



Big Book of Lenten Devotionals—Year 1

Based on the Daily Lectionary of the
Book of Common Worship

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's 2024 "Big Book of Lenten Devotionals—Year 1" gives you a valuable resource for personal and corporate Spiritual formation during the Lenten season. Each section includes multiple biblical passages from the daily lectionary, reflections based on those passages, and accompanying prayers based on each reflection. Seminary alumnae/i, faculty, staff, Board members, and students have contributed to this resource to help enrich your Lenten worship for many years to come.



The Big Book of Lenten Devotionals – Year 1, 2024

This compendium of devotionals follows the Daily Lectionary readings for Lent 2024. In this resource, you will find one or more devotionals and accompanying prayers on each of the passages listed, *except for those passages highlighted in red.*

You will also find Lenten devotionals and prayers on several additional readings—Genesis 2:15-17/3:1-13, 20-24; Psalm 36:5-11; Psalm 114:1-8; Isaiah 49:1-7; John 12:1-82; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; and Philippians 2:5-11.

The devotionals in this compendium are grouped into sections, which appear in the following order:

Morning and Evening Readings: Psalms
First Readings: Old Testament Law and Prophets
Second Readings: New Testament Epistles
Gospel Readings

Click on the hyperlink to a given passage to navigate quickly to the text, followed by the related devotional(s) and prayer(s).

Day 1 – February 14 (Ash Wednesday)

- Morning [Psalms 5](#); [147:1-11](#)
- First Reading **Amos 5:6-15**
- Second Reading [Hebrews 12:1-14](#)
- Gospel Reading [Luke 18:9-14](#)
- Evening [Psalms 27](#); [51](#)

Day 2 – February 15

- Morning [Psalms 27](#); [147:12-20](#)
- First Reading [Hab 3:1-10 \(11-15\) 16-18](#)
- Second Reading [Philippians 3:12-21](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 17:1-8](#)
- Evening [Psalms 126](#); [102](#)

Day 3 – February 16

- Morning [Psalms 22](#); [148](#)
- First Reading [Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32](#)
- Second Reading [Philippians 4:1-9](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 17:9-19](#)
- Evening [Psalms 105](#); [130](#)

Day 4 – February 17

- Morning [Psalms 43](#); [149](#)
- First Reading [Ezekiel 39:21-29](#)
- Second Reading [Philippians 4:10-20](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 17:20-26](#)
- Evening [Psalms 31](#); [143](#)

Day 5 – February 18

- Morning [Psalms 84](#); [150](#)
- First Reading **Daniel 9:3-10**
- Second Reading **Hebrews 2:10-18**
- Gospel Reading **John 12:44-50**
- Evening [Psalms 42](#); [32](#)

Day 6 – February 19

- Morning [Psalms 119:73-80](#); [145](#)
- First Reading [Genesis 37:1-11](#)
- Second Reading [1 Corinthians 1:1-19](#)
- Gospel Reading [Mark 1:1-13](#)
- Evening [Psalms 121](#); [6](#)

Day 7 – February 20

- Morning [Psalms 34](#); [146](#)
- First Reading [Genesis 37:12-24](#)
- Second Reading [1 Corinthians 1:20-31](#)
- Gospel Reading [Mark 1:14-28](#)
- Evening [Psalms 25](#); [91](#)

Day 8 – February 21

- Morning [Psalms 5](#); [147:1-11](#)
- First Reading [Genesis 37:25-36](#)
- Second Reading [1 Corinthians 2:1-13](#)
- Gospel Reading [Mark 1:29-45](#)
- Evening [Psalms 27](#); [51](#)

Day 9 – February 22

- **Morning** [Psalms 27; 147:12-20](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 39:1-23](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 2:14-3:15](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 2:1-12](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 126; 102](#)

Day 10 – February 23

- **Morning** [Psalms 22; 148](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 40:1-23](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 3:16-23](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 2:13-22](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 105; 130](#)

Day 11 – February 24

- **Morning** [Psalms 43; 149](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 41:1-13](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 4:1-7](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 2:23-3:6](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 31; 143](#)

Day 12 – February 25

- **Morning** [Psalms 84; 150](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 41:14-45](#)
- **Second Reading** [Romans 6:3-14](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [John 5:19-24](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 42; 32](#)

Day 13 – February 26

- **Morning** [Psalms 119:73-80; 145](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 41:46-57](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 4:8-20 \(21\)](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 3:7-19a](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 121; 6](#)

Day 14 – February 27

- **Morning** [Psalms 34; 146](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 42:1-17](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 5:1-8](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 3:19b-35](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 25; 91](#)

Day 15 – February 28

- **Morning** [Psalms 5; 147:1-11](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 42:18-28](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 5:9-6:11](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 4:1-20](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 27; 51](#)

Day 16 – February 29

- **Morning** [Psalms 27; 147:12-20](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 42:29-38](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 6:12-20](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 4:21-34](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 126; 102](#)

Day 17 – March 1

- **Morning** [Psalms 22; 148](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 43:1-15](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 7:1-9](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 4:35-41](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 105; 130](#)

Day 18 – March 2

- **Morning** [Psalms 43; 149](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 43:16-34](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 7:10-24](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 5:1-20](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 31; 143](#)

Day 19 – March 3

- **Morning** [Psalms 84; 150](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 44:1-17](#)
- **Second Reading** [Romans 8:1-10 \(11\)](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [John 5:25-29](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 42; 32](#)

Day 20 – March 4

- **Morning** [Psalms 119:73-80; 145](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 44:18-34](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 7:25-31](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 5:21-43](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 121; 6](#)

Day 21 – March 5

- **Morning** [Psalms 34; 146](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 45:1-15](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 7:32-40](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 6:1-13](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 25; 91](#)

Day 22 – March 6

- **Morning** [Psalms 5; 147:1-11](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 45:16-28](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 8:1-13](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 6:13-29](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 27; 51](#)

Day 23 – March 7

- **Morning** [Psalms 27; 147:12-20](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 9:1-15](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 6:30-46](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 126; 102](#)

Day 24 – March 8

- **Morning** [Psalms 22; 148](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 47:1-26](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 9:16-27](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 6:47-56](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 105; 130](#)

Day 25 – March 9

- **Morning** [Psalms 43; 149](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 47:27-48:7](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 7:1-23](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 31; 143](#)

Day 26 – March 10

- **Morning** [Psalms 84; 150](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 48:8-22](#)
- **Second Reading** [Romans 8:11-25](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [John 6:27-40](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 42; 32](#)

Day 27 – March 11

- **Morning** [Psalms 119:73-80; 145](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 49:1-28](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 7:24-37](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 121; 6](#)

Day 28 – March 12

- **Morning** [Psalms 34; 146](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 49:29-50:14](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 11:2-34](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 8:1-10](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 25; 91](#)

Day 29 – March 13

- **Morning** [Psalms 5; 147:1-11](#)
- **First Reading** [Genesis 50:15-26](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 12:1-11](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 8:11-26](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 27; 51](#)

Day 30 – March 14

- **Morning** [Psalms 27; 147:12-20](#)
- **First Reading** [Exodus 1:6-22](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 12:12-26](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 8:27-9:1](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 126; 102](#)

Day 31 – March 15

- **Morning** [Psalms 22; 148](#)
- **First Reading** [Exodus 2:1-22](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 12:27-13:3](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 9:2-13](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 105; 130](#)

Day 32 – March 16

- **Morning** [Psalms 43; 149](#)
- **First Reading** [Exodus 2:23-3:15](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 13:1-13](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 9:14-29](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 31; 143](#)

Day 33 – March 17

- **Morning** [Psalms 84; 150](#)
- **First Reading** [Exodus 3:16-4:12](#)
- **Second Reading** [Romans 12:1-21](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [John 8:46-59](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 42; 32](#)

Day 34 – March 18

- **Morning** [Psalms 119:73-80; 145](#)
- **First Reading** [Exodus 4:10-20\(21-26\)27-31](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Corinthians 14:1-19](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 9:30-41](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 121; 6](#)

Day 35 – March 19

- **Morning** [Psalms 34; 146](#)
- **First Reading** [Exodus 5:1-6:1](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Cor 14:20-33a, 39-40](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 9:42-50](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 25; 91](#)

Day 36 – March 20

- **Morning** [Psalms 5; 147:1-11](#)
- **First Reading** [Exodus 7:8-24](#)
- **Second Reading** [2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 10:1-16](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 27; 51](#)

Day 37 – March 21

- **Morning** [Psalms 27](#); [147:12-20](#)
- **First Reading** [Exodus 7:25-8:19](#)
- **Second Reading** [2 Corinthians 3:7-18](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 10:17-31](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 126](#); [102](#)

Day 38 – March 22

- **Morning** [Psalms 22](#); [148](#)
- **First Reading** [Exodus 9:13-35](#)
- **Second Reading** [2 Corinthians 4:1-12](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 10:32-45](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 105](#); [130](#)

Day 39 – March 23

- **Morning** [Psalms 43](#); [149](#)
- **First Reading** [Exodus 10:21-11:8](#)
- **Second Reading** [2 Corinthians 4:13-18](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 10:46-52](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 31](#); [143](#)

Day 40 – March 24

- **Morning** [Psalms 84](#); [150](#)
- **First Reading** [Zechariah 9:9-12](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Timothy 6:12-16](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Luke 19:41-48](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 42](#); [32](#)

Day 41 – March 25

- **Morning** [Psalms 119:73-80](#); [145](#)
- **First Reading** [Lamentations 1:1-2, 6-12](#)
- **Second Reading** [2 Corinthians 1:1-7](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 11:12-25](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 121](#); [6](#)

Day 42 – March 26

- **Morning** [Psalms 34](#); [146](#)
- **First Reading** [Lamentations 1:17-22](#)
- **Second Reading** [2 Corinthians 1:8-22](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 11:27-33](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 25](#); [91](#)

Day 43 – March 27

- **Morning** [Psalms 5](#); [147:1-11](#)
- **First Reading** [Lamentations 2:1-9](#)
- **Second Reading** [2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 12:1-11](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 27](#); [51](#)

Day 44 – March 28 (Maundy Thursday)

- **Morning** [Psalms 27](#); [147:12-20](#)
- **First Reading** [Lamentations 2:10-18](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Cor 10:14-17; 11:27-32](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Mark 14:12-25](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 126](#); [102](#)

Day 45 – March 29 (Good Friday)

- **Morning** [Psalms 22](#); [148](#)
- **First Reading** [Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33](#)
- **Second Reading** [1 Peter 1:10-20](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [John 13:36-38](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 105](#); [130](#)

Day 46 – March 30 (Holy Saturday)

- **Morning** [Psalms 43](#); [149](#)
- **First Reading** [Lamentations 3:37-58](#)
- **Second Reading** [Hebrews 4:1-16](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Romans 8:1-11](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 31](#); [143](#)

Day 47 – March 31 (Easter)

- **Morning** [Psalms 93](#); [150](#)
- **First Reading** [Exodus 12:1-14](#)
- **Second Reading** [John 1:1-18](#)
- **Gospel Reading** [Luke 24:13-35](#)
- **Evening** [Psalms 136](#); [117](#)

Morning and Evening Readings: Psalms

Psalm 5

1 Give ear to my words, O LORD; give heed to my sighing. 2 Listen to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you I pray. 3 O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch. 4 For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil will not sojourn with you. 5 The boastful will not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. 6 You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful. 7 But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house, I will bow down toward your holy temple in awe of you. 8 Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me. 9 For there is no truth in their mouths; their hearts are destruction; their throats are open graves; they flatter with their tongues. 10 Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of their many transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against you. 11 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, so that those who love your name may exult in you. 12 For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover them with favor as with a shield.

Kimberly Greway '20

One of the hardest books of the Bible for me to read is the Psalter. It is not difficult because of its poetic language and structure or because of its symbolism and allusion. In fact, those attributes make it one of my favorite books.

Rather, the Psalter is difficult for me to read because I can't help singing the songs that are drawn from it when I come upon those passages. I might be happily reading or praying a psalm when suddenly a verse leads me into a well-known song. The melody plays in my mind and the words of the song, rather than the psalm, drift into my consciousness. The music takes me to a place that I didn't intend when I began reading. Often the experience deeply enriches the reading.

When I read verse 8 of Psalm 5, the words and music of Samuel Wesley, grandson of hymn writer Charles Wesley, waft into my mind:

*Lead me, Lord, lead me in thy righteousness,
make thy way plain before my face.
For it is thou, Lord, thou, Lord only,
that makest me dwell in safety.*

The repetition of "thou, Lord only" in the song emphasizes the uniqueness of the Lord's protection. The drawn-out syllables in "safety" settle us securely in a protective shelter. Rather than detracting from the psalm, these elements of the song complement the psalmist's themes and enhance the experience of reading or praying. So, this Lent, let us find our refuge in God and ever sing for joy!

Prayer

Protector God, who straightens our paths and harkens to our cries, hear our words, heed our sighings, hide us from our enemies that we may take refuge in you and rejoice in your protection with songs and exultations, through Jesus Christ the Crucified, amen.

Luke Hillier '23

In full transparency, this was originally, mistakenly, written as a devotional for Advent. Returning to it now with Lent in mind, I wonder what distinguishes these two liturgical seasons. I am reminded that

Advent is a time of preparation; Lent a time of penance. In Advent, we await Christ's birth among us; in Lent, we anticipate Christ's death and resurrection. Both are also seasons of wandering and wondering. And what wisdom of the Church, what mercy of God, to realize we're likely to find ourselves lost in the wilderness more than once each year.

The Scriptures of Lent express the ways our lives groan under the weight of sin, both our own and other's. Reading through the first stanza of today's psalm, we see a picture of that sort of Lenten faith. The psalmist wakes up with a worn-down sigh, crying out to God with prayer and pleading before committing to the seemingly endless watch (5:1-3).

What are they watching for? Some sign that evil has been cast aside from sojourning with the God who has heard them (5:4). Some way to make penance, to be led into the way of righteousness they've strayed from (5:8). Some assurance that their afflictors will be made to bear their guilt, held responsibility for their rebellion against God (5:10). Again and again, the psalmist cries out with the language of lament. However, as is typically the case with a psalmist's lament, it also moves toward praise. "But let all who take refuge in you rejoice," they say, "let them ever sing for joy." Even amidst the constant longings of Lent, there is also, still, reason for sounding joy.

Prayer

God of Lent, who hears our cries as we watch and wait,
Cast aside the evil within us and within our world.
Lead us into righteousness, and under your refuge,
Lead us into joyful songs of praise.

Jonathan D. Lawrence '97

The last few years have been challenging between COVID-19, economic and political challenges, severe weather, and violence nearby and far away. Each day as the news brings new concerns, many of us may feel like the psalmist: "[G]ive heed to my sighing. Listen to the sound of my cry," (Ps 5:1-2). These years have been particularly difficult for clergy and congregational leaders and many have even decided to leave the ministry in this time of uncertainty. What should we do?

I serve both as a pastor and a religion professor and in both roles I often find myself caught between people saying "We just want to go back to what it was like before the pandemic" and others saying "That world doesn't exist anymore and we can't go back and we won't go back!" The pandemic brought loss and change but in the midst of that loss people found new ways to interact, even through the dreaded Zoom screen. Those streaming worship services were less than perfect but they allowed shut-ins and faraway family members to join in worship. We found new ways to organize and support our communities through porch drop-offs of food for the hungry. When my congregation could finally meet in person again, it was still painful for some of our members because it just didn't feel the same. What should we do?

Some days I feel as clueless as the disciples who heard Jesus' words but didn't understand him. But today's parable gives me some reassurance. The sower spreads the seed without knowing how it will grow—and without responsibility for making it grow. I don't have any big answers, but in the meantime I can keep teaching and caring for the people around me and let God do the rest. And like the psalmist I can start to say "But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy," (Ps 5:11). It's not the answer I was looking for, but many days it is enough.

Prayer

Lord, we turn to you for direction in a troubled and confusing world. We want answers but we know that sometimes there aren't answers. We take refuge in you and ask you to help the seeds that we have planted grow and bear fruit in service of your people. Amen.

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.

Paul Wierman '61 (1931-2019)

Lent is serious business. And the themes of today's reading from Psalm 6, a lamentation of David, reflect the serious business of pain and suffering, fear and death. So it surprises me that the sixth Psalm was meant to be sung.

Old Testament scholars do not know the melodies indicated in the superscriptions of many of the Psalms, but consider the example of Psalm 23. I am convinced that it was set in common meter, paraphrased by the author, and set to a tune, as it was in the Scottish Psalter of 1650 and has become so familiar in the tuneful song lyrics "The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want . . ."

But paraphrasing Psalm 6 isn't easy. One must congratulate those ancients who took its mournful phrases and made them resonate and harmonize. Psalm 6 is a complaint, a sad song sung by a choir of quite devoted holy people. In American colonial years, paraphrases were the cause of schism. Presbyterians fled from congregations who sang Isaac Watts's paraphrased psalms and repeatedly rejected such hymns as *Joy to the World* (based on Psalm 98), *Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun* (based on Psalm 72), and *O God, Our Help in Ages Past* (based on Psalm 90). They argued that these musical expressions were not the true "word of God" and thus that hymns based on *ideas* found in the Bible were unacceptable. Contemporary worshipers, on the other hand, love Watts's familiar hymns.

It strikes me as ironic how closely Psalm 6 parallels the sixth chapter of Job. Job, too, voices numerous arguments with God—arguments I might paraphrase thus:

The Almighty is at war with me.
His arrows [poisoned arrows!] pierce me.
The Lord's word is against me.
I await your instruction.
Speak and I will be silent.
Please recall that my life is a breath.
God, I will not blaspheme to your face.
Rescue me!

If you have ever been in a circumstance from which you sought deliverance, you can resonate with these words—the agony as well as the faithful pleading offered by Job and expressed by David in Psalm 6.

Prayer

Almighty God, we are in need of your deliverance. We need you to come to our rescue at the perfect moment—to invite us into the warmth and safety of your shelter from the storms of our lives. Thank you that you are behind all compassionate acts of deliverance—the true focus of the season of Lent. Amen.

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.

De Neice Welch '04

We often think of prayer as an act of faith initiated by us. We seek the Lord with all our hearts in times of great need, in times of devotional meditation, and in times of thanksgiving. We are often taught to strengthen our spiritual discipline through the practice of prayer. Since we believe that we initiate the act, we struggle with words: we struggle with eloquence, and we struggle with articulation, whether we are praying privately or publicly. But as we turn our attention to the depth of the meaning of Lent, we should remember that prayer is an act of the heart where God is the constant observer. God calls us to

prayer and then “words” our mouths, because God gives speech to mortals. God will teach us as God reads our hearts and understands what mere words cannot possibly capture. It is never our initiation that meets God in “the deep,” where only deep calls. It is always God who summons us by the Spirit to answer the longing of our hearts. Our public prayers should not be a function of the mind, wit, or language without being connected to our hearts that long for the Divine. Let God guide your prayers and give you speech this Lenten season.

Prayer

Holy One, We are ever in your mind and you are ever present in our lives. Word our mouths and give us speech so that we might thank you, praise you, adore you in our private time and in our public lives. Lead us to the place where the cross is overcome by the empty tomb so that we might know that our eloquence will never match your power. Amen.

Hallie Isadore, staff

In reading Psalm 22, we are reminded that from the beginning of our time on this earth, God has pursued, cared for, and treasured His creation. As David reflects in verse 9, we are brought into this world as part of God’s beloved. From the beginning of our time on this earth, we are participating in this story (v. 10), even though sometimes in life it may feel like all hope is lost, as David points out (vv. 12-18). But God is near, and our strength comes from Him (v. 19). God listens to us (v. 24) and gives us the strength to be renewed.

During the season of Lent, we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection—his life-giving, renewing resurrection. It is because of this gift that all of creation can go on to sing God’s praise (vv. 25-31). During this season of reflection, prayer, and self-examination, may we live into that story even when we do not know what is going on.

Prayer

O God of all hope, may we be thankful for this life, however brief it is. Help us to live in a way that speaks to the truth that you have pursued and treasured us since the beginning of time. Teach us to draw near to you, to live lives that sing your praise both verbally and through action in caring for those with whom we have the privilege of sharing this life. Thank you Lord Jesus for your freeing, life-giving, finished work on the cross. Amen.

Darryl Lockie '17

I am always astonished by the varied spiritual experiences we can have throughout a given day. I can’t count how many mornings I have woken up feeling so palpably in God’s grace that I am going to “carpe diem!” my way through the next waking hours. Yet so often by mid-morning, after a few setbacks and stumbles, I’ll be saying an approximation of this Psalm: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Perhaps such a statement is a little overly-dramatic when applied to the copy machine going down for the third time this week, but it’s also the case in matters of more substance.

That is the very reason I’ve always appreciated this Psalm. In just the first few verses, we glimpse what is so often our experience of the life of faith. There is deep despair as well as persistent hope. Sometimes we experience these heights and depths in the same day, or even in one particular moment. When this happens, I am grateful for this Psalm, where we find wide margins to acknowledge all the ways and places we feel our God has been too slow to deliver—yet the feelings are expressed in faith. We can lament while still remembering who God is.

I think the season of Lent is an invitation to consider this for ourselves. Where have we experienced the strange paradox of being both forsaken yet faithful, heartbroken yet not without hope? This season and this Psalm offer an invitation to explore the depths of our human experience. But our exploration will not lead us to empty despair, for there is hope that even amid such darkness, “The Lord is enthroned as the Holy One.”

Prayer

Dear God, give us the grace to accept the tension of this challenging but necessary season. As we look at some areas of our lives and our world, it seems as though we are forsaken and all traces of you are gone. Yet we still confess that you are on your throne. Grant to us the wisdom and strength to live into both of these realities, as we grow in the likeness of your son, Jesus Christ.

Psalm 25

1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. 2 O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. 3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. 4 Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. 5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. 6 Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. 7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD! 8 Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. 9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. 10 All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees. 11 For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great. 12 Who are they that fear the LORD? He will teach them the way that they should choose. 13 They will abide in prosperity, and their children shall possess the land. 14 The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them. 15 My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. 16 Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. 17 Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress. 18 Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. 19 Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me. 20 O guard my life, and deliver me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. 21 May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you. 22 Redeem Israel, O God, out of all its troubles.

Katie Galicic, SYI '09

At the end of the day, when watching the evening news or checking the notifications on my phone, I have often found myself feeling great loss in the pain and suffering so readily displayed in our “news” outlets. I see updates about political candidates demeaning and criticizing people of different cultures and heritages, I read sharp judgment and hate exchanged between those in disagreement with each other, and I hear about growing violence and countless lives lost. My soul aches. I feel lonely and afflicted as the growing distress of the world weighs down my heart. All I can taste and feel is the salty brine and harsh rub of sin. I imagine the despair that many of Jesus’ followers must have felt in the hours and days following his death, all hope lost. My hope lost.

I look to the Psalms and am reminded to lift my soul to the Lord and put my trust in God. I can rest in the comfort of the Lord’s steadfast love for me and find new hope, my old sin and pain washed away.

Prayer

Holy God, through desolate deserts, turbulent seas, and stormy nights you have comforted your people. In the midst of persecution, violence, and sin your steadfast love has sustained us. You have washed away our sins through the sacrifice of your son. Lord, be with us in our pain and sorrow, and teach us your paths. We lift up our souls to you in trust and thanksgiving. Amen.

Lynn Cox '14

I pray Psalm 25 with renewed focus now that I'm in my seventies. Its lament and longing are especially meaningful during Lent: Lord, remember not the sins of my youth (v 7) and let me be counted among your true friends (v 14) in this life.

You probably have your own catalog of youthful sins. My youth looks tame to an outside observer, but the Lord knows the truth. Memories of hidden transgressions can ambush my senior self without warning. I wince to recall people hurt by youthful habits: my petty greed and grasping, my wheedling to gain position, my desperation to cover any hint of ignorance or failure. The list goes on. Asking God to forget the sins of our youth is at the same time to re-acknowledge the wrongs done in a past we cannot change.

The psalmist does not want to live in the memory of past sins though and neither should we. Accordingly, we ask God to remember us not for our sinful past, but for his goodness' sake. Out of his goodness, God does much more. He pardons our guilt, leads us, and teaches us his way of steadfast love and faithfulness. In the process God reveals himself and gives us his friendship.

Jesus is now that revelation and in him we have what the psalmist longed for: the "stroll in the garden" intimacy of Eden once lost because of our sin. In Christ we are privy to the Father's plan: we are friends of God (John 15:14-15).

From the security of this relationship, Lent invites us to recall the sins of our youth, to feel and regret the harm we've done, that we might recognize afresh the benefits of God's forgiveness and forgetfulness and the joy of holy friendship gifted to us by Christ.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for your steadfast love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. Free us, Lord, from the burden of a past which we cannot change but which you can redeem. Lead us in your truth, instruct us in your way, and teach us how to walk with you as our savior and friend. Amen.

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!

Anita Stuart-Steve '04/'13

As we live our lives, we go through rough patches: illness, depression, joblessness, family difficulties. . . . Some of these patches are brief and others encompass an entire season of our lives. Like the psalmist in Psalm 27 we can feel attacked from all sides by these adversaries. The psalmist reminds himself that his light, his protection, his strength, and his courage come from the Lord. Our God lifts us above our circumstances.

Even though we are under attack we are able to face it knowing that God is with us. We can sing songs of joy in the midst of the sorrow; we can shout praises in the midst of the silence; we can hold our heads high in the midst of being bowed down. As we look into the face of our Lord we are able to look away from our troubles and see the goodness of God's provision for us. Listen to your heart saying "seek God's face!" and know that you are never alone.

Prayer

O Lord, your face do I seek. Teach me your way and lead me on a level path that I may see your goodness. I wait for you. Amen.

Britney Vokish-Knight '16

The Lord is righteous, merciful, strong, and a very present help in time of trouble. So, why do we still fear? Fear is a very real thing to all of us. For some of us those fears are small—public speaking or spiders, for example. For others, fear consumes our whole day—a health concern that became a very real and debilitating disease, or the fear of losing a child too soon because of an addiction he or she cannot overcome.

But the Psalmist in Psalm 27 reminds us that fear is only the result of not putting our full trust in the One who created everything. We fear when we put our faith solely in ourselves. We are reminded that the Lord is in control. In this sometimes uncertain, violent, and anxious world, still be confident in this: The Lord who created you and calls you has already made a pathway to salvation for you.

Fully trusting is hard to do, so sometime today, as you are praying, write down all your fears and speak them to the Lord.

Prayer

Merciful God, you are my light and my salvation. You are the stronghold of my life. So I come before you now and lift up to you every fear and anxiety I have. I need your help. Trouble surrounds me, but I am confident in you, God, because you have given your Son to us as a hope and a sign of our salvation. Amen.

Ellen Little, retired staff

The world seems to be full of things we could or do fear, from seemingly minor things (such as spiders, the dark, or snakes) to the overwhelming things (such as the loss of a loved one, terrorism, cancer, or death). And yet this Psalm says that we need not be afraid, because the Lord is our refuge. Verse 3 says that the Psalmist is confident in his God even when war is waged against him.

How are we to develop this confidence? At times when life seems to be more than we can handle, how can we trust that God will be with us? Read verse 14 again. We are to wait for the Lord. Spend time this Lenten season developing your relationship with our Lord so that you know His voice and can learn to wait for Him. Wait, for He died and rose and will come again. Wait, for He (and He alone) will bring you peace. Wait.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for loving us more than we can ever imagine. Help us to know You better, to trust You more, to live with the confidence that You are always with us even to the end of the age. May we bring You glory in all that we do and say in this most holy season. Amen.

Charles L. Fischer III, staff

We all have fears. We know that constant tug within ourselves that reminds us of what does not feel safe or might be uncomfortable. Fear is that shadow that we cannot escape from because it is tethered to us and we are unable to release ourselves from it until we change our position or move our location. It may be the fear of the unknown, failure, people, places, what the day may bring, and what lies in the future. Fear prevents us from being willing to face some situations, and precludes us from living more fully into our divinely ordered lives. It takes work to overcome fear.

The psalmist acknowledges that the Lord who is their light and salvation, the very stronghold of their lives stands between themselves and that which they were once afraid to address, face, or acknowledge. When the psalmist asks, "Whom shall I fear?" and, "Of whom shall I be afraid?" we remember that we are hearing the proclamation of an individual and a community who has overcome what has haunted others. The psalmist has found a new location and/or a different position to stand so that the shadow of fear no longer follows them.

On this your Lenten journey, may we find that which is within us to change our location and position so that the fears that once accompanied us will be no longer. It is not about finding the courage but rather it is to place our faith in the Lord who will redirect us so that you will bask in a new light and not be consumed with the shadows of the past.

Prayer

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Tara Woodard-Lehman '03

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

We see the full, messy breadth of human emotion throughout the book of Psalms. In it are songs of hope and despair, gratitude and grief, praise and protest. More than a third of the Psalms are songs of lament that boldly express anguish and feelings of abandonment.

We see this in Psalm 27 as the psalmist cries out, "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!"

The psalmist knew isolation and suffering. And so did Jesus. He still does. Jesus is, at the very same time, God with Us, and the God-Forsaken. He is both the source of Joy and the Man of Sorrows.

I don't know about you, but that gives me hope. Because this hurting world doesn't need a God of inspirational quotes or motivational speeches. Our world needs the God of the Psalmist, who is close to the brokenhearted and stands in solidarity with all who suffer.

I don't know what you're going through right now. I don't know what you may need to lament. You may not even know yourself. But I do know this: all of us are invited to join the psalmist and come, just as we are, offering up our whole selves to God.

Prayer

God of the Lenten journey,
Teach us to faithfully lament,
That we may freely express
Protest as praise,
And weeping as worship.
Amen.

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.

Anne Malone, staff

I have a small pocket Bible that I keep in my desk drawer in my office. I like to mark verses or passages that are significant to me. While I was reading this Psalm and deciding which lectionary reading I would focus on for this devotional, I noticed that verses 9 and 21 are aligned next to each other in their respective columns. I drew a box around each verse and an arrow across from one verse to the other looking something like this:

9 Be gracious to me, O Lord, 21 Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously
for I am in distress ----> shown his steadfast love to me . . .

I don't recall why I marked these verses as such, but as I reflect on them now, I am struck by how descriptive they are of how I journey through the Lenten season. I begin in a place of "distress," because I have fallen short yet again when it comes to maintaining spiritual disciplines, and then journey toward blessing the Lord for his steadfast love and faithfulness as I strive to deepen my relationship with God. For me, the Lenten season is not so much a time to "give up" something, but instead to refocus and establish consistency again in places where I have gone off track. In this passage in my Bible, I also have a box drawn around the final verse of the Psalm: Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord. This is my encouragement during the rest of the year—to take courage when I'm distressed about falling short again.

Prayer

Almighty God, help us all to be strong and take courage as we examine our lives during this Lenten season to see how we may draw into a closer and deeper relationship with you. Amen.

Mikayla Kovacik '19

Psalm 31 is particularly poignant during the season of Lent. According to the Gospel of Luke, the last words that Jesus spoke from the cross were from this Psalm. "Into your hand, I commit my spirit." Though this Psalm has come to be associated with Jesus' death, it also has a message for us as Christ's followers today. Psalm 31 is a prayer for God's help that leads into a song of thanksgiving. The psalmist writes of enduring a city under siege, navigating uncertainty, despair, brokenness, and death. With this in mind, the psalmist imagines God as a strong fortress, a protector, a shelter.

As followers of Christ we, like the psalmist, experience lives that sometimes feel as if they are under siege. We navigate uncertainty, despair, brokenness, grief, and death. The season of Lent brings these feelings to the forefront of our minds as we journey with Jesus toward the cross. Psalm 31, though, is good news for us today and always. It reminds us that God is our fortress, our protector, our shelter. We can trust God because God cares for us and loves us beyond all measure. With safety and confidence, we can place our lives in God's hands. No matter the range of emotions that we experience or the situations we navigate, God is with us and God is for us. May we commit our lives into God's hands once again.

Prayer

Bless you, O Lord, because you are faithful and loving. You lead me, guide me, and care for me all the days of my life. Be a shelter for me, O God. Protect me. Give me all confidence and assurance to commit my life to your hands. Amen.

Franklin Tanner Capps, staff

There is an important piece of advice in wilderness training that goes like this: if you're ever lost in the forest, find running water and follow it downhill. The idea is that if you do this then, hopefully, you'll come to some sort of structure—a dam, culvert, or road crossing that might guide you to help.

But what happens when you hear no running water, when everywhere you turn, things look unfamiliar? The hard swallow. Shortness of breath. The dizziness that comes with the feeling of being utterly alone. Do you move? Or do you stay put and wait on help that may never come?

The words of Psalm 31 roar with dread and with the angst of desolation, like being lost in the wilderness with no clear path. In the pain of solitude that gives way to disorientation, the psalmist opens with a cry: "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust!" That which was familiar has become strange and friends have become enemies. There is no solace in the solitude, only grief.

Many people have recently experienced something of the turmoil that leaks from the psalmist's mind and heart. We've witnessed incredible material loss, the decay of social relationships, and failed friendships resulting in profound isolation. The emotions that follow are familiar. Psalm 31 sets them out in excruciating detail.

But after darkness, light. "I will rejoice in your steadfast love," comes the refrain. "Let your face shine upon me" is the hopeful petition, even as the psalmist declares, "Blessed be the LORD, for the LORD has wondrously shown steadfast love to me."

These words remind us that we are accepted by the one whom the psalmist calls Lord and God, the one who "hears our supplications" amid our pain. To pray Psalm 31 is to hope, and to hope is to believe that God is for us, not against us. And in this there is great comfort, like running water in the wilderness.

Prayer

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the words of Psalm 31 that affirm us in our distress and in our sadness. We ask for deliverance from despair, that we would take heart, knowing that you are indeed our rock and our fortress. Amen.

Psalm 32

1 Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. 3 While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. 6 Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. 7 You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. 8 I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. 9 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you. 10 Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD. 11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

The Psalmist keeps silence while groaning. It seems so contradictory, but the Psalmist's silence isn't absolute. It's silence about sin. Immediately when that silence is broken by confession, the Psalmist experiences a sense of forgiveness and joy. The sound of moaning and confession is overwhelmed by the sound of "glad cries of deliverance."

This psalm is a sharp contrast to the passage we read yesterday. Instead of joy erupting into songs of worship, today we see the Psalmist keep silence while groaning. That phrase seems so contradictory, but the Psalmist's silence isn't absolute. It's silence about sin. The Psalmist moves from groaning and wasting away to a feeling of safety. We find our Psalmist protected from rushing waters, hidden from trouble, and even surrounded by sounds of joy so intense, so palpable, that they seem to act as a shield. The sound of moaning and confession is overwhelmed by the sound of "glad cries of deliverance." The psalm then ends with shouts of joy, returning us that that irrepressible worship that we encountered in yesterday's psalm.

Psalm 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.

Jake Horner '15

Today's lectionary passages take on the theme of affliction. The Gospel passage tells us that "everyone will be salted with fire." And Psalm 34 states that "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all."

The Christ was prophesied to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Jesus is a righteous man—THE righteous man in fact—and he was salted with fire and endured affliction. But the LORD did not deliver him out of them, but rather delivered him up to be crucified. The truth is, Jesus is the only human being whom God has treated unjustly. We get what we deserve, that is, death, for our failure as children of God. Jesus did not. As a Son who kept covenant in his Father's house, he deserved life.

Yet because he tasted death on our behalf, affliction has been turned on its head. What was once the fruit of sinners living in a cosmos subjected to futility is now, in the hands of the risen Christ, a sharpened scalpel shaving the rottenness of unrighteousness away from our lives.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, when there is affliction in my life, give me grace to endure patiently and trust in your purpose to bring about righteousness. Amen.

Colin Pritchard '18

In a season of protracted challenge, it can be hard to bless the Lord at all times. It is false to claim no anxiety or an absence of wanting the world to be different. The poetry of the Psalm may not have the specific application we may wish for on the days when we don't know what to do next. While precision may be lacking, wisdom is abundant.

What would it look like to magnify and exalt the Lord together, seeking the presence of the holy? Would it bring deliverance from all our fears? Or at least a step back from hopelessness? We can do that.

What would it look like to cast our eyes toward our Savior? Perhaps it would bring radiant faces reflecting love and security. In these times of downcast glances and worried looks, we can be shining lights. Let us do that.

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. As the body of Christ, we can choose to do the same. May it be so.

Perhaps all we need to do to bless the Lord this day, and to choose hope for ourselves, is to praise, shine, and serve.

Prayer

In times of trouble, O Lord, our souls cry out. In each and every hour, O Lord, you hear our cries. In this hour, O Lord, hear us once again. Draw our eyes upward, our feet forward, and our hearts toward your sure and certain hope. Release the fears of those burdened in spirit and guide the steps of those who have an opportunity to shine. Amen.

Jeff Bergeson '14

Ninety-one years ago this month, at the height of the Great Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave his first inaugural address as president. Into that tumultuous context, FDR spoke the words, "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Fear is a strange thing. In the Bible, we're told, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps 111:10; Prov 9:10). And yet repeatedly, God's people are told, "Do not be afraid." Even in today's reading, the psalmist declares "the LORD delivered me from all my fears" (v 4) and then goes on to commend and even teach "the fear of the LORD" (vv 7, 9, 11). So, which is it? Should we fear, or not?

I want to wrestle with this question: what is fear? When you're afraid of a spider, or your financial situation, or wars and rumors of wars, or the upcoming election, what is the fear in your heart communicating? I've come to believe that fear is essentially our heart saying, "This has some kind of authority or power over me." Occasionally it's a correct assessment of the situation, but usually it's not.

We know that love is fundamentally a good thing, but it can be misdirected or disordered, and so our perspective on love gets distorted. Similarly, I believe fear is fundamentally a good thing, but because we almost always misdirect our fear, we have a distorted view of it, and we miss the security that comes with fear properly directed, namely fear of the LORD (see Isa 8:12-13). Improper fear is a form of deception.

This Lent, may we not fear taking up our own crosses, because Jesus has come and set his people free from the fear of death (see Heb 2:14-15), seated us with himself in the heavenlies (see Eph. 2:6), and specifically tells us to fear no threats (see Matt 10:26-33; Luke 21:8-19). The LORD sees, hears, rescues, saves, is near to, and redeems those who fear the LORD (see Ps 34:15-22). If we are in Christ, what have we to fear? Nothing! Not even fear.

Prayer

LORD, I confess, I have not feared you alone. Jesus, help me to so seek, trust, and love you that I fear nothing else. Holy Spirit, come. Prune the rotten fruit of other fears from my heart, and fill me with yourself, that I may more closely follow Jesus, free from fear and full of love. Amen.

Rebecca Konegen '22

It's an odd reading for Lent: an exhortation to wisdom, for finding it in seeking the Lord, and celebration for God's consistent rescue of the righteous. All of this while we anticipate observing the fact that the holiest and most righteous of any human being, God's own son Jesus, was crucified. It's hard to think of God's constant rescue of the righteous in light of what happened to Jesus.

The stanza starting in verse 11 is easy: life is to be found in right relationship with YHWH. In order to have a good life, we must seek to live in accordance with righteousness; we must do good and seek peace. The second flows from the first: life is good for the righteous because God stays near to the righteous, even when life is very difficult. And even the converse makes sense, in context: the Lord God turns away from those who do evil.

It's the verse that begins the next stanza that can cause us some difficulty: not so much the "many are the afflictions of the righteous," as anyone who has lived long enough can see that that can happen, but the claim that "the Lord rescues them from them all." One wonders, then, what rescue means, if the righteous have many afflictions and their spirits can be crushed.

But the psalmist is unembarrassed and unapologetic about the juxtaposition of a plan for the righteous to be able to have the good life with the admitted fact of many troubles and our need for rescue. And one wonders, too, what it means to have a good life, or "many days to enjoy good," if one is also so deeply crushed and troubled. It can't be simply that a life is a good one because God is alongside us, because the psalmist acknowledges that we still need rescue. So maybe this psalm is a good one for Lent simply because it requires us to acknowledge—all at once—several things that we know to be true: God is good, God is always acting on our behalf, and life can be very, very difficult.

Prayer

Holy God, we can see that life is beautiful, and at the same time that life is difficult. We thank you for the gift of your presence, and for the gift of faith that allows us to trust in your promises. We cannot see everything we want to see, but we turn again to you in trust, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sarita L. Robinson '23

This beautiful psalm takes us on a journey of gratitude and guidance, leaving us feeling inspired and uplifted. It reminds us that despite the challenges we may face, we have a God who is always beside us, listening to our prayers and ready to save us from our fears. The psalmist invites us to experience God's goodness and to trust in him completely, even in uncertain and difficult circumstances. Through powerful metaphors like the angel of the Lord and the young lions, the psalmist shows us that even the strongest and most self-sufficient among us can experience hunger and struggle, but those who rely on the Lord will never lack anything they need. The psalmist's wise teachings about the fear of the Lord and his actions toward the innocent and the wicked alike remind us that justice will always prevail, and we should always strive to follow God's ways. Let us take comfort in this psalm and the encouraging message it brings. Let us trust in God's goodness and wisdom and always remember that he is with us every step of the way.

Psalm 146 celebrates the greatness of God and encourages us to trust in him. The author reminds us that human help can be limited and fallible, but God's care for the weak, the suffering, and the oppressed is boundless. By trusting in the Lord, we can find peace and comfort. The psalmist refers to God as the God of Jacob, reminding us of his covenant with his people. Let us praise God's power as the creator of all that exists, and let us never forget the eternal rule of the Lord. May we always choose the path of righteousness and reject the ways of the wicked.

Prayer

Gracious, merciful, and loving God, I pray for your people who need your touch of comfort, peace, and protection. I pray that you will continue to remind your people that you are near those who are faint-hearted and suffering. Let them know you hear their prayers and will answer them according to your will and ways. This is my prayer, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Psalm 36:5-11

5 Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. 6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O Lord. 7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. 8 They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. 9 For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. 10 O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart! 11 Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on me, or the hand of the wicked drive me away.

Kimberly Gonxhe '07

I will never forget my first night sleeping in the bush in northern Uganda. I was a five hour drive away from the nearest electrical grid. The stars appeared so close; it seemed I could reach out and touch them. In contrast, city dwellers are known for being at a disadvantage when it comes to stargazing. The lights within the city obscure one's ability to see fully the stars within the night sky.

These contrasts are not the case with God; verse 9 in our passage states that within God's light we see light. The exposure to God's brilliance actually sensitizes us to recognize light around us all the more. It gives us hope in tragedy, food in famine, clean water in drought, unfailing love when abandoned, and refuge in times of despair.

In this world where we live and are destined to die, our God is a fountain of life. And when we put our hands out to touch the stars, God's love reaches the heavens, God's faithfulness to the skies. We need not be discouraged, for we are people of the Light.

