, you become a crown of beauty in his eyes.

Jesus wore a crown of thorns. If we continue to make ourselves kings, we are mocking Jesus. We are taking the crown off his head and placing it on our own.

Who will be the king of your life—you or Jesus?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we humble ourselves before the Lord by taking off our prideful crowns and giving them to Jesus. So that then, and only then, we can experience the true prize—being exalted by Jesus, the one and only King. In your name we pray. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 30, 2015

Written by Lisa Davis, senior MA student, and brought to you by the Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 12:9-19

9 When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10 So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, 11 since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

12 The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. 13 So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord —
the King of Israel!”

14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:
15 “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt!"

16 His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. 17 So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. 18 It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. 19 The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!"

DEVOTIONAL

The Jerusalem crowd's shouts of Hosanna found in today's Gospel reading have always fascinated me. Only a few chapters later, we see another crowd shouting for this same man to be crucified—utter exultation to complete condemnation in a matter of days.

What's more, today's Gospel reading tells us that the people came not for Jesus's sake, but also to see Lazarus. In other words, the people's hearts were not in the right place. They were seeking signs, miracles, and results instead of solely seeking the One for His own sake. Now, at the beginning of Holy Week, is the perfect time to learn from this crowd. Are we missing out on what God is doing because we are seeking something other than Him for His own sake? Let us use this week to recommit ourselves to seeking Jesus for Who He is, taking time to sit at His feet and experience Him, free from the burden of our expectations. Let us seek Him alone.

PRAYER

Holy Father, we come to You asking for our hearts to be prepared to receive Your truth. Help me to seek after You for Who You are, trusting that my expectations are not necessary for You to work in my life. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 31, 2015

Written by Drew Myers, senior MDiv student, and brought to you by the Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 3:15-21

15 Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. 16 Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

17 Brothers and sisters,] join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18

For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

DEVOTIONAL

This world can be very attractive to us. Often we find our stomachs, minds, and hearts focused on earthly things, instead of heavenly things. But, oh what joy we find when we know the one whom transforms us from that earthly state!

Having our citizenship in heaven is exciting in so many ways, but one of the greatest is knowing that we are claimed. We do not gain citizenship by any of our own movements or thoughts, yet we are claimed as belonging in that place which seems furthest away from our current existence. We are claimed as ones to have our humiliating stomachs, minds, and hearts transformed into His glory. Oh, what joy in being claimed!

PRAYER

God of all, we thank you for coming to us, even in our weakest movements. Be with us even when we become enemies of the cross in our lust for this world. Help us to be the people displaying your Kingdom on this earth, and to welcome every person as a citizen in our communities as you have done for us. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 2015

Written by Marty Neal, junior MDiv student, and brought to you by the Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 12:27-36

27 "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say — 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." 29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.
34 The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" 35 Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light."

After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

DEVOTIONAL

In my youth I played club rugby in Columbus, Ga., and another member of the club, Dave, used to shout "Learn it, live it, love it." The idea behind the saying was that rugby was more than a game; it was an attitude and a way of living life.

In today's Gospel reading from John, Jesus says, "Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of the light." The disciples still did not fully comprehend the nature of Jesus' death or his role in God's salvific plan. This is demonstrated in their denial and hiding after Jesus' death. After Jesus appeared to them and provided the gift of the Holy Spirit, their trust blossomed and they became children of the light.

As Easter approaches, I invite others to reaffirm our trust in Jesus and seek renewed growth in the Spirit that others will be able to see and know the light of Jesus Christ working through our lives. "Learn it, live it, love it."

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, as Jesus fulfilled your will on the cross, help us to do your holy will. Give us the strength to show your life and share your story in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2015

Written By Benjamin Rumbaugh, junior MDiv student, and brought to you by the Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

- 1 I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my supplications.
- 2 Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

- 12 What shall I return to the LORD
for all his bounty to me?
- 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation

- and call on the name of the LORD,
- 14 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.
- 15 Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.
- 16 O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.
You have loosed my bonds.
- 17 I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice
and call on the name of the LORD.
- 18 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,
- 19 in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!

DEVOTIONAL

I find so much solace in Psalm 116 as it speaks to the intimacy and deliverance found in the LORD. The opening lines evoke emotions of love, comfort, and empathy as the psalmist is heard by the ear of the LORD. As we awaken from the cold stillness of winter, I picture God listening to our lamentations of hibernation as we prepare for the resurrection of spring, for the resurrection found in Christ. With Easter beckoning, where do we find the empathy that the psalmist beautifully alludes to?

When we do find it, how are we to respond? The psalmist does so through praise and gratitude. Indeed, as I imagine Christ and the disciples sharing one last meal, I have abundant gratitude toward the empathy God feels for us through Christ. Let this meal be a symbol of our intimate connection with Christ, and in its mystery let us react through praise.