Prayer

Lord, there are those who would delight to see us fall. There are circumstances which seem way beyond our reach. But you, oh Lord, have surpassed them all. We can rest in knowing that you take care of your people. As we enter the light of your presence, renew our minds so that we may see light in all around us. Amen.

Psalm 42

1 As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, "Where is your God?" 4 These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. 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 6 and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. 7 Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts; all your waves and your billows have gone over me. 8 By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. 9 I say to God, my rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?" 10 As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?" 11 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.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

Psalms 42 speaks about longing for God as a deer longs for streams. There is an interesting thing about deer longing for sustenance. They search for it. Deer come through my backyard rather frequently, and every once in a while I catch them through the window. Their movements appear random, but on closer observation, they are searching. They look over every inch of my yard, sometimes stopping to smell or even taste the plants, grasses, and weeds. To "long like a deer" is to move, to search, to work, to look, to examine and consider. To see and smell and touch and taste. It's to seek and strive. A longing deer does not stand still—not for long. It has to move, to find that for which it longs.

Kori Robbins '22

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.

Psalm 42 is one of my favorite psalms. It's a psalm of longing, asking for God's help amid the bad stuff of life. The psalmist is remembering all the hope that God brings, even as the psalmist is in the midst of their despair.

We live in a world where toxic positivity is a thing. People tell us "Hey! Don't be sad, because . . ." and list a million reasons why. On the other hand, we also live in a world where people tend to dwell too much in the bad. And to be fair, the last several years have brought us more sorrow than reasons to leap for joy. What I like most about this psalm is that it doesn't tell us to disregard the bad. The psalmist is experiencing something that is clearly not good. However, whatever bad the psalmist is experiencing,

they are also remembering the good things, the parties and processions the community held in celebration of God.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the first in the Narnia series by C. S Lewis, Mr. Tumnus tells Lucy that "It is winter in Narnia and has been for ever so long . . . always winter but never Christmas."

Now, pardon me for mixing up my seasons, but this quote seems ever so appropriate. Lent sometimes feels like a long winter. Many of us have given up something: meat or sweets or coffee. Sometimes we promise to do more of something: smile at neighbors or spend time volunteering. Lent is a time of mourning and sacrifice. We have not yet gotten to the joy of the Resurrection, the joy of Easter morning.

However, like the psalmist of Psalm 42, even amidst the bleakness of the season, hope ever prevails. Our trust and our love in God are always there. We don't need to feel joyful all the time, but in those bad moments, it helps to have something to hold onto. To help us remember that bad days don't last forever, and that good days are coming.

Prayer

Loving and Gracious God,

Sometimes we feel so dry, so thirsty.

We become preoccupied with our bad days, forgetting your presence always.

Where can we find you? When can we gather in worship again? Where do we find refuge?

Help us remember that you are present, right with us, right now.

Remind us to turn toward you, to open our hearts and minds to your loving presence.

Help us remember the good times, even as we experience bad days.

Amen

Kendra Buckwalter Smith '12/'13, staff

"Where is your God?" To inquiring observers, it seems that the psalmist has been abandoned. And indeed, our writer speaks from a place of desperate longing. Yet the psalmist chooses, even fights, to hope in the Lord. "Hope in God," the psalmist speaks to the soul, "for I shall again praise him, my help and my God."

The psalmist writes in Babylonian exile, longing to worship God in the temple. It is a longing that resonates with the church of our own time as we have come to know what it feels like to be separated from our houses of worship and the worshiping community. Perhaps our souls have come to be more closely aligned with the longing, not only of the psalmist, but of God who indeed longs so deeply to bring us into the divine presence that God took on flesh, suffered at the hands of those who would not receive Jesus, and raised us to eternal life in Christ.

Where is your God?

God is on the cross, crying out in thirst, that all our longings may be quenched.

God is in the wounded body of Christ, that we may be made whole.

God is in the abandoned soul of Jesus, that we may never be abandoned.

Where is your God?

God is with you. Even now, leading a joyful procession to the house of God.

Prayer

God of longing and of hope, our hearts are restless until they find rest in you. As we walk this Lenten journey, may we know your presence in the depths of our souls and be led with all of creation to behold your face in glory. Amen.

Rick Willhite '86

Psalm 42 is a hymn of longing. Arising from the poverty of spirit that Jesus called "blessed" (Matt 5:3), this psalm is an empathic prayer in company with all who have turned to God in longing and felt a distance. Psalm 42 should be read by candlelight.

The psalmist has been there: longing for divine consolation but before an unfelt presence of God that can seem like an absence. Better times held light and music, but this person stands in a moment when ache is immediate and deep. Their ache stood alongside hope and trust. Ache, hope and trust together: moments in the darkness. Strident voices ask, "Where is your God?" And sometimes, the harshest voices taunt from within. Doubt and trust can dwell alike in a heart that knows its many moments.

The best counsel comes from those who have been there. The Psalmist made a pause; a pause long enough to acknowledge and become intimate with the longing of a moment. They acknowledged all their heart moments without judgment. They listened to the longing, becoming intimate with it. This is not an easy thing to ask, nor is it self-indulgent. Pause with the longing and be drawn near our tender shared humanity. Longing is what unites us most. The pause can also clear a space. It can make room for the new. Pause, we are counseled by one who knew. The longing may become a prayer; a song to sing in the night.

Prayer

You know us so well, Loving God. It's true: our hearts know many moments. At times we're lost in distraction. Gather us before you as we pause in the longings of our hearts. May we hear your song above the noise of our busy and longing world. May we hear your song of Grace and possibility and live as instruments of your peace. Amen.

Annamarie Groenenboom '17

When I was young, I had the opportunity to visit Mt. Rushmore. It was the hottest day of the year. There was no cloud in the sky, just the blazing sun. My parents decided we needed to go on a family hike around the base of the mountain. I remember that we seemed to walk around the whole mountain and it seemed to take the whole day. We didn't have water and I remember feeling like I was going to die from a combination of exhaustion, dehydration, and boredom. But mostly, I was just so, so thirsty. This hike was one of the times in my life that I remember distinctly being so thirsty, needing water so badly, that I would have done almost anything to get it.

Water is a necessity in life. The psalmist who wrote Psalm 42 understood this concept well. He needs God like a deep thirst. God is not just a desire but a necessity in life. Yet, for some reason, the psalmist can't find God, can't feel God's presence. He can't go to the temple where he feels God's presence most acutely.

We too need God like we need water. God is our source of life. But where can we find God when the wells of our souls feel like they've run dry? When we ask ourselves, "Where is our God?"

The psalmist finds hope through memory. He finds the presence of God through remembering the places and moments where he felt God's presence. Like the psalmist, we can find hope in God's presence by remembering the thin places in life—the places where heaven and earth meet, and we truly feel God's presence. During this Lenten season, let us all remember the moments of God's faithfulness where we truly felt the presence of God.

Prayer

Gracious God, you are the God of our past, present, and future. In times when we feel a deep thirst for you, help us to remember the moments when we have felt your presence in the most powerful ways. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Simeon Rodgers '23, staff

Like the psalmist, we have all encountered times where the circumstances of life have amassed like a great wave and caused us inner turmoil. Perhaps this very moment is such a time for you. There is certainly no shortage of things to be vexed to the soul about in this troubling day. Whether it be personal or about the state of the world, heaviness is much too easy to come by. Everywhere we look there is something that questions the veracity of our claim to hope. Although the words "Where is your God?" are attributed to adversaries who are mocking, we may oftentimes find ourselves asking a very similar thing: "God, where are you?" Depending on different factors, you may face some mental anguish when doubt arises. Perhaps you were told that to have doubt is sinful, disrespect of the divine, or proof of an empty faith. I would like to present another way to look at doubt and renew the image of the person that asks God for God's whereabouts when facing something that surely needs God's presence. The very act of asking God, "Where are you?" is more proof of a teachable faith and a heart that is searching and longing after God's presence than would be a cold, rigid certainty that disengages from the reality of suffering in the world. We ask because we care to know and realize a need! We ask because we are thirsty for the rivers of God's justice and goodness to flow into the desert places of our lives and our world. When we ask, "God, where are you?" may it encompass the humility of not yet seeing as well as our hope to find the one whom we seek so that we may join them there in the work of healing and restoration.

Prayer

Heavenly Parent, present with us even when we cannot perceive you, grant us peace and patience with ourselves and our world in the process of becoming. Let us seek your presence while recognizing that we bear you with us wherever we go. Permit us to feel the weight and rest of that truth. In your name, Amen.

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.

Karen Bowden Cooper '98

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.

Anthony R.C. Hita '13

Approaching my 30s, my life underwent a radical shift, disrupting the trajectory I'd followed for 12 years. Career changes, a long-distance move, and the end of my marriage plunged me into a self-induced crisis, prompting an uncharacteristic detachment from the communal worship I'd faithfully embraced for three decades.

Two years into this tumult, a friend asked me to preside at his church. Despite feeling unworthy, I accepted. Standing on the chancel after a two-year hiatus, I choked on my words and fought back tears as I recited words I had spoken hundreds of times before. I sensed a stirring in my heart saying, "When you're done feeling sorry for yourself, get up, there's still work to do."

I wish I could say that all my problems vanished after presiding over that service. They didn't. Yet, this experience exposed me to a different facet of God. Raised perceiving God as a benevolent but demanding taskmaster, I discovered Jesus instead patiently waiting on me without the condemnation I had feared. To paraphrase John Wesley, I shifted from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son.

I realized that God's love is not a fixed place but a transformative process—not a state of being, but a dynamic journey of becoming through which you learn to know the One who already knows you, reaching out when you pull away, and opening up when you draw near.

Many without realizing it see God as the Ancient Taskmaster, a distant Sky Father noting our total depravity from a distant throne. But I met God as a patient friend, present during tearful nights and long days. God desires our faithfulness but also welcomes our anger, failure, angst, and pain. Jesus wants to be with us in both mountain highs and rock bottoms.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for accepting us as we are, but never leaving us there. You who give ear to our joys and our pains, as we walk through this journey of life, deepen our understanding and open our hearts to know you in new and surprising ways. Amen.

Alyce Weaver Dunn '88

"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?" The heart-wrenching words of the psalmist have resonated with me over the past five years as I have navigated some difficult times: the death of my dear mother; a pandemic which snatched away a sense of well-being; and then a season of disaffiliation in the United Methodist Church in which colleagues and churches willingly left

the connection in which I had invested my life and ministry. The psalmist gives voice to the desolation, brokenness and anxiety which often maneuvers its way into my spirit.

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

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

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

Prayer

Gracious God, on those days when my soul is disquieted, remind me that you are a God of hope and resurrection. Restore me in my brokenness so that like the psalmist and the followers of Jesus, I can praise you yet again! Amen.

Psalm 51:1-17

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. 5 Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. 6 You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. 9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. 14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. 15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. 16 For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased. 17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Greg Steible '14

Could there be a more perfect prayer for the beginning of Lent? After all, what is this season for other than to remember our transgressions, acknowledge our sin, and ask for a clean heart?

It’s an odd season in which we find ourselves: a season of self-denial and repentance. At times this season can be daunting in scope and overwhelmingly humbling. We know that in Christ we have already been forgiven of our sin and yet we still live in a broken world as broken people. We know that we have

been brought into this world by God and that we will leave this world by God, all the while failing every day. Even so, we are loved by God.

May we all acknowledge our own sin and the sin of our society. May we understand and witness the brokenness of this world. May we also recognize the goodness of Jesus Christ and the blessing of love and forgiveness as we look forward down this long path to Holy Week.

Prayer

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. Be with me this season; give me strength and wisdom as I strive to serve you. Give me humility and create in me a clean heart, O God, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Nathan Salamacha '23

Asking for forgiveness is hard. It's even harder to admit what we have done wrong. We are all taught from a young age that we should have the discretion not to tell the whole truth. This sometimes protects those around us, but we can also fall into the trap of letting these protective measures become actions to cover our pride and deceive for self-gain. When we get in the habit of telling too many little white lies, they can catch up to us in the long run when our actions are unveiled to those around us. It can lead to an atmosphere of mistrust and fear. We sometimes even try to do this with God. We excuse our actions even though God already knows what is in our hearts. But can you really blame us?

Obscuring our faults can not only be a way to deceive others but can be a survival tactic we have learned to protect ourselves. There are many people in our world who are interested in power and control above all else. They take what we have done and turn it into abuse, fighting for control over our lives. But the good news of the psalmist is that God is not that way. God is not interested in holding things over our heads in pursuit of absolute abusive control but instead calls us to a new life full of restoration and healing. During this Lenten season, I hope that we can have the courage to trust God with our shortcomings knowing that we will be renewed with a joyful spirit. God's goodness goes beyond the controlling attitudes and faults of those around us. It is something that brings salvation and perfection into our lives. It is a place where we can rest as a refuge for our souls. Our protective walls can come down as we can be fully honest and vulnerable with the Life-Giver of our universe.

Prayer

God of life, as we tend to our souls this Lenten season let us have courage to approach you with our faults and mistakes. Allow us to not only repent of them but to be filled with a new and right spirit which comes from you. Let your resurrecting reality seep into us as we prepare to celebrate your saving power through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Psalm 84

1 How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! 2 My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. 3 Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God. 4 Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise. 5 Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. 6 As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. 7 They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion. 8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! 9 Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed. 10 For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of

wickedness. 11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the LORD withhold from those who walk uprightly. 12 O LORD of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

Graham McWilliams '18

As God's people we face many difficult challenges, both personal and political, and we continue journeying through them in Lent. At this time of the season, we may feel exhausted in our Christian faith. Looking to the cross of Christ before us, we may be thinking, "Lord, how can I find the energy to go on?" And that is where we must stop, because living a life in faith is not about our finding anything. It is about receiving! As the psalmist says, "Happy are those whose strength is in you."

We have no strength but God's. We need no strength but God's. If the many challenges of the world have caused you to begin depending on yourself to overcome them, stop for a moment. Recognize that you are walking a more difficult path—a human path—than the one God intends for you. Behold your shield once more. Humbly bow your head in acknowledgement of your straying and *receive* the strength of God, through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Know that you are able, once more, to lift your head, follow your heart, and continue your journey through your own valley of Baca with the cross of Christ as your guiding light, not your immediate goal.

Prayer

Loving God, in our faith we know that You are always with us; yet the world tries to shield us from You, and we have become downcast. We pray that Your power and strength would overcome our human frailty, so that we may continue our journey through this pilgrimage of Lent until we can lift our heads upward to see the glory of Your risen and ascended presence. Amen.

Nancy Hammond, retired staff

I am reminded today of a friend's story about sitting in a parking lot waiting for an extraordinarily crucial business meeting to begin. Darting around the shrubbery separating the lot from the cars on Main Street, a grey squirrel passed his car window with a huge acorn in its mouth, actively hunting for a place to bury its treasure.

It found the perfect place and dug a huge hole as its underground safe. Then it carefully dragged new dirt over the place, rearranged the soil, patted it down, eyed its work, made a few adjustments, and scampered away for another nugget.

It dawned on my friend that this squirrel ritual of finding, burying, hiding, covering, patting, and evaluating had been going on for thousands of years . . . an unbroken history of squirrel work in the Lord God's creation. Suddenly my friend's vital work for the day didn't seem all that important.

The author of Psalm 84, verse 3, had exactly the same experience some 3,000 years ago, as he watched swallows and sparrows flit in and out of a man-made altar wherein they no doubt nested. He too longed to lay down his burden and place himself in the hands of a loving Lord God.

Whether sparrows or swallows or squirrels . . . or each of us in this hectic world . . . Happy are those this Lenten Season who live in the Lord's house, ever singing Your praise.

Prayer

God of hosts, even in this time of Lent our hearts and flesh sing for joy to you, the living God.
Amen.

Samuel McCann '19

This beloved psalm evokes pilgrimage. Pilgrimage imagery is not merely a powerful metaphor for the Christian life, but is often a spiritually powerful experience for those who undertake a literal pilgrimage. Occasionally, language about pilgrimage (literal or metaphorical) yields an obsession with the journey rather than the destination. While being concerned with the journey is worthwhile, it is good to stop and reflect on where we are going. Often our destination will determine not only the route we take, but the attitude we adopt on the journey.

As I read Psalm 84, I find myself asking, "Where are we going?" One can confidently assert that, based on this psalm, we go to the presence of God. But who is this God? A God who provides a home for the sparrow, a nest for the swallow. What's so moving about this imagery is that birds are fragile creatures. In essence, this psalm describes those traveling to a refuge for the fragile. People are journeying to a God who is gentle with the vulnerable. As you journey to the holiest days in the Christian calendar, what steps do you take knowing that you are seeking a gentle God who cultivates a home for the fragile and vulnerable?

Prayer

Gracious God, Creator of the universe, we humbly ask for your guidance in our journey to draw near to you. We pray that the paths we take are informed by your love and gentleness. Amen.

Psalm 102

1 Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry come to you. 2 Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call. 3 For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. 4 My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread. 5 Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my skin. 6 I am like an owl of the wilderness, like a little owl of the waste places. 7 I lie awake; I am like a lonely bird on the housetop. 8 All day long my enemies taunt me; those who deride me use my name for a curse. 9 For I eat ashes like bread, and mingle tears with my drink, 10 because of your indignation and anger; for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside. 11 My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass. 12 But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever; your name endures to all generations. 13 You will rise up and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to favor it; the appointed time has come. 14 For your servants hold its stones dear, and have pity on its dust. 15 The nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth your glory. 16 For the LORD will build up Zion; he will appear in his glory. 17 He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer. 18 Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet unborn may praise the LORD: 19 that he looked down from his holy height, from heaven the LORD looked at the earth, 20 to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die; 21 so that the name of the LORD may be declared in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem, 22 when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the LORD. 23 He has broken my strength in midcourse; he has shortened my days. 24 "O my God," I say, "do not take me away at the mid-point of my life, you whose years endure throughout all generations." 25 Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. 26 They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away; 27 but

you are the same, and your years have no end. 28 The children of your servants shall live secure; their offspring shall be established in your presence.

John White '82/'09

“. . . to set free those who were doomed to die . . .” (v. 20b). If one were ever in search of a vision of abandonment and total desolation, there is no need to look beyond the wisdom of Psalm 102. Just a little imagination can bridge the connection between its words and many contemporary situations of pain and struggle.

Recently, a friend shared with me, her family and friends, and all her co-workers that she had been diagnosed with ALS. Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (more commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease) is a progressive neurodegenerative condition that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. There is no known cure, and its impact is brutal on the individuals afflicted with it and on the people who love them.

Those of us who heard this news from my friend were devastated; many were moved to tears. It would have been more than understandable if this person adopted the existential stance depicted in verse 11 of Psalm 102: “My days are like an evening shadow, I wither away like grass.”

The surprising part of this scenario is that the person who was living this story had an amazing sense of calm surrounding her. Through her speech, which was becoming increasingly slurred, she had taken on the role of ministering to us, even passing out cookies as we gathered around the table. This person, who was neither seminary-trained nor a leader in her church, provided a level of pastoral care for us that I had never seen before. She was able to embody the sentiment of the psalmist that God is indeed in charge of all that we can see, and beyond: “Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure” (vv. 25-26a).

My friend’s faith had given her freedom—a gift she shared with us.

Prayer

O God of heaven and earth, I pause to give thanks to you for the gift of life and the promise of life everlasting. Amid the challenges of this world, help me to see the precious moments of your grace. Constantly renew my faith as I live in the power of the resurrection. These things I pray in the glorious name of Jesus, our Blessed Savior. Amen.

Andrew Wirt '10

Interesting how Lent 2024 starts: Ash Wednesday was Valentine’s Day this year. Today I find myself still thinking about that unusual combination. The celebration, thrill, and excitement of romantic love mixed with the humility of the ash meant to remind us of our mortality.

But, then again, that seems like a great example of the tension of Lent. Every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection, a mini-Easter. In Lent that is mixed with the themes of humility, repentance, preparation for the Easter that is to come.

The psalms, as they so often do, help us to express these difficult, conflicting emotions. Many of the psalms help us with our praises:

“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” (Ps 27:1)

“Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!” (Ps 147:14)

“The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.” (Ps 126:3)

Many of the psalms help us express our frustrations, worries, sorrow, and laments:

“My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread.” (Ps 102:4)

Whatever emotions we may be feeling this Lent, the psalms remind us that we are not alone. Others have walked this path before us. Their poetic words give voice to the feelings we struggle to name. And we can be reassured that in the celebration, the thrill, the excitement; and in the humility, the repentance, the preparation; and even in the frustrations, worries, sorrow, and laments, the Lord is there with us as well.

“. . . that he looked down from his holy height, from heaven the LORD looked at the earth.” (Ps 102:19)

Prayer

Lord, look down from your holy height, and see us here on the earth. Walk with us this Lent. Rejoice with us. Cry with us. Guide us and prepare us for the Easter that is to come. Amen.

Steffan Johnson '23

Theologian Martin Luther once said, “God hides in suffering.” Using this quote as a lens, it is safe to say that God is all around us today. With wars, rumors of wars, plagues, corrupt leaders, and oppression on the rise, God is in our midst. As we face large corporations in hopes to unveil their injustices, these battles become tiring and hopeless. When faced with suffering, it is easy to fall into despair, as the Psalmist says: “Like an owl of the wilderness, like a little owl of the waste places” (Ps 102:6).

Although the sight of suffering is overwhelming, overstimulating, and heavy on the heart, our understanding of suffering shows us God’s grace. Realizing this grace sets us, as believers, apart from the constant affliction placed upon us by our oppressors. Whether these adversaries are lawmakers with pens, soldiers with weapons, political leaders with pride, or even neighbors with envy, all we are left to do is pray. With our backs against the wall, prayer will guide us.

Prayer is what we have to lean on in the face of suffering: “He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer” (Ps 102:17). To recognize prayer as a byproduct of suffering is where we strengthen our faith, remain humble, and sense God amongst the turmoil of the world.

Now, a question that I often ask myself is “How does this look? How will it look once I am delivered from this angst?” Psalm 126 has an answer: “A harvest of joy.” In Psalm 126, the psalmist expounds on restorative justice with an agricultural take, a harvest: “May those who sow in tears, reap with shouts of joy” (Ps 126:8). Tears became joy and joy quickly turned into gratitude, shouts of joy.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for all that you have done in and around us. Thank you for giving us hope in the face of turmoil, and love in the midst of hate. As we see younger generations react to the same world that we have been neglecting, give them strength to do justice and compassion to accept diversity. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Psalm 105

1 O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. 2 Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. 3 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. 4 Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually. 5 Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered, 6 O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones. 7 He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. 8 He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, 9 the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, 10 which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, 11 saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance." 12 When they were few in number, of little account, and strangers in it, 13 wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people, 14 he allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account, 15 saying, "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm." 16 When he summoned famine against the land, and broke every staff of bread, 17 he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave. 18 His feet were hurt with fetters, his neck was put in a collar of iron; 19 until what he had said came to pass, the word of the LORD kept testing him. 20 The king sent and released him; the ruler of the peoples set him free. 21 He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions, 22 to instruct his officials at his pleasure, and to teach his elders wisdom. 23 Then Israel came to Egypt; Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham. 24 And the LORD made his people very fruitful, and made them stronger than their foes, 25 whose hearts he then turned to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants. 26 He sent his servant Moses, and Aaron whom he had chosen. 27 They performed his signs among them, and miracles in the land of Ham. 28 He sent darkness, and made the land dark; they rebelled against his words. 29 He turned their waters into blood, and caused their fish to die. 30 Their land swarmed with frogs, even in the chambers of their kings. 31 He spoke, and there came swarms of flies, and gnats throughout their country. 32 He gave them hail for rain, and lightning that flashed through their land. 33 He struck their vines and fig trees, and shattered the trees of their country. 34 He spoke, and the locusts came, and young locusts without number; 35 they devoured all the vegetation in their land, and ate up the fruit of their ground. 36 He struck down all the firstborn in their land, the first issue of all their strength. 37 Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold, and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled. 38 Egypt was glad when they departed, for dread of them had fallen upon it. 39 He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light by night. 40 They asked, and he brought quails, and gave them food from heaven in abundance. 41 He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river. 42 For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant. 43 So he brought his people out with joy, his chosen ones with singing. 44 He gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples, 45 that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws. Praise the LORD!

Nancy Lowmaster '11

I am surrounded by a surprising number of aids to help me remember. Appointment cards magnetted to my refrigerator, lists in my planner, chiming pop-up reminders on my computer, a sticky-note phone widget. Even my microwave will record and play messages to assist me in remembering what I have to remember today.

I need those aids, because I forget (more than I'd like to admit). So did the Israelites. They forgot who provided them with a land and an identity. They forgot who blessed them with sun and rain and harvest. They forgot who protected them from plagues and enemies. They forgot who claimed them as a people and promised always to be their God. And when they forgot—because of hardship or arrogance or fear

or boredom—the Israelites turned away from the God who had given them life and freedom. We are no different now.

Psalm 105 is a call for us today to remember God and to remember all God's blessings . . . because when we remember, we can't help but praise and worship the God who never forgets God's loving and grace-filled covenant with us.

Prayer

Eternal God, fill me with your Holy Spirit of encouragement and chiding and remembering. In this moment, show me the many ways you have blessed me . . . Let me live my praise and worship of you today and throughout these days of Lent while never forgetting that you gave your love for me enfleshed in Jesus Christ, in whose name I offer myself and this prayer to you. Amen.

Psalm 114:1-8

1 When Israel went out from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,
2 Judah became God's sanctuary,
Israel his dominion.
3 The sea looked and fled;
Jordan turned back.
4 The mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like lambs.
5 Why is it, O sea, that you flee?
O Jordan, that you turn back?
6 O mountains, that you skip like rams?
O hills, like lambs?
7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
8 who turns the rock into a pool of water,
the flint into a spring of water.

Mary Washington-Hornezes '09

My own exodus story goes like this: According to the Division of Youth and Family Services of Essex County, N.J., I was born to "unfit" parents in Newark, N.J., in 1966. Due to "parental neglect," I was removed from their care at 11.5 months of age. I would never see my biological parents again. During my exodus as a brown-skinned baby with "hazel" eyes and "hair like steel wool," I was placed in a Catholic orphanage and several foster homes, until I was adopted at age eight.

The three (white) women who lived with my new family were of mixed Jewish heritage (i.e. Jewish, German, Polish). Their parents were "Hidden Children"--a term used for the (mainly Jewish) children who were hidden during the Holocaust, in an attempt to save them from the Nazis. These three women were like my big sisters. I loved them and they loved me. We were different, but I could tell that there was something that made us the same. These women were being hidden, because they were "unfit" too! They were "defective," just like my biological mother.

When one of the mothers of the three women living with my adoptive family would visit her daughter, Ruth, the mother would always tell the Exodus story—not the story as recited in the Haggadah Jewish historical text, but her own exodus story of the “Hidden Children.”

As we commemorate the work of the cross, on this Easter Sunday, we will celebrate—because we are no longer orphans.

We have been redeemed!

Prayer

“Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord, Praise the name of the Lord! Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of the sun to its going down The Lord's name is to be praised.” Amen. (Psalm 113:1-3)

Psalm 119:73-80

- 73 *Your hands have made and fashioned me;
give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.*
- 74 *Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice,
because I have hoped in your word.*
- 75 *I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right,
and that in faithfulness you have humbled me.*
- 76 *Let your steadfast love become my comfort
according to your promise to your servant.*
- 77 *Let your mercy come to me, that I may live;
for your law is my delight.*
- 78 *Let the arrogant be put to shame,
because they have subverted me with guile;
as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.*
- 79 *Let those who fear you turn to me,
so that they may know your decrees.*
- 80 *May my heart be blameless in your statutes,
so that I may not be put to shame.*

B.T. Gilligan '11

Today is my birthday! I've made another trip around the sun, which has been a long, strange trip. I have made a lot of memories this year, and I hope to make many more memories. I still have hopes, dreams, and goals to accomplish as I continue this wonderful life.

As I reflect on the previous year and look forward to the next year, I find some comfort and hope in today's reading. I long to learn more about Christ and what Christ would want me to do in the future. I know that some memories I make may not be the greatest, but I hope that my comfort can be found in the love of God towards me. I still long for the mercy of God and to find even more delight in God's precepts. I know I'm not there yet; some days are better than others, but I'm not where I used to be. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “I may not be the man I want to be; I may not be the man I ought to be; I may not be the man I could be; I may not be the man I truly can be; but praise God, I'm not the man I once was.” There is much to work on, but I see God at work.

You may be in the same place. You find the years passing, and everything changes, yet the desire is still the same: to fully live into this Scripture and fully immerse ourselves in all that God has for us. If that's the case, may you find comfort and hope in today's Scripture and know that you aren't there yet but aren't where you were either.

Prayer

Almighty God, you mold and shape my life daily. Please keep making me into your image. Show me your life, help me to delight in you, and guide me ever closer to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Drew Himes '13

Lent is a season for seeking wholeness. During these 40 days, we are called upon to slow down, pause, and reflect. For many, it is a season of penitence and seeking to be forgiven of our misdeeds and inactions. For others, it is a time to return to God after rushing about throughout the rest of the year. In either way, both approaches call us to return wholly to God, the source of our life and seek God's wholeness again.

The idea behind the English word "heart" is the Hebrew "לֵב" which gives the impression of the very depth of our being, the soul or psyche some may call it. From the very deepest reaches of our humanity—broken, tired, worn out, hurting, empty—we cry out to the God of life who, as Easter reminds us, resurrects us from our graves and brings us back to life.

The author of this Psalm reminds us of the personal touch of God: "Your hands have made and fashioned me." God reaches out to us to make us, remake us, and give us life. When we cry out we know that God not only hears but also grabs us and embraces us.

The source of our life is God's love for us. This is God's very being whom we cling to in our Easter promises. The psalmist tunes our hearts and minds back to God: "Let your steadfast love become my comfort." Prayerfully we ask that God would love us back to life again. Prayerfully we seek mercy and reconciliation with God, our sisters and brothers, and God's wonderful creation. Honestly, we confess our need for God and our need for the grace of life and love.

May your Lenten journey make you full of life again. May you find yourself in the stillness of your existence and give yourself the time and space to slow down, speak honestly to our God, and allow God to embrace you back to life.

Prayer

God of mercy, hear our prayers. We humbly ask you to embrace our weary bodies and reach into the depth of our beings to pour your love and life into us again so that on the day of Resurrection we may experience the fullness of our future life with you. Amen.

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.

Theodore Kalsbeek '51 (1925-2023)

One of the comforting components of our Christian experience is the spiritual assurance that there is a divine, perpetual presence and protection in the life of a believer in God. In Psalm 121 the psalmist expresses his personal conviction that such a divine reality does exist. That conviction is based on his own personal experience, and it provides for us an appropriate subject for Lenten meditation.

The psalm begins with the author's statement that he "lifted his eyes to the hills," followed immediately by his question, "from where will my help come?" His answer is that his help "comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth." It is generally thought that by "looking to the hills" he meant looking up to God, because the answer to his question was the strong affirmation that his help comes "from the LORD, who made heaven and earth." Without knowing exactly what he meant by "help from the hills," it is enough for us to focus on his statement that his help comes from God.

Note that after his admission of need and his affirmation that his help comes from God, the remainder of the psalm is spoken as though to us. Verses 3-8 are a strong, inspired affirmation of what God will do as our "keeper"—an affirmation ending with the assurance that "The Lord will keep our going out and our coming in."

Surely in these Lenten days we do well to spend time pondering the assurance that, by our faith, the Lord who keeps us "will not slumber nor sleep," meaning that his presence and protection are continuous (vv. 3-4). The Lord is our keeper day and night (vv. 5-6).

Because the Lord is always awake and watchful, he is aware of circumstances that develop in our lives, and his protecting surveillance will keep us, not just occasionally, but "from this time on and for evermore" (vv. 7-8).

These examples of divine assurance given by the psalmist give us confidence in facing life's experiences with dependence on the promises of God. They call us to have faith and to be assured that the promises of God are reliable and worthy of our gratitude.

Prayer

Gracious God, in the midst of busy contemporary life, we pause to listen prayerfully and expectantly to the ancient voice of the psalmist, as across the centuries it speaks to us of your gift of spiritual assurance in our times of uncertainty. We offer our profound gratitude for your promises given. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Rebecca DePoe '16/'20

For me, Lent is often a season of anxiety, because Lent is often a time of discernment. Especially for those of us in ministry, Lent is usually the time where we discern whether God is calling us to stay in our current ministerial context, or if we might serve God more faithfully elsewhere. And this discernment produces anxiety because our decisions do not affect only us. They affect our families, our friends, and our communities of faith.

What I love about Psalm 121 is the Psalmist's proclamation that God will protect us. "The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore." God's protection is not just good news for today, but also good news forevermore! As we enter into this time of discernment, the Psalmist reminds us that we need not be

anxious, because God promises to protect us. The assurance of God's protection gives us the freedom to follow God's call wherever it leads us without the crippling anxiety that often surrounds major life changes.

Prayer

God we rejoice in your assurance of protection. We pray that you would give us the courage to follow your call wherever it may lead, each and every day. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Jelty Ochotan '11

"The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night." (Ps 121:6)

We are uniquely created by God, not merely a coincidence on this Earth. God has a purpose for each of us being here. When we confess our belief in Jesus Christ, it signifies that we belong to God. He has prepared us to be his ambassadors, witnessing who God is through our lives. We are constantly being witnesses to how God has created this world uniquely. Each part of the earth has distinct conditions, situations, uniquely formed maps and lands, and each area has unique characteristics, including weather.

For instance, the hottest country in the world is Mali in West Africa. At first glance, 28.83°C / 83.89°F may seem surprisingly cool. However, these are not average summertime highs but average overall temperatures for both nights and days. How can people live there? God created them uniquely to thrive in this place and survive each day and night.

In this reading, through the witness of the psalmist, we see that God has protected the Israelites with unique weather conditions for both nights and days. Despite the challenging climate in Israel, the travelers express confidence that God will not allow them to experience ill effects from the daytime or nighttime due to the Lord's watchful care.

This reference is also symbolic of how God still watches over his people, caring for us day and night. Psalm 91:1 promises: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." Jesus assured his followers that there was no need to worry because our heavenly Father provides for us (Matt 6:25-33). Amen.

Prayer

O Almighty God, we long for peace in our world today. In every difficulty of our lives, may God bless our nation, and may world leaders work together in this time of need, finding peace and harmony for all—the sick, poor, homeless, lonely, hungry, victims of violence and abuse, refugees, immigration concerns, violence in schools, and violence in our streets. Especially, we pray for Israel and Palestine, for Ukraine and Russia; to you, O Lord, we ask. We also pray for those living with life-threatening illnesses, those aging or living with cancer, those with mental health concerns, and those who are caregivers. You care for us. Thank you, Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Richard W. Wingfield '02/'13

The annual vacation to my grandmother's house was always a memorable journey. As a young child this five hour trip seemed to take forever, but my parents would keep me occupied by singing one of those traveling songs to take the boredom and restlessness out of the trip. The Songs of Ascent (120-134)

were those travelling songs during the pilgrim's triennial journeys to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts. This psalm would be sung to remind them of God's ability to help and to keep them while they travelled.

This is a wonderful psalm to pray as you go through life. It's a psalm for all seasons and points to the God who keeps you. Life is a journey of faith filled with both wonder and worry, faith and fear, awe and anxiety. Yet, the psalmist reminds you of God's faithfulness to God's people. God is intricately involved in your life. God, and God alone, sustains you on this journey. God goes before you and is there to guide and protect you (vv. 3-4), God is with you and watching over you (vv. 5-6), and God will keep you in every aspect of life (vv. 7-8). Thus, you do not need to live in fear or worry because God's ever-present help is with you.

Rehearsing this psalm will keep you grounded in your struggles. It's easy to get down and discouraged, especially during those mundane moments when you are exhausted and struggle to get out of bed. But even amid your distress, knowing God's keeping ability helps you to keep going on.

Choose to live life in total reliance on God who is the keeper of your soul. Don't seek help from anywhere else than from YHWH. Wherever he calls you to go, however hard the journey feels, whatever fears emerge along the way, hear the psalmist say, "The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore."

Prayer

God, you are the great I AM, the Creator and Sustainer of all life. Gently whisper in our ear the reminder of your presence with us, especially during those moments in life when we wrestle with our emotions. Help us to rest in your presence with us and your protection for us. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

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.

Jim Durlless '78/'80 (1953-2022)

Psalm 126 is one of the Psalms of Ascents (Psalms 120 through 134). It is often thought that the Psalms of Ascents were sung by the Israelites as they were on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as they were "going up," as they were "ascending," the hill of Zion to worship at the Temple.

The season of Lent is a pilgrimage, a spiritual journey to Jerusalem, a journey to the Cross of Christ. Psalm 126 invites us to think about joy during our Lenten pilgrimage. Verses 1-3 speak of the joy that the people of God have because of what God has already done. Verses 4-6 anticipate the joy that the people of God will have because of what God will do in the future.

On our Lenten journey, we rejoice when we think about what God has already done for us. And we look forward to the ways in which God is going to continue to work in our lives. We see the darkness of Good Friday. But beyond Good Friday is Easter, when the tears of mourning of which the Psalmist speaks will become a harvest of joy.

Prayer

LORD, we rejoice in the great things you have done for us. And we rejoice when we think about all the things that you are going to do for us in the future. Be with us during these solemn days of Lenten pilgrimage. May our tears of mourning become a harvest of joy. Amen.

Kay Day '97

Sometimes during Lent, we feel as if we are in a place of exile, away from the joy and comfort of all that is familiar. Sometimes in the midst of the stress of life and the challenges of the situations around us, we also feel that way. That was where the children of Israel were for many years. But today's psalm is the promise of the end of that exile for the children of Israel and for us.

The hopeful expectation is that God will bring us back to a home base. And we, like the children of Israel, move as in a dream. That is the state of delight that seems too good to be true. To once again be surrounded by all that is comforting, that is filled with good memories that have sustained us during times of trouble and exile. You know those times, in the midst of difficulties, when you remember the goodness of a place or event. But God returns us, not to memory, but to the reality of that place that feels like home. That is what God has for us at the end of the struggles and isolation that we face. That is the focus of the first three verses of this psalm: the delight of being restored to our home place.

The joy is that the Lord has done great things for us. We see them more clearly when we have come through the times of exile, the times of struggle and alienation. But there is more to the psalm. It is a prayer that God will restore all that we have lost, that our sorrow and tears will be turned to joy and plenty. This is a prayer that the restoration will be complete.

Where are you at this point in Lent? Maybe still feeling exiled, away from all that you love, as you experience the discipline and direction of God? Perhaps recovering from tears of sorrow and loss? Or maybe ready to enter again into God's joy for you? Wherever you are on your journey, may you be able to say with the psalmist, "The Lord had done great things for us."

Prayer

God, we thank you that you bring us back to a home base. You sustain us with comfort, memories, and goodness in the midst of our difficulties. And we look forward to when memories will no longer be needed, because we will enter the reality of home. Amen.

Steffan Johnson '23

Theologian Martin Luther once said, "God hides in suffering." Using this quote as a lens, it is safe to say that God is all around us today. With wars, rumors of wars, plagues, corrupt leaders, and oppression on the rise, God is in our midst. As we face large corporations in hopes to unveil their injustices, these battles become tiring and hopeless. When faced with suffering, it is easy to fall into despair, as the Psalmist says: "Like an owl of the wilderness, like a little owl of the waste places" (Ps 102:6).

Although the sight of suffering is overwhelming, overstimulating, and heavy on the heart, our understanding of suffering shows us God's grace. Realizing this grace sets us, as believers, apart from the constant affliction placed upon us by our oppressors. Whether these adversaries are lawmakers with pens, soldiers with weapons, political leaders with pride, or even neighbors with envy, all we are left to do is pray. With our backs against the wall, prayer will guide us.

Prayer is what we have to lean on in the face of suffering: “He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer” (Ps 102:17). To recognize prayer as a byproduct of suffering is where we strengthen our faith, remain humble, and sense God amongst the turmoil of the world.

Now, a question that I often ask myself is “How does this look? How will it look once I am delivered from this angst?” Psalm 126 has an answer: “A harvest of joy.” In Psalm 126, the psalmist expounds on restorative justice with an agricultural take, a harvest: “May those who sow in tears, reap with shouts of joy” (Ps 126:8). Tears became joy and joy quickly turned into gratitude, shouts of joy.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for all that you have done in and around us. Thank you for giving us hope in the face of turmoil, and love in the midst of hate. As we see younger generations react to the same world that we have been neglecting, give them strength to do justice and compassion to accept diversity. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

“More than those who watch for the morning.” Today, the sun came up. And the day before. And the day before. In fact, morning is a pretty sure thing. Morning will come.

To say my soul waits and hopes more than those who watch for the morning—that’s more than a sure thing. Though this is a psalm written from the darkness of night, it speaks of a hope that is surer than the hope that the sun will rise tomorrow.

It’s important for us to remember that hope in sunrise doesn’t dispel the night. The psalmist still has to endure the darkness of night, but it’s with the knowledge that sunrise is coming. As we continue our journey through Lent, we are tempted by our experience of instant downloads and overnight shipping. We want to get to the end. We are tempted to skip ahead to Easter morning—to ignore or forget the events of Lent and Holy Week. Instead, let’s sit with the Psalmist and wait. Let’s continue our journey, not only anticipating what lies ahead, but noticing what God is doing at this very moment.

Leon Pamphile '74

“Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem” (v. 7). In the depth of our being lies a natural craving for certainty. We wish to be sure of the successful outcome of our plans and the ultimate fulfillment of our dreams. We aim to exercise firm control over our lives. Certainty matters for our security as well. Yet our world is manifestly marked by the brutal reality of *uncertainties*. We cannot rely on our leaders, who too often fail to keep their promises, or on our institutions, which, though they try, cannot offer a foolproof warranty for our safety. In the midst of disappointments and failures, we too often slip in this land of worry and anxiety.

It is reassuring to know that our utter state of disillusionment finds satisfaction in God. The psalmist bids us place our hope unreservedly in the Lord. His recommendation stems from his personal experience with God's unfailing love. While everything fails around us, we find certainty in his steadfast, unfailing love and his great power to redeem us fully. His loving care from day to day brings reassurance of his abiding presence.

We, like the psalmist, can also find *peace of mind* in God, who does not keep a record of sins, who hears deep cries for mercy. We can rely on Christ's promise to nurture our peace: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). What a relief to know Christ as a reliable and faithful burden-bearer. Let us learn to lean on him all the days of our lives.

Prayer

Lord, we confess our limitations and shortcomings in all areas of our lives. We too often worry about our future instead of relying on your compassions, which never fail. We humbly invite you to open our eyes to the provisions of grace and mercy available to us in our daily struggles. Please help our unbelief, so that we can find hope in your unfailing love and trust in your grace for full redemption. Be attentive to our cry for mercy, we pray. Amen.

Jillian Jones '19

You cry, you beg, and you scream trying to make God hear you. It's all in vain; He already does. He listens when you whisper. He listens when you don't say a word. He listens when your heart breaks or when you can't make a sound or even form a coherent thought.

He listens, He hears, He knows. He knows every thought, feeling, and sin. There is no hiding or covering up. We are all naked before Him. Yet he doesn't have a long list in his back pocket of all we've done wrong and all the ways we've messed up. If He did, we'd all be done for. Instead, He forgives us our wrongs, teaches us what we can learn from our mistakes, and comforts us when it's all too much.

So instead of crying, begging, and screaming for attention, breathe and wait. Inhale, exhale, and wait at his feet.

Prayer

Abba, thank you for being my Immanuel, my God with me. You're with me through the good and the bad. Thank you for being my El Roi, my God who sees me. You see me when I bring you glory and when I bring you disgrace and love me the same. Lord, teach me to wait in your presence. Amen.

Annie Parker '13

Waiting—let alone being patient as we wait—does not come easily to most of us. And so much in life requires waiting. There is trivial waiting that pops up in our day-to-day living: waiting in line at the store, waiting to pick up a loved one from the airport, waiting for that present you ordered online to arrive. But there is another kind of waiting, a much more difficult kind that is hard to live through. It's a soul-wrenching, heart-weakening kind of waiting, like waiting for a diagnosis after a medical test, waiting to hear how a loved one's surgery went, or waiting for a phone call from a family member we can't seem to reach.

This kind of waiting is full of questions: how long will it take, what will the answer be, is it a worst-case scenario, will I survive? This is the kind of waiting we dread, filled with the questions we hope we'll never have to ask.

And while we still have pain and unanswered questions, we trust in God. We remember the promises God has made to us, and we remember that our God never breaks a promise. We have hope in God, who is a mighty redeemer. Part of that waiting is hard, as we still experience the pain of a broken world. But through all the struggles and triumphs, we do not wait in vain, for our God brings redemption for all of creation.

Prayer

God, in this season of waiting, grant us peace in our hearts. Grant us hope that all our questions will be answered and all creation will be redeemed. Wait with us, as we are impatient and long to know the ending. Remind us of your many promises and your steadfast love for us always. Amen.

Scott Dennis '13

The 130th Psalm is a Pilgrimage Psalm, which is fitting since Lententide is a journey that begins with us getting our "sorry ashes" in church, and one we end at the foot of the cross and peeking into the empty tomb. However, before we can begin our journey with the psalmist and the countless great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us, the Saints, we find ourselves transported to an all too alien, uncomfortable, and yet all too familiar place: a depth, possibly a great depth, or even the valley of the shadow of death itself.

In this place of removal, distance, and isolation, what happens? We find ourselves joining the psalmist in crying out to the Lord, who seems so distant from this place of deep isolation. Yet, he alone is our only hope during this pilgrimage journey of our spiritual discontent. If we proceed from verses 1 and 2 on to verses 3 and 4, we are reminded of the good news that the Lord is our help alone, since none of us can stand on our own merits. None of us mortals have any hope within ourselves. Hence, should the Lord consider our iniquities, we must rely upon his forgiveness. Thus, we journey from verses 3 and 4 on to verses 5 and 6, where we join the psalmist in waiting for the Lord with that which is deepest within ourselves, for as long as it takes him to appear and liberate us from the depths!

No wonder, then, we journey from verses 5 and 6 on to the psalm's conclusion in verses 7 and 8. With predecessors gone before us, we hope in the Lord as individuals united in the Church Militant, who rely on his hesed, his steadfast, unbreakable, never-ending faithful love to us, his children. Here we conclude with the psalmist that the Lord shall redeem us from our iniquities, from our time of separation in the deep pit of isolation and hopelessness. Such a fitting psalm for Lententide, since we know where our journey ends: with redemption. Now, that's a journey worth embracing!

Prayer

Dearest Lord Jesus, aid our Lententide pilgrimage to your cross and tomb. Take our spiritual discontent to fill us with your assurance that you journey with us each step of the way to redemption. Grant us a holy, restful, and safe sleep this night that we may arise eager for the new day. This we ask for your namesake. Amen.

Psalm 143

1 Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness. 2 Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you. 3 For the enemy has pursued me, crushing my life to the ground, making me sit in darkness like those long dead. 4 Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled. 5 I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands. 6 I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. 7 Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me, or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit. 8 Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. 9 Save me, O Lord, from my enemies; I have fled to you for refuge. 10 Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path. 11 For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life. In your righteousness bring me out of trouble. 12 In your steadfast love cut off my enemies, and destroy all my adversaries, for I am your servant.

Brad Rito '15

"I don't want to bother God with something so menial." This is a thought many of us have had when we hit a rough patch on the path God has set before us. We wonder whether or not asking God for help is appropriate, whether or not God would even answer our cries.

But it is in these moments that one must remember that Jesus, the greatest person ever to live, the Son of the Most High, cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In much the same way, we all experience trouble, hardship, feelings of loneliness or abandonment—however you want to put it. If Jesus cried out in such times, why do we question the power such cries can have in our lives? We are humans, perfectly and wonderfully made in God's image, but imperfect by nature. If we were perfect, we wouldn't face these adversities. We as God's children must therefore always remember that our loving Father is ever-present in our lives, by our sides, walking the path with us, and knows our pains and our need for God in our lives. We are never forsaken, and nothing is inappropriate to lift up to God.

Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for your ceaseless presence at our side and for your unwavering love as expressed through your Son, Jesus Christ. We must admit though, Lord, that we are not always the quickest to turn to you in our times of need. We think some things are too menial or insignificant for someone as great as you to deal with. Help us never to question your power or your involvement in even the most minute affairs of this world. You hear our prayers, and you most graciously answer them, more than we could ever earn on our own. We thank you and pray all of this in your name, Father, through your Son, Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Edith Humphrey, faculty emerita

Today we approach Holy Week; in preparation we read Psalm 143, a poignant cry of repentance and supplication. St. John Chrysostom tells us that this psalm provides the remedy for haughtiness: "if your well-doing makes you arrogant," then verse 2 ("No one living is righteous before You") "will make you immediately lowly" (Romans Homily 28). But the psalm is also for the poor, the harried and the lowly. We enter with David into the cave, crushed to the ground, harassed by enemies, parched for God, and seeking refuge with God. True refuge comes in the form of remembrance: "I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands" (v. 5). What are those divine deeds? The creation of this beautiful world, His provision for sinful Adam and Eve, His calling and guidance of

Israel, His promise of the Messiah through the prophets, His coming as the God-Man, His living the perfect human life; His sacrificial and representative death; His glorious resurrection, His ascension in glory; His promised coming again; and His giving of the Holy Spirit! God has not hidden His face, but has offered us everything we need, including a thirst for Him—for we, like David, live in a “parched land.” Even our longing, even our calling out, is a sign of His goodness and promise to us. How wonderful that He, anticipating our times of distress and need, has given this honest psalm!

Prayer

Hear me, Holy Father, as you heard your Son in distress. Bring me low when I am mindless of you, and lift me up when I am close to despair. By your Holy Spirit, recall to my mind and heart all you have done, and make me thirsty for you.

Elizabeth Wallace '07

I have a recurring dream that stems from my unfortunate habit of sleeping with my mouth open, especially when I'm sick and can't breathe through my nose. In this dream, I am consumed by thirst. No matter how much water I drink, nothing quenches it. I start with a glass of water, and I drink the whole thing. But nothing changes. I inevitably dream that I am drinking straight from a faucet, and can feel the cold water all around my face. But my thirst is not slaked.

Finally, I become so frantic that I wake up and realize I'm still thirsty because I only dreamed of drinking something. As soon as I am able to actually take a drink, there is immediate relief. Even one sip of water makes a tremendous difference, and there is no substitute for the real thing. Psalm 143:6 says, “My soul thirsts for you like a parched land.” I think this is such a helpful image of how we long for God. How we need a reminder of God's presence, God's provision, and God's goodness. Just a taste helps us feel connected again. One sip gives us hope again, no matter what we are going through.

This Lenten season, may we all thirst for God as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Prayer

Holy God, make me thirsty for you—for your word, for your presence, for your grace. Remind me that all of life flows from you. I pray this in the name of Jesus, who gives living water. Amen.

Psalm 145

1 I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. 2 Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever. 3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable. 4 One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. 5 On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. 6 The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness. 7 They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. 8 The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. 10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you. 11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, 12 to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. 14 The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. 15 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. 16 You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing. 17 The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his

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

Dave Hosick '76, Board emeritus

Psalm 145 is a meditative hymn in praise of God. It is the only psalm with “praise” in its title. God’s works and character are enumerated and declared to be worthy of our praise. It insists, “all flesh will bless God’s holy name.” None other than John Calvin said of this psalm that it “contains an accurate summary of God’s perfections. Nothing seems to be omitted.” It notes God’s greatness, majesty, goodness, righteousness, grace, and mercy. It assures God abounds in love and is compassionate, faithful, just, kind, and near to us. All these things lead the psalmist, David, king of Israel, to praise God’s name forever and ever.

In verse 5, David declares, “On the glorious splendor of God’s majesty, and on God’s wondrous works, I will meditate.” As you ponder this psalm, upon which of God’s perfections would you choose to meditate? Scholars say God’s “grace and mercy” serve as a definition of God. They are divine perfections appropriate for meditation in any season of the church year.

For Lent, though, consider God’s “righteousness.” To our contemporary ears, “righteousness” is a fussy word. It connotes adherence to a strict moral code or set of requirements. It makes God less than attractive to many. The meaning of “righteousness” in Hebrew, however, is not an abstract quality that God holds over and above us; it is God’s capacity to make right what has been wrong. Our relationship with God and the world has gone off track under the power of sin. God’s righteousness is his desire and ability to restore and renew these relationships.

During Lent we journey over 40 days to the cross of Christ. There, on Calvary, God, the Son in agreement with the Father in the power of the Spirit, puts right all that is wrong. God rectifies life’s personal and corporate sin by accepting the worst that sin and death can do and defeats them with an empty tomb.

The good news of God’s righteousness is that it puts us right with God and the world. God is molding us into the shape of Christ, beginning now and completing in eternity—certainly reason for joining David in letting our mouths “speak in praise of the Lord” and joining in calling “all flesh” to “bless [God’s] holy name forever and ever.”

Prayer

Righteous God, fill our souls to overflowing with the fullness of your grace. In this season of Lent, remind us of your triumph over the tragedy of the cross, and your victory over sin and death, so that we may reflect your glory as disciples of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, and bless your name forever. Amen. (Adapted from *Book of Common Worship: Daily Prayer, The Season of Lent*, p. 173, WJK)

Psalm 146

1 Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! 2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long. 3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. 4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish. 5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, 6 who made heaven and

earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; 7 who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; 8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. 9 The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. 10 The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

Jennifer Haddox '06

As our dear friend, Jannie Swart, was often heard saying, “God is up to something in the world!” He, along with this Psalmist, was confident to proclaim it. Read again the saving acts of the Lord proclaimed in this Psalm—he keeps faith, executes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets prisoners free, opens blind eyes, lifts up the lowly, loves the righteous, watches over strangers, and upholds orphans and widows. This is what God is up to!

As I worship with these words, I see these actions in the life of Jesus, who indeed set people free, fed the hungry, opened blind eyes, and lifted up the lowly. And I also see in these words a call to Christ’s body to live into these saving acts of our Lord.

If we want to draw near to the Lord, then we must come near to the oppressed, the hungry, the prisoner, the blind, the lowly, the stranger, the orphans and widows. In doing what can be seemingly risky things, like welcoming refugees, parenting foster children, or working on behalf of the homeless or those in prison, we declare our trust in a God who has faithfully acted in these ways for generations. In doing so, we proclaim, “The LORD will reign forever!”

Prayer

I praise you, O Lord, for your saving love at work in the world. Give me eyes to see what you are up to in the world around me, and a heart that is ready to trust you by coming alongside you in that work. Amen.

Lori Liller Arnold, retired staff

It is the 35th day of the 40 days of Lent. Lent—a period of reflection and preparation for Holy Week and Easter that is to be a parallel reminder of the time that Jesus spent in the desert. I have been pondering how Jesus may have felt on his 35th day in the desert. Did he know that his time there would end in five more days? And, if he did, was there relief in his heart because the time of being in the desert was almost at an end? Or was it sadness because of what he would face upon returning to the city? Or might it have been joy because all that would come to pass during and after Holy Week would mean a new birth for all people and hope for each new morning. When we carefully consider Psalm 146 as a prayer Jesus may have prayed on that 35th day in the desert, I think we know that praise was on his lips and joy was in his heart. May it be so for us as well.

Prayer

Dear Creator of all that we survey, may we open our eyes and lift up our voices for the gifts bestowed upon us. And may we praise the Lord for the one true gift of Jesus. Let us move through this day with trust and happiness in the Lord. In your blessed name, we pray. Amen.

Erin Davenport '05, staff

I spend a lot of my time reading the news on my phone or in some of my favorite magazines. As I read, I often wonder: where is the hope? I spend hours researching candidates for elections, reading up on policies, and educating myself so that I have a glimmer of understanding of what is or is not happening

in the world around me. And I often wonder: where is the hope? I confess that at times, I find myself looking for hope in all the wrong places. I look for hope in politics, government, and social service organizations. I look for hope in my checking account, online shopping, and local stores. And yet this hymn reminds me that the hopes of this world perish when the person, place, or thing connected to them perishes. These hopes are temporal. The hope of the God of Jacob is eternal. This hope is not something I wander around looking for, but something that finds me. God's hope is a hope that finds all of us.

Prayer

Jesus, you are our hope. Thank you for reaching out to us with your hope this day and every day. Help us to see the hope that you provide us today. Amen.

Sarita L. Robinson '23

This beautiful psalm takes us on a journey of gratitude and guidance, leaving us feeling inspired and uplifted. It reminds us that despite the challenges we may face, we have a God who is always beside us, listening to our prayers and ready to save us from our fears. The psalmist invites us to experience God's goodness and to trust in him completely, even in uncertain and difficult circumstances. Through powerful metaphors like the angel of the Lord and the young lions, the psalmist shows us that even the strongest and most self-sufficient among us can experience hunger and struggle, but those who rely on the Lord will never lack anything they need. The psalmist's wise teachings about the fear of the Lord and his actions toward the innocent and the wicked alike remind us that justice will always prevail, and we should always strive to follow God's ways. Let us take comfort in this psalm and the encouraging message it brings. Let us trust in God's goodness and wisdom and always remember that he is with us every step of the way.

Psalm 146 celebrates the greatness of God and encourages us to trust in him. The author reminds us that human help can be limited and fallible, but God's care for the weak, the suffering, and the oppressed is boundless. By trusting in the Lord, we can find peace and comfort. The psalmist refers to God as the God of Jacob, reminding us of his covenant with his people. Let us praise God's power as the creator of all that exists, and let us never forget the eternal rule of the Lord. May we always choose the path of righteousness and reject the ways of the wicked.

Prayer

Gracious, merciful, and loving God, I pray for your people who need your touch of comfort, peace, and protection. I pray that you will continue to remind your people that you are near those who are faint-hearted and suffering. Let them know you hear their prayers and will answer them according to your will and ways. This is my prayer, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Psalm 147:1-11

1 Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting. 2 The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. 3 He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds. 4 He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. 5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. 6 The Lord lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground. 7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre. 8 He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills. 9 He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry. 10 His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner; 11 but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

“The Lord builds up Jerusalem, he gathers the outcasts of Israel.” You can’t gather what is not scattered. This means the people are far from home. You don’t “build up” unless something is torn down. This means Jerusalem is just a shadow of what it once was. We see this kind of action over and over in this psalm. The Lord lifts, heals, and binds, but only what is downtrodden, broken, and wounded. This psalm was written either in or after tragedy, yet notice the tone. Joy, thanksgiving, and the final word is hope. As we journey through Lent together, the tone of this psalm provides a perfect guide—one of serious reflection, but filled with hope.

Carolyn Jones '77/'89

Reading Psalm 147 seems a bit like preparing for or listening to the pastoral prayer offered during corporate worship. The prayer is directed to God, but it needs to “connect” with the people. So great is God’s power, so broad the range of the Creator’s care and activity, that anyone who is paying attention will almost inevitably be moved to be generous with praise. Since time doesn’t ordinarily allow for exhaustive lists to be spoken aloud, the one who prays and praises can be tempted to yield to what English teachers used to critique as “glittering generalities.” So some specifics need to be cited.

Here the psalmist deals with this dilemma by identifying in particular a number of ways in which God’s goodness is made known. The One who is the great God of Israel also cares for outcasts and the brokenhearted. The God of Creation not only counts and names the stars in the heavens, but also makes the rain fall and the grass grow and sees to it that each bird and animal is fed. In all these ways—and countless others—God is simply being God. But according to the Psalmist, a kind of divine delight is generated when people such as we are moved to love and honor God with our praise. How will we give God pleasure today?

Prayer

Following the example of the psalmist, offer your own song of praise, giving thanks for something remarkable in the created order that amazes, pleases, or surprises you; committing to God’s care at least one brokenhearted or downtrodden individual or group; expressing gratitude for a plant or animal that enriches your life; and acknowledging one particular way in which you have experienced God’s love. Praise the Lord! Amen.

Charissa Clark Howe '14/'16

Lent is a season in which we reflect on our need for Jesus. For 40 days, we give up things like Facebook and chocolate. Some of the more hardcore Lent-fasters might give up meat or coffee. It is a somber time, in which we tend to focus on our brokenness and our despair without Jesus. But in Lent there is a hope to be found—a hope that we are remiss to forget if we focus only inwardly on what we’ve gotten wrong.

This Psalm, like many Psalms, offers us a look at both sides of the coin—both the desperation and the hope. There are outcasts—and God gathers them up. We are brokenhearted—but God binds our broken hearts. The humble are lifted up. And God is given pleasure by our hope.

As we continue to enter deeper into this season, let us remember that when we fall down, God lifts us up. When we are hopeless, God gives us hope. Even though we walk through the dark passage of the Lenten season, we walk toward The Great Light—Jesus Christ.

Prayer

God, remind us not only of our need for you in our despair, but also of the great hope that is offered to us. Help us to allow your light to shine into the darkest corners of our lives. Bind up our broken hearts. Give us hope in the hopeless times. Take pleasure in the hope we find in your steadfast love. Amen.

Heather Runser '14

Praise the Lord. But how can I praise the Lord when I'm surrounded by darkness? How can I praise the Lord when there is violence and war and all sorts of injustice? How can I praise the Lord in the midst of the storm that I find myself in?

Praise the Lord. Not a suggestion, but a command. It is so easy to lament, and even easier to complain, because life is hard and cruel sometimes. No one understands this better than the Lord himself, who bore the darkness of sin and cried out in agony.

Praise the Lord. How can we not praise Him for all He has done, and for all He has given? As we journey closer to the cross, let us not forget that after the darkness comes the brightest dawn of an empty tomb. No matter how dark this life can be, we can trust that the victory over the darkness is won.

Praise the Lord!

Prayer

Lord over darkness and Lord of light, it is easy to look around us and wonder at the state of the world. It is so easy to worry about the future and our place in it. Thank you that the simplest thing we can do is put our trust in you, the One who holds our past, our present, and all the years to come. Amen.

Psalm 147:12-20

12 Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! 13 For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. 14 He grants peace within your borders; he fills you with the finest of wheat. 15 He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. 16 He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes. 17 He hurls down hail like crumbs—who can stand before his cold? 18 He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow. 19 He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel. 20 He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances. Praise the Lord!

Derek Davenport '05/'17

This psalm is filled with such rich imagery. Frigid words like snow, frost, and hail are compared to images of warming up after dinner—wool, ashes, and crumbs. After this juxtaposition we switch to the power of God's word to melt away the cold. Though the author describes "his cold," he uses imagery of warmth, and then moves to a springtime image of blowing wind and flowing water. This paradox is perfect for us as we journey toward both the cold dark night of the crucifixion, and then the warmth of sunrise on Easter morning.

Steve Tuell, faculty emeritus

In Pittsburgh where I live, Lent always comes in wintertime. But the wintry language of Psalm 147 may seem suitable to this season of the church year wherever you call home. The liturgical color for Lent is purple—an appropriately grim and gloomy shade. But we likely think of Lent in even more somber,

Winter shades: the penitential black of clerical robes and leafless branches; the gray of ash on our foreheads and of clouded winter skies; the dingy off-white of sackcloth, like dirty snow.

Yet, curiously, the word “Lent” has nothing to do with Winter—or for that matter, with fasting or penitence. Etymologically, “Lent” derives from the Middle English *lenten* and the Old English *lencten*, and is related to the Old High German *lenzin*, all of which mean “Spring”!

These 40 days of preparation are appropriately penitential, marked by self-examination, prayer and fasting, but they need not be grim and colorless. “Lent” *means* Spring—a green season, a time of growth. Lent provides the opportunity for us to break up the fallow ground of our cold hearts, as God makes the wind of the Spirit blow and the Water of Life flow into us. Lent is the time for the Spirit to prune away our dead branches so that we may bear fruit. Lent can be a season of new life—a springtime for our souls.

Friends, God grant you a green, growing, God-filled Lent!

Prayer

Artist of souls,
you sculpted a people for yourself
out of the rocks of wilderness and fasting.
Help us as we take up your invitation to prayer and simplicity,
that the discipline of these forty days
may sharpen our hunger for the feast of your holy friendship,
and whet our thirst for the living water you offer
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Psalm 148

1 Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! 2 Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! 3 Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! 4 Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! 5 Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. 6 He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. 7 Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, 8 fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! 9 Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! 10 Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! 11 Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! 12 Young men and women alike, old and young together! 13 Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. 14 He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord!

Exodus 9:13-35

13 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 14 For this time I will send all my plagues upon you yourself, and upon your officials, and upon your people, so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. 15 For by now I could have

stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. 16 But this is why I have let you live: to show you my power, and to make my name resound through all the earth. 17 You are still exalting yourself against my people, and will not let them go. 18 Tomorrow at this time I will cause the heaviest hail to fall that has ever fallen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. 19 Send, therefore, and have your livestock and everything that you have in the open field brought to a secure place; every human or animal that is in the open field and is not brought under shelter will die when the hail comes down upon them.” 20 Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD hurried their slaves and livestock off to a secure place. 21 Those who did not regard the word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock in the open field. 22 The LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that hail may fall on the whole land of Egypt, on humans and animals and all the plants of the field in the land of Egypt.” 23 Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire came down on the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; 24 there was hail with fire flashing continually in the midst of it, such heavy hail as had never fallen in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25 The hail struck down everything that was in the open field throughout all the land of Egypt, both human and animal; the hail also struck down all the plants of the field, and shattered every tree in the field. 26 Only in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail. 27 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. 28 Pray to the LORD! Enough of God’s thunder and hail! I will let you go; you need stay no longer.” 29 Moses said to him, “As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord’s. 30 But as for you and your officials, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God.” 31 (Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. 32 But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they are late in coming up.) 33 So Moses left Pharaoh, went out of the city, and stretched out his hands to the LORD; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured down on the earth. 34 But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned once more and hardened his heart, he and his officials. 35 So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

Jonathan Lawrence '97

Psalm 148 and Exodus 9:13-35 present contrasting views of humanity’s experience with creation. In Psalm 148 all parts of creation praise God in harmony, but in Exodus thunder, hail, and fire punish Pharaoh for the disharmony he has caused by treating the Israelites unjustly. As the story continues, we find that thunder and hail are not sufficient to change Pharaoh’s mind, and further destruction results. These “natural” disasters end the injustice and help to restore order, a theme seen earlier in the story of Noah. This use of divine violence continues throughout the Bible as faithful heroes are protected by God but the unrighteous are destroyed.

Such stories have led some people to argue that even now natural disasters are God’s punishment on us for various sins. These explanations ignore the widespread suffering among many people who have no responsibility for those sins and the environmental destruction that has contributed to recent storms, floods, and mudslides. I grew up near Niagara Falls and have now returned to teach and preach in the area. Niagara Falls is a site of great natural beauty. It is also a reminder of environmental destruction that occurred when factory owners thought it was okay to dump their waste products into the river and bury them in nearby fields, some of which may never again be safe for human use. This kind of damage has happened worldwide, and in many cases the poor and vulnerable suffer the most due to environmental destruction.

As we approach the celebration of new life at Easter and the observance of Earth Day, these texts can challenge us to consider our attitude toward the environment. Will we view storms and other natural disasters as part of God's will, even if they result from human damage to the environment? Perhaps instead we can seek to restore the harmony described in Psalm 148, where humans add their voices to the praises coming from all other parts of Creation—we can seek to reduce our damage to God's creation, though storms and destruction will continue to come.

Prayer

Loving Creator, all creation sings your praises, but sometimes we have allowed our greed to threaten the balance of your creation. Help us to restore the harmony in our natural world, and help all nations when they face natural disasters. Amen.

Psalm 149

1 Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful. 2 Let Israel be glad in its Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King. 3 Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre. 4 For the Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with victory. 5 Let the faithful exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their couches. 6 Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands, 7 to execute vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, 8 to bind their kings with fetters and their nobles with chains of iron, 9 to execute on them the judgment decreed. This is glory for all his faithful ones. Praise the Lord!

Derek Davenport '05/'17

The people are glad in their Maker. We understand that, and even expect it from a psalm. But notice that the Lord also takes pleasure in the people. God chooses to enjoy creation and the people who are a part of it. This sense of delight is something we experience in our own relationships. There is something delightful about spending time with friends and loved ones. There is something delightful in friendship, trust, and love. This mutual sense of gladness points us to the fact that God has chosen to enter into relationship with creation. The joy then explodes into song and action—it's worship that comes from deep within, worship that cannot be silenced or stopped.

Nick Bersin '23

When we begin this psalm, reading it for private devotion or perhaps chanting it in worship, it is fairly congenial to us. Singing! Celebration! Rejoicing! The humble being adorned with victory! There is some war imagery—the previously mentioned victory, and the two-edged swords—but this imagery is clearly metaphorical, so we go with it.

Then we get to verse 7.

Suddenly, we're talking about executing vengeance on the nations—the others—and about punishing people, binding kings and nobles and executing judgment on them. This is not what I signed up for!

This kind of violent imagery is a stumbling block for many of us. How can we claim such violent and tribalistic texts as our Scripture? What happened to loving your enemies and worshiping with every tribe and tongue?

I am inclined to agree with Origen that such stumbling blocks are not embarrassing mistakes to be left out of the liturgy and forgotten, but rather inspired features of the text pushing us to deeper spiritual

meanings. We approach this text in the penitential season of Lent, a time when we examine ourselves and repent of our sin in anticipation of Good Friday and Easter. As we read this psalm, we may find that there is indeed a part of us that wants to chant these words about our earthly enemies. There is so much wickedness in the world, so many people who have wronged us. We would love to execute judgment on them!

But as we go down this path, we start to wonder whether we may not be the ones on the receiving end of the judgment. Why are we so sure that we are sitting in judgment over others and not the other way around?

If we continue to follow this thought, we realize that it is foolish either way. Jesus Christ will come again in glory to judge the quick and the dead. We will all stand before his judgment seat on the last day. Rather than propping ourselves up to judge others, we must throw ourselves before him and cry, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on us!" And when we do, we will find that he has already handed down his verdict: we are declared righteous in his sight, not on the basis of what we have done, but what he has done for us. By his faithfulness, we have been released from the judgment of the law and set free to live in fellowship with him.

Once we have realized this, we will come to read this psalm aright. Those who are being cast down and bound here are not ultimately human rulers. As Paul tells us, our enemies are not "of blood and flesh"; rather, we fight "against the cosmic powers of the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). Our own sin must be bound and judged to prepare us for the Lord's coming. These prayers of vengeance direct our attention away from our earthly enemies and toward the one who has defeated sin, death, and Satan by his cross and resurrection. As we anticipate the commemoration of the Lord's death and resurrection and eagerly await his return, let us remember that he has already won the victory.

Prayer

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth and have sent your blessed Son to preach to those who are far off and to those who are near. Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Psalm 150

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

John Magnuson '13

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.

First Readings: Old Testament Law and Prophets

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-13, 20-24 (Sunday Readings)

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” . . . 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3 but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” 4 But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. 8 They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” 11 He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” 12 The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.” . . . 20 The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living. 21 And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them. 22 Then the LORD God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” —23 therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. 24 He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

Don Owens ’69

This great story of the primordial parents of the whole human race continues to invoke the nature of humanity and the grace of the loving God and Creator. This story is one of freedom and love. We have been created free to make our choices—but *not* free to choose our consequences! Lent is the time to examine our choices and their consequences.

Human beings continually make poor choices and pursue inadequate remedies for their mistakes. Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and realized they were naked. To remedy their vulnerability, they

made clothes of fig leaves. But humans are allergic to fig leaves, not to mention the leaves are not large enough to cover what needs to be covered and wilt shortly after being taken from the tree. Adam and Eve were afraid. They suffered deep and profound fear.

But God, being more concerned with their (and our) future than with their past, steps into the picture and remarks, You ate from the forbidden tree! His grace prevails, and he makes for them clothes out of skins—adequate and lasting. With Eve following him, Adam is removed from the Garden, and thus they are protected. For if they had eaten from the Tree of Life (the other tree growing in the center of the Garden), they would have lived forever in their state of fear. God’s gracious act of removal prevents their living eternally in pain and shame.

In this time of Lent, let us examine our lives. We know that we often make many poor choices and just as poorly try to correct or cover them up. At the same time, we often reap the consequences. Instead of dwelling on our poor choices, let us recognize God’s embracing grace. What may seem like a curse is often, instead, divine grace that keeps us from an even worse fate. For God is infinitely more concerned with our future than our past. Lent is the time to embrace God’s grace and love in our lives—and in the lives of all around us.

Prayer

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan, come quickly to help us, for we are assaulted by many temptations. You know all our weaknesses—let each one of us find you mighty to save. We make these requests through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Genesis 37:1-11

1 Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. 2 This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. 4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him. 5 Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. 6 He said to them, “Listen to this dream that I dreamed. 7 There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf.” 8 His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?” So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words. 9 He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, “Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” 10 But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, “What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?” 11 So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Robin Craig ’10

It’s almost impossible to read this passage without hearing the score from Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. But once you shake the music from your mind and get past the reality that the coat is not technicolored, nor any particular color at all, but merely “a long robe with sleeves,” you can think anew about what it represents.

Designed to delight and to conceal and to protect, that coat instead arouses envy, exposes innocence, and threatens danger. Joseph, coat on his shoulders, can't resist telling his brothers about the dreams portraying a destiny for him which far outshines their own. He has no inkling that his coat and his dreams will ignite jealousy and propel him into circumstances which threaten his security and even his existence.

As we plunge into our Lenten pilgrimage, we might remember Joseph's journey, from favored son to slave to prisoner to gifted advisor to triumphant rescuer of his people. When we first set out, wearing beautiful coats and dreaming about our own ideas of success, challenges which threaten to overwhelm us may await. And yet, God is preparing us with precisely the gifts needed to fulfill dreams and serve others in ways and circumstances we are not yet capable of imagining.

Prayer

Gracious God, as we move into the Lenten season, we know that surprises may lie in store for us. Guide us, we pray, through even the harshest of circumstances, so that we might discover the ways in which you call us to serve your people. Amen.

Genesis 37:12-24

12 Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. 13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." 14 So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. He came to Shechem, 15 and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" 16 "I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." 17 The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. 18 They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. 19 They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." 21 But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." 22 Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; 24 and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Don Ewing '72/'81

Young, bright, his father's favorite, not sure of what life will bring but only that it will be great, he heads off on an errand—and so begins the story of Joseph. The story is very personal. We love the story and even as we read it we are pulling for Joseph, for we remember all that has happened before in his dreams. We read quickly through the brothers' jealousy, for we know jealousy never leads to anything worthwhile. We read through their jealousy with great anticipation of how God will extract Joseph from this terrible situation and bring about God's dream of a nation.

We can identify with that pattern (dream, kicked to the curb, restoration), for it is not unlike our own story, or the story of our family. The youthful dive into life includes dreams, like those for career and family. Starting out, we anticipate great things, new things. We aren't exactly certain how they will happen, but the future looks bright. Then suddenly . . . we get thrown into a pit of many sizes and shapes—loss of income, job termination, medical issues, aging-parent concerns, emotional grief and

loss. It can go on. Like Joseph at the bottom of his pit, we wonder not *how* is God going to get us out of this mess, but *whether* God is going to get us out.

Then comes grace—we are shown a way out of our pit. And looking back we wonder how we could have doubted God. Where was our faith? Where *is* our faith? In this season we look back at the pits we have been thrown into, and we give thanks for the grace that has raised us then and will continue to do so through faith.

Prayer

O Lord of light and darkness, of mountain tops and deep abyss, open our eyes and hearts to your grace shown to us in the past and awaiting us in our future. We pray that the darkness and depth of the pits we are thrown into would not only turn us to You in trust but also remind us of your power to redeem, and your joy in doing so. In hope and with joy we lift to you our lives in the knowledge of your sure grace and love through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Brian Wallace '06

Dreams are powerful. Whether actual brain activity during sleep or a more figurative imagining of what could be, dreams can help unlock new God-breathed possibilities in our lives. For Joseph, the dream he had (and shared) was one that threatened much of what his brothers understood as normal in their time and place. And yet, the dream he had would be a critical piece in the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to the Hebrew people and the world. In many ways, Joseph's dream was part of a larger dream—a divine dream—to heal the separation between God and the people.

In Lent, we spend time reflecting upon who we are and who God is in preparation for rejoicing in what God did in raising Jesus from the dead. Lent is a time in which we prepare to celebrate the fulfillment of the dream that Joseph carried. In the midst of this Lenten season, is there space for us to dream? To think about God's call to places we may never have considered because they would threaten our understanding of what is "normal"? Which would push and stretch us into new places and new situations? That at points along the road we might find ourselves at the bottom of a pit, wondering if we got the dream wrong?

Prayer

God, this Lenten season, may we have the courage to dream about what you might have for us on the other side of Good Friday. After all, echoing Tony Campolo's famous line, even on Friday, Sunday is still coming. Amen.

Genesis 37:25-36

25 Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. 26 Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. 28 When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt. 29 When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes. 30 He returned to his brothers, and said, "The boy is gone; and I, where can I turn?" 31 Then they took Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood. 32 They had the long robe with sleeves taken to their father, and they said, "This we have found; see now whether it is your son's robe or not." 33 He

recognized it, and said, "It is my son's robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." 34 Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. 35 All his sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father bewailed him. 36 Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

Keith McIlwain '00

Long centuries have passed since the sons of Jacob sold Joseph into slavery. It seems to us an act of the highest cruelty to sell one's own brother into slavery and almost certain death to remove an annoyance or even to eliminate a rival. Knowing that ultimately God uses Joseph's misery to save Israel helps to lessen our shock, to be sure, but perhaps in this season of penitent reflection we should not be too quick to move on from this moment.

What must have been the dark clouds of sin and alienation in the hearts of the sons of Jacob that killing or selling their brother seemed at all acceptable? How far can envy or ambition drive a person? How deep into selfishness and shadow must one crawl to find this act in any way tolerable?

Lest we condemn Judah and his brothers too quickly, we ought to ask ourselves if indeed we have ever "sold out" a brother or sister for convenience, comfort, or profit. Have we ever avoided the cries of the hurting or the lost because it seems far easier to focus on another project or ministry, even a worthwhile one? Have we ever ignored the demands of faithful discipleship because obedience is difficult in a culture which doesn't know the Holy One of Israel . . . and, in so doing, "sold out" Jesus himself?

The act of Judah and his brothers is barbaric and easy to denounce. Perhaps a more fruitful response would be to ponder prayerfully how we as disciples and as the Body of Christ have acted similarly when faced with challenging moments of decision.

Prayer

Eternal God, who finds a way for the broken even in the midst of chaos, forgive us where we have failed to seek obedience, and, by the Spirit's power, grant us your strength and a deep desire for faithfulness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Genesis 39:1-23

1 Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. 2 The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. 5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. 6 So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate. Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. 7 And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. 9 He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back

anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" 10 And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not consent to lie beside her or to be with her. 11 One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house, 12 she caught hold of his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. 13 When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, 14 she called out to the members of her household and said to them, "See, my husband has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us! He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; 15 and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside." 16 Then she kept his garment by her until his master came home, 17 and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; 18 but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside." 19 When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, "This is the way your servant treated me," he became enraged. 20 And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. 21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. 22 The chief jailer committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. 23 The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

Tami Hooker '02/'20

As a prison chaplain, I read with great interest a number of stories about inmates who spent decades in jail, only to be exonerated and released. But one story was different. It was about an inmate I had known and had been blessed to work with for years. When I heard what had happened at court, I looked up the news articles. The pictures all showed him wearing the same smile that he had on his face most of the time I'd encountered him as an inmate. Sure, there were days when he was a bit discouraged, and he was always ready to tell someone he hadn't met before that he had been wrongly convicted. But I don't ever recall his being bitter or taking his anger or disappointment out on anyone else. I wonder how he did it day after day for more than 21 years. I'm not sure that I could have done it.

We live in a fallen world where family members or people with power are vengeful because they haven't gotten what they wanted, and where oppressive and unfair circumstances can all harm the innocent. It's tempting, when it happens to us, to put on our victim label and to think that, because we're wearing it, we're entitled to act out and treat others badly or be angry with God.

But Joseph and my friend, both wrongly convicted prisoners, show us a different way. It doesn't require that we stop working for justice. But it does involve refusing to grant the actions of others or even our circumstances the power to change who we are and what we do. That power rightfully belongs only to God, who claims us as God's own, who is with us in our times of struggle and disappointment, and who finds a way to show us *such* great favor in our most challenging circumstances that it is apparent even to those outside the faith.

Prayer

Holy God, when we are tempted to claim the right to behave badly toward others or toward you because of what has happened to us, remind us of Joseph's integrity even as a man sold into slavery in Potiphar's house by his own family, and as a man sent to prison for doing the right thing. Remind us that our Savior bore the injustice of being wrongly accused and condemned, so he knows our struggles when we are treated in an unjust way. Help us to hold onto our integrity

and our trust that you will be with us even in times of trial. And may our actions be a witness of this belief to others. Amen.

Genesis 40:1-23

1 Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt. 2 Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, 3 and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. 4 The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he waited on them; and they continued for some time in custody. 5 One night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own meaning. 6 When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. 7 So he asked Pharaoh’s officers, who were with him in custody in his master’s house, “Why are your faces downcast today?” 8 They said to him, “We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.” And Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.” 9 So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, “In my dream there was a vine before me, 10 and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms came out and the clusters ripened into grapes. 11 Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.” 12 Then Joseph said to him, “This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days; 13 within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you shall place Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. 14 But remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place. 15 For in fact I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.” 16 When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, “I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, 17 and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head.” 18 And Joseph answered, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; 19 within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a pole; and the birds will eat the flesh from you.” 20 On the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, he made a feast for all his servants, and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. 21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand; 22 but the chief baker he hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. 23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Carey Jo Johnston '03

In western culture, we often pay little attention to the meaning of our dreams. We might put them down to the work of our subconscious, or eating leftover pizza that didn't agree with our "system," — not to God's communicating with us. But in the Bible, dreams have great significance. In fact, the whole Joseph story hinges on dreams. (Read also Genesis 37 and 41.) When asked about interpreting others' dreams when he was imprisoned, Joseph was quick to give witness to God in a culture that believed in many gods. "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me" (Gen. 40:8b), Joseph responded.

Today, many cultures still put great stock in dreams. Christians who are working among Muslim people groups share that most Muslims who come to Christ do so through a dream and a connection with a caring Christian. A friend of mine who comes from a 99% Muslim people group in the horn of Africa had such a dream. He dreamed of a man in a shining white robe telling him to go to the town (a several hours' walk away). He walked to the town and there met a Christian woman who invited him to church.

There is more to the story, but the dream and the Christian woman were key elements leading him to belief in Jesus.

In our Lenten prayers, we can pray that God would give people like my friend dreams of Jesus and that they would meet loving Christians who will share about Jesus. And for people of cultures in which dreams are not given as much significance, we can pray that Christians, like Joseph, would give witness to the presence of God when opportunities present themselves. Pray that *you* might be one of these Christians!

Prayer

Lord, I pray today for dream-believing people to have dreams of Jesus and connections with Christians who can share the love of Jesus with them. Lord, keep me sensitive to how I can share the truth and love of Jesus with those around me. Amen.

Genesis 41:1-13

1 After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, 2 and there came up out of the Nile seven sleek and fat cows, and they grazed in the reed grass. 3 Then seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. 4 The ugly and thin cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. And Pharaoh awoke. 5 Then he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. 6 Then seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them. 7 The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Pharaoh awoke, and it was a dream. 8 In the morning his spirit was troubled; so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh. 9 Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "I remember my faults today. 10 Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard. 11 We dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own meaning. 12 A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each according to his dream. 13 As he interpreted to us, so it turned out; I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged."

Sandra Collins '87

In the recounting of the strange and terrible dreams in Genesis 41, Pharaoh's chief cupbearer suddenly says, "I remember my faults today" (v. 9). Such a poignant moment bears reflection.

The NIV translates this statement in terms of the cupbearer's suddenly seeing his "shortcomings"—as though he unexpectedly recalled where he had left his keys. In truth, the Hebrew here is one of the many words for sin: *chet*, conveying the condemnatory sense of sinning against someone, or causing grievous offense through one's actions. In the midst of serving this mercurial pharaoh, the cupbearer realizes he has failed the captive Joseph.

We are presented on one level with a paradox: even Joseph's own brothers, who sold him into slavery, have not yet come to such a conviction of spirit. But the cupbearer, calling his offense against Joseph to mind in this way, offers a meditation on the many little injustices that we, through sins of commission as well as omission, commit each and every day.

Such moments when our spirits are pricked urge confession as well as redress. Ours can be as simple as the cupbearer's "I remember my faults today" or as overwhelming as a sober discernment of our many grievous offenses. In fact, this exact wording is picked up in the General Confession of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*:

We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, Which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed.

The cupbearer remedied his sin against Joseph: he told Pharaoh of the Israelite who could interpret dreams. Then as now, the humility of confession opens a space for God's saving action to enter in. Through Christ's wounds, we are healed. Today, embrace that humble confession which allows space for salvation to take hold, to convict, and to transform.

Prayer

Accept today, Lord, my humble and contrite heart. Forgive my actions that have caused pain to others. Show me the way forward, that I might act in accordance with your divine and awesome love in all things great and small. To the praise and glory of your name always, now and forever, amen.

Genesis 41:14–45

14 Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurriedly brought out of the dungeon. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. 15 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." 16 Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." 17 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile; 18 and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. 19 Then seven other cows came up after them, poor, very ugly, and thin. Never had I seen such ugly ones in all the land of Egypt. 20 The thin and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows, 21 but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had done so, for they were still as ugly as before. Then I awoke. 22 I fell asleep a second time and I saw in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good, growing on one stalk, 23 and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouting after them; 24 and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. But when I told it to the magicians, there was no one who could explain it to me." 25 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. 26 The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. 27 The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of famine. 28 It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. 29 There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. 30 After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land. 31 The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous. 32 And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. 33 Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34 Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. 35 Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. 36 That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine." 37 The proposal

pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. 38 Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?" 39 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. 40 You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you." 41 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." 42 Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck. 43 He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command; and they cried out in front of him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44 Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." 45 Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt.