PRAYER

Creator God, allow us the grace to find assurance in your open ear. You hear our cries and offer deliverance through Christ's love, through his suffering and everlasting empathy. Allow us the ability to respond to your awesome reality through praise and gratitude—praise for the intimacy of your meal, gratitude for the moment and space it creates with you. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 2015

Written by Jennifer Hipple '11 and brought to you by the Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 22

- 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words
of my groaning?
- 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.
- 3 Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- 4 In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
- 5 To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.
- 6 But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
- 7 All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
- 8 "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver —
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"
- 9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
- 10 On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
- 11 Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.
- 12 Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
- 13 they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
- 14 I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
- 15 my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
- 16 For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;
- 17 I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
- 18 they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.
- 19 But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
- 20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!

- 21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!

- From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
- 22 I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
 - 23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
 - 24 For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.
 - 25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
 - 26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
May your hearts live forever!
 - 27 All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
 - 28 For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.
 - 29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow
down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.
 - 30 Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
 - 31 and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

DEVOTIONAL

Both Mark and Matthew record Jesus quoting from verse one of this psalm as He hung bloodied and pierced upon the cross. We may never comprehend the depths of His afflictions there. Yet, this cry of God-forsakenness is not the end of the story, nor even, as Jesus would have known, the end of this Psalm.

In following verses the word "trust" repeatedly stands out: the trust of the Jewish fathers, the Psalmist's own trust in times past, and the trust he is now being mocked for. In the midst of the horrible suffering recounted by the Psalmist and of Jesus in the Passion narrative, the theme of hope also springs forth. There is hope for the world, for all peoples, for the future, and in the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

What the Psalmist recognized, and Jesus well-knew, is also true for us. God "has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him, He heard" (vs 24).

Whatever your pain, whatever your sorrow, those times of desolation, deprivation, poverty, humiliation, abandonment, illness in mind or body, when all seems lost, our God sees and hears. Our God cares. He is with us, and we have hope!

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, when all seems hopeless and we feel forsaken and all alone, please awaken us once again to the hope we have in You. Help us to trust in Your power and Kingship. May we know You in an ever-deeper way as the One Who “has borne our grief and carried our sorrows” and promises, “lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

SATURDAY, APRIL 4, 2015

Written by Dr. Karen Bowden Cooper, curator of the Museum and lecturer in Hebrew, and brought to you by the Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 43

- 1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from those who are deceitful and unjust deliver me!
- 2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you cast me off? Why must I walk about mournfully because of the oppression of the enemy?
- 3 O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.
- 4 Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.
- 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

DEVOTIONAL

For the disciples of Jesus this was a day of grief, isolation, and fear. In the shadow of the cross, they are vulnerable, now threatened with the scorn and mistreatment suffered by their beloved teacher. For us it is a day to confront death and to recall the desolation of those who experience violence and who are left to mourn in its wake.

The psalm expresses the conflicting emotions of one who has known God’s protection but who now is beset by enemies. He demands justice and accuses God of casting him off, but his wavering soul is steadied as if by the prayer itself. In “O send out your light and your truth, let them lead me,” the psalmist entrusts himself to God and opens his still unquiet heart to hope.

PRAYER

Loving and gracious God, we thank you for Jesus, and the hope that his life brings even in the darkness. Help us to witness that hope in the world. Amen.

SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 2015

Written by KJ Norris-Wilke '14 and brought to you by the Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 20:1-18

1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to their homes.

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” 14 When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and

said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).
17 Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

DEVOTIONAL

I have seen the Lord! Jesus is risen! He is risen, indeed!

Confidence that the Lord Jesus Christ has been raised from death to life permeated the early church. This confidence led believers to create monuments, buildings, and other artworks to proclaim what resided so concretely in their being. One of the earliest known baptisteries resides in an ancient house church in Syria. This archaeological site, known as Dura-Europos, includes a large mural whose central image leading up to the font appears to be a group of women walking toward a tomb, proclaiming confidence in Jesus' resurrection and drawing them toward worship.

Brothers and Sisters, we are called to the same confidence. Today as we remember the Lord's resurrection, let us also remember our baptism. Our old lives have been put to death, and we have been raised to new life in Jesus Christ. Our Lord is risen! Let us profess this today not only with our mouths but embody it in our lives.

PRAYER

Risen Lord, we give you thanks and praise that you have conquered sin and death and have been raised to new life. Enable us to live as a resurrected people, living each day in the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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Founded in 1794, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary is a graduate theological school of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Rooted in the Reformed tradition, the Seminary is committed to the formation of women and men for theologically reflective ministry and to scholarship in service to the global Church of Jesus Christ.

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