Charissa Clark Howe '14/'16

When Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream, he was not being called to do something new. He'd done it before. This wasn't even the first time he'd done it right. The first time he'd done it right, it got him into some seriously hot water. His brothers didn't appreciate that previous interpretation, nor were they fond of their father's favor of Joseph. As a result, they shipped him off to Egypt in the hands of slave traders and acted as though he were dead.

I wouldn't blame Joseph if he'd just packed it in right there. "That's it! I'm not interpreting any more dreams. It's not worth the trouble!" What courage it must have taken for Joseph to continue to interpret dreams for those around him—to help others see what it was God was speaking to them through their dreams. And yet, he continued.

Here we see that, in spite of the trouble that speaking God's word to others caused for Joseph early on, eventually he was recognized for it. Eventually, it bore clear fruit and made a huge difference. In fact, had he not warned Pharaoh of the coming famine, Joseph's own brothers who had betrayed him would have starved. What strange but wonderful ways God works in through our courage!

Prayer

God of all, thank you for the way you speak in our lives. Make me a vessel of your Word, so that, through my courage and willingness to speak up, others' lives might be touched by you and changed. Grant me the strength to speak your Word, even when it's difficult or unpopular.

Genesis 41:46-57

46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. 47 During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. 48 He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. 49 So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure. 50 Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. 51 Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." 52 The second he named Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes." 53 The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; 54 and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of

Egypt there was bread. 55 When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do." 56 And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. 57 Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

Michael Stanton '06

As I began writing this meditation, I was struggling with depression, overwhelmed by vocational challenges, and dogged by a sense of dread that I was failing. It was in that mental state that I found the depiction of Joseph's prosperity and success irritating—until Mannaseh and Ephraim were birthed into the story. The names of Joseph's sons serve as reminders of the hardships and misfortunes Joseph had endured for the better part of his 30 years of life: being forsaken by his brothers and sold into slavery, falsely accused of a crime and imprisoned—unmerited hardships resulting from the jealousy and spite of others and instigated, ironically enough, by Joseph's God-given gifts and obedience.

My hardships pale in comparison. Yet in Joseph we see no indication of a darkening disposition, no hint of resentment, no feelings of failure. His demeanor begs the question, "What got him through?" As Joseph realized the horrific reality of his brothers' intentions, did he have hope? As he was being escorted down the dark corridors leading to his prison cell, did he have hope? What did that hope look like? What form did hope take to enable him to hold onto it and stave off depression, resentment, and defeat?

In the midst of these questions a pattern emerges: At the onset of each of Joseph's hardships, the reality of God's presence is acknowledged. As he was pulled from the pit by his new owners and carried into an unknown future, "the Lord was with Joseph" (39:2). As his eyes were still adjusting to the darkness of his prison cell, "the Lord was with Joseph" (39:21). During the development of each hardship, the power of God's presence is acknowledged. As the baker, the butler, and the pharaoh all looked to Joseph to make sense of their dreams, Joseph asks, "do not interpretations belong to God?" (40:8) and declares, "it is not I," (41:16). And at the conclusion of each hardship, the faithfulness of God's presence is acknowledged. In fact, at the pinnacle of Joseph's prosperity and the birth of his two sons, Joseph gives them *Hebrew* names whose meanings declare the faithfulness of God!

In the pit, in the prison, and in prosperity, Joseph's hope is rooted not in the circumstances, not in himself, but in the reality of God's powerful and faithful presence.

Prayer

Merciful Lord, in our pits, our prisons, and our prosperity, draw us not to ourselves but, instead, to the reality, power, and faithfulness of your presence with us—in, as, and through your Son, Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Deliver us from the emptiness of self-reliance and use us to share your presence with and to serve "all the world." We make these requests for your glory and in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Trevor Jamison '01

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely . . . there is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it." (John Dahlberg-Action, 1834-1902)

How do you respond to that statement? A hearty "Amen"? Or do you feel it's unnecessarily pessimistic?

Both Bible readings feature people appointed to an office. Joseph, after many trials and tribulations, is now Pharaoh's right hand man, preparing for a famine in Egypt. In the second reading, Jesus appoints twelve men as apostles—messengers with authority to cast out demons. How will Joseph and the Twelve behave now that power is in their hands?

Joseph uses his power to organise a nationwide food collection in the good years. Then when the bad times come, he opens up the storehouses and sells that food to the hungry Egyptians from whom he had collected it in the first place! Clever? Yes. Honourable? Not so sure.

As for the Twelve, it's a mixed picture. Peter used the authority of his office to ask Jesus questions, but had trouble listening to the answers. James and John came to Jesus seeking to be promoted above the others. And as for Judas . . .

If Joseph, who was aware of being accompanied by God during his life, and the Twelve, who accompanied Jesus throughout his ministry on earth, underperformed in such fashion, what hope is there for us?

Politicians or church leaders, teachers or social influencers, and all others appointed to positions of power: don't put ultimate trust in them, even the good ones. Instead, look to Jesus, who was not corrupted by power, but used it to teach, to heal, and to set people free, including from our sinful human tendency to be corrupted by office and power.

Prayer

Gracious God,

We thank you for the gifts of office and power.

We pray for all who hold office,
and for all who wield power,
including ourselves.

May all of us look to follow the example of Jesus,
who wielded power for the sake of others, not self.

Amen.

Genesis 42:1-17

1 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you keep looking at one another? 2 I have heard," he said, "that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." 3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he feared that harm might come to him. 5 Thus the sons of Israel were among the other people who came to buy grain, for the famine had reached the land of Canaan. 6 Now Joseph was governor over the land; it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. 7 When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." 8 Although Joseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. 9 Joseph also remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them. He said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!" 10 They said to him, "No, my lord; your servants have come to buy food. 11 We are all sons of one man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies." 12 But he said to them, "No, you have come to see the nakedness of the land!" 13 They said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is

now with our father, and one is no more.” 14 But Joseph said to them, “It is just as I have said to you; you are spies! 15 Here is how you shall be tested: as Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here! 16 Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies.” 17 And he put them all together in prison for three days.

Dan Aleshire, Board member

Brothers didn't do very well in Genesis. Cain killed Abel; Jacob swindled his twin brother out of his rightful inheritance; Jacob's older sons sold their younger brother, Joseph, to traveling slave traders. In today's text from Genesis, Jacob “did not send” the youngest son with the older brothers because he “feared that harm might come to him.” It appears Jacob remembered what had happened to Joseph. Perhaps it was envy or jealousy, or ancient testosterone, or perhaps something else, but this book of many wonderful beginnings also records the beginning of tragic fraternal conflict.

In today's text, it is not clear why Joseph treats his brothers the way that he does. One reading would put anger at the center of his behavior: he treats them harshly; accuses them of being spies even though he knows they are not; requires one of them to return to Canaan to get the youngest brother, and puts the rest in jail for a few days. Another reading is that Joseph is the loyal governor of the pharaoh—and at a time when many were coming to Egypt in search of food because of widespread famine, it is Joseph's job to care for the careful distribution of Egypt's food reserves—even if the petitioners are his brothers and he is pompous and overbearing about how he does the job. While the story continues with tender moments, with food for Abraham and his family, and even with reconciliation among the brothers, this text is full of reminders of tragically broken brotherly bonds.

Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount come to mind: “if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment.” Maybe Lent is a good time to assess the anger, envy, and jealousy we hold toward others. Maybe this Lenten season would be a good time finally to give them up. And, maybe, giving them up for a season would lessen their grip on us the rest of the year.

Prayer

God of grace and mercy, give us insight into the tendencies in us that strain family relationships. Give us courage to seek their resolution. Help us tend to relationships beyond our families—with neighbors and enemies, with immigrants and those seeking justice, with strangers near and far. Teach us to be our brother's keeper. Amen.

Genesis 42:18-28

18 On the third day Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: 19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here where you are imprisoned. The rest of you shall go and carry grain for the famine of your households, 20 and bring your youngest brother to me. Thus your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they agreed to do so. 21 They said to one another, “Alas, we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother; we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this anguish has come upon us.” 22 Then Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.” 23 They did not know that Joseph understood them, since he spoke with them through an interpreter. 24 He turned away from them and wept; then he returned and spoke to them. And he picked out Simeon and had him bound before their eyes. 25 Joseph then gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to return every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. This was done for them.

26 They loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed. 27 When one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money at the top of the sack. 28 He said to his brothers, "My money has been put back; here it is in my sack!" At this they lost heart and turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

Kendra Buckwalter Smith '12/'13, staff

During Lent, we remember that the way of the cross, the way to resurrection, is through death. New life requires a daily surrendering of the old life, a letting go of the present order, so that we may embrace the new humanity. When Joseph saw and heard the brothers who had sold him into slavery, he wept. The weight of it all must have been overwhelming. Moving forward, embracing a new way of living, required Joseph to lay to rest the hurt of his brothers' hatred, the bitterness and resentment over what they had done to him, the longing for the family life that could have been, the pride of having been elevated to a place of power over those from whom he might be tempted to seek revenge. And so he wept.

Sometimes, all we feel we can do is weep. As Jesus wept over Jerusalem, we weep for our own circumstances and for our weary world. When the weight of everything overwhelms us, perhaps all we can do is join our voices with Jesus' from the cross in crying out, "Father, forgive them." Perhaps all we can do is tell God that the weight is too heavy for us, the brokenness of this world too powerful, the pain put upon us too unforgivable. Perhaps all we can do is weep under its weight . . . and then remember that, even now, it is all at the foot of the cross and being pieced back to wholeness through the sacrificed body of Christ—it is being redeemed by the blood of Jesus shed for the forgiveness even of those sins that are too painful for us ourselves to forgive.

Prayer

Eternal God, forgive us where we have failed to seek reconciliation, where we have sought revenge rather than reunion. By the power of your Spirit, help us to weep for all that breaks your heart. Then, as we trust in your forgiveness and reconciling work, give us the grace to lay to rest the old and live in the newness of life you have brought. Amen.

Genesis 42:29-38

29 When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, 30 "The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly to us, and charged us with spying on the land. 31 But we said to him, 'We are honest men, we are not spies. 32 We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.' 33 Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. 34 Bring your youngest brother to me, and I shall know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will release your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'" 35 As they were emptying their sacks, there in each one's sack was his bag of money. When they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. 36 And their father Jacob said to them, "I am the one you have bereaved of children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has happened to me!" 37 Then Reuben said to his father, "You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." 38 But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should come to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."

Walt Pietschmann '90

The long story between Joseph and his brothers is one that is full of jealousy, hatred, and backstabbing, but also one that is ultimately about forgiveness and redemption. In this section of the story, Joseph has given his brothers food to return to Canaan and has requested that the youngest brother, Benjamin, be brought back to Egypt when the brothers return. Even though the brothers brought money to pay for the food, Joseph has secretly given it back to them. Upon returning to Canaan the brothers tell their father, Jacob, all that has happened. Jacob is beside himself with grief. He doesn't want to let go of Benjamin and thinks he's already lost Joseph and perhaps now Simeon, who has been bound and held for ransom in Egypt.

There is an old saying that "blood is thicker than water," meaning that relationships and loyalties within a family are the strongest and most important ones. Since the beginning of time, however, those ties have served as some of our most difficult and toxic relationships as well. During this Lenten season, perhaps we need to examine our closest relationships and see how we can turn any difficulty we might have with a brother or sister, mother or father, son or daughter, into a more nourishing relationship. With hope and expectation, we can perhaps allow God to make all things new by turning jealousy and hatred into forgiveness and redemption.

Prayer

Redemptive God, my relationship with (*friend or relative*) hasn't always been a reflection of Your love for me. Fill my heart with a new spirit of grace and allow opportunities for us to heal our relationship. Forgive me any arrogance or contempt and replace it with hope and joy. Amen.

Genesis 43:1-15

1 Now the famine was severe in the land. 2 And when they had eaten up the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little more food." 3 But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' 4 If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food; 5 but if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.'" 6 Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?" 7 They replied, "The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?" 8 Then Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the boy with me, and let us be on our way, so that we may live and not die—you and we and also our little ones. 9 I myself will be surety for him; you can hold me accountable for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. 10 If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice." 11 Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry them down as a present to the man—a little balm and a little honey, gum, resin, pistachio nuts, and almonds. 12 Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the top of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. 13 Take your brother also, and be on your way again to the man; 14 may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, so that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin. As for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." 15 So the men took the present, and they took double the money with them, as well as Benjamin. Then they went on their way down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph.

Lois Swestyn '03

Jacob/Israel, one of the great Patriarchs of the Bible, is not showing his best leadership at this time, but we can learn from his actions. He's in a time of crisis, a famine in the land. Decisions need to be made about purchasing grain. God has already provided grain through Jacob's son Joseph, who is now in Egypt. But for the family to get more needed grain from there, Jacob will have to risk sending along his beloved son Benjamin, Joseph's youngest brother. That's part of the deal Joseph made with his other brothers when they came for grain the first time. Jacob resists sending Benjamin, for much deceit had been played out in this family before. Perhaps understandably, Jacob thought that the less others knew about him, the better off he and his family were.

Many Christians operate on this same principle. They think that keeping others from knowing them well avoids problems. But like Jacob, such people are misled. For it is sin that loves darkness and secrets. Righteousness, on the other hand, loves light and truth. Good communication is a must in all relationships—especially in our relationship with God. And trust is the key.

In this passage we see that Jacob relied on God, but only as a last resort. God had been and would continue to be active in this family's life in times of trouble, famine, and reconciliation. Likewise, God is active at all times in our lives.

Is there a famine in your life today? Are you seeking God for direction? Are you trusting God with all your life?

Prayer

All knowing God, we thank you for being active in all times of our life. We pray to be drawn closer to you through our honesty with you and others. May we rely on you first in our life and not as a last resort. Help us to recognize the 'famines' in our life and to trust you through every step of the journey to be fed, encouraged, hopeful, and in right relationship with others, especially with you. Amen.

Genesis 43:16-34

16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, 'Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon.' 17 The man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph's house. 18 Now the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, 'It is because of the money, replaced in our sacks the first time, that we have been brought in, so that he may have an opportunity to fall upon us, to make slaves of us and take our donkeys.' 19 So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the entrance to the house. 20 They said, 'Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food; 21 and when we came to the lodging-place we opened our sacks, and there was each one's money in the top of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it back with us. 22 Moreover, we have brought down with us additional money to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.' 23 He replied, 'Rest assured, do not be afraid; your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your sacks for you; I received your money.' Then he brought Simeon out to them. 24 When the steward had brought the men into Joseph's house, and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, 25 they made the present ready for Joseph's coming at noon, for they had heard that they would dine there. 26 When Joseph came home, they brought him the present that they had carried into the house, and bowed to the ground before him. 27 He inquired about their welfare, and said, 'Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?' 28 They

said, 'Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.' And they bowed their heads and did obeisance. 29 Then he looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, 'Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!' 30 With that, Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into a private room and wept there. 31 Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, 'Serve the meal.' 32 They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. 33 When they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, the men looked at one another in amazement. 34 Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.

Adam Davis, field education supervisor

This passage from the first book of the Bible details the beautiful reunion of Joseph with his estranged family. In large part, this account is why Joseph is held high before us as a model of biblical forgiveness. In spite of the (beyond) ill treatment Joseph received at the hands of his brothers, not to mention the cascading disasters that followed, Joseph was able to arrive at a place of forgiveness and reconciliation.

What is not highlighted in this particular passage, however, is Joseph's own role in provoking the ire of his brothers, or the ways that Joseph, in turn, tortured his brothers before arriving at this blessed place of reunion. Certainly one can understand the difficulty Joseph would have experienced in encountering his brothers so many years later, with the tables having been turned in the dynamics of their relationship in such a profound way.

So, while we admire Joseph and his willingness to forgive, we look beyond Joseph to Jesus as our model—Jesus, who calls us to turn the other cheek; Jesus, who calls us to bless, heal, and forgive.

Prayer

Most gracious God, we thank you for those who have modeled for us what it looks like to follow you. Thank you for the many times we have been forgiven. Make us faithful to give as we have received. As we continue to face our own humanity throughout this season, make us your instruments of healing and peace. Amen.

Genesis 44:1-17

1 Then he commanded the steward of his house, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the top of his sack. 2 Put my cup, the silver cup, in the top of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him. 3 As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. 4 When they had gone only a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward, "Go, follow after the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my silver cup?' 5 Is it not from this that my lord drinks? Does he not indeed use it for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.'" 6 When he overtook them, he repeated these words to them. 7 They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing! 8 Look, the money that we found at the top of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; why then would we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? 9 Should it be found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover the rest of us will become my lord's slaves." 10 He said, "Even so; in accordance with your words, let it be: he with whom it is found shall become my slave, but the rest of you shall go free."

11 Then each one quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. 12 He searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. 13 At this they tore their clothes. Then each one loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city. 14 Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house while he was still there; and they fell to the ground before him. 15 Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that one such as I can practice divination?" 16 And Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? How can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; here we are then, my lord's slaves, both we and also the one in whose possession the cup has been found." 17 But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the one in whose possession the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father."

Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, Board member

Joseph's story is one of the many Old Testament accounts of sibling rivalry. It is a story of transformation, redemption, and forgiveness. Genesis 44:1-17 recounts one of the tests Joseph gave his brothers in order to discern whether his brothers' hearts had been transformed since that fateful day when they sold him into slavery for 20 pieces of silver.

Their hearts had, in fact, been transformed by their father Jacob's profound grief resulting from their plot "to disappear" Joseph. They had been transformed from a group that did not want to bear with a brother who had fanciful dreams to a group that wanted to bear the punishment of a brother—Joseph's only full brother—now, ironically, accused of stealing silver. They wanted to spare the heart of their father, who undoubtedly would have been devastated by the loss of yet another child of his beloved wife Rachel. Later, we see that Joseph responded to the transformation of his brothers with great joy and lavish forgiveness.

Jesus, for the sake of his heavenly parent, willingly bore the punishment for our sins. But Jesus' willingness was not the result of his guilt or desire to right a previous wrong. He who was without any sin freely gave himself for your sin and my sin.

During Lent we are called to reflect on how we respond to these actions of our savior, redeemer, and brother. Are you being called to respond to the sanctifying movement of the Holy Spirit with a greater spirit of joy, forgiveness, and hope? Are you being called to stand in the gap for the Benjamins in our culture who, by systems and institutions, are set up to fail? Are you being called to rectify a past wrong you committed?

Prayer

God, I thank you for the gift of transformation and redemption. Help me to accept the transformation you have worked in others and in me. Help me to respond to transformation with joy, not skepticism. Help me to respond to you today by surrendering myself to stand in the gap for someone falsely accused or in need of redemption. I pray in the name of my brother, Jesus. Amen.

Genesis 44:18-34

18 Then Judah stepped up to him and said, "O my lord, let your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are like Pharaoh himself. 19 My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' 20 And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead; he alone is left of his mother's

children, and his father loves him.’ 21 Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me, so that I may set my eyes on him.’ 22 We said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.’ 23 Then you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.’ 24 When we went back to your servant my father we told him the words of my lord. 25 And when our father said, ‘Go again, buy us a little food,’ 26 we said, ‘We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother goes with us, will we go down; for we cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.’ 27 Then your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons; 28 one left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since. 29 If you take this one also from me, and harm comes to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol.’ 30 Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy’s life, 31 when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. 32 For your servant became surety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I will bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life.’ 33 Now therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers. 34 For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father.”

Alina Kanaski '16

This passage is from the middle of a story, one that is about Joseph but also about so many others. Take Judah, the speaker here: he was one of Joseph’s older brothers—a son of Leah and the brother who suggested selling Joseph into slavery.

Yet here he is, offering himself as Joseph’s slave to save his younger brother Benjamin from the same fate. Benjamin is Rachel’s other son, so beloved by their father that Jacob didn’t want to let Benjamin go to Egypt. He’s not too different from Joseph, but still Judah offers his life in exchange for Benjamin’s. Joseph isn’t the only one who’s changed as this story has unfolded.

Judah has offered himself as a surety for his brother Benjamin. Judah is responsible for Benjamin in their father’s eyes.

As I read this passage, I remember another Son—a “son” of Judah and one who also offered Himself for another. He also took on the responsibility for not just one, but for many, by giving His life in order to save them. He offered Himself not into slavery but into death. There is no sordid history behind Jesus’ sacrifice—not on God’s end. Yet there is the same love, the same desperate desire to save. God’s love, enacted in and through Jesus, is powerful, proven, and acted out through His life, His death, and His resurrection. As we sit in this period of waiting, of remembering the pain and the darkness, let us also remember God’s love, which Jesus enacted and which is the source of our hope.

Prayer

God, thank You for Your love, made visible and physical in Jesus Christ. Help us to see its echoes all around us, whether in the Bible, in the people around us, or in the small moments of life. In Your name we pray, Amen.

Genesis 45:1-15

1 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. 10 You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' 12 And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. 13 You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." 14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Sue Blank '15

Sibling rivalry has been around a long, long time. In fact, it rears its ugly head on page three of my Bible. Many of us have experienced struggles with siblings. I was the middle child of seven; there was always someone who was teasing, tattling, or cheating at Monopoly. Often we outgrow sibling rivalries. But in my work as a chaplain, I sometimes encounter the estrangement of those brothers and sisters who have disagreements over the care of their elderly parent. Family bonds can be stretched thin—even broken.

Our scripture passage tells us the story of Joseph, the braggart, the favorite son, sold into slavery by his brothers. Joseph's fortunes rise; his brothers come looking for a handout during a famine. Joseph, once powerless at the bottom of a pit, now has all the power. Will the blood that ties these men together now be spilled upon the ground? After some manipulation and testing of his brothers, Joseph forgives them and provides generously for their needs. Then he sends them back to Canaan to fetch their father. Humorously, Joseph cautions, "Do not quarrel along the way."

Is Joseph a paragon of mercy? Was he able to write off his brothers' crime as a "boyish prank"? Are the ties to their common ancestor that strong? Or was God the primary agent in this drama? Was Joseph able to extend mercy after he himself experienced God's mercy? Was Joseph able to extend grace after he himself received God's grace?

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, Open my eyes to see my sin and the signs of your grace. Teach me to be grace-full. Open my heart that I might extend mercy. Open my mind that I might seek forgiveness and that I might give it generously. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Elizabeth Nicodemus '23

I can't be the only one that reads this passage and the forgiveness that Joseph has for his brothers (who sold him into slavery!) and be left wondering how Joseph could possibly forgive them. They not only sold Joseph, but we are not told whether they looked for Joseph in the years that followed; and they more than likely did not. Any one of us would probably not welcome the one who wronged us into our lives

again, at least not in the way that Joseph has. Joseph, however, not only welcomes them in but shows them such great love and compassion. He grants them the solace to spend the rest of the famine with him, in land that he will provide them. He has shown them unconditional love.

As we read this text during this Lenten season, may we realize that we have been forgiven despite all that we've done. Like Joseph's brothers, we have been blessed with unconditional love: the unconditional love that Christ's death provided and continues to provide for all of us. This love knows no bounds and exceeds any and all expectations. Just like the love and grace Joseph shows his brothers, we are shown this same love everyday as people of faith. We have been forgiven just like Joseph's brothers and are loved by a God who sees us and knows us and loves us no matter what. May we spend this season in contemplation about the unconditional love that we have been given.

Prayer

God of love, open our hearts and minds to the ways that you have loved us. Grant us the peace to know that we are not defined by our past mistakes. Show us how we can love others despite the ways that we have been wronged. Allow us to love others as we are loved. In your name, Amen.

Genesis 45:16-28

16 When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, "Joseph's brothers have come," Pharaoh and his servants were pleased. 17 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your animals and go back to the land of Canaan. 18 Take your father and your households and come to me, so that I may give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you may enjoy the fat of the land.' 19 You are further charged to say, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. 20 Give no thought to your possessions, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'" 21 The sons of Israel did so. Joseph gave them wagons according to the instruction of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey. 22 To each one of them he gave a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. 23 To his father he sent the following: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. 24 Then he sent his brothers on their way, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Do not quarrel along the way." 25 So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. 26 And they told him, "Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt." He was stunned; he could not believe them. 27 But when they told him all the words of Joseph that he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 28 Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die."

LindaJo McKim '77

Earlier in Genesis, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and openly wept as he asked whether Jacob, his father was still alive. He also offered words of forgiveness and reconciliation: "Do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5).

When the members of Pharaoh's household heard of Joseph's actions and reported the incident to Pharaoh, he told Joseph to send his brothers home with gifts and an invitation for Jacob and his household to move to Egypt. The hungry, poverty-stricken people of Israel are now to be blessed through the migration of Jacob's family. God has chosen to bless this family and through Pharaoh brings about the needed reconciliation.

Lent is a time of repentance and forgiveness. During this time, the messages of forgiveness and reconciliation are ones we need to hear and experience as well. The overwhelming forgiveness demonstrated by Joseph is a paradigm of true forgiveness. A forgiveness that remembers in a new way the hurts and pains of the past. A forgiveness that can lead to reconciliation and new life and to a blessed Easter morning.

Prayer

Forgiving God, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, you offer us an opportunity to be reconciled to one another and to you. During this Lenten season, urge us to seek reconciliation in our personal lives and to work for forgiveness and reconciliation throughout the world. Amen.

Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34

1 When Israel set out on his journey with all that he had and came to Beer-sheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. 2 God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." 3 Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. 4 I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph's own hand shall close your eyes." 5 Then Jacob set out from Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. 6 They also took their livestock and the goods that they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, 7 his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters; all his offspring he brought with him into Egypt. . . .28 Israel sent Judah ahead to Joseph to lead the way before him into Goshen. When they came to the land of Goshen, 29 Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to meet his father Israel in Goshen. He presented himself to him, fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. 30 Israel said to Joseph, "I can die now, having seen for myself that you are still alive." 31 Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. 32 The men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have.' 33 When Pharaoh calls you, and says, 'What is your occupation?' 34 you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our ancestors'—in order that you may settle in the land of Goshen, because all shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians."

Antony Andrews '20

Joseph is a type of Christ. As the second-youngest of 12 brothers, Joseph finds that his grandiose dreams and visions cause his brothers to hate him. Their hate is so severe that it ultimately leads them to sell Joseph into slavery and to grieve their father, Jacob, by telling him that Joseph has been killed.

Of course, Joseph is not dead, but like Christ he is betrayed by his own, sold for a sum of silver, and ends up "saving the world." Joseph's revealing of himself to his brothers in Egypt is, for them, a sort of "resurrection" of their brother, thus making Joseph a type of Christ.

Their father Jacob's journeying to Egypt to see Joseph before this son's "own hand shall close [Jacob's] eyes" makes a further parallel between the stories of Joseph and Jesus: The "righteous and devout" Simeon, after seeing the baby Jesus in the Temple, says "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the

presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." Both Jacob and Simeon can die in peace after seeing in the flesh God's timely provision for salvation.

The goodness of God is evident in his dealings with Jacob, with Joseph and his brothers, and with us this Lenten season as we experience Christ's giving himself up for the life of the world.

Prayer

My Lord Jesus Christ, give me the eyes to see your salvation that you have so wonderfully accomplished for me on the tree of the cross. Let me gaze at it as the children of Israel gazed upon the bronze serpent in the wilderness when they were stung with sin. Amen.

Genesis 47:1-26

1 So Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; they are now in the land of Goshen." 2 From among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. 3 Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our ancestors were." 4 They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to reside as aliens in the land; for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks because the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, we ask you, let your servants settle in the land of Goshen." 5 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. 6 The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land; let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock." 7 Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob, and presented him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8 Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the years of your life?" 9 Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my earthly sojourn are one hundred thirty; few and hard have been the years of my life. They do not compare with the years of the life of my ancestors during their long sojourn." 10 Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. 11 Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and granted them a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had instructed. 12 And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents. 13 Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. 14 Joseph collected all the money to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. 15 When the money from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan was spent, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, "Give us food! Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone." 16 And Joseph answered, "Give me your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone." 17 So they brought their livestock to Joseph; and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. That year he supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock. 18 When that year was ended, they came to him the following year, and said to him, "We can not hide from my lord that our money is all spent; and the herds of cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. 19 Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate." 20 So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. All the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's. 21 As for the people, he made slaves of them from one end of Egypt to the other. 22 Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh, and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land. 23 Then Joseph said to the people, "Now that I have this day

bought you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you; sow the land. 24 And at the harvests you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones.” 25 They said, “You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh.” 26 So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth. The land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh’s.

Josephine (Jodi) Brodhead Moore '96, Board member

Lent. A time to examine ourselves—our needs, our shortcomings . . . and yes, our blessings, those Old Testament conventions that mirror the original promise God made to Abraham, conventions intended to invoke safety, prosperity, and longevity. In the Old Testament, the activity of blessing displays a proper hierarchy: fathers bless wives and progeny, rulers bless their subjects, priests bless their congregations. Always it is the greater who blesses the lesser in the context of one’s own community.

After Jacob’s remarkable reunion with Joseph in Egypt, Joseph presents his father to Pharaoh. Astoundingly, Jacob’s first act is to bless Pharaoh, both at the beginning of his audience and in its closing. Not only does his action represent a reversal of the standard convention, but, more dramatically, Jacob’s blessing also underscores the fact that God’s blessing is not limited to the Abrahamic community. God’s blessing is intended for all God’s creation—a radical notion that Jesus emphasizes again and again in the New Testament.

What is a blessing other than the promise of God’s salvation—a theme that interlaces the narrative about Joseph? Here in chapter 47, Joseph’s new life in Egypt proves to be a salvific blessing to his family, not just in their loving reunion but also in their escape from famine in Canaan. Pharaoh (perhaps because of Jacob’s blessing?) gives Israel’s family fertile land in Goshen, east of the Nile, for farming and grazing flocks and livestock. This land will be their home for the next 400 years and will save them from certain starvation and death.

What is remarkable in this little vignette is God’s saving grace shown not just to Jacob and his family, but also to all Egypt and Canaan. By working within Pharaoh’s existing institutional structures with supplies he had so wisely stockpiled, Joseph sells food and seeds to all Egypt for surviving the next five years of famine.

In our Lenten journey we, like Joseph, must find blessing and salvation whatever our circumstances; like Jacob and his family, we must recognize *when* to seek out salvation; like Jacob, we must remember that even in our weakness, we can bless.

We must also ask the question, Who in this story is chosen? Does Lent call us to acknowledge the powerful human sin of designating some as “chosen” and others as “unchosen”? Does Scripture teach us that God has eternally desired and chosen to bless ALL God’s creation?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are beloved sinners of your own creation who are striving always to be more like you. Help us to recognize and root out our need to define ourselves by “the other.” Help us to recognize how this attitude permeates society and our institutions. Bless us with a kingdom-view of your creation and a revelation of a just world in which all can participate equally. For it is through your blessing that our fractured world can attain salvation. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Genesis 47:27-48:7

27 Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly. 28 Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred forty-seven years. 29 When the time of Israel's death drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If I have found favor with you, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal loyally and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt. 30 When I lie down with my ancestors, carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." He answered, "I will do as you have said." 31 And he said, "Swear to me"; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself on the head of his bed. 48:1 After this Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2 When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," he summoned his strength and sat up in bed. 3 And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and he blessed me, 4 and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers; I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your offspring after you for a perpetual holding.' 5 Therefore your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are now mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are. 6 As for the offspring born to you after them, they shall be yours. They shall be recorded under the names of their brothers with regard to their inheritance. 7 For when I came from Paddan, Rachel, alas, died in the land of Canaan on the way, while there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath" (that is, Bethlehem).

Myles MacDonald '55, Board emeritus

Years ago, when preparing for a visit to the Holy Land, I had an opportunity to discuss my proposed itinerary with Dr. Kenneth Bailey, my seminary classmate and a noted theologian who resided and taught for years in the Middle East. When I told him I wanted to visit Hebron, the burial place of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, he strongly advised me that it was not worth the trip. So I followed his advice and didn't go there (though I admit there are times when I wish I had done so out of respect for our spiritual ancestors).

In today's Scripture reading from Genesis, one of those Patriarchs—Jacob, whose tomb is in Hebron—in what amounted to be his Last Will and Testament, stated first that he wanted to be buried with his ancestors (in Hebron), and second that he wanted to bless Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (because of Joseph's birthright).

Jesus, on the night before he died, revealed *his* Last Will and Testament, which is recorded in John 14. First, he bequeathed to his disciples, and to us, the gift of eternal life: "Because I live, you shall live also" (v. 19). Second, he bequeathed to us his Holy Spirit: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything" (v. 26). And third, he bequeathed to us his peace: "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (v. 27).

What an inheritance is ours through our Savior! We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Thanks be to God!

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for our rich inheritance, received through faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ. We are greatly blessed, since we have received "an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" for all who trust in him. We pray in Jesus' blessed name. Amen.

Genesis 48:8-22

8 When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" 9 Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." 10 Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, and he could not see well. So Joseph brought them near him; and he kissed them and embraced them. 11 Israel said to Joseph, "I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also." 12 Then Joseph removed them from his father's knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. 13 Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them near him. 14 But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn. 15 He blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, 16 the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude on the earth." 17 When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." 19 But his father refused, and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." 20 So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will invoke blessings, saying, 'God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.'" So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh. 21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your ancestors. 22 I now give to you one portion more than to your brothers, the portion that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow."

Richard Wingfield '02/'13

Has God ever reversed your plans? You had good intentions. You did your homework. You set things in their proper order. Then when the time came to proceed, God had something different in mind and upset your proverbial apple cart. So it happens to Joseph in today's Scripture reading from Genesis. He brings his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to his father, Israel, to receive the patriarchal blessing. Joseph positions them so that Manasseh is at Israel's favored right hand and Ephraim, the younger son, is at Israel's left hand. Israel, however, crisscrosses his hands to place his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh. Joseph tries to rectify the issue. But Israel knows exactly what he's doing; for though his physical sight has diminished, Israel still possesses keen spiritual insight. Though the descendants of both of Joseph's sons would be a great people, Israel sees something in Ephraim that would surpass Manasseh.

As humans, we tend to operate according to cultural norms. We are often influenced by social convention or personal bias because we're accustomed to functioning in this way. As such, we miss the big picture. The prophet reminds us that God's thoughts are distinct from ours. We must be open to and in tune with God's desires, not our own. Are you influenced by social convention or personal bias in your choices? Do you make choices based on social convention or human preferences? Or, alternatively, are you in tune with God so that you can choose based on divine directives? Jesus reminds us from Gethsemane, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."

Prayer

God of glory, help us to be open to your will so that we may see things as you see them. Open our hearts that we may adjust to your desires. Open our spirits that we may accept your will. Amen.

Genesis 49:1-28

1 Then Jacob called his sons, and said: "Gather around, that I may tell you what will happen to you in days to come. 2 Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob; listen to Israel your father. 3 Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the first fruits of my vigor, excelling in rank and excelling in power. 4 Unstable as water, you shall no longer excel because you went up onto your father's bed; then you defiled it—you went up onto my couch! 5 Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. 6 May I never come into their council; may I not be joined to their company—for in their anger they killed men, and at their whim they hamstrung oxen. 7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel. 8 Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. 9 Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness - who dares rouse him up? 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his. 11 Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes; 12 his eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk. 13 Zebulun shall settle at the shore of the sea; he shall be a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon. 14 Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds; 15 he saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant; so he bowed his shoulder to the burden, and became a slave at forced labor. 16 Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. 17 Dan shall be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path which bites the horse's heels so that its rider falls backward. 18 I wait for your salvation, O LORD. 19 Gad shall be raided by raiders, but he shall raid at their heels. 20 Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall provide royal delicacies. 21 Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears lovely fawns. 22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. 23 The archers fiercely attacked him; they shot at him and pressed him hard. 24 Yet his bow remained taut, and his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, 25 by the God of your father, who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. 26 The blessings of your father are stronger than the blessings of the eternal mountains, the bounties of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers. 27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey, and at evening dividing the spoil." 28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, blessing each one of them with a suitable blessing.

Carol Pitts '89

Blessings? Yikes, Jacob! You call all of these blessings? Yes, they certainly are for Judah, Zebulun, and Joseph. But calling your son Reuben unstable, calling Simeon and Levi violent, and calling Benjamin a ravenous wolf? Really? These sound like insults, not blessings. Aren't all these men your children? Don't you love them all? What do you think your words will do to them and to their relationships with each other?

Children long for their parents' blessings. Even adult children—consciously or unconsciously—often yearn for parental approval. Likewise, whether we want to admit it or not, many of us yearn for God's approval. Sometimes we feel like we'll never get it. And sometimes we assume we stand with Judah and Joseph and are blessed.

If I were a child of Jacob, what would he call me? Would Jacob bless me, or insult me? Before I criticize Jacob too much, or before I get too angry at him . . . have I always blessed the children I love? Have I insulted them? Have I at times exercised poor judgment and shown favoritism?

One of the beauties of Scripture is that in it we meet characters who reflect the best and the worst in us. No one is perfect. And that means there is room for me.

Prayer

God of the blessed and the cursed, God of those who bestow kindness and those who do not, grant me good judgment that I may bless and not insult, that I may be compassionate and not hurtful. Amen.

Genesis 49:29-50:14

29 Then he charged them, saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my ancestors—in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the cave in the field at Machpelah, near Mamre, in the land of Canaan, in the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite as a burial site. 31 There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah—32 the field and the cave that is in it were purchased from the Hittites." 33 When Jacob ended his charge to his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people. 50:1 Then Joseph threw himself on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. 2 Joseph commanded the physicians in his service to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel; 3 they spent forty days in doing this, for that is the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days. 4 When the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph addressed the household of Pharaoh, "If now I have found favor with you, please speak to Pharaoh as follows: 5 My father made me swear an oath; he said, 'I am about to die. In the tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.' Now therefore let me go up, so that I may bury my father; then I will return." 6 Pharaoh answered, "Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear to do." 7 So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, 8 as well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household. Only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen. 9 Both chariots and charioteers went up with him. It was a very great company. 10 When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed a time of mourning for his father seven days. 11 When the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning on the part of the Egyptians." Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim; it is beyond the Jordan. 12 Thus his sons did for him as he had instructed them. 13 They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, the field near Mamre, which Abraham bought as a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. 14 After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

This passage shows us the burial of Jacob. Joseph asks the Pharaoh for permission to leave, and the Pharaoh agrees. Joseph then leads Pharaoh's servants out of Egypt along with their chariots. He completes his mourning, and returns. It's amazing how much difference time can make. In just a few generations, that story will be completely reversed. The next time a Hebrew asks Pharaoh to let him lead workers into the wilderness there will be plagues, floods, and death. But for now; the relationship is healthy and look at the difference that makes.

Genesis 50:15-26

15 Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" 16 So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 17 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? 20 Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. 21 So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. 22 So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's household; and Joseph lived one hundred ten years. 23 Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were also born on Joseph's knees. 24 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die; but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 25 So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, "When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here." 26 And Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old; he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Rebecca Hickok '93

An hour before the Christmas Eve service. Choir rehearsing in the sanctuary. Greeters gathering up bulletins and candles before arriving at their stations. Communion being arranged. Sound levels being checked. All systems go until the teen in charge of putting out the luminaria runs up to me, a worried look on her face. "I've looked everywhere and I can't find them." Down the stairs to the social hall. "Why do I smell burnt coffee?" I ponder aloud. "AA is setting up," the teen tells me. "AA?!" "AA?! What are they doing here . . . oh . . . it's Sunday night." And it hits me. Soon 27 children will arrive to get ready for the bathrobe drama and 250 people will start streaming into the sanctuary. AA? Tonight? No. Uh uh. Not possible. I walk over to the people setting up chairs and setting out pamphlets. "I'm so sorry, You can't meet here tonight. It's Christmas Eve. I mean, there will be children down here running around and lots of people upstairs and the parking lots full and" . . . and I see their faces, strained and stunned. And I stop. And I start again. "And it will all be fine. You'll be down here and we'll be upstairs and it will be fine." And it was. Angels and shepherds and donkeys and drunks. All thrown together one Christmas Eve. In a place of God.

Prayer

In this season of Lent and throughout the whole year, thank you, Sweet Baby Jesus, for rearing up out of the cradle and gobsmacking us when we forget one of our most important jobs: showing hospitality. Amen.

Exodus 1:6-22

6 Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation. 7 But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. 8 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. 10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." 11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. 13 The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing

tasks on the Israelites, 14 and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them. 15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 16 "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." 17 But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. 18 So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." 20 So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. 22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

Brad Frey '77/'83

The violence of the cross casts a shadow over the entire Lenten season. How is it that we humans are drawn to violence when our experience of peace is so refreshing? Even as Jesus made his relentless journey to Jerusalem the specter of violence was all around (see John Pritchard's *The Journey to Jerusalem*).

For the people of Syria, Israel/Palestine, Nigeria, Afghanistan, and so many other parts of the world, violence has become a daily routine. And so we struggle and pray during Lent not to "understand" violence but to see it end. Particularly vulnerable to violence are children. They are the most severely affected by poverty in the U.S. and by violence worldwide.

Given this reality, it ought not to surprise us that as we open the book of Exodus, we're greeted by violence. The founding story of Israel is steeped in a deep suffering birthed of the greed and power of empire. For Pharaoh it is an easy transaction: sacrifice Israel so that Egypt may prosper. That transaction necessitates violence.

The narrative contained in Exodus 1:6-22 describes the lust of empire and the pain it inflicts on anyone on the margins. But woven into the narrative is the reality that God hears. God is at work to rescue a people—and especially to rescue vulnerable children. This violent beginning frames the entire narrative of Exodus: God's people trapped in empire.

The people of Israel would have to wait for centuries for the one described as the Prince of Peace to resolve the constant violence of life in the world. And yet the very violence of empire and sin was visited on Christ himself. He knew the pain of violence suffered by vulnerable children and those on the margins. Yet he didn't respond with violence but with a sacrificial love given to empower his people to enact an alternative ethic.

Prayer

Great God of Peace, in this season when we look to the central event of our faith, your crucifixion and resurrection, work in us your Kingdom-spirit. Where empire insists on violence, let us insist on peace. When our world is busy with war, let us look to the cross to find a new way. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

Exodus 2:1-22

1 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. 3 When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. 4 His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. 5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. 6 When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" 8 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 9 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. 10 When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water." 11 One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. 12 He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?" 14 He answered, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "Surely the thing is known." 15 When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well. 16 The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. 17 But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. 18 When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" 19 They said, "An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock." 20 He said to his daughters, "Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread." 21 Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. 22 She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, "I have been an alien residing in a foreign land."

Rebecca Dix '15/'17

My parents' home is situated on a flood plain. Nestled neatly beside the West Fork River, cradled in a shallow valley, almost yearly the flood waters would come, invade our home, ravage the roads and newly sown fields, damaging buildings, equipment, and occasionally the lives of our animals. Our parents would try their best to keep us from swimming in it, because flood currents are strong and dangerous and the waters carried chemicals from fertilizers and pesticides, not to mention bull snakes and other unsavory critters. So it is no stretch of my imagination for water to represent death.

Yet in the midst of drowning in the death of sin, Jesus, like the Pharaoh's daughter, draws us out of the water. Jesus reaches out his pierced hands and pulls us into life.

Prayer

I will praise you, My God, for you have not forsaken me. I will praise you because you came and bore my sin on the cross. You have lifted me out of the dark waters into your life and light.
Amen.

Exodus 2:23-3:15

23 After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. 24 God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 25 God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them. 3:1 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9 The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. 10 So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12 He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." 13 But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations."

Rebecca Dix '15/'17

How to be remembered: A step by step guide. First, learn your own name. Let the syllables carve your name's existence on your tongue. Begin slowly pressing ink or pencil to paper in awkward strokes and slashes. Practice over and over till it is legible to more people than just you yourself. Write your name on everything—every assignment, every paper, every note, every book. "Graffiti" it on walls and empty spaces to ensure that when people encounter the particular item upon which your name has been scrawled, they 1) know the object is yours, and 2) that you exist.

Second, introduce yourself to all. Have a firm handshake and look them directly in the eye. Take a chance and be someone's friend. Or, better yet, fall in love. Make yourself a home and build a family.

Third, build great big things. Melt and mold steel and wield it into edifices that pierce the sky and make people stare up, mouths gapping open and minds overcome by its daunting magnificence. Scheme, plot, plan—harvest all the money you are able to, and conquer every land. Place statues of your likeness on the borders with your hand extending outward in the unspoken promise of where you have yet to go.

Fourth, plan for someone else to write your name for the last time on a slab of granite. Make sure they understand that your full name is to be used. Request the letters to be large and clear.

And fifth and finally, understand that metal rusts, stone erodes, and memory fades—and so will your name. Understand that the sandcastle towers of your achievements will crumble. Understand that there will be dark days in which you are utterly invisible. And understand and trust that the God of Sarah, Rebekah, Hagar, Tamar, and Rachel has remembered you, has heard your cry in the desert, and will bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey.

Prayer

Almighty God, you saw us before our seeing could even be. Grant us the strength and wisdom to trust not in our own achievements and accomplishments but in your steadfast love and faithfulness, as perfectly revealed in Jesus the Messiah, in whose holy name we pray, Amen.

Exodus 3:16-4:12

16 "Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. 17 I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.' 18 They will listen to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go a three days' journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' 19 I know, however, that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. 20 So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders that I will perform in it; after that he will let you go. 21 I will bring this people into such favor with the Egyptians that, when you go, you will not go empty-handed; 22 each woman shall ask her neighbor and any woman living in the neighbor's house for jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; and so you shall plunder the Egyptians." 4:1 Then Moses answered, "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'" 2 The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." 3 And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail"—so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand— 5 "so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." 6 Again, the LORD said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." He put his hand into his cloak; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous, as white as snow. 7 Then God said, "Put your hand back into your cloak"—so he put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his body— 8 "If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. 9 If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground." 10 But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." 11 Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak."

Robin Sharp '18

Like so many of us do, Moses is trying to convince God that He has chosen the wrong person for the job. Moses sounds like someone trying to worm his way out of a responsibility so he can just continue to enjoy the calm life he knows. First, in so many words, he asks the Lord, "Why should anybody believe me?" The Lord responds with three tools to show His power in Moses. None of them are delightful: a

staff that becomes a snake, a hand that turns leprous, and water that changes to blood when poured on the dry ground. Three signs showing the power of God, and *still* Moses argues. "I am not eloquent of speech."

How many tools has God given each one of us for responding to His call? How many times do we hesitate in answering that call? How many times do we find excuses for answering "No" just to stay in our comfort zones?

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for your persistence in pursuing us to be active parts of your ministry and for providing us with the tools we need. The places to which you call us and the instruments you provide are not always ones we would choose, so help us to

Kay Day '97

We know the story of God's call to Moses and Moses' reluctance. We understand Moses' hesitation. This is asking more than he believes he is capable of. God clarifies his name and credentials when God says to tell them, "I AM has sent me to you" (3:14). Then God gives him instructions call the people to follow him to leave Egypt.

But Moses voices concerns. What if the people do not believe him? God gives him an object lesson of his power by turning his staff to a snake and then back to a staff and of covering his hand with leprosy and then healing it. God has the power do these demonstrations and so much more. He invites Moses to trust him.

But Moses' self-doubt takes control. He is not eloquent, is slow of speech. God challenges him about who gives speech or sight? God himself has this power. God promises to give Moses the words to say.

We all shake our heads at Moses for being so untrusting, so unwilling to follow God's instructions, so afraid to be faithful and take the step of trust. We can do this because we know the full story and the power of God to deliver his people from captivity in Egypt. It is easy to trust when you know the outcome. But Moses didn't. He had to live through it. We many times are in the same place as Moses and have many of the same questions and reservations for the same reason. We don't know the end of our story or the outcome. We question God's power. We doubt our own abilities for the task at hand. We really don't want to do what we are being asked to do. We want God to find someone else. God says to us the same things he said to Moses. I AM is sending you. I have power to deliver. I will give you all you need. I have chosen you.

Are we willing to trust as Moses ultimately was?

Prayer

All powerful God, we are fearful to follow you, but you are more than able to lead us and empower us. Enable us to trust you for all you call us to do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Exodus 4:10-20, 27-31

10 But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." 11 Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." 13 But he

said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." 14 Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. 15 You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. 16 He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. 17 Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs." 18 Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, "Please let me go back to my kindred in Egypt and see whether they are still living." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." 19 The LORD said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt; for all those who were seeking your life are dead." 20 So Moses took his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey and went back to the land of Egypt; and Moses carried the staff of God in his hand. 21 And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. 23 I said to you, "Let my son go that he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son.'" 24 On the way, at a place where they spent the night, the LORD met him and tried to kill him. 25 But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, "Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" 26 So he let him alone. It was then she said, "A bridegroom of blood by circumcision." 27 The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went; and he met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. 28 Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him, and all the signs with which he had charged him. 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. 30 Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and performed the signs in the sight of the people. 31 The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

Erin Davenport '05, staff

Grace is a strange thing. Here in this story Moses seems to be on the way to the wrath of God. Refusing God's call on his life, he makes excuses for all the things he is unable to do. When the Lord speaks to Moses and promises to supply all that he needs, Moses still refuses. God is angry, and rightly so.

This is our daily walk with God, isn't it? God calls us; we make excuses. God tells us that all our needs will be met and that we are not alone; we still refuse. God is angry, and rightly so.

But Moses' story, like ours, does not end with God's anger. God, for some reason (which is beyond me), listens to us mere mortals. The Lord of all listens to Moses and gives him what he wants. God forgives Moses and gives him Aaron as his mouthpiece. How often is that true of us as well? How often does the Lord of all listen to us and let us off the hook? Daily.

Daily we refuse the grace and goodness and love of God in Jesus Christ. And daily God gives it to us again. Moses did nothing right to deserve God's listening ear. Yet God listened. God listens to us as well, this day, and every day, in the fullness of grace we do not deserve.

Prayer

Thank you for grace, O God. Thank you that though I so often refuse the grace that is extended to me in Jesus, your love extends to me with each breath. Thank you that your anger is replaced by love because of the work of your Son, my Savior. Amen.

Exodus 5:1-6:1

1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.'" 2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go." 3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword." 4 But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!" 5 Pharaoh continued, "Now they are more numerous than the people of the land and yet you want them to stop working!" 6 That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors, 7 "You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.' 9 Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words." 10 So the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw. 11 Go and get straw yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.'" 12 So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw. 13 The taskmasters were urgent, saying, "Complete your work, the same daily assignment as when you were given straw." 14 And the supervisors of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, "Why did you not finish the required quantity of bricks yesterday and today, as you did before?" 15 Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, "Why do you treat your servants like this? 16 No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!' Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people." 17 He said, "You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' 18 Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks." 19 The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, "You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks." 20 As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them. 21 They said to them, "The LORD look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us." 22 Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, "O LORD, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? 23 Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people." 1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land."

Mark 9:42-50

42 "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. 47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, 48 where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched. 49 "For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

This passage in Mark is one of the most frightening passages in the book. Jesus threatens to tie stones around people's necks and throw them into the sea.

Again we see this strange familiarity with the sea, and in this passage, the sea assists Jesus in defending the defenseless. It's interesting that the Exodus reading for today is the beginning of Moses' encounter with Pharaoh—which will culminate with the sea assisting the Lord in defending the defenseless. Notice that the defenseless, in this case, are children. This continues the theme we've encountered over the last few days.

We haven't seen much of this kind of anger from Jesus up to this point in Mark—it's a threat to the helpless that brings it out. This should be comforting when we feel helpless and frightening when we threaten those who are.

Exodus 7:8-24

8 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 9 "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a wonder,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.'" 10 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the LORD had commanded; Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. 11 Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. 12 Each one threw down his staff, and they became snakes; but Aaron's staff swallowed up theirs. 13 Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. 14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. 15 Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; stand by at the river bank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake. 16 Say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, "Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness." But until now you have not listened.' 17 Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD." See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall be turned to blood. 18 The fish in the river shall die, the river itself shall stink, and the Egyptians shall be unable to drink water from the Nile.'" 19 The LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over its rivers, its canals, and its ponds, and all its pools of water—so that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout the whole land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.'" 20 Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and of his officials he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river, and all the water in the river was turned into blood, 21 and the fish in the river died. The river stank so that the Egyptians could not drink its water, and there was blood throughout the whole land of Egypt. 22 But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the LORD had said. 23 Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. 24 And all the Egyptians had to dig along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the river.

John Fife '67

The Book of Exodus reveals the identity and nature of the God who created the heavens and earth and made covenant with Abraham and Sarah. This God declares that he has heard the cry of his people in bondage in Egypt, that he is "the Lord your God" and means to free them from Egypt. "Go tell Pharaoh, 'Let my people go.'" God is the God who is with the oppressed and suffering in their quest for liberation.

Second, this text from Exodus 7:8-24 relates the struggle of the Hebrew slaves against the Pharaoh of the Egyptian empire over the question of ultimate power. Are the Empire and the wealth, the horses and chariots, and the gods and sorcerers of Egypt more powerful than the God who makes covenant with the enslaved Hebrews? Which is most powerful?

The saga here reminds me of the line from a Broadway musical, “Anything you can do, I can do better”! Aaron takes the rod of Moses, casts it down, and it turns into a serpent. All the sorcerers of Egypt do the same magic, but Moses’ serpent devours them all. Then with the same rod, Moses and Aaron strike the waters of the Nile, which then turns to blood. The sorcerers of Egypt match them serpent to serpent, blood to blood. Pharaoh’s heart remains hardened.

Of course, empires have always trusted in their wealth, power, military might, and conquests, and the sorcerers and magicians who make it all look like the gods are on their side. . . . except the witness of the Bible is that the God of the Torah, the Prophets, and Jesus is more powerful than all the empires of history. This is the God who means to free the oppressed and seeks to lead all of beloved creation into the Kingdom of God. Then all people will live in a covenant of justice, mercy, and peace.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke prophetically when he was asked how people suffering through generations of slavery and segregation could ever expect to become free. King said, “The arc of history is long indeed, but it always bends toward justice.”

Prayer

Creator God, Great and Holy Spirit, we would be faithful to the coming of your Kingdom even as we live in an empire. Teach us anew the power of doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the God who means to free the suffering and oppressed. In the name of Jesus, crucified on a cross of the Roman Empire and raised from death by God, amen.

Exodus 9:13-35

13 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 14 For this time I will send all my plagues upon you yourself, and upon your officials, and upon your people, so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. 15 For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. 16 But this is why I have let you live: to show you my power, and to make my name resound through all the earth. 17 You are still exalting yourself against my people, and will not let them go. 18 Tomorrow at this time I will cause the heaviest hail to fall that has ever fallen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. 19 Send, therefore, and have your livestock and everything that you have in the open field brought to a secure place; every human or animal that is in the open field and is not brought under shelter will die when the hail comes down upon them.’” 20 Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD hurried their slaves and livestock off to a secure place. 21 Those who did not regard the word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock in the open field. 22 The LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that hail may fall on the whole land of Egypt, on humans and animals and all the plants of the field in the land of Egypt.” 23 Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire came down on the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; 24 there was hail with fire flashing continually in the midst of it, such heavy hail as had never fallen in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25 The hail struck down everything that was in the open field throughout all the land of Egypt, both human and animal; the hail also struck down all the plants of the field, and shattered every tree in the field. 26 Only in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail. 27 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. 28 Pray to the LORD! Enough of God’s thunder and hail! I will let you go; you need stay no longer.” 29 Moses said to him, “As

soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord's. 30 But as for you and your officials, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God." 31 (Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. 32 But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they are late in coming up.) 33 So Moses left Pharaoh, went out of the city, and stretched out his hands to the LORD; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured down on the earth. 34 But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned once more and hardened his heart, he and his officials. 35 So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

Psalm 148

1 Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! 2 Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! 3 Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! 4 Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! 5 Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. 6 He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. 7 Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, 8 fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! 9 Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! 10 Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! 11 Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! 12 Young men and women alike, old and young together! 13 Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. 14 He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord!

Jonathan Lawrence '97

Exodus 9:13-35 and Psalm 148 present contrasting views of humanity's experience with creation. In Psalm 148 all parts of creation praise God in harmony, but in Exodus thunder, hail, and fire punish Pharaoh for the disharmony he has caused by treating the Israelites unjustly. As the story continues, we find that thunder and hail are not sufficient to change Pharaoh's mind, and further destruction results. These "natural" disasters end the injustice and help to restore order, a theme seen earlier in the story of Noah. This use of divine violence continues throughout the Bible as faithful heroes are protected by God but the unrighteous are destroyed.

Such stories have led some people to argue that even now natural disasters are God's punishment on us for various sins. These explanations ignore the widespread suffering among many people who have no responsibility for those sins and the environmental destruction that has contributed to recent storms, floods, and mudslides. I grew up near Niagara Falls and have now returned to teach and preach in the area. Niagara Falls is a site of great natural beauty. It is also a reminder of environmental destruction that occurred when factory owners thought it was okay to dump their waste products into the river and bury them in nearby fields, some of which may never again be safe for human use. This kind of damage has happened worldwide, and in many cases the poor and vulnerable suffer the most due to environmental destruction.

As we approach the celebration of new life at Easter and the observance of Earth Day, these texts can challenge us to consider our attitude toward the environment. Will we view storms and other natural disasters as part of God's will, even if they result from human damage to the environment? Perhaps instead we can seek to restore the harmony described in Psalm 148, where humans add their voices to the praises coming from all other parts of Creation—we can seek to reduce our damage to God's creation, though storms and destruction will continue to come.

Prayer

Loving Creator, all creation sings your praises, but sometimes we have allowed our greed to threaten the balance of your creation. Help us to restore the harmony in our natural world, and help all nations when they face natural disasters. Amen.

Exodus 10:21-11:8

21 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt." 22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was dense darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. 23 People could not see one another, and for three days they could not move from where they were; but all the Israelites had light where they lived. 24 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses, and said, "Go, worship the LORD. Only your flocks and your herds shall remain behind. Even your children may go with you." 25 But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings to sacrifice to the LORD our God. 26 Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must choose some of them for the worship of the LORD our God, and we will not know what to use to worship the LORD until we arrive there." 27 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was unwilling to let them go. 28 Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me! Take care that you do not see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die." 29 Moses said, "Just as you say! I will never see your face again." 11:1 The LORD said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go from here; indeed, when he lets you go, he will drive you away. 2 Tell the people that every man is to ask his neighbor and every woman is to ask her neighbor for objects of silver and gold." 3 The LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, Moses himself was a man of great importance in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's officials and in the sight of the people. 4 Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go out through Egypt. 5 Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the female slave who is behind the hand-mill, and all the firstborn of the livestock. 6 Then there will be a loud cry throughout the whole land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again. 7 But not a dog shall growl at any of the Israelites—not at people, not at animals—so that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. 8 Then all these officials of yours shall come down to me, and bow low to me, saying, 'Leave us, you and all the people who follow you.' After that I will leave." And in hot anger he left Pharaoh.

Curtis Illingworth '70

I remember the accounts of the plagues from my Sunday school days. I can still visualize the illustrations of the plagues in my picture Bible--they were quite dramatic: the frogs, flies, boils, and locusts (my favorite). I haven't thought about them much since. My understanding of the God of the New Testament does not seem to be present in these acts meant to inflict pain and suffering. But in Exodus 10:21-11:8, we have the accounts of the last two plagues. We read the ninth one: Moses stretched out his hand and "there was darkness in all the land of Egypt." Next we travel back through time to number ten: death. (As we travel back, we might stop to remember how King Herod massacred the firstborn in his region). Here Moses tells the people, "Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go out through Egypt. Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die." Nice! Nice?

Fast-forward to the year 2020 A.D. and I see these plagues differently. I now see God leading me out of the darkness of my selfishness and the lifeless silence and thoughtlessness of a meaningless future. I cross the Red Sea into a wilderness of trials and sacrifices we call "life," and I get a glimpse of entering

the new “promised land.” Now I recall studying the laws of the universe in physics, biology, and math on my path to becoming an architect. Here are some thoughts on modern-day plagues through the eyes of science.

Light and Darkness: In physics I learned that there is no such thing as darkness. It’s a word scientists use to describe the absence of light. We can measure the amount of light in a room, but there is no measurement for darkness. We don’t say, “Close the door—you’re letting the darkness in!” Likewise when you open a door, darkness does not “spill out.” Light is real, it is the source of life; darkness is a void. It is nothing. A plague of darkness is a plague of nothingness.

Life and Death: There is no such thing as death either. It’s a word scientists use to describe the absence of life. We promise, “Until death do us part.” After that, does the promise end? A plague of death to the firstborn of a generation is a signal that the future is void. There is nothing more.

Heat and Cold: As strange as it might sound, there is no such thing as cold. It might be freezing cold outside, but physics will tell you that cold is just a word we use describe the absence of heat. There is an absolute zero, but there is no absolute in measuring heat. We crave warmth and sunshine to grow and thrive. Without it we die.

Sound and Silence: Additionally, there is no such thing as silence. It’s a word we use to describe the absence of sound. Do I keep silent when I see injustice? Do I tell those around me that I love them and show it in my actions, or do I remain quiet? Am I silent when I should speak? The plague of silence can be deafening.

I now find myself searching for my own promised land. I have spent time in the wilderness making mistakes and sacrifices, asking for forgiveness. Over the horizon I can see my promised land. I try to sort out the good from the bad. Light, Life, Warmth, and Words are all realities that describe my promised land. Darkness, Death, Cold, and Silence are the plagues that overwhelm my life and that, with God’s help, I will escape.

Journey with me and escape the plagues of the modern world. Journey through the wilderness of discovery and faith. Journey to the promised land of sustained life.

- Choose the **light of Christ**, through which you will see others in God’s light instead of the blind darkness of the world.
- Choose the **richness of a life in Christ** that grows and nourishes over the emptiness of death.
- Choose the **warmth of Christ’s love** to sustain your relationships over the cold emptiness of separating yourselves from others.
- Choose the **Word made flesh in Christ** by proclaiming His word and deeds over the silence of those who are skeptical.

Enter the promised land of hope and dreams!

Prayer

Our heavenly Father, you have ordered the universe with physical laws that control the stars above and the world below. You have given us life and the freedom to choose our path. Help us to avoid the modern-day plagues that tempt us daily; help us discover the life-giving universal

laws found in your word. Light the way with your love so that we may enter the Promised Land, a life that grows and blossoms under the hand of your life giving love and care. Amen.

Heather Henkel '20

Where do you see yourself in this Scripture? Are you the leader, Moses? Are you one of the Israelites, finding favor with God, living in the light and just waiting for God's continued blessings? I have to admit that sometimes I relate to the Egyptians. Living in the darkness. The shadowed days. Losing my first-born child, very suddenly. Perhaps you relate to Pharaoh, being asked for something you feel is unjustly sought, and then trying to negotiate—"You can go, but leave the livestock"—and that isn't enough.

Where does that leave us in this story, if we don't relate to Moses and the Israelites? Whenever we read the Old Testament stories, we must remember that Jesus has not yet come as the savior. God was the God of the Israelites before Jesus came along, at which point the picture started to shift: God is the God of all people. So when I read this story, I remember that at this time, God wasn't known as the God of the Egyptians, or of Pharaoh—but now, thousands of years later, I know this God as my God. And God does see my suffering, and walks by my side in my times of darkness and grief. God will walk with all of us; we just need to allow it.

Prayer

Faithful God, thank you for sending your son Jesus to be among us, to walk with us, and to teach us. His lessons transcend time. This precious gift cannot be overstated. Thank you for walking with us in our times of need. Send your Holy Spirit to be with us, to guide us, to continually teach us, and to watch over us as your children. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 49:1-7

1 Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. 2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. 3 And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." 4 But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the LORD, and my reward with my God." 5 And now the LORD says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and my God has become my strength—6 he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." 7 Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Alina Kanaski '16

Here the Servant of the Lord speaks, recalling his service: his call to servanthood (vv. 1-3); his service in Israel (vv.4-5); his call to minister not just to Israel but also to all the nations (v. 6); and, finally, his promised glorification (v. 7).

It's not clear who the Servant was intended to be, for he is never named, but Christians saw Jesus in the Servant—for who else was called to suffer but ultimately be glorified, and who else was called to be "a light to the nations"?

Even in the darkest moments, when our work seems “in vain” and “for nothing,” when we are “deeply despised,” when we suffer and are discouraged, let us remember that Jesus went through the same. Let us take comfort from His presence and solidarity in those times. Let us remember, as the Lord reminds the Servant here, God is our strength. For Jesus died, but He also rose again. Jesus suffered, but God worked through that suffering to bring about the salvation of the world. Hallelujah!

Prayer

God, we thank You for Your light, shining in the darkness of even the darkest night. You sit with us in that darkness, even when we cannot see Your light. Give us faith in Your strength rather than our own. Amen.

Lamentations 1:1-2, 6-12

1 How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal. 2 She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has no one to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies. . . . 6 From daughter Zion has departed all her majesty. Her princes have become like stags that find no pasture; they fled without strength before the pursuer. 7 Jerusalem remembers, in the days of her affliction and wandering, all the precious things that were hers in days of old. When her people fell into the hand of the foe, and there was no one to help her, the foe looked on mocking over her downfall. 8 Jerusalem sinned grievously, so she has become a mockery; all who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans, and turns her face away. 9 Her uncleanness was in her skirts; she took no thought of her future; her downfall was appalling, with none to comfort her. “O LORD, look at my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed!” 10 Enemies have stretched out their hands over all her precious things; she has even seen the nations invade her sanctuary, those whom you forbade to enter your congregation. 11 All her people groan as they search for bread; they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength. Look, O LORD, and see how worthless I have become. 12 Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.

Keith Kaufold '07/'12

More than 10 years ago, I moved into an urban area that once housed steel mills as far as the eye could see. The main avenue in town would feel electric with the bustle of people walking, shopping, and eating. But the electricity would stop flowing as the steel mills closed in 1986. As the sights and sounds from the steel mills died, so did the sights and sounds of the main avenue. Like the skeletons of enormous creatures, the empty steel mills and vacant storefronts and restaurants stood as reminders to passersby of what used to be.

The Holy City, Jerusalem, was thought to be the locale of the blessing of the Lord God of Israel. But because of the onslaught of the Babylonians, the city once full of life is, in Lamentations 1, personified and likened to a person who has suffered great loss due to death. To the author of Lamentations, the destruction experienced by the Southern Kingdom of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem, was not merely a historical coincidence—it was punishment due to sin. Similarly to the gasping of steel mill workers as they looked at the abandoned mills and remembered what used to be, “Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and wandering, all the precious things that were hers in days of old” (v. 7). Brothers

and sisters, ask yourselves and your congregations, “Are the ‘glory days’ of the past keeping us from facing the reality of the present?”

Prayer

Lord, we confess that our sin is greater than ourselves. Our separation from you leaves our lives, our homes, and our communities abandoned. Jesus, you are the Light of the world, the hope of every city, the longing of every human heart. Holy Spirit, illumine our hearts to recognize what within us refuses your will in the present.

Lamentations 1:17-22

17 Zion stretches out her hands, but there is no one to comfort her; the LORD has commanded against Jacob that his neighbors should become his foes; Jerusalem has become a filthy thing among them. 18 The LORD is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word; but hear, all you peoples, and behold my suffering; my young women and young men have gone into captivity. 19 I called to my lovers but they deceived me; my priests and elders perished in the city while seeking food to revive their strength. 20 See, O LORD, how distressed I am; my stomach churns, my heart is wrung within me, because I have been very rebellious. In the street the sword bereaves; in the house it is like death. 21 They heard how I was groaning, with no one to comfort me. All my enemies heard of my trouble; they are glad that you have done it. Bring on the day you have announced, and let them be as I am. 22 Let all their evil doing come before you; and deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my transgressions; for my groans are many and my heart is faint.

Michael Spezio '96

In loving memory of Pfarrer Wilhelm Handwerk

“See, O Lord, how distressed I am; my stomach churns, my heart is wrung within me, because I have been very rebellious.” Can we allow the poet’s lament to echo our own, in our own day? Can we join in communion with the great lament in the poet’s time over Jerusalem’s historical fall, joined to that of our own lonely cities?

What is the poet’s lament? Isn’t it the same as our own? It is a lament for the suffering brought on by our own rebellion, our rebellious action and inaction. We have hurt ourselves and others. Participating in systems of false value and disvalue, we have helped cause a suffering that holds the entire nation in its grasp, in the grip of loneliness, of emptiness. We extend our hands for some sense of friendship, fellowship, comfort. God’s grace meets us there. God’s own action moves us inwardly to a greater awareness of and wakefulness to the source of this great suffering and our part in it.

It is only God’s grace that can turn the heart, that turns our hearts, that brings repentance and our return to understanding. “Is wrung” in the passive voice of the Hebrew means “is turned, is changed.” We are changed. God turns us around. Our hearts are met by God’s own grace, turning us to awake, to look, to see anew.

What we see when we look may deepen our own distress. How can a heart turned and awakened by God not feel distress at suffering? Our “stomach”—the most inward aspect of our very self—is churned as we are turned, once again by the grace of God. We turn and are distressed as our repentant eyes take in the suffering of the nation, of our neighbors, of our most authentic self. Our prayer is that we will remain open to grace and, in so being, open to compassion, and that God will likewise turn the hearts of

all nations. We pray then to the most gracious and compassionate God: “Deal with them as you have dealt with me.”

Prayer

Gracious and compassionate God, be with us in our lament. Turn our hearts and our most inmost parts toward seeing anew, toward the suffering that we ourselves experience in this moment, and toward the suffering that others experience because of our shared rebellion. Bring us this day into the grace of knowing that our suffering is that of others also, that our lament is their lament, and bring us into the grace of praying that our understanding may become full—and of praying for a fullness of understanding that all may share. Amen.

Lamentations 2:1-9

1 How the Lord in his anger has humiliated daughter Zion! He has thrown down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel; he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger. 2 The Lord has destroyed without mercy all the dwellings of Jacob; in his wrath he has broken down the strongholds of daughter Judah; he has brought down to the ground in dishonor the kingdom and its rulers. 3 He has cut down in fierce anger all the might of Israel; he has withdrawn his right hand from them in the face of the enemy; he has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob, consuming all around. 4 He has bent his bow like an enemy, with his right hand set like a foe; he has killed all in whom we took pride in the tent of daughter Zion; he has poured out his fury like fire. 5 The Lord has become like an enemy; he has destroyed Israel; He has destroyed all its palaces, laid in ruins its strongholds, and multiplied in daughter Judah mourning and lamentation. 6 He has broken down his booth like a garden, he has destroyed his tabernacle; the LORD has abolished in Zion festival and sabbath, and in his fierce indignation has spurned king and priest. 7 The Lord has scorned his altar, disowned his sanctuary; he has delivered into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; a clamor was raised in the house of the LORD as on a day of festival. 8 The LORD determined to lay in ruins the wall of daughter Zion; he stretched the line; he did not withhold his hand from destroying; he caused rampart and wall to lament; they languish together. 9 Her gates have sunk into the ground; he has ruined and broken her bars; her king and princes are among the nations; guidance is no more, and her prophets obtain no vision from the LORD.

David Dawson '72

. . . in the day of his anger. Lament is difficult for American Christians today because it means that something terrible has gone wrong and we have no control over a way of escape. Either someone has done something to us, or our actions have led to a catastrophe and there is no salvation.

The poet of Lamentations lived in the midst of such impossible times. The year is 586 BCE. Babylon has rained death and destruction on Jerusalem. The devastation was unimaginable and too brutal to describe. The depth of inhumanity was too much to portray even as a scene in *Game of Thrones*. The poet lamented the terrible things being done to his people.

But it is worse than that. They have brought it on themselves. Not only has Yahweh abandoned them because of their infidelity—Yahweh was so angry as to be the actual perpetrator of their suffering. Idolatry had been exercised in a myriad of expressions. Personal piety had been flaunted in distortions of their relationship to money, sex, and power. Corporate expressions of international intrigue, arrogance, and crude nationalism had flourished.

When we lament, it is because our sin is so great and persistent and God is so angry that there is nothing left to do but lament. For the writer of Mark, lament is not simply about a disaster of the past. When he describes the mocking humiliation of Jesus at his crucifixion (15:29-32), he draws on Lamentations 2:15-16. Jesus is abandoned by God and mocked by all for the sake of the world's redemption.

What can come of such absolute love if not confession of sin, repentance, and truth-telling? Throw oneself on the mercy of God demonstrated most profoundly in the cross.

Prayer

God, we have sinned against you and each other. We are not worthy to be called your children. Immerse us in deep lament. Do not allow us to excuse our sins. Meet us at the cross, where our lament can be done in the presence of the perfect suffering of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33

1 I am one who has seen affliction under the rod of God's wrath; 2 he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light; 3 against me alone he turns his hand, again and again, all day long. 4 He has made my flesh and my skin waste away, and broken my bones; 5 he has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation; 6 he has made me sit in darkness like the dead of long ago. 7 He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has put heavy chains on me; 8 though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer; 9 he has blocked my ways with hewn stones, he has made my paths crooked. . . . 19 The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! 20 My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. 21 But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: 22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." 25 The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. 26 It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. 27 It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth, 28 to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it, 29 to put one's mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope), 30 to give one's cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults. 31 For the Lord will not reject forever. 32 Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; 33 for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.

Kellie Wild '09

In my life I've known a number of people who have prayed for a miracle, and the request has been granted. The response is usually, "God is good." God is good, but I always wonder what the person's response would have been if God had chosen to answer the prayer differently. What if God had decided not to cure the cancer or heal the person's child? What would be the response then? I am cautious when responding to a wonderful healing that has taken place after ardent prayer, because there is usually someone close by for whom God did not answer the prayer for a loved one with a miraculous healing. I have had people ask me, "Why didn't God save my loved one? Didn't I pray hard enough?" Most of us know someone who prayed and prayed and prayed, yet God seemed silent.

I understand rejoicing in the wonderful healing power that God has and demonstrates. I also understand that for many faithful, God-loving people, life can be very hard. It can be easy to believe in God's grace and mercy in the good times, when we have an abundance of "stuff" and lots of love from family and friends. It can seem more difficult to believe in God's grace and mercy when we struggle just to find enough to eat or a place to sleep, or people we know and love have died, been killed, or suffered brutality. I work with people who seem to go from one struggle to the next, one tragedy to the next, feel

alone or abandoned and, basically, that life is hard and then you die. And I see the pain and suffering they experience.

The book of Lamentations is hard for many people to read. Yet it is in this book that we hear of a faith in God's goodness and compassion and steadfast love based on who God is, not on what God has "done for me lately." The strength of our faith is demonstrated when life is hard, prayers seem unanswered, and God appears absent, yet still we *know* the abundance of God's steadfast love.

Prayer

God, help us to know that you do not forsake us, that your steadfast love, grace, and mercy are always present in our lives. Let us rejoice and say "God is good" even when to our prayer we do not get the answer we so desperately want. Amen.

Jon Mathieu '21

This is a hard passage to read, for more reasons than one. The lamenter's sufferings are many and specific: isolation, bodily injury, emotional bitterness, unanswered prayers, homelessness. As difficult as that gauntlet is to consider, I am perhaps even more alarmed by the jarring words of faith and praise that follow. After enumerating the gut-wrenching sorrows, with no warning the writer insists upon God's steadfast love and accordingly has hope.

Perhaps you have been spared from these types of experiences, but when I read this text I am brought back to the "toxic positivity" of many well-intentioned churchgoers from my past. In the face of abject heartbreak after a diagnosis or a death, many bystanders try to be helpful by offering trite statements of positivity. Everything happens for a reason. There's another angel in heaven. It's all part of God's plan.

Despite the kindness of those who speak these words, they often have a toxic or corrosive effect because they invite the griever to bypass their negative emotions. Or, worse still, they generate guilt or shame in the mourner for not having enough faith to embrace the positive viewpoint.

Is the author of Lamentations just performing a grand spiritual bypass?

Upon a closer reading, I think not. Just before the turn to words of faith, the writer not only lists their hardships, they note: "My soul continually thinks of [my affliction] and is bowed down within me." Whatever hope has arrived, it is not serving to hide, ignore, or obliterate the pain and anguish.

And so we are left with tension. Heartbreak and hope. Real pain and God's love. Good Friday's execution and Easter Sunday's empty tomb. This lament suggests that the alternative to toxic positivity is not unmitigated despair. It is the affirmation, if only in parentheses, that "there may yet be hope."

Prayer

God of steadfast love, teach us to feel our negative emotions. Not to hide or ignore them, but to sit with them. As we do, please make space in our broken hearts for faith, joy, and love. There may yet be hope. Amen.

Lamentations 3:37-58

37 Who can command and have it done, if the Lord has not ordained it? 38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? 39 Why should any who draw breath complain about the

punishment of their sins? 40 Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD. 41 Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven. 42 We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven. 43 You have wrapped yourself with anger and pursued us, killing without pity; 44 you have wrapped yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through. 45 You have made us filth and rubbish among the peoples. 46 All our enemies have opened their mouths against us; 47 panic and pitfall have come upon us, devastation and destruction. 48 My eyes flow with rivers of tears because of the destruction of my people. 49 My eyes will flow without ceasing, without respite, 50 until the LORD from heaven looks down and sees. 51 My eyes cause me grief at the fate of all the young women in my city. 52 Those who were my enemies without cause have hunted me like a bird; 53 they flung me alive into a pit and hurled stones on me; 54 water closed over my head; I said, "I am lost." 55 I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit; 56 you heard my plea, "Do not close your ear to my cry for help, but give me relief!" 57 You came near when I called on you; you said, "Do not fear!" 58 You have taken up my cause, O Lord, you have redeemed my life.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

"I have forgotten what happiness is." Desolation, bitterness, and taunting. These are the images from Lamentations. It's no shock that we don't read Lamentations often. But it's there. And we need it.

There are times in life that we feel like the author of this passage. Naturally there are days of joy and elation, but sometimes we can't even remember what those days feel like. On this day, we read from Lamentations and remember that even God has felt that kind of pain.

Chris Brown '08

"Who can command and have it done, if the Lord has not ordained it?" The destruction described in Lamentations is horrific. Even more horrific is the thought that our God is responsible for such desolation and destruction . . . until we read these words through the lens of Holy Saturday.

Read the passage again. Imagine Jesus gasping its words. On the cross, Jesus experienced the terror and pain, the mocking and shame, the judgment and the despair described here. He bore our sins in his body, suffering both as a consequence of our sin, and in solidarity with all who suffer the effects of sin.

And so he grieves: "My eyes flow with rivers of tears because of the destruction of my people." And so he was cast down to the realm of the dead: "My enemies without cause have hunted me like a bird; they flung me alive into a pit." And so from that place of death—like Jonah in the belly of the fish—he offers a call for salvation: "I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit."

Prayer

God in heaven, our Father, we thank you that our Lord Jesus Christ knows the full depths of our suffering. Thank you that you heard his voice when he called from the pit. Raise us up with Him, that we may say with Christ, "You have taken up my cause, O Lord, you have redeemed my life." Amen.

Felicia Zamora '21

In Nicaragua, we use the verb *resignar* to mean giving up when a situation is entirely impossible to cure or fix. We usually use it when speaking about the loss of a loved one. This verb is embedded in comments we hear from church friends who say, "I know you are going through a painful process, but think about how Suzy is in heaven with Jesus. She is no longer suffering." It attempts to numb

someone's pain and grief process using what we think are words of comfort but actually ignore how someone is feeling.

The Book of Lamentations takes place during the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The Prophet Jeremiah voices the pain and anguish of the Israelites in all five chapters.

In Lamentations 3, the Prophet does not hold back tears when saying, in paraphrase, "Lord, look at the destruction, look how our enemies are now making fun of us. I feel completely lost. Please help us."

Even though the situation is out of control, and the Prophet could have quickly taken the *resignar* route, he still does not give up as he writes, "Do not close your ear to my cry for help, but give me relief!" Lament is an act of openness in faith that cries out to God, praying with hope that our Creator will listen to us.

In our prayers to God, let us dispense with the notion that our Creator is only available during our joyful moments. Lament is part of our reality, and God has room for us to weep out our anguish.

Prayer ("Prayer Life," a haiku by David Meade)
kneeling I pour out
father – your love I need . . .
hold me, I shudder

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

1 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? 3 As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. 4 Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die. 25 Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is unfair." Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? 26 When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. 27 Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. 28 Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. 29 Yet the house of Israel says, "The way of the Lord is unfair." O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? 30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live.

Ben Beres '10

"Setting teeth on edge" is an old phrase, but its meaning is clear. Perhaps you too have had your teeth set on edge by some distasteful drink or fetid foodstuff. But imagine if you bore tortured taste buds because of another's putrid palate. Someone else samples the forbidden fruits, but you bear the consequences. Surely you would name such a system unjust.

The Israelite children do the same by leveling their accusation against the Lord. While the truth of their proverb lies in the communal nature of sin (for no sin is without corporate consequence), the ultimate

price tag to wickedness, the wage, as Paul calls it, is death, and under the Old Covenant, “the one who sins is the one who dies.” This is “eye-for-an-eye” in action.

Thank our God that it doesn’t end there! Though it’s clear that injustice is found in the hands of us sinners, the Lord allows us to repent, to consider the compounded folly of our ways, and to turn away from them. In echo of David, the Prophet pleads for us to take on a new heart and a new spirit. The ones we wield will only wipe us out.

Prayer

Holy One, we are grateful for a season of self-reflection. Help us discover the distaste deep in our souls for the sin in our lives and in our communities. May we purge our lives of our unjust inclinations, and in your Cross and Empty Tomb, may we find hope to live. Amen.

Ezekiel 39:21-29

21 I will display my glory among the nations; and all the nations shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid on them. 22 The house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God, from that day forward. 23 And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt treacherously with me. So I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword. 24 I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions, and hid my face from them. 25 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for my holy name. 26 They shall forget their shame, and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they live securely in their land with no one to make them afraid, 27 when I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies' lands, and through them have displayed my holiness in the sight of many nations. 28 Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them behind; 29 and I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD.

Lisa Dormire '86

There is an old Chinese proverb that says, “May you live in interesting times.” Certainly we are living in interesting times. There are other words that we might also use . . . difficult, sad, confusing, overwhelming. The people of Israel in this passage from Ezekiel were also living in “interesting times.”

Sin. Exile. God’s face hidden from them. Perhaps like we do, they found it hard to get out of bed in the morning. Perhaps like we do, they wondered how to live faithfully in their “interesting times.”

Nevertheless, a word came to them from God in the midst of such times: “I will have compassion. I will forgive. I will gather them back. I will show them my face once again. I will pour out my Spirit upon them.”

Anne Lamott blogs, “. . . the world has always been this way, people have always been this way, grace always bats last, it just does—and finally, when all is said and done, and the dust settles, which it does, Love is sovereign here” (Facebook post, July 15, 2016). Alleluia.

Prayer

Holy God, on this Lenten journey we feel at times as though your face is hidden from us. Speak love to us. Gather us back. Show us your face. Remind us that your love carries us, no matter how “interesting” the times in which we are living. Amen.

Habakkuk 3:1-18

1 A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk according to Shigionoth. 2 O LORD, I have heard of your renown, and I stand in awe, O LORD, of your work. In our own time revive it; in our own time make it known; in wrath may you remember mercy. 3 God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. 4 The brightness was like the sun; rays came forth from his hand, where his power lay hidden. 5 Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind. 6 He stopped and shook the earth; he looked and made the nations tremble. The eternal mountains were shattered; along his ancient pathways the everlasting hills sank low. 7 I saw the tents of Cushan under affliction; the tent-curtains of the land of Midian trembled. 8 Was your wrath against the rivers, O LORD? Or your anger against the rivers, or your rage against the sea, when you drove your horses, your chariot to victory? 9 You brandished your naked bow, sated were the arrows at your command. You split the earth with rivers. 10 The mountains saw you, and writhed; a torrent of water swept by; the deep gave forth its voice. The sun raised high its hands; 11 the moon stood still in its exalted place, at the light of your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of your flashing spear. 12 In fury you trod the earth, in anger you trampled nations. 13 You came forth to save your people, to save your anointed. You crushed the head of the wicked house, laying it bare from foundation to roof. 14 You pierced with their own arrows the head of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind to scatter us, gloating as if ready to devour the poor who were in hiding. 15 You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the mighty waters. 16 I hear, and I tremble within; my lips quiver at the sound. Rottenness enters into my bones, and my steps tremble beneath me. I wait quietly for the day of calamity to come upon the people who attack us. 17 Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will exult in the God of my salvation.

Steve Crocco '78

Habakkuk knew that God’s judgment was real. History proved it. If the Exodus was not a story of judgment against the Egyptians in history, what was it? Yet Habakkuk struggled mightily when it was inevitable that God was going to use the nation of Babylon to bring judgment against God’s own people.

When all was said and done, the cold, hard, reality of judgment did not prompt protests from Habakkuk; instead he prayed, “in your wrath may you remember mercy.” What a foreign-sounding prayer today! It’s not that we don’t believe in mercy, it’s that we don’t believe in wrath!

In this season of Lent, when our sins are ever before us, dare we not take God’s wrath seriously? How can we deny the times when God’s judgment is inevitable in our lives as we face the consequences of our acts of betrayal, abuse, theft, failure, sloth, and faithlessness? What do we do when God’s wrath washes over us like the Red Sea washed over Pharaoh’s chariots? In these moments, may we join Habakkuk in praying, “in your wrath may you remember mercy.”

Prayer

Almighty God, soften my heart and let me see the extent to which I have sinned against your holiness and the creatures you love. Though I can only see pain ahead for now, I accept your judgment and pray that, in your wrath, you will remember mercy. Amen.

Zechariah 9:9-16

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. 13 For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will arouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword. 14 Then the LORD will appear over them, and his arrow go forth like lightning; the Lord GOD will sound the trumpet and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south. 15 The LORD of hosts will protect them, and they shall devour and tread down the slingers; they shall drink their blood like wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar. 16 On that day the LORD their God will save them for they are the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land.

Anita Stuart-Steva '04/'13

A recent trip to Israel has informed this Lenten reflection on Palm Sunday and Holy Week. Jerusalem, to a great degree, seems more like Disney World than a sacred place. It is difficult to find quiet places for reflection. Crowds of people from all over the world are everywhere, pushing and shoving to get ahead . . . both locals and tourists. Vendors are aggressive in their efforts to make a sale . . . to catch tourists in their trap. The roads are narrow and hilly; people press in on all sides; the chaos and commotion are disorienting.

During the last week of Jesus' life, things were probably much the same. People from all over the known world pressed into the Holy City; the noise, chaos, and commotion must have been overwhelming. As Jesus rode the colt along that narrow, hilly road, people must have pressed in on him, thus making it difficult to move forward. Strangers, unaware of who he was, most likely glared at him, even as others shouted his praises and cried out in desperation, "Save us!"

At the Temple, vendors surely hawked their goods aggressively to catch out-of-town visitors with the exorbitant prices. Even now, I can hear Jesus shouting, "This is a house of prayer!"

By the end of the week, crowds must have been pushing and staring at the man moving slowly toward Golgotha—the man who, at the very least, inconvenienced them as they prepared for Shabbat. Surely the priests, scribes, and Pharisees haughtily walked before and behind, glad finally to get rid of this pain in their back side, to nip this movement in the bud, like they'd done with other movements so many times before. This rabble rouser Jesus, this self-made rabbi, was a threat to them by leading people astray with his talk of forgiveness and love. How were they to make a living if they couldn't sell their religion to anyone they could trap in their Law-filled snare?

This Holy Week, will we take time to reflect, or will we be caught up in the trappings of the commercialization of the holy? Will we consider our special services inconveniences in the midst of egg

hunts, Easter breakfasts, and clothes shopping? Let us allow Jesus, the rabble rouser, to rouse us with his grace that we might discard the commercial and embrace the holy.

Prayer

O Lord of infinite forgiveness and love, rouse our hearts to see the holy in the hustle and bustle, to feel the peace in the noise and chaos, and to experience your grace anew. Amen.

Jake Horner '15

One of the most important aspects of YHWH's unimpeachable character toward us humans is that YHWH keeps covenant. Always and forever. In today's passage from the prophet Zechariah, YHWH appeals to the blood of the covenant with Israel as the reason the people can expect rescue and restoration. There are two impossibilities present which preclude God from not rescuing and restoring Israel. First, it is impossible for God to violate the divine character by not fulfilling covenant obligations towards Israel. Second, how can it be possible, even granting the impossible circumstance of covenant failure on YHWH's part, for the blood of the covenant to fall on the "head" of the eternal, invisible, omnipotent, omniscient God? Short answer: it's not possible.

Yet God makes the impossible possible in the incarnation. God is the "head" upon which the curses of failed covenant may fall. Humanity had left itself outside of any claim of relationship with YHWH long ago. That is why every time God enters into relationship with a human being, there is a covenant. Our first forbears experienced both steps prescribed in the punishment for covenant failure: exile (from the garden), and falling under the ban (in the flood). Israel did too, eventually falling under the Assyrians and Babylonians.

Christ came among us and did what had to be done, both in his perfect obedience to God and in his submission to the curse of failed covenant. For this we can rejoice greatly!

Prayer

Holy Father, Son, and Spirit, today we give thanks for our King, Jesus Christ, who entered into our brokenness and yet kept covenant, who opened a gate for us to enter into the pasture of your presence. Grant that we may live as covenant-keepers through Christ in your eternal kingdom. Please let this be so!

Second Readings: New Testament Epistles

Romans 6:3-14

3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For whoever has died is freed from sin. 8 But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Bill Myers '67

In this passage from Romans 6, Paul tells us to offer our bodies to God for use as “weapons to do right” (v. 13, the *Common English Bible*), or as “instruments of righteousness” (NRSV). Paul believes that the God of creation does not want us to be enslaved in a culture of death.

By faith, Paul claims that through baptism we are freed from death-like existence and called into grace-filled living—God’s promised newness of life. Death is said no longer to have power or dominion over us. No longer slaves in a culture of death, we stand before God as people once gripped by death and now reborn into the fullness of life.

Paul embodies the risk entailed in living this kind of life, but here he is content to ask why such a rebirth surprises us. Is it not what we saw in Jesus, whom we confess to be the Christ? This man went to the cross and died not only for us, but also for the world. Paul claims that, like Christ, we also die but are resurrected and reborn into God’s newness of life. In a deep sense, we are converted from the fear of death into this new way of living. The person we used to be is crucified in order “to get rid of the corpse that had been controlled by sin” (v. 6, *Common English Bible*). Given this conversion from death to life, the evil and threat of death still present in the world have no power in our lives because—whatever the immediate and bodily cost—we live under God’s grace.

By God’s grace, death no longer has power over what we are called to be and do. We still live within a world that often honors death, power, greed, and violence. In our leaving the fear of such things, Paul claims our lives are now entwined with this God of love. As such, we are to be active persons of God’s grace in this world. Such a radical demarcation relocates us and informs us, thus affirming our bodies as “weapons to do right” by becoming God’s “instruments of righteousness.”

Prayer

Creator God, our lives are in your hands. In Jesus, whom we know as the Christ, you have chosen to enter this world. He went to the cross, died, was resurrected, and lives as a radical claim in the face of the world’s culture of death. Living into our baptismal vows, we ask that you continue to be with us as we lean into this world’s future. Be with us in who we are and in what we do. In Christ’s name, amen.

Romans 8:1-11

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

James Reese '49 (1924-2022)

In almost every listing of “Great Chapters of the Bible” you will find Romans 8:1-39. For many, that is because of the words found in verses 31-39; but the words in verses 1-11 also contribute to making this chapter a great one. Consider verses 2-4:

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

These words to followers of Jesus Christ are words of prayer, benefits, and liberation telling us that every day God has done nothing less than send his own son in the flesh to deal with our sin. Now, salvation has taken place through Jesus. We have been given freedom.

We have freedom from the Law thanks to the supremacy of the Spirit. The path from justification to glorification is one of the fruits of the Spirit. We walk and live on this path thanks to Jesus Christ. We, who once were enveloped in fatal disobedience from Adam's sin, are now wrapped in the goodness of Jesus.

Prayer

Gracious God, Giver of all good gifts, enable us to give goodness and loving kindness to all people through the supremacy of the Spirit. Let your Spirit raise up our hearts that we may glorify you. Let each of us begin, continue, and end in your care. Amen.

Brenda Henry '17

In this passage, Paul reminds us of what was at stake when Jesus allowed himself to be sacrificed on the cross—humanity's salvation. Paul makes a distinction between two types of people—the person who is “in Christ Jesus” and the one who “lives according to the flesh”—and their relationship to God. To be “in Christ Jesus” means to be guided by the Spirit of God who dwells within us. To be “in the flesh” is to be hostile to God and refuse to submit to God's commands. Paul was careful to note that humanity's separation from our sinful nature can only be done if the Spirit of Christ dwells in us. Jesus' sacrifice on

the cross conquered the nature of sin that held us bound. No longer are we condemned to death; rather we have been made alive through the righteousness of Christ Jesus.

In the face of the many concerns that surrounds us—the ravages of natural storms and disasters, the tension from the threat of nuclear warfare, the strife of social injustices—we are also reminded that we do not have to live and act out of our sinful nature, for we have been freed to act through the Spirit of God that dwells in us. Being set free from the bondage of sin and death, we are called to reflect the Spirit of God within us in all that we do and toward all those whom we encounter. This Lenten season, may we reflect on God’s abiding love that has set us free, and may we in turn love and care for others as we ourselves are loved.

Prayer

Triune God, thank you for the gift of life granted through the death and resurrection of your son Jesus. Thank you for your Spirit that dwells in us and guides us. Lord, may we seek to please you and follow your commands always. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Andy Hill '20/'23

My Sunday School teacher once taught us to ask a question whenever we see the word “therefore” in the Bible: “What is the *therefore* there for?” So before we consider the conundrum between flesh and spirit that Paul presents in today’s passage, we need to look back to chapter 7’s discussion of sin, the flesh, and the battle that consumes them both.

First up is sin. Contrary to popular belief, sin is not simply the act of doing something wrong. Unless there is a common definition of what “wrong” means, there is no such thing as wrongdoing. The law had to be given to define what is wrong, not so that we might blindly follow the law. But, in fact, the opposite often occurs. The law can heighten the desire to do what is wrong, and here Paul seems to absolve himself of sin. Sin, he argues, takes on a life of its own in light of the law. The law comes to declare war on sin, and sin responds by doubling down.

This war takes place in the flesh, which Paul distinguishes from the mind. Sin lives in the flesh and constantly rebels against the law, while the mind sets itself on godly matters and tries to will sin away. But it fails. The mind is not strong enough to overcome the will of the flesh to sin. The flesh is in slavery to sin and cannot escape except through death.

Now back to our passage’s “therefore.” Therefore, Paul teaches, if the Spirit dwells in you, you are not condemned for your sin. Christ has set you free from the law that defined what sin is, so that you are also free from the war between sin and the law that lives in your flesh.

You don’t have to toil and strive and obsess over this battle between what you do and what you think you ought to do. You can instead bask in the peace and joy of the Spirit. The flesh has already been condemned through Christ’s death on the cross, so let that war between sin and the law go on without you. Take no part in it; find your life and peace in the Spirit who dwells within you.

Prayer

God, we thank you for the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. We were struggling in vain in the war between sin and law, but you have set us free. Teach us to live in joy and peace this season. Amen.

Romans 8:11-25

11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. 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.

Robert Benedetto '77

Lamia Al-Gailani Werr, Iraq’s first female archaeologist and a curator at the National Museum of Iraq, died last year at the age of 80. Her expertise was Mesopotamian cylinder seals, and she curated a collection of 7,000, along with other priceless artifacts. The museum’s collections documented 7,000 years of human history, including the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian civilizations. After the U.S. military invaded Iraq in 2003, the Iraq Museum was looted, and everything was lost.

The cultural catastrophe continued between 2014 and 2015, when the Islamist group Isis plundered or destroyed at least 28 religious buildings in Iraq and Syria, including tombs, mosques, and shrines. Two such buildings were the traditional tombs of the biblical prophet Jonah in Nineveh, just outside Mosul, and the façade of the Roman theatre in the city of Palmyra.

For those who care about the origins of human civilization, the ancient Near East, and the Bible, the past two decades have been years of unprecedented cultural loss. When the Iraq Museum reopened in 2015, only one-third of its estimated 15,000 pieces had been recovered.

This great cultural “dying” of the last two decades has been accompanied by a corresponding “dying” of the natural world. Romans 8 reminds us that “the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth” (v. 22). In our time, we might understand this earthly “groaning” in the context of climate change, a force affecting planet earth with significant implications for civilization as we know it. The “groaning” comes in many forms: melting glaciers and rising seas, more frequent and deadlier floods, fires, storms, heatwaves, droughts, hurricanes. Air pollution, crop failure, water scarcity, reduced biodiversity. It all seems so apocalyptic. And yet . . . “in hope we were saved,” and “we ourselves . . . have the first fruits of the Spirit.”

Prayer

In times such as these, O God, we wait in Lenten apprehension and hope, longing for the preservation of humanity, the restoration of your creation, and the redemption of both through the sustaining and transforming presence of your Holy Spirit in our hearts and in our world. We

“groan inwardly” as we wait for our full and complete adoption as sons and daughters of your Kingdom and for the New Creation you have promised. Amen.

Romans 12:1-21

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. 9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Dave Keys, staff

Paul is defining and describing a picture-perfect Christian life. He begins by telling us to present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice. If we offer ourselves in spiritual worship to God, God will transform and renew us. Paul then tells us to use sound judgment, which is dependent on the faith and grace that has been given to us through our transformation. We all have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us. No one gift is more important than another gift. We are all members of one body, and we should use our gifts for the building up and the edifying of the body of Christ. Be devoted to one another in brotherly and sisterly love, giving preference to one another with honor. And finally, we are told to be at peace with all humankind. Even our enemies. Because good will always overcome evil, we must strive to be good and follow these standards in our Christians lives.

We should not be discouraged by the reality that we will never live up to these standards. The key is to use the talent and grace that God has given to each of us to always strive toward the principles that Paul has laid out. For it is through our struggle and humility that we are continually being sanctified, made holy. Therefore, our worship is truly a living and holy sacrifice.

Prayer

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Take my moments and my days; let them flow in endless praise. Take my life, Lord, and I will pour it out as a living sacrifice to you. For you alone are worthy of my eternal love and praise. Amen.

1 Corinthians 1:1-19

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—6 just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 10 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. 12 What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. 18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

Jay Howell '18

The church should be united, but it isn't Psalm 114:1-8. Here in 1 Corinthians Paul directly describes and denounces the contours of division. The church in Corinth has apparently drawn dividing lines according to those by whom different sects of the church have either been baptized or been taught—for example, Paul, Apollos, or Cephas (v. 12).

These divisions are simply not compatible with the calling of the church. They were wrong then, and they are wrong now. Instead of Paul or Apollos or Cephas, we insert labels like "Presbyterian" or "Lutheran" or "Roman Catholic" or "Evangelical" or "Progressive." Categories of understanding a branch of Christian heritage may have their place, but when those labels supplant the primacy of our collective identity as the body of Christ and instead result in tribal sniping and competition, we must remember anew Paul's question, "Has Christ been divided?" (v. 13).

Lent of course is a season of repentance. Have we for too long overlooked the sin of division within the church? Are we in need of repentance of it? How many of us have quietly resented the fact that a congregation whose theology does match our own grows and flourishes? How many of us have been silently pleased when such a congregation hits upon hard times? Such mentalities are not compatible with Paul's appeal, "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," to be "united in the same mind and the same purpose" (v. 10).

Prayer

God of Unity, we confess to you our indifference to division and our complicity in it. By your Spirit, we pray, convict us of this sinfulness, and bind our hearts closer to yours in the unity in the gospel. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

1 Corinthians 1:20-31

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. 26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, 29 so that no one might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Steven Falci '03

"Consider your own call." St. Paul's words to the Corinthians provide us the opportunity to reflect on our own call here and now. Most often we associate calls with the call to ordained ministry; but each and every one of us has a call, and that call is from God and rooted in Christ Jesus. "He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God."

As we move through Lent this year, let us slow down and take the time to consider what God may be calling us to. It may involve a career change, or it may be ways to be more present to minister to those around us in need. Let us humbly reflect on the gifts we have been given by God and discern how God may be calling us to use these gifts for God's greater glory. Finally, let us give thanks to God for the gifts he has endowed us with—and pray for the strength and consolation to be grounded in these gifts and guided by God in following our call.

Prayer

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.
(*Suscipe* – St. Ignatius of Loyola)

1 Corinthians 2:1-13

1 When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. 6 Yet among the mature we do

speaking wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. 7 But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"—10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13 And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

Jim Davison '69

Across the Allegheny River from Highland Park, the Roman Catholic parish in Aspinwall, St. Scholastica, contains an intriguing crucifix on the back wall of the chancel. Behind a larger-than-life wood carving of the crucified Jesus, the artist has painted bright beams of light in red, yellow, and white, radiating outward in all directions. What a combination—the crucifixion joined together with the glory of the Lord!

Now I don't usually link the crucifixion with glory. I think of *God* as glorious, *God's creative works* as glorious, and certainly *the resurrection* as glorious. But the cross? Not so much. But then, this image in the chancel reminded me of verse 8 of today's passage from 1 Corinthians 2, with the Apostle Paul's comment about "the rulers of this age" who "crucified the Lord of glory."

How could those rulers have missed Jesus' identity? It's because, says Paul, they were looking for glory in human characteristics such as power, wisdom, impressive speech, and noble birth. In short, those rulers expected to find glory in the kind of qualities that all human societies—including our own!—have normally prized and praised.

Paul recognized that the early Corinthian church was also captivated by such thinking, hence his reminder in verse 2 that he had tried to counter their expectations by "knowing nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Obviously, this striking phrase describes perfectly the need for those Corinthians, and for all later followers of Jesus (again, including us, of course) to focus on humility, not glory. But the mysterious truth here, which, in verse 7, Paul calls "God's secret and hidden wisdom," is precisely this: we are imitating our glorious Lord as we live humbly and give of ourselves for the benefit of others.

As we reflect on God's hidden wisdom this Lenten season, perhaps we can recall St. Scholastica's chancel, with the link it makes between the cross and the Lord of glory. For me, that means trying to serve with a greater awareness that such service isn't only about showing compassion or meeting someone's need. Whether helping a friend, assisting in a mission or ministry, or undertaking some very minor service, at a deeper, hidden level there's also a glorious aspect to it, for it means that I'm walking in the way the Lord of glory did when he offered himself so selflessly for others.

Prayer

Glorious God, I thank you that in Jesus Christ you have revealed your hidden wisdom and displayed your power through what our world calls weakness and foolishness. Grant that I too

may display wisdom in serving and giving of myself, instead of striving after success or seeking for things such as worldly approval or acclaim. In Christ, the Lord of glory, I pray. Amen.

Scott Hagley, faculty

Lydia Millet's novel *A Children's Bible* depicts a group of families who are vacationing together at a large seaside manor when a hurricane brings American society to the edge of collapse. Told from the perspective of an adolescent looking after her younger brother, the adults in this story are feckless and fragile, more interested in escapist fantasies than taking responsibility for their children or the world they have created. The scaffolding these adult professionals once depended upon as professors, artists, and bankers has collapsed before their eyes; their collective passivity regarding climate change and political polarization has borne catastrophic fruit, and they have no skills to meet the moment. The adolescents, however, take the apocalypse in Gen-Z style, searching out DIY videos to learn to grow food, bring discipline to their unruly parents, and create new community from the ashes of the old. In a crisis of biblical proportions, wisdom gets turned inside out and upside down, for a child shall lead them.

In the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 2, Paul insists upon the upside-down, inside-out wisdom of God disclosed by the cross of Jesus Christ: "When I came to you, brothers and sisters . . . I decided to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." A crucified Messiah is a contradiction in terms. We don't expect God's anointed to die a criminal, abandoned by friends. The disruptive and disjunctive reality of the cross strips away our pretensions, placing us in a world without the usual scaffolding of knowledge, with only a connection to the one Jesus calls "Father" by way of the Holy Spirit: "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God" (2:12).

In many ways, the various social, political, environmental, and personal crises we face only make sense in light of the cross: for at the end of human wisdom is the folly of a crucified Messiah, through whom God loves the world back to life.

Prayer

Give ear to my words, O LORD;
give heed to my sighing.
Listen to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.
O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch (Ps. 5:1-3).
Amen.

1 Corinthians 2:14-3:15

14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. 16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. 3:1 And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? 4 For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and

another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? 5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. 9 For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. 10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—13 the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. 14 If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

Mark Whitsel '04

Why is it so important that Paul explains the importance of unity within the Church? Is he really concerned to press upon these early Christian believers, who are like children, the importance of getting along? While getting along seems rather trivial in the sweeping narrative of Christ's Kingdom—ushering death and resurrection, such a lesson appears to be foundational for how the Church understands itself—both as individuals and as a whole. Here Paul reminds the church (and her leaders!) that our work—our efforts—are, in the final analysis, not ours at all. They are part of a broader work that God is doing within His people. To recognize this truth is to give oneself over to a more unified vision of the Church. Clearly the church in Corinth was struggling with this very issue.

Throughout the years, I've witnessed how easily the Church at any level can fall into such behavior or thinking. We pick our people, set up shop, and build our silos. We've all seen it happen. Especially those in leadership should remember that we are not immune to this tendency. Consider the temptation for Paul and Apollos to feed into the cult of personality developing before them. How easily one could succumb to such allure! But Paul reminds us that "we are God's servants, working together," building on the one "foundation," who is Christ. For a leader, keeping a clear light of sight on this truth is always to the benefit of the people of God!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, today we thank You for Your call into the Church through the death of Jesus Christ. As we go about the hard work of leadership, guide us in paths of clarity, unity, and humility. May we model and mirror the gospel faithfully. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Scott Paul-Bonham, D.Min. student

How grateful we should all be that the Corinthians were such a dysfunctional group of Christians with so many misunderstandings. If they were not so, we would have not have the detailed teaching from Paul about spiritual divisions in the Church.

For two decades I was a chaplain in a U.S. penitentiary. I marveled at the intensity of converts to Christianity. They would throw themselves into the study of Scripture, even learning biblical Hebrew or Greek. They would spend every moment they could worshipping in the chapel. Some converts became extremely judgmental incredibly quickly, decrying things like tattoos and gambling—activities in which they had participated mere weeks before. Many thought of themselves as amazingly spiritual, better than all the rest of us Christians.

They thought they could handle the solid food. They could not. Many flamed out. I asked one such convert in the dining hall why he stopped coming to the chapel. His response was something like: "I tried it. I got really good at it. It didn't work. I knew it wouldn't." It seems this man had thought that if he became the perfect Christian, God would grant him release from prison. Funny how he never noticed in his Bible study how faith got a lot of biblical people into prison, not out of it.

To counter this convert crisis, we began a mentoring program. Men of faith, volunteers of all ages, would come in on Monday nights and just talk with two inmates for an hour each. The positive spiritual effect was dramatic upon both mentors and mentees. These meetings fostered humility and trust, positive growth and prayer.

It is not only the penitentiary that needs relationships like these. Let us endeavor this Lent to participate personally in intentional spiritual mentoring and to seek the mind of Christ together.

Prayer

Lord God, give me the grace to see myself as you see me, loved but lacking. Help me to seek, in humility and faith, to grow in the mind of Christ with other Christians. Please bring a mentor, or an opportunity to mentor, into my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

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.

Ken Woo, faculty

Self-awareness is empowering. This is the lesson the Apostle put before the church at Corinth: Do you not know who you are? The Corinthians are holy, set apart. The point? God is with you and for you. To press this point, Paul makes several lofty claims: "You are God's temple . . . God's Spirit dwells in you . . . You belong to Christ . . . All things are yours." Self-awareness, in this case, meant freedom from attempts to impose identity, priorities, and strategies contrary to God's mission. It's freedom to resist. To be different. Why? God is with you.

Self-awareness is empowering, but it's also dangerous. Because self-deception is easy. Rather than resisting cultural markers of success that separate winners from losers, the Corinthians embraced them. They confused them with God's power. Similar opportunities for self-deception abound today. "All things are yours"—God is with you—quickly becomes license to seize the levers of political advantage, grasp after wealth and prestige, boast at another's expense. We trade security in God's presence for the insecurity of needing to prove God's presence with us by winning.

Making ourselves great seems prudent enough, but it's not the gospel. In Christ, God's power is revealed in setting aside glory, defying expectations. The gospel surprises. It subverts. God doesn't conform to

business as usual. Neither should we. Do not be deceived. In the face of injustice perpetuated by insecurity, resistance requires self-awareness, even self-denial. Dare to defy expectations. How? God is with us, we belong to Christ, God's Spirit dwells in us.

Prayer

Gracious God, when our eyes—and the eyes of our hearts—deceive us, show us the futility of securing ourselves by ensuring we always side with the winners. Teach us to resist false power, to live differently as those confident in the promise that Christ has sided with us. Amen.

1 Corinthians 4:1-7

1 Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. 2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. 4 I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God. 6 I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, "Nothing beyond what is written," so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another. 7 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?

Lisa Bunting, staff

In this scripture, we are reminded that everything we have, do, and accomplish is not achieved solely by our own doing but is, in fact, a precious gift bestowed on us by the grace of God. Paul says, "For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" God's gifts are all-encompassing in our lives and give us the strength to achieve all things. We should keep a humble spirit and not boast; we should also keep a gracious heart to acknowledge the gifts God has graciously bestowed on us. In the same way, we would not receive a present from a friend or family member and behave as though we bought it for ourselves; rather, we would be grateful, thankful, and appreciative that our friend or family member generously provided us with a gift. We should follow this example in our everyday lives, since it is God's grace that sustains us. God is the source of strength in our lives and intervenes in our behalf—God always shows up strong and mighty. During this Lenten season, we should examine ourselves to see whether we have a gracious heart and a humble spirit. We should also give thanks to God for all the strength we have been provided and all the gifts we have been given.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, first, we thank you for all the gifts you have lovingly and graciously bestowed on us. Help us not to take them for granted, but instead, to continuously acknowledge your love. We also ask that you humble us, so that we do not become consumed with our own ego and pride but, rather, maintain a modest heart and spirit. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

1 Corinthians 4:8-21

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you! 9 For I think that

God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. 10 We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. 11 To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, 12 and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; 13 when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day. 14 I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15 For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. 17 For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church. 18 But some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant. 19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. 20 For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. 21 What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

Joseph Hedden '97

I have often wondered about the church in Corinth. Why would anyone want to minister there? The congregation is divided along class lines and is split into factions. Sexual immorality is prevalent. People are suing each other. Pretty much any conflict you can think of grows in the Corinthian soil!

Paul's frustration with the whole situation flows over into his sarcastic tone. He rightly names their arrogance. He writes, in effect, that their 'talk is cheap' (vv. 20 and 21). He diagnoses their conflict.

Yet, diagnosis is not enough—not then, and not today. How does one heal from this disease? In marked contrast to the talkers of Corinth, Paul demonstrates that the gospel must be embodied and practiced. If the gospel is to mean anything, it must bear fruit as a counter-witness to the conflict of Corinth. "When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly" (vv. 12-13).

The raw materials that make for conflict are a given in the human condition. When we are wounded, we are tempted to lash out. When the congregation and its pastor are most stressed, we automatically look for scapegoats, exit plans, and so on. We react out of base instinct, rather than live up to our professed values. That's not a rationalization for bad behavior; it's a fact of life. Paul calls us to look to the values of Jesus Christ as examples of new ways of living and new ways of dealing with conflict.

Prayer

O God, we know too well what conflict looks like. We have witnessed it. We have contributed to it. Help us to confess our sinful attitudes and to live lives of repentance. Give us the grace to embody the gospel values that make for peace. Amen.

1 Corinthians 5:1-8

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you? 3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment 4 in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of

the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? 7 Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Christian Brooks '17

This time of fasting is a time to examine ourselves. Much like the Corinthians, as we go through life we pick up habits and desires that are not pleasing to God. Satan is crafty. He tries many ways to capture our attention and cause us to sin. Sometimes we do not realize that we are giving in to his advances. So during this time of fasting, examine your life. Observe any areas where you have allowed sin to enter, and submit those areas to God. For just as a little leaven spreads and causes dough to rise, so does a little sin spread and cause the believer to fall. During this Lenten season, set aside the distracting things that have been capturing your attention and seek God.

Prayer

Lord, I ask you to forgive me for the sin that I have committed. Reveal to me anything in my life that is not pleasing to you. Help me to submit those areas of my life to you. Give me the strength to resist the advances of Satan and overcome temptation. I am overjoyed for the redemption that I have because of the risen Savior. Lord, I thank you for the grace and mercy that you pour out on me every day. God, help me to be more like you. Amen.

1 Corinthians 5:9-6:11

9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons—10 not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? 13 God will judge those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.” 6:1 When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we are to judge angels - to say nothing of ordinary matters? 4 If you have ordinary cases, then, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? 5 I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, 6 but a believer goes to court against a believer - and before unbelievers at that? 7 In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? 8 But you yourselves wrong and defraud - and believers at that. 9 Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, 10 thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Hetz Marsh '68/'87

The “verse” that immediately comes to mind as I read today’s passage from 1 Corinthians 5 is “in the world, but not of the world.” But there is no such verse! Nevertheless, several New Testament verses make the point: John 15:19, “If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because

you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you”; John 17:16, “They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world”; John 2:15-16, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world”; Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God”; and James 1:27, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this; to care for orphans and widows in distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

“In the world” is our locus, our location. We cannot influence the world as “light” and “salt” if we are not in it. But we are not to draw from the world as our source of inspiration or behavior. This was no easy task for the Corinthian Christians, surrounded as they were by hedonism. It is no easy task for us either. We are called to be “holy,” to be different from the world. None of us reaches this goal. Thus the need both for forgiveness and for God’s transforming presence and power. We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, but we are sanctified by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

David McFarland, formerly of the Sewickley Presbyterian Church, defined sanctification as “the process of growing to be more and more like Jesus Christ for the sake of others.” The goal of our journey of faith is the integration of Christ into everything we do. If we do so, the world will see the love of God through us.

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, when, as you taught us, we pray “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven,” we are reminded that the church is sent into the world so that the world will know eternal life, which is to “know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” Continue, we pray, your Spirit’s transformation of us from within. Amen.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

12 “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. 13 “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” 17 But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

W. Fred Graham '55 (1930-2021)

As our brother Paul addresses divisive issues in the young church at Corinth, he is forced to assert over and over again the young Christians’ freedom (“by grace [which is a gift] are you saved”) while living in wholesome community in a pagan world. This situation means that all manner of issues come up: food and drink, hairstyles, prostitution, lawsuits, and the list goes on. So to believers trying to find their way in such a society, Paul returns again and again to the slogan-like admonition, “all things are lawful, but not all are beneficial.”

The human body is good, not evil, as some ascetics would assert. After all, our Lord rose in body from the grave. Our Lord owns my body and your body. His Spirit is within. So during Lent, perhaps we should examine how we use the body God has gifted to each one of us. Do we work too much? Eat too much? Loaf around too much? Join me in asking yourself, What balance can I find today as I work and live in loving community with other followers of the Risen One?

Prayer

Dear Lord, take my whole self this day, and inspire me to admire what you are about within my heart and by my hands. Amen.

Erin Morey '22

"[Y]our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." (1 Cor 6:19b-20)

On our last youth confirmation retreat, we had scheduled time on the "King Swing," where you are harnessed, hauled as high into the air as you are willing to go, and then released to drop and swing. At first, I thought I might skip the swing. But, I watched the nervous teenagers I was with gently encourage one another to push beyond their comfort zones to try it. Watching the videos later, I realized that no one was silent as they fell, and at some point everyone yelled involuntarily at the thrill of swinging. Each of the youth decided to be hauled up a little higher, and most chose to go all the way up. I realized that this was an intense experience, but it was a holy experience, too, and I finally mustered the courage to share it with them. I'm excited to report that I had to keep my eyes closed as I was hauled up, but I made it all the way to the top, and then shrieked "WOO!" as I swung back and forth.

How holy it is that we share this strange and wonderful experience of being in this physical world with one another, and with Christ. How beautiful it is that we can rejoice together in worship, work, and play! And I've found that I am often capable of doing so much more than I assumed was possible when I am asked to push beyond my own comfort. I am never grateful enough for the gift of this body that allows me to connect with others and with God. This Lenten season, I will focus on God's call to glorify God in the sometimes mundane, sometimes intense, gift of being an embodied human being in the world.

Prayer

Creator God, all we are is yours. Let us delight in the gift of our bodies, that we may joyfully praise you in every gesture, every moment, and every step. Let the world know your goodness through us. Give us the strength to do the work you have created us to do: to love you, and one another. Amen.

1 Corinthians 7:1-9

1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman." 2 But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 This I say by way of concession, not of command. 7 I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind. 8 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is

well for them to remain unmarried as I am. 9 But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.

Michael Gehrling '08

“I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind.” These words from today’s Scripture passage from 1 Corinthians have been words to which I’ve returned regularly over the past 15 years. I’m single. And the reminder that my single life is as much a gift from God as the lives of my married friends is an assurance. It’s also a challenge.

The Greek word translated “gift” in this verse is χάρισμα (“charisma”). It’s the same word Paul uses to describe spiritual gifts just a few chapters later in this epistle. What if we thought of our singleness or marriage less as gifts for ourselves to enjoy and more as spiritual gifts given by God through us to the Church?

As a single person, I’ve experienced the gift of married people in my community. They bring into my life a sense of stability and a rootedness in place. Sacramentally, their love and relationship point me to the love between Christ and the Church.

As a single person, I’ve also seen how my singleness makes me available to my community. That’s not to say, as many think, that singleness means having more hours and energy to give. As a single person, I still need time for personal spiritual practices, for rest and recreation, and for the work of maintaining a home (work which I do without the help of a partner). But I do bring to my community a certain flexibility and availability. I can bring single-minded attentiveness to each person I encounter and to God. Sacramentally, I can point my community to the virgins with oil in their lamps waiting for the Bridegroom to come, or to the angels who with single-minded devotion never stop crying, “Holy.”

How is your singleness, or your marriage, a gift to your community?

Prayer

God, you generously entrust each of us with the gift of singleness or the gift of marriage. Help us to steward these gifts faithfully, that whatever our station in life, it may be a blessing to the Church and to the world. We pray in the name of Christ, the Bridegroom who lived in single-minded devotion to you. Amen.

1 Corinthians 7:10-24

10 To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband 11 (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. 12 To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. 13 And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 15 But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you. 16 Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife. 17 However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches. 18 Was

anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything. 20 Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called. 21 Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever. 22 For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters. 24 In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God.

Diane Fonderlin '89

During our time in the overseas mission field, my husband, Tim, and I lived in some of the world's most impoverished nations. Over the years, we encountered countless challenges as we sought ways to work alongside people who needed decent shelter, good health care, enough food to eat, and educational opportunities.

To say that I never thought about just packing up and leaving would not be honest. Sometimes I would get so frustrated with bureaucratic red tape and corrupt government officials that I would mentally throw my hands in the air and say, "Lord, I'm ready to get out of here!"

But then I would spend a morning with Carl, the young man who served as my interpreter for seminary classes, and all those thoughts would melt away. Very bright and with a grasp of English that was so good, Carl would easily translate difficult theological concepts into explanations that Creole- and French-speaking students could understand. Knowing of Carl's desire to teach theology, I often thought how great it would be for him to study at a seminary in the U.S. or France. There he could flourish, get hired at a good theological school, and help equip future pastors.

But Carl has other ideas. Yes, he would like to take graduate courses at a good seminary, but his ultimate goal would always be to return to his homeland to teach theology. Because of all the limitations that people in his home country face, Carl wants to be a part of giving students the best schooling possible. This young man is truly content to "bloom where he was planted."

That principle is what Paul teaches the church at Corinth here in verses 10-24 of chapter 7. Many of those baby Christians were still holding on to their old way of life, and Paul's first letter to them is one of good, practical counsel. He wants people to understand that they can be good Christians no matter their circumstances—and that they can bring about change by being obedient to the gospel.

These are words that still hold true for us—today!

Prayer

Lord of all creation, desire of our hearts, we thank you that we are able to come to you in the knowledge that our words reach loving ears. We are humbled by such caring. In this season of Lent, help us, we pray, to understand more fully your purposes for our lives. Strengthen us and guide us in the power of your great and Holy Spirit so that we may fulfill those purposes. For in doing so, our hope is that we may represent you in this world with all the graciousness, kindness, generosity, forgiveness, and love that Jesus Christ himself revealed when he walked this earth. O Lord, we truly want to be participants in your Kingdom-building! In the name of Christ, amen.

1 Corinthians 7:25-31

25 Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. 26 I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. 29 I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, 30 and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, 31 and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

Drew Smith, faculty

This passage's focus on eschewing spiritual distractions and social entanglements (including those that may accompany marriage) is perhaps a bit discomfiting to most who encounter it. We may shield ourselves perhaps from the passage's sacrificial demands by rationalizing that it applies only to a selected group of Christians uniquely called to lives of heightened spiritual discipline, self-denial, and service. This group could include, for example, persons devoted to religious sisterhood and monastic priesthood traditions. But confining the passage's applications only to persons who ecclesially (or less formally) devote themselves to this kind of ascetic living would obviate what the passage portends about spiritually consecrated living and service in a broader sense.

Although the scriptures often reference the "few" versus the "many" (as in "many are called, few are chosen" [Matthew 22:14]), such distinctions do not necessarily apply to this passage in 1 Corinthians. It is not simply the few whom the passage beckons into deeper spirituality and service through consecration and sacrifice—it is the many, irrespective of social status or station, profession or livelihood, family structure or marital status.

There is a selflessness written into this passage, but also an urgency—both of which are quite pertinent to the Lenten season. Through crucifixion, Christ "laid down" His life in an act of supreme selflessness to rescue a perishing humanity. As Christ demonstrated so clearly through His life and death, it is in losing ourselves that we find ourselves, it is through emptying ourselves that we become full, and it is through sacrificing ourselves in behalf of others that we show our love for each other and for God (Matthew 10:39; Philippians 2:7; John 15:13). In recalling the meaning of Christ's sacrifice, let us also assess how much of ourselves we are giving to God and to a world of people in peril.

Prayer

Lord God, in a world preoccupied with self, may we be so giving to others and so surrendered to you that we hold nothing back. Let your words, your ways, your will be entirely ours. Let us seek you with our whole heart, and let us draw nearer to you through our service to others. Take our lives and consecrate them to you and to the service of your people.

1 Corinthians 7:26-29a, 32-38 (spanning lectionary passages 7:25-31 and 7:32-40)

26 I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. 29 I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; . . . 32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to

please the Lord; 33 but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. 35 I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord. 36 If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée, if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. 37 But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control, and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well. 38 So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.

Bill Jackson '61, Board emeritus

A cursory reading of these verses from 1 Corinthians 7 might lead one to think that they merely discuss the contrasts (the pros and cons) between being married and being celibate—which is better or worse? The text is actually, however, a statement about the obvious differences regarding the number of demands, duties, and pressures—or lack of them—attendant to each marital status.

Paul states that it would be easier (and perhaps better) for a single person to fulfill his/her calling without the hindrances and distractions that can come with marriage. But he also says very clearly that marriage is not a sin. In fact later, in Ephesians, he says that marriage is a significant symbol, sign, and example of the perfect relationship between Christ and his bride, the Church.

The crucial point in his letter to the Corinthians is that Paul was certain the return of Christ was imminent; it constituted the “impending crisis” of verse 26. Another translation reads, “the time is short.” So for Paul there was an urgency, an imperative, for the followers of Jesus to be ready imminently—to be prepared by putting all their priorities in place. Whether married or celibate, then, and whatever extra personal responsibilities attended them, the Corinthian Christians’ top priority should be readiness and empowerment by the Spirit as Christ’s faithful, well-prepared, obedient servants.

The message for us here in this Lenten season is to take another opportunity for disciplined worship, study, and prayer to re-enforce our “top priority” to fulfill our role of being dedicated disciples, stewards, and witnesses for the Lord, even as we hear again the haunting echo of Jesus saying to us, “You must be ready [AT ANY TIME], for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you least expect.”

Prayer

Oh Lord, may our relationship with you through our daily discipline and devotion of study and prayer make us ready at any time for all opportunities to fulfill our “top priority” to be your faithful, loyal, and obedient servants—ones who share your love and grace with all the family, friends, neighbors, and strangers we will encounter today. In the name of Jesus our Savior, amen.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

1 Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 2 Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; 3 but anyone who loves God is known by him. 4 Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” 5 Indeed, even

though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. 7 It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 “Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? 11 So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. 12 But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

Andy Greenhow, staff

By this point in Lent, I have long given up any observances that have to do with food. I’m back enjoying a glass of beer, eating meat, or chowing down on chocolate. A big part of my justification for doing so goes roughly along the lines of this passage from 1 Corinthians. “I’m free in Christ, justified by faith! I don’t need to withhold the pleasure of this steak/wine/ice cream! I’m not spiritually immature like those folks who have to give up food—this vegetarianism has served its purpose and I get it now.”

Hey, at least I abandoned my integrity theologically

But maybe the best part of Lent is the sweet relief of not pretending we’re mature or advanced in the faith. It’s an opportunity to entertain the notion that maybe we are weaker than we thought, that we stumble more readily than we would like to admit. There is freedom in saying, “I need help. I am not where I want to be.” And just like the believers living together as the early church, so we, in observing Lent together, get to look out for one another.

I hope we feel free enough to get in touch with our own weakness and lack of knowledge this Lent and, in so doing, grow in compassion for those around us, who are struggling along just like we are.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the opportunity in this season to reflect on our weakness and to know more of your power made perfect in weakness. Make us attentive to you and to one another. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

1 Corinthians 9:1-15

*1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?
2 If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.
3 This is my defense to those who would examine me. 4 Do we not have the right to our food and drink?
5 Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? 7 Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk? 8 Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? 10 Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever plows should*

plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop. 11 If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? 12 If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? 14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. 15 But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this so that they may be applied in my case. Indeed, I would rather die than that—no one will deprive me of my ground for boasting!

Edward Newberry '71

Today's passage of 15 verses contains 17 questions asked by Paul to the Corinthians. Each question is different and somewhat rhetorical, but all relate to his work as an apostle. Reflecting other assertions of authority, such as "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God," and Paul's comment in verse 3, "this is my defense," the passage could be seen as another effort by Paul to declare that he is a real apostle. The powerful authority claimed here is rooted in the notion of freedom, framed by the opening question: "Am I not free?" It sounds like Paul's commission by the risen Christ has established his freedom to do as he pleases when enacting his apostolic ministry.

Today's passage is part of a larger section of the letter—a section dealing with Christian freedom, especially in the matter of eating meat offered to idols. Assuring Christians of sound knowledge that "food will not bring us close to God," Paul is using himself and his exercise of freedom as an example, as strong Christians relate to weaker believers who are worried and wrestling with this dilemma.

In the modern West of 2020, we individual Christians are not defending our "apostleship" or worrying about idol-tainted food. So what does this passage say to our reflections and spiritual disciplines during Lent? An interpretation contrary to the traditional understanding of Paul's purpose here might help: says one commentary, Paul is not defending his right to be an apostle, but explaining why he has not *exercised his rights* as an apostle, namely, he doesn't want to be a stumbling block, a hindrance to the gospel of Jesus Christ. For Christians who revere the gospel, that sounds like a worthy goal for Lent—or any time—as we live out our faith.

As individuals who are joined with others in the body of Christ, we might look to Paul's convictions as an apostle of Christ for guidance regarding our witness in Christian life together. In explaining the marks of the Church, the PC(USA) *Book of Order* speaks of the apostolicity of the Church as God's gift in Jesus Christ. Our calling and mission as those sent by Christ is to proclaim the gospel of God's love, grace, truth, freedom, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, and salvation in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, for the whole world.

We could follow Paul's example of sacrificial freedom in our witness of word and deed. We could strive not to hinder but rather to further the proclamation and living of this good news. Our faithfulness as Christ's body, the Church, will determine the outcome.

Prayer

Holy God, your eternal love sent Jesus Christ to our world. The Lordship of Jesus sends us into our world. Both of these commissions are signs of apostolic responsibility. Help us to know the blessing of being the Church, which is charged with continuing the mission and message of the Savior. We seek to proclaim Jesus and his truth as good news. Empower consistent and sincere

faithfulness in our ministries. May all we do as your Church bless our world and glorify our gracious Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

1 Corinthians 9:16-27

16 If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! 17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. 18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel. 19 For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. 24 Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. 25 Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. 26 So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; 27 but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

Kellie Wild '09

It's all about relationships. I work with many people whom some would refer to as the disinherited or those who are marginalized by society. Many of the folks with whom I spend my time do not feel comfortable around Christians or in our churches because they do not feel welcome and accepted. On the other hand, I am often approached by individuals in churches about what they can do to get the people who are marginalized to come into their churches. What I say to these well-intentioned church folk is that people who feel marginalized are not going to come into your churches just because you say your doors are open. Until you are willing to go *out* of the church's doors and engage in building genuine relationships with others, your doors are not open. We need to get to know people and their stories so that we can then share the story of the gospel. I have heard many times over the years that people do not care what you know until they know that you care. You see, we in the church are focused on getting people to come into the church when, like Paul, we need to be going out to the people and speaking to them in a way that shows we care about them as persons. What would it look like if, instead of focusing on getting people into the church, we took the message of the gospel *out* of the church and *to* the people?

Prayer

Gracious God, you speak to each of us in unique ways so that we know of your love for us. Help us to go out of the safety of our churches and into the world to build genuine relationships with those who may not know the message of the gospel so that we may be able to speak and act in ways that allow your love to be shared with others.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

1 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock

that followed them, and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. 6 Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. 10 And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. 13 No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

Jane Larson '17/'20

Although writing to a primarily Gentile audience, Paul frames this passage by remembering the ancestors whom Moses led out of slavery in Egypt. These Jewish ancestors became inherited ancestors of the Gentiles through their "ingrafting" into the Hebrews' faith community. Paul acknowledges the unity of all these people through their eating "the same spiritual food" and drinking "the same spiritual drink." More importantly, Paul identifies the spiritual rock, the source of this unity, to be Christ.

As Christ unites the community in Corinth, Paul offers guidance on how to live in community and warns against the mistakes of the past. As a finite people living in a broken world, the Corinthians will inevitably experience trials in striving to maintain this unity. People are coming from diverse backgrounds and social locations, so coming together as one collective will require preparation by the entire community. Despite the difficulties, however, Paul calls the community to remember that God will provide them with the same kind of strength and perseverance as God has provided in the past.

In this season of Lent, when we practice self-examination, let us not forget that our faith is inherently communal. We are called to live with one another in beloved community united by Christ. So let us examine ways in which we can grow as a communal body. How might God be calling us to refine our relationships and heal our divisions? As we encounter adversity, let us remember God's faithfulness and walk together in times of trial.

Prayer

Steadfast God, we give you thanks for your faithfulness. Guide us through this season that we may not avoid the hard work of seeking peace in our communities. Teach us to serve one another with justice and mercy. In your grace, strengthen us to walk together in times of adversity and to remember Christ as the source of our unity. Amen.

Joshua Fisher '14/'18

In my work as a pastor and chaplain at Allegheny County Jail I have had the honor of holding holy space for others to confess their pain and mistakes. It rarely comes out in a formal confession, like the liturgies we use in worship. Rather, it comes with a hanging head or strained laughter, and sometimes, through bitter tears. It is not uncommon to hear someone say at the Jail that the bitterness that keeps them up at night is that they have committed the same sins as their ancestors. They promised themselves that they would not end up like them. Not them, not like their deadbeat dad, or their drug-sick mom. They are looking into the mirror of life and are having the courage to confess and bring to the light what many bury in the dark of their denial. Sometimes, I wish that we all had the courage to confess these deep

wounds and failures. In these moments, I often think of the old monk adage attributed to Abba Moses: "Go to your cell and your cell will teach you everything."

The Apostle Paul encourages the church of Corinth to be looking in their own mirrors. In this reminder though, he is abundantly clear that it is not their faithfulness that will redeem them. It is God's faithfulness. It is God's faithfulness. Yes, this is redundant; it is God's faithfulness that will provide no matter what they face. How do they know? They look to the ancestors and they will see God's faithfulness. They look to the Christ who revealed God's love to both Jew and Gentile. In Lent, we focus on repenting of our sins and opening space to God's love. As you look in your own mirror this Lent and if you see some things you do not like, remember: God is faithful. The love of God is greater than our failures. It was true yesterday, it is true today, and it will be true tomorrow.

Prayer

God of Moses who murdered, God of Jacob who lied, God of Rahab who prostituted, come into our hearts this day and deliver us from the judge and accuser. Remind us that there is nothing greater than your love or power to heal our wounds. And give us the grace to hold this for others as we need it for ourselves. To the glory of God and in the power of Christ we pray, Amen.

1 Corinthians 10:14-17; 11:27-32

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. 15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. . . . 11:27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. 30 For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Don McKim '74

On Maundy Thursday, the church celebrates the Lord's Supper. The bread and wine offered by Jesus to all his disciples focuses on Jesus' death and the benefits of salvation given by the God of grace, who has loved us to the uttermost in Jesus Christ. In Christ's death we are united with God in Christ and with each other by bonds of faith in the church. The bread and cup are a *koinonia*, a sharing of the body and blood of Christ (10:16). We "who are many are one body" (10:17) as we share in this sacrament. We cultivate the unity which is ours in Christ so that we do not "eat and drink without discerning the body," which would thereby bring judgment (11:29-32).

The church's unity is grounded in Jesus Christ as God's gift of grace. Our discipleship as followers of Christ involves doing all we can to emphasize and enact this unity among Christian believers. The Table of our Lord is where we find who we are and whose we are—and where we know most fully that we have sisters and brothers in Christ with whom we share the bread and wine.

Ecumenical efforts in our churches are not options. They are necessities for us to live into the unity Christ brings. To turn away means we are "discerning the body" wrongly. Our commitment is to Christ in the church. We join together in the whole family of faith in praise and service to Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, you died to save us. You stretched your arms on the cross to embrace the world and gather us as your people in the church. We rejoice! May we share our lives with others who love you—and with the world you love so deeply. Amen.

1 Corinthians 11:2-34

2 I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. 3 But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. 4 Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, 5 but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. 6 For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. 7 For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. 8 Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. 9 Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. 10 For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. 11 Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. 12 For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? 14 Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, 15 but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. 16 But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. 17 Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. 19 Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. 20 When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. 21 For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. 22 What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! 23 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. 30 For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. 33 So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things I will give instructions when I come.

Edwin van Driel, faculty

The Lord's Supper is not only a celebration. It is also a moment of judgment. We have largely lost that sense. A story told by the American missionary Vincent Donovan can help us rediscover it. In his *Christianity Rediscovered* Donovan writes about a Eucharistic celebration among the African tribe of the Sonjo. The Sonjo were known as very experienced dancers. Vincent noticed that the members of the tribe approached the table while performing their dances, deliberately and carefully. Some of these dances were decidedly secular. Donovan was confused as to why they would perform such dances while going to celebrate communion. But the elders of the tribe told him they did so on purpose. The celebration of the Eucharist would help them to make a decision. If they could perform the dance without hesitation while going to meet the Lord at the table, they could perform the dance whenever. But if they felt shame in dancing the dance while going up, that dance should have no place in their lives at all.

The table is an anticipation of the messianic meal of God's kingdom. What cannot be brought to the table will not be brought into the Kingdom. And what cannot be brought into the Kingdom we may as well let go of now. It has no future—therefore, it warrants no place in our lives at all.

Prayer

Lord, help me today to discern what parts of my life I cannot bring into your presence—and which I therefore should not hang on to at all. Amen.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Carolyn Cranston '99, staff

What an amazing gift God has given us in the Holy Spirit. It is only through the Spirit of God that we are able to know and love Jesus as our Lord and Savior. As followers of Jesus, we receive an invitation to journey with him to the cross. We experience the dark days of Jesus' crucifixion, death, resurrection, and final victory as he ascends to heaven with God.

Scripture tells us that there are varieties of spiritual gifts given to God's children. There are also many ways to serve and work to use those gifts. All of these things come from the same Spirit, for in all things it is the same God at work. It is not up to us to decide which gift we want to receive and which gift we have no interest in using.

The Holy Spirit determines how to distribute the spiritual gifts. The Spirit does not distribute spiritual gifts to everyone equally, but as the Spirit of God so chooses. The beauty of this is that we have no reason for pride or envy. The gifts we possess are just that—gifts. They are not of our own making. We do not claim, nor should we desire, what the Spirit has not given us.

The Holy Spirit has bestowed spiritual gifts upon every one of God's children to use for the common good of all in building up the Kingdom of God. It is most important for all of God's children to discern which spiritual gifts they possess. Spiritual gifts should never lay idle. If you have not identified your own gifts, seek clarity through a spiritual gifts inventory, or perhaps through conversations at your church.

Your gifts will make a unique difference, because only you possess them.

Prayer

Holy and gracious God, thank you for the Spirit who generates in us the love of Jesus Christ. We are grateful that, through the Holy Spirit, every person receives spiritual gifts. Help us to use our gifts for the benefit of others. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; 24 whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, 25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Corey Rugh '18

An incredible aspect of being a Christian is that no matter what political, economic, ethnic, racial, sex, or any other phenotypic characteristic you possess, you are a member of *one* body: the body of Christ. The members of the Corinthian congregation were no exception to such amalgamation. It seems, however, that they were diverse in some negative ways. Paul writes at the beginning of the letter, "Now I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters" (1 Corinthians 1:10-11). Clearly, there were some who did not have the same mind or same purpose, thus causing dissension. Anyone familiar with church life can likely conjure up a situation where such disagreement has occurred.

In an attempt to rally the Corinthians back together, Paul expounds the body-metaphor. Each member of the human body plays its specific and unique purpose. The eye cannot do what the foot can, nor can the ear perform the tasks that the hand can. Furthermore, the weaker members, such as the eyes and ears, are “indispensable.” Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to treat the seemingly weaker members of Christ’s body with greater respect and honor! Doing so is contrary to our natural instinct, by which we tend to give honor and respect only when we believe they have been rightly earned. In short, Paul is promoting equity. The result he intends is that the same care will be given to each member of Christ’s body. How blessed are we that “God has so arranged the body”!

Prayer

Loving Father, we thank you for bringing us into the body of Christ. May we give honor and respect to those around us who are feeling weak. Teach us to deny ourselves so that we may properly care for others and encourage our fellow members in their roles as indispensable parts of the body of Christ. And when we are the ones who are weak, help us accept the care given to us by other members of the same body. So we pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1 Corinthians 12:27-13:3

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Kimberly Gonxhe '07

Faith without works is dead, and works without love are nothing. Some of us strive and toil under the banner of Christ . . . but with so many of the wrong motivations or approaches. A church planter enters a community without first consulting the faith leaders already in the neighborhood. A pastor fervently serves all the people at church while the minister’s own immediate family starves for attention and affection. A layperson “does for” people in need without empowering their self-sufficiency.

Often we can become consumed by the drive, repetition, and demands of service without entertaining whether the service is relevant and/or contextually healthy for oneself and for those being served. In doing so, we can very well find ourselves relating more to a Martha preparing food than a Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. Once we untangle ourselves from the work and focus on the true need, then perspectives can change toward healthy, balanced living.

What is your motivation? Why do you do what you do? Is love at the center of it all?

Prayer

Lord, reveal to me the things I may be blind to see that cause others harm or pain. May all my actions be of pure intent and benefit most the most vulnerable. May I be a good steward of the giftings and talents given unto me, and may they fully bring you glory. Amen.

Rebecca Cole-Turner '14

During the Lenten season, we can begin to unfold the meaning of what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote about God's great love for us. He says that as followers of Jesus, we are all members of the body of Christ—in other words, we embody Christ—and that we should strive to love as our Savior loved. Otherwise, all that we do in this life will mean nothing.

When the visionary English mystic and theologian Julian of Norwich turned 30 years old in 1373 C.E., she experienced 16 visions as a response to her prayers asking for a deeper understanding of Jesus' suffering and God's love for us. In the first book written by a woman in English, *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian asked the question, "What was God's meaning in this?" After many years of contemplation, she understood: God's meaning was love!

Both Paul and Julian are speaking of love as *agapé* (Greek: ἀγάπη), which is unconditional love, a love that does not demand repayment but is sacrificial, focused on the needs of the other person and not our own.

Like Paul, Julian also calls us to desire "the greater gifts" in the "still more excellent way." We cannot understand what it means to live with the *agapé* mindset of Christ unless we understand that in all that we do and say, actively striving to be love, to literally embody love as he was love, is the only action that will give us our true meaning in this life.

How might you become more loving to your family members and friends today? What is one loving action you could choose today to be love as Christ was love to a stranger you may meet?

Prayer

Jesus, lover of my soul, show me how I might better express your love for all I meet and those I care for today. Help me understand ways in which I can choose to embody your love as I live out my days. Give me grace to embrace an *agapé* way of loving others in your name. Amen.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Bill Paul '59

After 60 years of ministry, I am convinced: nothing matters more than genuine divine and human love. This is the claim of 1 Corinthians 13.

I wonder what the world would be like today if, from our first-century beginnings, Christians had more faithfully reflected the grace of God's unconditional love offered to all—and included friends, non-Christians, and even the foes of Christian faith. Sadly, such has not been the case.

One tragic example of the church's failure happened in the year 1099. That year the European Christian Crusaders, in one day's battle to recapture Jerusalem, slaughtered an estimated 25,000 Moslems and Jews (*Archaeology Magazine*, Nov./Dec. 2018).

When fully grasped and faithfully embraced, the scriptural claim that God "so loved the world" and Jesus' command to love our neighbors, including our enemies, are alone what will transform life on our precious planet earth. It will be the gift of all gifts for all people of every race, class, faith, and nation.

I wonder what our world would have been like if, from the beginning, Christians had taken more seriously the command to love all our neighbors, near and far, both friends and enemies. What if every follower of Jesus had become—and today became—a walking, talking, and loving instrument of God's grace in the lives of all who crossed our paths?

If our world is ever to experience lasting peace and harmony, we Christians must more fully and faithfully embrace the truth that our God "so loved the world" and calls us to do the same. If you have received God's love, you will want to share it and devote yourself, body, mind, and spirit, to reflect that love in all you say and do.

Prayer

O God, whose love for us is transforming and forever, help us to embrace and share it with all those who cross our paths as neighbors. Help us also to contribute to peace, justice, and a love that has the power to transform the world and bring harmony and redemption to all, both near and far. In the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1 Corinthians 14:20-33a, 39-40

20 Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults. 21 In the law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people; yet even then they will not listen to me," says the Lord. 22 Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. 25 After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, "God is really among you." 26 What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, 33 for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. . . . 39 So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; 40 but all things should be done decently and in order.

Joe Small '66

John Wimber, founder of the Pentecostal, new-paradigm Vineyard Churches, was a self-described “beer guzzling, drug abusing pop musician” before his conversion. As a new Christian, he became a voracious reader of the New Testament and began attending a church. One Sunday, following a sedate worship service, Wimber asked a church leader,

“When do we get to do the stuff?” . . . “What stuff?” the leader replied . . . “You know, the stuff in the Bible—like raising people from the dead, healing the blind and paralyzed.” . . . “We don’t do that anymore” . . . “You don’t? What do you do?” . . . “What we did this morning.” . . . Exasperated, Wimber sighed, “For that I gave up drugs?”

Most congregations in mainline denominations “don’t do that anymore,” and they have no desire to start. Pentecostal and charismatic churches are viewed as an alien zone, puzzling and mildly threatening.

For 12 years I was co-chair of the International Reformed-Pentecostal Dialogue. A personal result of the Dialogue is that I now read the New Testament differently. I am far more aware of the centrality of the Holy Spirit throughout the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles.

Today’s reading is uncomfortable and challenging. Do we believe that the Holy Spirit’s gifts include ecstatic utterance, healing, interpreting God’s word, revealing God’s purpose, and edifying the congregation? Or do we exclude some and domesticate others? Do we believe that all the Spirit’s gifts are distributed throughout God’s people and that every person is gifted by the Holy Spirit of God? Or do we restrict spiritual gifts to pastors? Does our worship honor the Spirit’s gifts to all God’s people, or do we only recognize some of the gifts given to some of God’s people?

Prayer

Mighty God, every day you send your Holy Spirit to your people, thereby blessing us with spiritual gifts. Open our hearts to make us receptive disciples. Fill us with flaming desire to join our gifts together, thus building up the Church and serving the world for which Christ died. Amen.

2 Corinthians 1:1-7

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, 4 who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. 6 If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. 7 Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

Karen Rohrer, staff

*The leaves are falling, falling as if from far up,
as if orchards were dying high in space.
Each leaf falls as if it were motioning “no.”*

*And tonight the heavy earth is falling
away from all other stars in the loneliness.*

*We’re all falling. This hand here is falling.
And look at the other one. It’s in them all.*

*And yet there is Someone, whose hands
infinitely calm, holding up all this falling.*

Rainer Maria Rilke

We know the reality of suffering. We know that pain is all too real, injustice all too prevalent, cruelty all too common in a fallen and seemingly endlessly falling world. The wounds of affliction are deep and abiding. In the midst of Lent, we acknowledge the reality of death and limitation, of pain and affliction. We sit with and lament the way that our world crushes the vulnerable and exploits the weak. We admit and remember the reality of death—the ones we have lost, the ones we will lose, even the life we will one day leave behind. We take time to recognize that those losses are real.

This passage in 2 Corinthians, in its repetitive, clunky style, bears witness to the fact that suffering, pain, and affliction are no less real for those who follow Christ. We don’t live on a continuum between affliction and consolation as though hoping to stay closer to the consolation side and avoid affliction by luck or divine favor. No, the world this spiraling text offers looks more like concentric circles—when affliction is closing in, the truth beyond our affliction is the God who consoles, the God who holds us up beyond all falling.

Prayer

God of all things, uphold us as we recognize all the ways we and those we love are afflicted. Console us amid the pain we cannot move through on our own. Dwell within us and grant us strength, stand guard with your gentleness on every side of us. Make us brave and make us kind as we walk through your hurting, beloved world. Amen.

2 Corinthians 1:8-22

8 We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, 11 as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. 12 Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God—and all the more toward you. 13 For we write you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand until the end—14 as you have already understood us in part—that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast. 15 Since I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double favor; 16 I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on to Judea. 17 Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? 18 As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been “Yes and No.” 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not “Yes and No”; but in him it is always “Yes.” 20 For in him every one of God’s promises is a “Yes.” For this reason it is through him that

we say the "Amen," to the glory of God. 21 But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, 22 by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.

Brandon Shaw '19

"Why the tough seasons?" The answer to such a question is not always as immediately lucid as Crystal Pepsi, but my own life's winters serve as times in which God's grace shined the brightest . . . more brightly than in the "winning" (to steal the over-hashtagged term) moments. God's Isaiah 41:10 promise of presence at all times is a "yes" and gets my hearty "amen" because he has shown up at hours when I thought hope was more sunk than the S.S. Titanic was on April 16, 1912.

Sometimes God breaks the world around us to convey that he alone is enough, that his promises are true, and that we can say we concur in the midst of all earthly hellishness. As someone once told me, "You don't know God is all you need until God is all you've got." Cliché? Maybe. True? As true as the Penguins' 2017 winning of Lord Stanley for the second time in a row.

From a humble, broken-world posture, we are often most able to see God's astounding magnificence and give God praise . . . not to mention that we have a comforting Christ, who understands us fully in affliction. And that makes all the difference.

To God, the One who rescues us from our seeming death sentences so that we see his omnipotent hand and everlasting grace and love more fully, be all glory around the globe and forevermore.

Prayer

Father, we might not understand our afflictions fully in this life, but we know you are always with us because of the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and reigning of dear Jesus. Please shower us with your grace during troubled times that we may magnify your name. In Jesus' name. Amen."

Ben Beres '10

"But . . . but . . . But I thought God would never give me more than I could handle?!?"

It is a common misconception, but the challenges we face each day are not given to us in proportion to our strength or our ability to navigate such problems. I don't know how or why this became passed off as gospel truth, but you don't have to look any further than the Garden of Eden to see that God knows we are limited. We are finite. It's not good for us to be alone.

Paul starts our reading today by empathizing with the Church in Corinth in the hardships they are facing. This small group of Christ-centered folks finds themselves burdened beyond their ability. Paul tells them of his woes, not because he wants their sympathy, as a catalyst for action, or for any other desire. He tells them so they know that when they hit their limit, when they have nothing left in the tank, when death seems like a possibility, that God is still faithful.

Despite Paul's words to the Church, we are tempted to make our lives seem easier or better than they are. We cling to silly things and shield ourselves with aphorisms that fly in the face of our true circumstances. It is not weakness to need help. It is not unfaithful to struggle. Telling the stories of our hardships allows us to also tell the joy of God's provision, and God's strength to bring us through times that would have otherwise destroyed us.

Prayer

Father God, teach us to be more honest in all our dealings, so that we might be the vessels of your glory, for the whole world to see. Let us welcome others into the challenges we face so that they might pray for us and rejoice with us when the victory is yours. Help us to be transparent to our communities. Forgive the ways we try to hide. Amen.

2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6

14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. 15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; 16 to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? 17 For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence. 3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? 2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; 3 and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, 6 who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Michelle Spomer, faculty

While updating your CV or résumé for a job search can be a good reminder of your experience and skills, it is often the letter of recommendation from a trusted colleague that reveals what makes you an outstanding candidate for the position. The best letters will effectively communicate your most significant accomplishments and how you might even transform an organization for the better.

While the letter Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 3:3 isn't exactly a letter of recommendation as we know it, it is a metaphorical letter of recommendation that included evidence of Paul's influence and the transformative power of the gospel of Christ in the lives of the Corinthian believers. The letters of their Christian lives were to be "read" by all those who encountered them—and were to inspire others to follow Jesus.

This passage is a beautiful and challenging one for the Lenten season. What do the letters of our lives say to others? Would they read Christ in our letters? Do they reflect the love and insight that other believers have poured into us?

Prayer

Lord, may we "show that we are letters of Christ" to all we meet. Thank you for all those throughout our lives who have shown us how to be Christian. Amen.

Scott Hagley, faculty

In the book *God the Spirit*, Michael Welker describes the Holy Spirit as a "force field" of love. In using this language, Welker understands the Spirit as analogous to a gravitational field. Like gravity, God's Spirit is a force operating between, around, and through us. But we can use the term 'field' to describe relational realities and not only forces acting on objects. A decade ago, James Fowler and Nicholas Christakis argued in their book *Connected* for a much more social understanding of human behavior

than previously understood. Our social networks, they insist, shape our attitudes, habits, and emotional well-being. We exist in emotional and relational fields—social realities created by, in, and through our shared life.

God, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, “spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing God” in and through those found in Christ. “For *we* are the aroma of Christ,” Paul says (referring to his apostolic ministry) and “*you* are a letter of Christ . . . written . . . with the Spirit of the living God.” Thanks be to God, the gospel of Jesus Christ is a social reality among us, a field, an aroma, a love letter written by the Spirit through our shared life. Let us recognize and not resist this force field of love that is the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

1 Give ear to my words, O LORD;
give heed to my sighing.
2 Listen to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.
3 O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.
4 For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil will not sojourn with you.
5 The boastful will not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.
6 You destroy those who speak lies;
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.
7 But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house,
I will bow down toward your holy temple
in awe of you.
8 Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.
9 For there is no truth in their mouths;
their hearts are destruction;
their throats are open graves;
they flatter with their tongues.
10 Make them bear their guilt, O God;
let them fall by their own counsels;
because of their many transgressions cast them out,
for they have rebelled against you.
11 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy.
Spread your protection over them,
so that those who love your name may exult in you.
12 For you bless the righteous, O LORD;
you cover them with favor as with a shield.
(Psalm 5)

Chad Bogdewic '10/'13

For years, I have been involved in the United Methodist Church's disability ministry in Western Pennsylvania; it is something that I have always felt called to. One of the fundraisers the Disability Concerns Committee has is through its t-shirt sales. One of our most popular has "Who Do You See?" on the front and "Who Does God See?" on the back. We are called to see the image of Christ in others, but we are also called to live out the message of Christ through not only our words, but our actions as well.

In the passage, Paul writes, "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all." This imagery is reminiscent of Jeremiah, who said, "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah . . . I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jer 31:31, 33).

Living out our faith in humility is the highest form of praise. It is so much easier to live for ourselves, but that does nothing for society or for the message of the Gospel. To truly live is to die to self—meaning, I believe, to die to our selfishness, self-interest, and if we are being honest, our self-hatred. This, I believe, starts with loving self. If we do not love ourselves, how can we love others as ourselves? And if we cannot love others, whom we see, how can we love God whom we don't see (1 John 4:20)? We can show the world the message of Jesus Christ by sharing the message that is written on our hearts by showing them that they are worthy of God's love. Because if I am worthy, then they certainly are as well.

Prayer

Living and Loving Incarnate One, you have shown us how to live and how to love. You have written your message on our hearts. May we share that message by showing our hearts to others through incarnational living and loving. In your name, Lord Jesus, we pray, Amen.

2 Corinthians 4:1-12

1 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. 11 For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Rebecca Dix '15/'17

"This little light of mine . . ." shines even when the world is dark, even amid the slow decay of the earth, crumbling under the weight of our sinfulness, all the spilled blood and shed tears.

“I’m going to let it shine . . . ,” even when all seems lost and hope is a simple whisper of yesterday.

“This little light of mine . . .” may seem small and fragile, flickering anxiously against all the forces that try with all their might to snuff it out.

“I’m going to let it shine . . . ,” for this very light, small but burning bright, is given to me from the Light of the world, the Light to all nations, the great Healer and Redeemer.

“Oh, this little light of mine . . .” is the promise that God has been with us, is with us, and will be coming again—that our stories are woven together, no longer to be forsaken or destroyed, left unraveling, but to be remembered.

“I’m going to let it shine . . . ,” for Jesus Christ has made a claim on me—and has made a claim on you. So I will carry my little light as a witness to that amazing and steadfast love.

“Let it shine. Let it shine. Let it shine.”

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, may the light of your glory, truth and love, which remains bright and present in our darkness and in our blindness, be unveiled to and in us, the Church your Bride. Amen.

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

13 But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—“I believed, and so I spoke”—we also believe, and so we speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. 15 Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. 16 So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, 18 because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Scott Hagley, faculty

In one of his broadcasts of the radio show “A Prairie Home Companion,” Garrison Keillor tells a story about a young boy who grows up believing he has royal bloodlines. Shortly after the boy’s father left him and his mother, we are told, the boy began receiving anonymous letters claiming the family’s connection to Scandinavian royalty. The promise offered in the letters sustains the child throughout the insecurities of childhood and buffers him from fears of abandonment. His unseen identification with royalty enables him to endure all kinds of hardship with peace and equanimity.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul reflects on the different challenges faced by him and his companions for the sake of the gospel. They, too, are vulnerable and have every reason for fear. But Paul has entrusted himself to Jesus Christ and has a gospel-shaped imagination. His sufferings share in the death of Christ and place him at the mercy of the resurrection power of God: “we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us with Jesus, and bring us with you into his presence” (v. 14).

As with the boy in Garrison Keillor’s story, identification reframes Paul’s experiences so that what is hidden—his life in Christ—can re-narrate what is visible—his present circumstances . . . but with one

large difference: Paul's hope stems not from anonymous letters, but from the real presence of Christ in the Spirit and through the grace poured out on the community of Christ.

Prayer

Creator God, Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling. In the name of Jesus Christ, raised from the dead; and by the power of your Spirit, Amen. (adapted from Psalm 43:3)

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Alan Olson '14

Have you ever described someone as “a good person?” What does that even mean? I suppose it means you approve of that other person, but it doesn't give much information. Perhaps she's kind. Or maybe he's helpful. Those are useful adjectives—I can see acts of kindness. A better question might be, “Are you in Christ?” Certainly, as Christians, we believe that we are in Christ.

In this passage, the Apostle Paul tells us that if we are in Christ, then it is our duty to see other people, not in a human way, but as God sees us. The truth is, it's much easier to see people in flawed, human ways: good or bad, pretty or ugly. The problem with seeing others in human ways is that we are called to the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul instructs us that we are called to be reconciled with one another, just as Christ has reconciled us to God. But our own perceptions get in the way. We hold on to our opinions, our anger, our pain and hurt, and in doing so, we continue to see things in human ways. In this season of self-examination, let us look at all of the human ways that we are holding on to—the things that we must cast off before we can be reconciled to one another.

Prayer

Gracious God, pour your Holy Spirit upon us, so that we may see all your children as you see us. Help us to reconcile with one another. Equip us for this work; help us to let go of our anger and our hurt, our pride and our selfishness, our fear and our arrogance. Help us to know others as we are known by you and love others as we are loved by you. Make us instruments of your peace and reconciliation. Thanks be to God. Amen!

Philippians 2:5-11

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became

obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Sarah Sedgwick '10

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” The Apostle Paul sets a pretty high standard for the Philippians and us in this passage of his letter. Most of us try very hard to be like Jesus, but we fail miserably! I think of the number of times I’ve woken up determined to be more like Jesus throughout the day but usually find I’ve failed before lunch. Do you ever feel that sort of failure?

I want to be like Jesus; I try to be like Jesus; but the reality is I will never be Jesus. It doesn’t mean I don’t try to live the characteristics Jesus modeled in his life on earth. It doesn’t mean that I don’t try to love the least of these or have compassion toward those who grieve, or offer grace to those in need of forgiveness. I try very hard to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in my life, but I remember to extend grace to myself when I mess up.

And then I give thanks to God for the beautiful gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, who was born Emmanuel, God-with-us, and as Paul reminds us was “obedient to death, even death on a cross.” Paul helps to remind us that during this Lenten season we should turn to gratitude for eternal life given to us through the death of Jesus Christ. We thank God and proclaim, “Jesus Christ is Lord!” And remember that tomorrow is a new day to be more like Jesus.

Prayer

Dear God, we give you thanks this day that in the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, we have received eternal life. Help us to be more like Jesus in our daily lives, but remind us to extend the same grace to ourselves that you give to us when we fail. In the name of your Son, we pray, Amen.

Philippians 3:12-21

12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. 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.

Eric McIntosh '12

Do you ever get tired of being tired? I do! I am tired of fighting every day of my life. I see racism every day, and I am tired of it. I see misogyny almost just as often, and I am tired of it. The stock market keeps rising, but my paycheck does not, nor do the paychecks of my friends. My kids and their friends may

never do better than their parents because of having to take out huge student loans. The sheer weight of all that I have to negotiate because of the oppressive actions of would-be enemies of the cross makes me tired. Emotionally speaking, it feels like the evildoers are getting away with it.

But I am tired of being tired! And I hear God telling me, “Then give up being tired! After all, their end is destruction. Besides, this isn’t your home anyway; your citizenship is in heaven, and this ain’t heaven yet!” So this Lenten season, instead of continuing to be tired of being tired, I am pressing on! I am putting the troubles behind me and pressing on! I am putting the pain behind me as best I can and am pressing on! With God’s help, I am forgetting the hate that lies behind me and I am pressing on! I am pressing on with expectant anticipation that the Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior, will transform this body of humiliation! This year for Lent, I am just tired enough to give up being tired. I am giving it all to God, and I am pressing on toward His glory!

Prayer

Lord God almighty, many of us are just fatigued beyond hope. Many of us do not know where to go or what to do. Help us to be honest with you. Remind us to turn to you. Call us as loudly as you can to press toward our Savior, Jesus, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever! Amen.

Anne Malone, staff

Paul’s language in this passage brings to mind the image of a race and of a competitor waiting for the starting gun to go off so they can go for the prize. I am not a racer, but I enjoy watching a lot of racing events. I am an Olympics junkie, and I am always tuned into the swimming, track and field, skiing, skating, and other events that involve striving for the gold, achieving the fastest time, or breaking world records. I love hearing about how the athletes prepare for their events and overcome obstacles that might interrupt the achievement of their goals. There are a number of reasons why individuals may enter a race. For many, their goal is to win and set records. Others race to achieve a personal best, or simply to be able to say they did it. What matters to some is not winning, but finishing.

Paul is not an athlete. He sees himself in a different kind of race, and he is in it to win it. He tells us in verses 13-14 of today’s passage that he is “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.” He is focused on the finish line. Paul presses on “toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” But what is his race? What is his goal? To answer this, we must look a few verses earlier in the chapter. Paul has given up everything in order to gain Christ and his righteousness, to know the power of his resurrection, to share in his suffering and resurrection (3:7-11). Then he invites us in 3:17 to join him, to imitate him in pursuit of this goal. And the prize is not earthly—it is heavenly.

The Lenten season is a time for each of us to reflect on our kingdom calling. What is it we are striving for? What is the goal we are straining to reach? Is it “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” or something for our own glory? Are we looking behind or striving toward the prize? If we’re not striving forward, how do we get into this race?

Prayer

Lord God, there are so many things which can interrupt and keep us from reaching our goal to serve you. During this season, help us to reflect on our calling and strive to know you and the power of your resurrection more fully. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Philippians 4:1-9

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. 2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Jeffrey Dahle Sterling '88/'98

Wouldn't it be something if Christian believers purposed to live a life of "passionate gratitude"? The expression "with thanksgiving" (v. 6) is meant to be more than an add-on in this text, I believe, and it follows the phrase "in everything." I'll bet you have had lots of blessings in your life for which it was *easy* to be thankful. But what about the things that, at least initially, were not perceived as "blessings" at all? Verse 6 says "in everything," doesn't it?

The author of Philippians suggests that approaching God with a thankful attitude makes a difference. Maybe God grooves on hearing us being grateful, even as we come with our "laundry lists" of prayer requests. What if gratitude had nothing to do with whether we had a *reason* to be grateful? I am thankful for my partner of 40-plus years, always, regardless of whether she gives me reason in the moment. And my "passion" for her means that I regularly tell her just how thankful I am. I think she really likes it. Maybe God does, too?

Developing a perpetually thankful heart is a win-win-win situation: God likes it, it makes us feel really good, and others are blessed by it and respond favorably to it. Only being thankful when something positive happens is lame. Passionate gratitude "in everything" makes a powerful witness, dear ones!

Prayer

Dear God, I thank you. I just thank you! Help me develop a truly thankful heart and a passion for gratitude, not just toward you, but around others as well. Teach me the joy and power of giving thanks in everything. In Jesus' name, amen.

Robin Sharp '18

Normally, I would not consider myself a vocal feminist. It isn't that I don't believe in gender equality, because I do. Perhaps I am not a vocal feminist, because I consider gender equality to be broader than between males and females. I am, however, intrigued by the Apostle Paul's reference to the women, Euodia and Syntyche. In a culture where men are considered "superior," he is asking this young church—"his loyal companion"—to help these women reach an understanding. Paul values these two individuals as being as important to the growing Church as the men who have also engaged in the same work of the gospel. And yes, he is doing so because their disagreement is bitter enough to harm this community. It is not the topic of the disagreement that is disconcerting; the crisis Paul addresses is where genuine peace is lacking Christ cannot be present.

Doesn't this underline the importance of women in this Philippian church? Paul did not cast aside their quarrel as immaterial because they were women and therefore little or no harm could come from it. He saw it on the same plane as the frictions found in the Book of Acts: circumcised or not, kosher diet or not, and adherence to Temple Rule and customs or not. These were subjects of disagreement that could have shattered the fragile young church because Christ could not exist within that friction.

Paul has long been considered to treat women in the church as subservient. I admit to leaning this way. His encounter with Lydia, the merchant of purple dye (Acts 16:13-15), as well as today's passage, tells the world otherwise. Today, I see Paul tell us the love of Jesus breaks barriers and works towards trust and forgiveness. Isn't that the message of the cross?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we continue to learn and grow through your grace and your love. Please help us to remove the roots of dissension from our souls bringing peace into your kingdom. Amen.

Philippians 4:10-20

10 I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. 11 Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. 12 I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me. 14 In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. 15 You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. 16 For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. 18 I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

William Zachery Jr. '12

It is no secret the religion of Jesus usually receives bad reviews. Some say, "It promotes a mythical utopianism." This religion does not espouse ideas of false hope. It seeks to bring harmony into the world. If there was ever a time we needed this kind of reconciliation, it is now.

The religion of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus Christ seeks true peace. A true sign of a thriving civilization is one which excels at industry, technology, governing, and culture. There are times when it seems we are living with corporate, innovative (A.I.), congressional, and social/cultural decay. Everyone, it seems, is chasing after materialistic increase. They seek this through the acquisition of power. Most are not satisfied according to the concurrent blessings of God.

There is nothing wrong with a desire for increase. However, when material increase is one's sole desire, it quickly turns to idolatrous greed. We must learn how to live with need and abundance. No one wants to exist in want. They say it is undesirable. Everyone wants abundance.

Nevertheless, there is a blessing living with need. It can teach us satisfaction. It can promote humility within our hearts and minds. This is one of the purposes of Lent. It is a time of expectation. It is a time of

waiting to see what God is going to do in our life's circumstances and needs. It is waiting for God's provision.

What can this season of Lent teach us? It is the hope of true peace. God is shalom in practice. We must learn how to walk out this divine exercise progressively. Some may say, "This is not enough." However, this season speaks to God's abundant supply of love for us. He is with us and for us. He is more than enough.

Prayer

God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the father of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ, help us to walk out your peace. Strengthen us to proclaim and confess you are more than enough during this season of Lent. In Jesus' name, Amen.

1 Timothy 6:12-16

12 Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you 14 to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. 16 It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

George Barr '18

In this passage, Timothy is exhorted to "fight the good fight," a biblical idiom now firmly planted in the English language. But what does it mean? The verb *agōnizō* (here rendered "fight") is meant to evoke an athletic competition, but it might also refer more generally to a fight or struggle. Is the Christian life a race or a boxing match? Perhaps both.

Whatever is implied by the use of *agōnizō*, one thing is certain: it is not easy. To remain faithful to the message of the gospel and to obey the Lord's commands is no small task, nor is it without its perils. One thinks of English theologian John Owen's words to "be killing sin or it will be killing you."

Yes, the Christian life is indeed a hard-run race and veritable slugging match, but its wreath is worth all our toils. Timothy is exhorted to "grasp" or "take hold of" that eternal life. At some point, we will know God more fully than ever. We will draw near to Him in his resplendent glory. And at that time, our constant longing will be satisfied. At last we will finally hear the words "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Prayer

Almighty and eternal God who dwells in unapproachable light, grant that we might fight our fight and run our race in faithfulness to your will as revealed in your word. Set our sights on you and on the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. May that be our reward. Amen.

Lauren Davis '22

As a chaplain I hear frequently the language of "fighting the good fight." Even at my own grandmother's funeral the pastor echoed the sentiments that she had fought long and hard and stayed steadfast in the

faith. This language may bring about mixed feelings. One may question why one must fight through life to take hold of the reigns of eternal life. Why does it have to be so hard?

That is a question I have wrestled with quite a bit, and I will not pretend to have the answers. What I can share is that in the sacred encounters with friends, family, and complete strangers I see a great deal of beauty and strength in their choice to keep embracing life even in the face of suffering. Fighting the good fight of faith any given day may look like summoning the bravery to have that hard conversation with a loved one, or voicing a need you have neglected for far too long. Fighting the good fight of faith may simply mean embracing your life in all its messiness and complexity as one that is worthy of love.

In the fanfare of Palm Sunday, Jesus too embraced the life in which he was called for, riding into the holy city amidst joyous people who could not truly understand the suffering and pain he was about to endure. The joy and expectation that filled the air in juxtaposition of the reality of the cross. That sacrificial love may be experienced in the daily battles we all face, the ones we win and the ones we lose. Thanks be to God for that.

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for your love that surpasses all understanding. We ask for your sacrificial love to guide us through the heartache of Good Friday into the joy of Easter morning. Help us Lord, embrace each day, remembering you are with us, and we are not alone.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen.

Hebrews 4:1-16

1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "As in my anger I swore, "They shall not enter my rest," though his works were finished at the foundation of the world. 4 For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows, "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." 5 And again in this place it says, "They shall not enter my rest." 6 Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he sets a certain day—"today"—saying through David much later, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day. 9 So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; 10 for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. 11 Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs. 12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. 14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Brenda Barnes '07/'18

Jesus was dead. There is no denying it. In words from the movie "The Wizard of Oz," he was "spiritually, physically, positively, absolutely, undeniably and reliably dead." His body lay in the tomb while his

disciples mourned his death and, since it was the Sabbath, they rested. The women returned home to prepare the burial spices to honor him, and then they rested. At the tomb, the guards did their job of watching the tomb to make sure that none of Jesus' followers came to steal his body. They rested in the grass at the rock, because the disciples were celebrating their Sabbath—they wouldn't come.

But those pictures are earthly pictures—human pictures. While humans were resting on the Sabbath, Jesus was working. According to Paul's letter to Ephesus, Jesus descended to the lower parts of the earth (Ephesians 4:9). Peter tells his readers that Jesus preached to the imprisoned spirits (1 Peter 3:19-20).

In chapter 4 of Hebrews, the writer reminds us that the promise of entrance into Christ's rest "still stands," and the promise is only realized when we remember the work of Christ on earth, below the earth, and in heaven. The whole Easter mystery of resurrection becomes much clearer in the context of Holy Saturday, namely, that Christ's work continued even in his death and continues even in his resurrection and reign. Salvation has been finished since the creation of the world (v. 3). That reality should give us rest and confidence, not in our works, but in the work of him who created all. Holy Saturday—Holy Sabbath.

Prayer

Holy, mysterious God: In your mercy, help us to find true Sabbath rest in you. Help us to rest in the promise of your glory here and forever. May our Holy Saturday truly be a day of remembrance in the promise of that glorious rest. For the sake of the One who died and rose again, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Hebrews 12:1-14

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children—"My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; 6 for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts." 7 Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? 8 If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. 9 Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. 11 Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. 14 Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Darrell Yeaney '56

The writer of the Book of Hebrews is unknown, but his intention is clear. Writing to Jewish Christians in the first century CE, he was keenly aware of the struggles faced by people of faith who lived in the pagan and polytheistic empire of Rome. That is why his writing is as explicit and clear as it is helpful to us today.

Our world may be scientifically and technologically far advanced over the writer's known world—the pagan world of the Roman Empire—but it is no less brimming with false gods. We have grown up in a secular culture where our idols are fame, power, wealth, and pleasure—all modern symbols of success.

Yet as Christians we know, and are reminded especially during this period of Lent, of the lures that lead folks—including ourselves—into what the Scriptures call “sin,” a life forgetful of God's presence and call to unselfish, compassionate living. The writer of Hebrews reminds us followers of Jesus that the remedy to keep us from these modern, powerful, social distractions of success is the same as that in the first century: “keep your eyes on Jesus.”

Prayer

Dear Lord of the universe, of time, and of our lives, give us the wisdom and courage to heed the insights of the writer of the Book of Hebrews as we face the attractions of today's false gods. Give us the wisdom to be aware of the misleading lures of our popular culture. And give us the courage to turn away and set the eyes of our hearts on Jesus. Amen.

1 Peter 1:10-20

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, 11 inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. 12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look! 13 Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. 14 Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. 15 Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” 17 If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. 18 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. 20 He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.

Tucker Ferda, faculty

When you consider that 1 Peter was written to Gentiles who had little to no former contact with Judaism, the claims of this text are remarkable. The passage seeks to graft these Gentiles into God's covenant with Israel and challenges them to live within the mantra of the Holiness Code in Leviticus: “Be Holy, as I am Holy.” Moreover, it offers a new perspective of time and value for persons seemingly marginalized and persecuted by their contemporaries. They are to see that they actually live at the dawn of the end of the age and that, as Christ “ransomed” them with his very life, they have unsurpassable worth in the eyes of God.

In short, to consider what God had done in Jesus Christ meant that this community had to tell itself a new story about its past, its present, and its future. Today, Good Friday, we are called to a similar reorientation. The Christian claim is that the cross, far from being the failure of Jesus' message, is actually the moment in which we see most clearly the heart of God. How does that change the stories we tell ourselves? Are we open to see the cross as our *axis mundi*—the center around which time, value, and purpose rotate and depend? To re-center around the cross will look different for different people, and we trust the action of the Holy Spirit among us for this good work. For those our world labels outsiders, or for those who feel uncertain of their worth, the cross may tell a story of true belonging, while for those who stand at the center of what our society adores and privileges may be invited to “lose their life” so that they may truly “find it.”

In verse 13 we find a marvelous image for this process. “Therefore”—in the light of what God has done—“gird up the loins of your understanding.” In other words, prepare for your understanding to move to a new place. Expect to travel. Our prayer today should be that, as we ponder the cross, we may find that our typical, status-quo “understanding” of priority, value, worth, and the purpose of life *may be moved* closer to the self-emptying love of God in Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Lord, our text reminds us that we have been “ransomed” from a former way of life. Our text reminds us that we live at the dawn of the new age declared by the prophets. But we too often live in the old age. Forgive our tardiness. Create in us that love you showed us on the cross. Break our hearts of stone with this love, and write it on new hearts of flesh that ache with the pains of our world. Move us to actions that mirror and embody the character of Christ. Amen.

Brian Sandell '12

As human beings we live in a world that is filled with a lot of noise. Phone calls. Spotify. Television. Radio. The list of noise that fills our world goes on and on. On average, human beings have 42 conversations a day. There is noise all around us, but the question remains: are we listening? Are we paying attention?

Our text in 1 Peter reminds us that the prophets told of God's grace that would come to us (v. 10) and shared with us that the sufferings of the Messiah would lead to glory (v. 11). The prophets were able to share the Gospel because of the Holy Spirit's power (v. 12). Listen deeply. Listen intently. This Lenten season may we pay attention to what God is telling us and what God is showing us.

When we do listen and pay attention to what God is sharing with us, it will lead to a transformed life. Our desires will change. Our minds will change. Our hearts will change when we listen to God's voice in our lives. As Peter reminds us in v. 15, be holy in all you do. Holiness can be complex but also incredibly simple. The simple understanding of holiness is loving Jesus above anyone and anything else in this life. When you and I seek to live lives that are focused on holiness, we truly will be free from the emptiness of the pleasures of this world and free to live fully as children of God pursuing holiness all of our days.

Prayer

Lord God, we step into your presence once again on this Lenten journey. Revive us, restore us, and cause us our hearts to listen and respond. May we listen to the wise words of your revealed word, your prophets, your Son, and the Holy Spirit. May our lives be focused on pursuing holiness and loving Jesus above everything else. Amen.

Gospel Readings

Mark 1:1-13

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" 4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." 9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." 12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

At Christmas, we love to read Luke. At Epiphany, we often read Matthew. During Holy week and Easter we read John. But Mark doesn't really get a season. Often, when we read these first verses we focus on the voice that cries out in the wilderness; the voice is sometimes the reason we connect Mark to the image of the winged lion. As we prepare for Lent, though, it is the next words that make Mark appropriate for us: "Prepare the way of the Lord." That's our focus during this season—preparation. So throughout the rest of Lent, we will stay with Mark as we read, pray, and prepare.

Mark 1:14-28

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." 16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. 21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24 and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." 25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" 26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." 28 At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

I love the Gospel of Mark, in part because he gets so much mileage out of so few words. "He taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes." Mark does a great job using this short phrase to tell us not only who Jesus is, but also who the scribes were. The encounter with the unclean spirit is also

fascinating. It's something we aren't really comfortable with today. Nonetheless, these encounters run throughout Mark's account. Some prefer to view these passages as straightforward supernatural encounters. Others lean toward more psychological or physiological explanations. Others may pursue a different alternative altogether. However you choose to understand the unclean spirit, Mark's point stands—he's not really talking about the unclean spirit. Whatever afflicts the man, Jesus heals him with His words, and the people are amazed. Mark's point is the amazing grace found in Jesus Christ.

Ryan Pixton '10

The Common English Bible's translation of verse 15 says, "Now is the time! Here comes God's Kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news." As we go through Lent it should be a time of preparation for what comes at Easter. We should have the urgency that is evident in verse 15. Now is the time. Not in five minutes or whenever it's convenient for us, but now. Our excitement at the ushering of God's Kingdom into the here and now changes our hearts and lives as we trust this good news.

We should continually ask, "What is God doing in my life and in the lives of those around me? Where and how is God acting?" When we get the answer to the question, we need to respond with the same urgency and excitement that we read about in verse 15. God has great things in store for us. But it takes willingness to keep our eyes open, drop our nets, and follow God even when strange things happen.

Prayer

Faithful God, thank you for your faithfulness to me when I have been unfaithful, doing things I should not do and leaving undone things I should do. Prepare my heart and mind during this season of Lent, so that I am ready for your arrival to earth. Help me not only to pray "Come Lord Jesus," but also to be ready to follow you when you show up and want to use me to build your Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

Jeffrey D. Sterling '88/'98

I just love call stories! We United Methodists "walk" part of our early journey into ordained ministry as part of a "provisional class" of ministerial candidates with whom we share retreats and training events, so we get to know each other well. And we share our call stories with each other, which is one of the joys of this experience.

Today's text includes the call stories of Simon, Andrew, James and John. Jesus made it simple for them: "Follow me . . ." and they made their decision. Most of the call stories in my provisional class were not that simple! Some germinated during a crisis, or even a tragedy, of some sort. Others were joyous, occurring during a "mountaintop" experience. Many were multi-faceted and drawn out over a considerable time of "give and take" with the Holy Spirit's tug.

Lent is a wonderful time to examine or revisit YOUR call story, whether lay or clergy. We are wise to also note that we may have multiple "calls" from God, and to varying ministries or tasks, even within our broader call that got us to our current place in ministry. I am reminded of a line from one of Woody Allen's movies: "My God, my God, what has thou done LATELY?" All call stories are not permanent; they may have a shelf-life. A good Lenten question for reflection: What is God calling me to do TODAY?

The latter part of today's text demonstrates for his new followers what Jesus' call was to: speaking forth God's word with authority; disarming evil; healing the afflicted; rebuilding lives; and facing the unknown

with the confidence of God's abiding presence. They quickly knew what they were in for, and so should we!

All of God's call stories should have a happy ending, as will our Lenten journey!

Prayer

O God, I've heard your call, and I hear you calling! Give me ears to continually hear the freshness of your call, and courage to act decisively and boldly on where it leads me. As I "drop my nets" and follow you, walk with me, empowering me and comforting me with your presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Mark 1:29-45

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. 32 That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. 35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 38 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." 39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons. 40 A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean." 41 Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" 42 Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. 43 After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, 44 saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." 45 But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

We could probably spend all of Lent reflecting on any one passage from Mark. "He went to a deserted place, and there he prayed." Jesus spends the night before responding to the needs of the people around him, and he then makes both the space and the time to pray. It's fascinating that Jesus is intentional about both space and time as he prays here. Sometimes, we're intentional about neither. Sometimes we pay attention to one, but not the other. This week as we continue our journey through Lent, try to be intentional about both space and time for prayer—at least once during this week, set aside time in a specific place to do nothing but pray.

Emily I. Miller '07

Lent is a time when we all give extra thought to our prayer life. Maybe we even spend a little more time than usual speaking to God. But what about the rest of the year? Do we have quiet time with God on a regular basis? Jesus shows us in Mark 1:29-39 that we should.

When reading this passage, I think back to the Xfinity commercial from early 2021 with Amy Poehler hiding in her bathtub as she tries to get a little "me" time. Using her tablet to binge her favorite show, she tells her family to leave her alone so she can de-stress. And because she is Amy Poehler, she makes

it funny. But even now, the stresses of life continue to make us all a little nuts. Such is life in the 21st century.

Being under stress isn't new. It may surprise some readers to know that even Jesus felt the crush of demands on his time and had to get away from things for quiet time with God. In this passage, Jesus is in the throes of ministry. He just healed Peter's mother-in-law, and that evening, "[T]hey brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door" (1:32, emphasis added). Wow. It sounds like a first century emergency room, and Jesus is the only physician.

What does he do after dealing with these hurting people? Mark says, "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he went out to a deserted place and he prayed" (1:35). Jesus shows us that to live a balanced life, we need to balance our ministry with quiet time in prayer. When we feel like things are getting to be too much, we need to take the advice of mental health experts and of Jesus, and center ourselves with God. Then, God's Holy Spirit can rejuvenate us and send us back into ministry better equipped to love God and our neighbors.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the busyness of our lives as we seek to serve you. Help us to balance our busyness with quiet time with you, so that we remain grounded in the One who created us, who loves us, and who gives us strength. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Mark 2:1-12

1 When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. 3 Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? 10 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—11 "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." 12 And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Derek Davenport '05/'17

What a great passage. This is one of the stories that children love. It presents such a vivid mental picture, and it's actually quite humorous. Four desperate people battle the crowds, scale the building, and descend through the roof—all to bring a paralyzed man to Jesus. When Jesus sees him, clearly unable to walk, he immediately responds by saying, "Son, your sins are forgiven." That's it.

Jesus doesn't even acknowledge the obvious condition of the man before him. It's only when Jesus realizes the confusion of the people around him that he heals the paralysis. The people are shocked—not by the authority over sin, but the ability to bring physical healing. They only perceive one part of what happened, and it's enough to amaze them.

Nonetheless, our author still packs so much into these words. Again we see what appears to be a supernatural healing, and our narrator explicitly highlights the fact that the healing is not the point. The event is merely to point us to Christ. The people respond appropriately, crying out, “We have never seen anything like this.”

Kristen Renee Barner '97

I have always read this story as Jesus proving he has the same authority as God has, specifically to forgive sins. Today, for me, this reads differently.

In 2017 I had a spinal stroke which left me partially paralyzed. I have become increasingly and acutely aware of places and locations that comply with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) laws and those that do not. I have discovered what it is to be marginalized and disqualified simply for my inability to traverse this land as “normal” people do. Suddenly, in this passage from Mark, I’m the one on the stretcher. And I’m lucky because like this man in the stretcher, I have proactive and loving people surrounding me. I’ve no doubt they’d remove a patch of roof and haul me where I need to be. (How come we never talk about those people in this story?)

The first thing Jesus does is tell the man, “Your sins are forgiven” (2:5). The religious leaders lose their minds and Jesus says, “Fine, fine . . . and stand up, take your mat and go home.” Jesus asks the religious folks which might be easier to say, and therefore accomplish: forgiveness or physical healing? Jesus offers forgiveness first. What I see is that Jesus’ first interaction with the paralyzed man is to recognize him not for his disabilities, but for his worth and value as a human being. Beyond his paralysis, the man is recognized as a HUMAN BEING WORTHY OF FORGIVENESS! Oh, yeah, and stand up and walk . . . almost as an afterthought, to further prove his power.

When we meet one another, let’s start with the place of recognizing the humanity of each other. Please, unless you have a handicap placard, leave those blue parking spaces for people who need it. Also, find people who will remove a patch of roof for you so you can go where you need to go. We really need those people in our lives.

Prayer

O God, teach us to begin with humanity. Teach us to live in the spirit of saying to one another: “the divine in me sees the divine in you.” Encourage us to proactively care for one another, to cut away the patch of roof and to offer praise and thanks when we recognize that we live in a place of forgiveness. Amen.

Mark 2:13-22

13 Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. 14 As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him. 15 And as he sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. 16 When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” 17 When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” 18 Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” 19 Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 The days will come when the

bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. 21 "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. 22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners." This is one of those paradoxes that is easy to forget. Jesus came to call sinners. The image of healing is also helpful in this way. You have to admit you're sick before you look to be healed.

When Jesus talks about sinners, we like to imagine them as people who are different from us, people who live, think, vote, choose, and act differently from us. But of course, when Jesus speaks of sinners, that category includes us as well. Lucky for us, Jesus came to call sinners.

Mark 2:23-3:6

23 One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" 25 And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? 26 He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions." 27 Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; 28 so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath." 1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2 They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." 4 Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5 He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

"The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath." Jesus turns our entire concept of Sabbath upside down. The concept of Sabbath is meant to be a blessing, not a curse. It should be freeing, not restraining. It's funny how easily we take blessings like this and turn them into curses. We become slaves to the very things that should set us free.

After this pronouncement, Jesus further demonstrates the beautiful, life-giving concept of Sabbath as he heals a man. In response, the scribes are furious, and we see the first movements that will eventually lead to the events of Holy Week. They begin to plot his death because he healed a man. They were more comfortable with slavery than freedom, and they were willing to kill for it.

Mark 3:7-19a

7 Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; 8 hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. 9 He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him

because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; 10 for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. 11 Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" 12 But he sternly ordered them not to make him known. 13 He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. 14 And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, 15 and to have authority to cast out demons. 16 So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); 17 James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); 18 and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

In this morning's passage we find multitudes gathering around Jesus. The story has begun to spread, and people flock to Jesus, just to touch him and gain healing. It's gotten so bad that Jesus has to seek refuge on a boat.

Jesus then climbs a mountain to call the disciples. These backdrops, the sea, the mountain, call to mind the stories of Moses, Elijah, and Jonah. As a storyteller, the narrator is letting us know that something important is happening. And Jesus then chooses 12 disciples, many of whom we've already encountered in Mark's pages.

It's also worth noting that even as Judas is first selected, we are introduced to him as a traitor. This is our first exposure to Judas in the book, and he is identified as a traitor. It's something so painful yet true—legacy can be defined by a single action. We never know of Judas as anything but a traitor.

Keith Sandell '16

I'm sure at some point the disciples wondered why they were following Jesus. They encountered uncomfortable situations, such as rubbing shoulders with outsiders, living life on the road away from family and friends, facing opposition from the religious elite, and having their master turned over to the cross. The disciples probably thought to themselves during these times, Why did I agree to this life? I imagine they were sustained during these times by returning to Jesus' call to them as described in Mark 3. Remembering Jesus' call reminded them why they agreed.

Perhaps now in this dreary season you might wonder about your ministry. Perhaps the hard times of ministry have made you question why you agreed to a life of ministry. Or perhaps the mundane seasons of session meetings and capital campaigns have left you wondering whether this is the life for you. It is during these times when we must remember Jesus' call to us. The life of ministry is not always filled with miracles and Easter—sometimes it's filled with February and finals. But in returning to our call, we can gain renewed purpose even in the cold and dreary times.

Prayer

Lord and Sustainer, we thank you that you are a God who hears our prayers. We thank you that you are a God who has spoken into our lives with purpose and peace. We ask, Lord, that during the difficult times in ministry you remind us of our call. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Andy Greenhow, staff

One of the roles I'm pleased to have at PTS is the secretary to the Board of Directors and perhaps I had board business on the brain when considering this passage.

Much is rightly made of Lent as a time for us as individuals to spend time in prayer and reflection to better connect with God. The operative metaphor for so much of Lent is Jesus' time in the desert, and the way that his 40 days alone mirror our 40 days of reflection.

But it didn't take long after that solo desert sojourn for Jesus to appoint a board of directors, even giving some of them cool nicknames. When I think back to my own Lenten disciplines that failed to stand the test of time or be sustained in my life after Lent, I realize it was because I tried to do things myself. Never a good idea.

This Lent, I'll spend some time reflecting on my own board of directors, those who encourage me, keep me on the straight and narrow, and provide me with much-needed disconfirming information. This Lent, I'll be asking, "Who would Jesus appoint?"

Prayer

Triune God, thank you for appointing people to keep us company on our Lenten journey with you.

Trevor Jamison '01

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely . . . there is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it." (John Dahlberg-Action, 1834-1902)

How do you respond to that statement? A hearty "Amen"? Or do you feel it's unnecessarily pessimistic?

Both Bible readings feature people appointed to an office. Joseph, after many trials and tribulations, is now Pharaoh's right hand man, preparing for a famine in Egypt. In the second reading, Jesus appoints twelve men as apostles—messengers with authority to cast out demons. How will Joseph and the Twelve behave now that power is in their hands?

Joseph uses his power to organize a nationwide food collection in the good years. Then when the bad times come, he opens up the storehouses and sells that food to the hungry Egyptians from whom he had collected it in the first place! Clever? Yes. Honourable? Not so sure.

As for the Twelve, it's a mixed picture. Peter used the authority of his office to ask Jesus questions, but had trouble listening to the answers. James and John came to Jesus seeking to be promoted above the others. And as for Judas . . .

If Joseph, who was aware of being accompanied by God during his life, and the Twelve, who accompanied Jesus throughout his ministry on earth, underperformed in such fashion, what hope is there for us?

Politicians or church leaders, teachers or social influencers, and all others appointed to positions of power: don't put ultimate trust in them, even the good ones. Instead, look to Jesus, who was not corrupted by power, but used it to teach, to heal, and to set people free, including from our sinful human tendency to be corrupted by office and power.

Prayer

Gracious God,
We thank you for the gifts of office and power.

We pray for all who hold office,
and for all who wield power,
including ourselves.
May all of us look to follow the example of Jesus,
who wielded power for the sake of others, not self.
Amen.

Mark 3:19b-35

19b Then he went home; 20 and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21 When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." 22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." 23 And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27 But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered. 28 "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—30 for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit." 31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." 33 And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" 34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

"Then he went home." This phrase comes immediately after the words "Judas Iscariot who betrayed him" and shortly before the words "He has gone out of his mind." Jesus went home.

Jesus had fled to the sea to escape crushing crowds, he had appointed his followers, one of whom would betray him, and he returns home. But when he gets there, people question his sanity, and his own family tries to restrain him.

It's at this point that Jesus again turns everything upside down. He doesn't shrink his concept of family or trust; he expands it. After the foreshadowing of Judas' betrayal, and a betrayal of sorts from his own family, we might expect Jesus to tighten his circle, but instead he does the opposite, opening it to "whoever does the will of God." Looking around him, he proclaims, "here are my mother and my brothers."

Judy Zimmerman Herr '82

Mark's Gospel shows us Jesus in a whirlwind of activity—healing, teaching, calling disciples and collecting crowds—and now, in today's passage, turning up at home again. His family doesn't know what to do with him. *Is he having a mental break, needing to be controlled? How can we get him to settle down and be more "normal"?*

The Jerusalem establishment also doesn't know what to do with him. *Is he getting his power from Beelzebub, the evil one? What else would explain the healings and the charisma? How else to understand someone who calls into question the structures of faith and of family?*

If we're honest, we don't always know what to do with Jesus either. How are we to follow a Lord who pushes back on the definitions of correctness, someone who argues with and calls out the religious leaders, someone who violates deeply-held norms about the role of the family, and even redefines what family is?

The Lenten fast calls us to self-reflection, to repentance. As we walk these 40 days, what are we being called to give up? What are the assumptions of value, of people or actions, we need to ask questions about? And what are the new directions we are being called to go? What are we being called to say yes to?

Who belongs to our family?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, open our eyes this day to see where you are leading us. Break down our easy assumptions about worth and about structures, to see how God's reign, that Kingdom you spoke of, turns us in new directions. Make us channels for your healing and hope in all the corners of our lives and the world. Amen.

Mark 4:1-20

1 Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." 9 And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" 10 When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. 11 And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; 12 in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'" 13 And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. 16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. 17 But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. 20 And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

Jesus returns to the sea here, and once more is only safe in the sea itself. He stays on a boat, allowing the often chaotic forces of nature to protect him as he preaches.

The parable he tells is another story beloved by children and adults alike. One of the things that I've always loved about this story is the way the sower works. Some of the seeds grow, and some do not, yet that doesn't stop the sower from casting the seeds. There is a boldness, almost stubborn determination from a sower who plants amongst thorns, rocks and roads. There's a sense of abundance in a sower who scatters seeds even where they aren't likely to grow. Then we are given a framework to interpret the parable, and we find that the sense of growth and abundance carries over to the interpretation as well as the parable. There is something about Jesus that calls us to participate in this bold, determined abundance.

Chris Taylor '19, staff

Wendell Berry's essay "Damage" offers a personal lament. Having dug a small pond to supply water for a track of land he wished to farm, Berry notes that a cold and wet winter resulted in the earth slumping, his pond now useless, his work undone. Bemoaning the defacement of the soil, he writes, "In general, I have used my farm carefully. It could be said, I think that I have improved it more than I have damaged it . . . But now a part of its damage is my own."

Sowing seeds necessitates the disruption of soil. Not always through extensive digging, but enough to allow creation to flourish over and against the damage of the earth. Till too little and the birds, sun, and thorns claim the growth; till too much and the soil becomes unhealthy, unstable, and marred. It is a delicate balance between tilling the earth for the sake of new growth and injuring the landscape. So it is with our hearts this Lenten season. From day one, Ash Wednesday, we contemplate our mortality and wrestle over the next 40 days about what it means that our savior is betrayed, is unfairly crucified, and dies on a cross. This disruption in us is necessary so that God's Word may take root and deepen our understanding of Christ's sacrifice. But the agitation in our hearts during Lent can also seem, at times, like too much. How can God's Word find good soil, earth that has been disturbed and tilled, but not overworked by guilt or self-flagellation?

Sowing seeds, and the growing of God's Word in us, require some disruption of the soil and of our hearts. This Lent, as you walk from the cross and the tomb, right on to the promise of Easter and the full knowledge of the resurrection to come, may the stirrings of your heart be good soil in which to root God's Word and your life. May your heart find itself properly tilled in the promise of Christ's everlasting reign.

Prayer

Farmer God, till our hearts this Lent to be ready to receive your Word. Let us be places of growth where scattered seed may take root and flourish in the promise of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jonathan D. Lawrence '97

The last few years have been challenging between COVID-19, economic and political challenges, severe weather, and violence nearby and far away. Each day as the news brings new concerns, many of us may feel like the psalmist: "[G]ive heed to my sighing. Listen to the sound of my cry," (Ps 5:1-2). These years have been particularly difficult for clergy and congregational leaders and many have even decided to leave the ministry in this time of uncertainty. What should we do?

I serve both as a pastor and a religion professor and in both roles I often find myself caught between people saying "We just want to go back to what it was like before the pandemic" and others saying "That world doesn't exist anymore and we can't go back and we won't go back!" The pandemic brought

loss and change but in the midst of that loss people found new ways to interact, even through the dreaded Zoom screen. Those streaming worship services were less than perfect but they allowed shut-ins and faraway family members to join in worship. We found new ways to organize and support our communities through porch drop-offs of food for the hungry. When my congregation could finally meet in person again, it was still painful for some of our members because it just didn't feel the same. What should we do?

Some days I feel as clueless as the disciples who heard Jesus' words but didn't understand him. But today's parable gives me some reassurance. The sower spreads the seed without knowing how it will grow—and without responsibility for making it grow. I don't have any big answers, but in the meantime I can keep teaching and caring for the people around me and let God do the rest. And like the psalmist I can start to say "But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy," (Ps 5:11). It's not the answer I was looking for, but many days it is enough.

Prayer

Lord, we turn to you for direction in a troubled and confusing world. We want answers but we know that sometimes there aren't answers. We take refuge in you and ask you to help the seeds that we have planted grow and bear fruit in service of your people. Amen.

Mark 4:21-34

21 He said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? 22 For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. 23 Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" 24 And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. 25 For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away." 26 He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27 and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28 The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come." 30 He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." 33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34 he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

Parables can be so confusing. They defy our attempts to make them into fables or allegories. They're not systematic. They're word pictures. Poems. Sculptures. They create an impression, a sense, a hunch, an idea, a thought, a feeling.

These parables speak of growth, attention, work, blessing, urgency, life, provision, safety, shelter, productivity, creation. Notice that those who have ears to hear don't automatically hear. They are called to listen, and to pay attention. This calling is helpful for us to bear in mind as we encounter the parables. As much as we want to tie them down to easy interpretations, there is value in simply listening, paying attention, and soaking up the strangeness of the stories.

Mark 4:35-41

35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." 36 And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. 37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" 39 He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. 40 He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" 41 And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Derek Davenport '05/'17

Jesus returns to the sea. There are so many phrases that are worthy of thought in this passage, but for today, it's worth just thinking about that image of the sea. Throughout Mark, Jesus has turned to the sea for refuge and protection. We haven't seen Jesus rest often in the book of Mark. We've seen him healing into the night and praying before sunrise, but this is the first time in the book that we've actually seen Jesus sleeping. This first moment of rest comes in the midst of a storm on the sea. Even as "the waves beat into the boat," Jesus finds comfort and solace for the first time. Naturally, the disciples immediately interrupt him. When he wakes, Jesus offers two rebukes. The first is to the sea, the second is directed at the disciples who feared it. After all this time, all the escapes to the sea, the disciples still don't realize that the man in the boat is more powerful than the storms without.

Leanna Fuller, faculty

As Christians, we affirm that we can learn about the nature of God by looking at the life and ministry of Jesus. In today's reading, Jesus' words and actions make powerful claims about who God is. First, we learn that while the waves swamped the boat, Jesus slept. The disciples think this means that Jesus doesn't care about them. Instead, Jesus shows us that God brings peace and rest even in the midst of the world's chaos. Our God is a firm foundation; God is our refuge and strength (Ps 46).

Then, when Jesus perceives his disciples' distress, he commands the wind and the waves, "Peace! Be still!" From this we learn that our God brings comfort; when we cry out to God, God will be present with us. Yet our God is also a God of challenge, as we see from Jesus' response after the storm has calmed: "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" While God comforts us, God does not wish us to remain mired in despair. Instead, God calls us forth from our anxiety and fear, inviting us to trust God completely, no matter what storms may rage around us.

Prayer

Gracious God, in this season of Lent, help us to learn to listen for your voice in the midst of the storm. Even when it seems to us that you are sleeping, or that you are indifferent to our plight, remind us that you are always near, ready to calm the chaos that swirls around and within us. Most of all, give us the strength and courage to respond when we hear you calling us beyond our fears to follow wherever you may lead. Amen.

Jason Dauer '21

Life has felt like a never-ending storm these last two years. Just as we think the seasickness is going away, another storm comes. As we strengthen our "sea legs," another wave hits the side of the boat, and we're thrown off-balance. Meanwhile, Jesus is sleeping through all of it!

My favorite Lent song is “Wake Up, Jesus” by The Porter’s Gate. The song is a desperate cry for help from Jesus. It is a simple song that yearns for a response: “Jesus, when you gonna wake up? / When you gonna wake up and calm this raging sea? / Jesus, when you gonna wake up? / When you gonna wake up? / How can you sleep when we’re in need?”

The call for help is simple: Jesus, wake up! The dramatic irony of this song and Scripture is that we know Jesus wakes up and everything is okay in the end, but that’s not how it always works. Having faith doesn’t make the seasickness go away or help us sturdy our legs. Storms can still make boats sink, cargo can fall overboard, and people can drown. In the chorus, The Porter’s Gate sings, “Just one word from the Maker and all the waves will be made still / Just one touch from the Healer and all will be made well.”

In Lent, we cry out for God to respond. We could all create a list of the things we would like God to do, yet we plead for a simple response—just one word. What is the word you need to hear from God today? What is the word that might give you peace? Is it a command to the storm to be still, or is it an encouragement for you to rest and take care of yourself? Meditate on this word today and make it your prayer. Is it *peace, breathe, rest*? Maybe it’s *eat, drink, or sleep*.

Prayer

Sleeping Jesus, wake up! We need you. How can you sleep when there is so much injustice in the world, when your children are continually in danger? Wake up, and speak a word to us or the storm. Tell the powers and principalities to stop. Tell us to rest and sleep like you. Remind us to eat and take care of our bodies. But Jesus, please wake up. Amen.

Connie B. Hoeke '94

“Are we there yet?” It is a standard question for children (and often adults) when traveling to a destination. It is a question of frustration and wonder about whether there will be an end to travel. In this passage, the disciples and Jesus are traveling in a boat when a terrible storm rages against them. The boat was swamped with water and the disciples, including several professional fishermen, were afraid. Because Jesus does nothing about the storm, the disciples think that he doesn’t care about their plight. However, Jesus does care. He cares so much that he addresses the storm as he would a demon; he quiets the storm and there is a perfect calm that results.

The main point of this passage is trust and faith. And Jesus asks the disciples why they are afraid. It is as if he is asking them, “Aren’t you there yet? Don’t you believe?” In Mark, faith is shown by believing in Jesus as Christ and as the Son of God. A miracle worker could have done other miracles, but only God can rule the winds and the storms. Jesus has just told people many parables and has also explained them privately to the disciples and yet they do not understand who Jesus is, i.e. the Son of God. We must believe that God is always with us and is stronger than evil. We also need to go to Jesus with our requests with faith that he will answer our needs and fears. Later, in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus asks them to pray for him, it is the disciples who are indifferent to Jesus’ difficult moment when he asks God to remove the cup of death facing him. Faith and trust in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is imperative if we are to follow him and be his disciples. Let us always believe in Jesus the Christ and obey him.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for being so faithful to us even when we don’t trust you with our fears and desires. As we look toward the cross, we realize the evil you bore on our behalf. You also

overcome the evil in our lives and help us to trust you with every part of our lives. May we trust you with our requests and know that you will answer us as our faithful God who accompanies us on our journey. Help us to pray. Amen.

Mark 5:1-20

1 They came to the other side of the sea, 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 any more, 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 sea, and were drowned in the sea. 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.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

Once again in Mark we find a story that appears to be a supernatural healing. However you interpret the healing itself, the most frightening part of the story is the end. The man with the reputation, the man with a past, the subject of rumors and urban legends, is told to "Go home to your friends." As we've previously seen in the book of Mark, "home" can be a difficult place to return, and yet that's where Jesus sends him.

Yet he obeys. Because he was obedient, he discovered that he was uniquely prepared for the ministry to which he was called. No one had a better opportunity to demonstrate the mercy of Jesus than the subject of rumors and urban legends.

Darryl Lockie '17

To be frank, today's Gospel reading is bizarre. It's bizarre even by the Gospels' standards, which is a rather high bar. Indeed, if a friend told you this same story over a beer, you'd suggest he close his tab and go home. "You just wouldn't believe it, man," he tells you with a slight slur. "So we get right off the boat, right? Then this crazy guy comes up and starts screaming at us. Oh, there was this hoard of pigs. Did I tell you about the pigs yet?" It's at this moment you half expect him to fall off his barstool and pass out.

The central message of this passage is of course, the authority of Jesus, the power of God. But perhaps something not to be lost here is the way God works in both the chaos and utter ridiculousness of life. If this is the messiah of the unexpected, we might expect to find him in, well, the unexpected. He is to be found working not just among the staid and the stoic, but also the eccentric and the idiosyncratic. We all likely know this, but this story is a good reminder.

Perhaps it gives us pause to actually say hello to the woman caught in spirited conversation with herself in the park. Or maybe we reach out to the odd man at our church who owns a small herd of cats and has the odor to prove it. As opposed to always trying to turn away from the bizarre, possibly we look for the divine in it. According to this story, Jesus works there. Some thoughts to consider as we make our way through this strange and reflective season of Lent.

Prayer

Dear Lord, this Lenten season, please give me fresh eyes to see your Spirit at work. Help me to see you bringing freedom where there is oppression, and hope amidst desperation. God, life is so often messy and downright ridiculous. Yet, give me wisdom to see you working through such circumstances, and also, conviction so I too might share your message of hope and light. Amen.

Mark 5:21-43

21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. 22 Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet 23 and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." 24 So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. 25 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. 26 She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. 27 She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." 29 Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30 Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" 31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" 32 He looked all around to see who had done it. 33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." 35 While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" 36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." 37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. 38 When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." 40 And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" 42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. 43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

“So that she may be made well and live.” The sequence of that request has always fascinated me. Made well is first, and live is second, not the other way around. It’s as if being made well is more important, more vital.

From one perspective, this is obvious. To live again without having the underlying problem addressed will yield the same results. But there is more to it. There is something deeper. When Jesus heals the woman in the middle of this story, he proclaims healing and also wholeness. He doesn’t use either phrase with the little girl, but he tells them to feed her. Feeding—an action that indicates growth, strength, health, wholeness.

Jesus makes them both well. He doesn’t just bring the little girl back to life and cleanse the bleeding woman. He makes them well. Their prayers are bigger than simple removal of symptoms. They don’t want to be unsick. They ask to be well.

Kathryn Ophardt '22

“Do not fear, only believe.” This is such a bold commandment. I find myself often overcome by fear: fear of instability, fear of uncertainty, fear that what hurts us will be with us for the rest of our lives, or fear that what we have today may not be there tomorrow. There are fears of individual concerns like the failing health of a loved one. There are fears of the health of the world, plagued by war, injustice, and abuse of nature. Yet, Jesus calls us to have faith rather than fear.

Jesus encounters several suffering people in this passage: the woman who suffered hemorrhages for 12 years, and the parents of a child whom they thought to be dead. Jesus healed them all, not just of their physical afflictions, but also of their fear. It is easy to focus on the healing in this story, but these are also stories of damage already done. The woman had already suffered for more than a decade, and the child was already thought to be dead. These are not stories of how having faith protects us from suffering. Rather, they are stories of how having faith liberates us from the fear that things will never get better.

Since reading this passage, Jesus’ words, “Do not fear, only believe,” have echoed in my ears. I pray that they echo in yours today, begging you to name not just your fear, but to also name your faith. How might God be inviting you to let go of a fear and to hold fast to faith today?

Prayer

God, you are so bold. Help me to live with boldness today, to embrace the faith that you have given me and to let go of the fear that afflicts me. Amen.

Mark 6:1-13

1 He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2 On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. 4 Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” 5 And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6 And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching. 7 He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the

unclean spirits. 8 He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9 but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10 He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11 If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." 12 So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. 13 They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

Once again Jesus returns home, and once again it's not pleasant. In fact, Jesus himself was amazed at the "unbelief" he encountered there.

We also see a shift in the story here. Jesus sends the 12 out in groups of two. They're not sent out alone, but they are sent. In this way, we see the disciples taking a more direct role than they have in the past. They are called to participate and proclaim this good news—they are not passive bystanders. They are active participants. This may call to mind the parable of the sower—the disciples are given the chance to exhibit the bold determination of those who "sow the word."

Mark 6:13-29

13 They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. 14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." 15 But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." 17 For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. 18 For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. 21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. 22 When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." 23 And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." 24 She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." 25 Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, 28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

Here we return to John the Baptist, and find the haunting tale of Herodias and John the Baptist. We've been speeding through the life of Jesus, and here take a rare detour to learn another story altogether.

This story has fascinated artists, authors, poets, and playwrights for centuries. Often, it is assumed that the daughter of Herodias was named Salome. Her dance has been interpreted as everything from a display of acrobatics to seduction. The details of the dance, however, don't change the tragedy of the story. The characters manipulate each other, deceive each other, and mistreat each other. The result is

the death of an innocent victim. Yet despite the tragedy of the story, we end with a body laid in a tomb—a scene we will revisit later, with a much different outcome.

James Golla '16

We enter our Scripture text after Jesus has sent out the Twelve. News is spreading about Jesus that it has reached the ears of King Herod. There is speculation over who Jesus is and King Herod believes that Jesus is John the Baptizer who he had killed. Mark gives us some background on what has transpired between King Herod and John the Baptizer. King Herod broke Levitical law (Lev. 18:16, 20:21) by taking his brother's wife as his own wife. John the Baptizer went to the King and called him out on his sin. John lives into the role of a prophet, much like how Elijah confronted King Ahab. The dynamic between the prophet of God, John, versus the power structure of this world, King Herod, is important to note. John stands and speaks truth and justice against power. The power system does not like to be told what to do or when they are wrong. John is arrested and eventually beheaded for standing up for truth and justice. Jesus in the same way speaks truth and justice. This pushes the power structures to eventually talk Rome into crucifying him. Will we, as followers in the way of Jesus, stand in the prophetic tradition of speaking truth and justice into our power structures today? Are we willing to faithfully risk persecution, even though it may lead to death? In the season of Lent, we are called to "suffer" for our faith. This is more than just giving up chocolate or coffee! Jesus calls us in this season to get uncomfortable, and stand up to speak truth and justice into this world!

Prayer

God of love and justice, we pray that you will embolden us to take a stand. Fill us with your Spirit to speak your truth and justice in the face of opposition. Give us the courage to choose you this day to serve you in your prophetic tradition. Amen.

Mark 6:30-46

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. 33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. 34 As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. 35 When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; 36 send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." 37 But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" 38 And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." 39 Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. 41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And all ate and were filled; 43 and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men. 45 Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

After our interlude with John the Baptist, we return to the disciples. More precisely, they return to us. Jesus had sent them out, and they now return to report what they experienced. At this point, we find them tired and weary, and they turn (as Jesus does throughout Mark) to the sea for refuge.

As soon as they return to the land, there is a crowd waiting. Despite the picture we often carry in our minds, the scene here is not particularly pleasant. The passage opens with an explanation that the disciples haven't even had the leisure to eat. The crowds have started to become dangerous; we've seen Jesus retreat from them several times already throughout the book. The people are far from home, wandering as if lost. At this point, the crowds also grow hungry. It's growing dark. The scene is of desolation, hunger, and darkness.

That's where Jesus wants the people to sit. He wants them to sit in groups in the midst of the desolation, hunger, and darkness. Then, he feeds them. Then, Jesus goes to the mountains to pray.

Caroline Baker '23

The feeding of the 5,000 is a story we know well. We are inspired by this miracle when we are caught in worries of scarcity, trusting that Jesus will provide. Yet, while we focus on the teaching and feeding, it is easy to gloss over the thing that makes it possible: rest.

Read verses 30 and 31, then verses 45 and 46. What do you notice?

Verse 30 is about doing. The apostles told Jesus what they did and taught. His response? Verse 31: come and rest. They did as they were told and got in a boat. Because a large crowd followed them to this deserted place, there were 5,000 people to unexpectedly feed that evening. Once everyone was nourished, verse 45, Jesus "immediately" made the disciples get back in their boat and go take the rest they never got, while he himself went to a mountain to pray.

It is easy to perceive resting as the passive work, and miracles—feeding, healing, teaching—as the active work. Our Western society is one that rewards productivity; one that praises doing more than being. Jesus, with an endless list of important work to be done, consistently made time for rest and commanded his disciples to do the same.

Is this a command you find easy to follow?

Are you consistent with scheduling rest for yourself?

Rest can look many different ways, but is ultimately a time of spiritual grounding and healing that is unprovoked by concerns of productivity. Jesus invites his disciples to rest for "a while"; to be unhurried in their resting. Jesus invites you to do the same, for it is through spending time in rest that we are able to share the full abundance of our gifts with the world.

Prayer

Creator God, thank you for the divine gift of rest. Thank you for knowing that my body, mind, and spirit all need nourishment and for inviting me to care for them just as Jesus did. Help me to trust in the value of being as much as I value doing. Amen.

Mark 6:47-56

47 When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. 49 But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; 50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 51 Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. 53 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. 54 When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, 55 and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56 And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

This passage opens with Jesus on the shore, and the disciples struggling on the water. The sea and the storm were too much for the disciples to handle, and Jesus saw them struggling.

By this point in the Gospel according to Mark, we've seen Jesus seek refuge amongst waves, find protection in the storms, and even speak to the sea. When seeing his disciples in danger, in some way it should be logical for us to expect Jesus to demonstrate his mastery over the sea once more.

Yet what happens next is beyond anything we've seen thus far. More shocking than even conversing with the elements, Jesus simply treads on the sea itself. The disciples, upon witnessing this mastery over nature itself, are shocked. But notice what shocked them. It wasn't Jesus walking on water. It wasn't even the obedience of the wind. They were still shocked about the loaves. One of the great things about this is that God's blessings weren't contingent on their understanding. Jesus continued to bless them even though they could hardly even see it.

Raymond Pelling '23

Working in a camp kitchen in the California mountains one day, my rational mind became aware of the absurdity of the Gospel. "It's not logical . . . Why does God just love us, and not demand anything in return? It doesn't. Make. Any. Sense!"

My co-worker was Ricky Bender, one of those people you know loves Jesus, and through whom you have a 99 percent surety that the love of God is real. Most of the time he wears a smile on his face, and many times laughing. Ricky also smiles through many scars. His testimony includes that he is in the Book of Miracles at Loma Linda Medical Center. As a young child, he was involved in a car accident in which he hit the inside of a car windshield with his face, not expected to survive.

"That's just the point, Ray, it's not supposed to make sense! God just loves us. Salvation in Jesus is a gift, and that's just the way it is. We can't do anything to deserve it," Ricky replies, laughing.

We probably went back and forth like this for 30 minutes, he laughingly replying every time I declared my confusion.

Mark loves to tease us with the mystery of Christ and the Gospel. Here we have the mystery of the loaves mentioned, and the wild humor of Jesus pretending he is going to walk on water past the

disciples, before calming their fears and getting in with them. Those at Gennesaret are healed just touching “the fringe of his cloak.”

We naturally put up blocks to the audacity of the Gospel: it’s simply too good to be true. We make divisions of who is unworthy of God’s love: in our world, nations, families, churches, denominations, and even ourselves.

The outrageous love of God in Christ is not some demigod walking ahead of us, demanding we follow what seems impossible. Christ climbs in the boat with us, calms our fears, and even when it feels we only see something like a fringe of the truth, it is enough for something inside us to be healed.

Prayer

Lord God, thank you for being a God who loves us outrageously, giving us Christ who gets in the boat with us, and teaches us how to love closer to the way you do, healing our hearts along the way. Amen.

Mark 7:1-23

1 Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, 2 they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. 3 (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; 4 and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) 5 So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” 6 He said to them, “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; 7 in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.’ 8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.” 9 Then he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! 10 For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.’ 11 But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, ‘Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban’ (that is, an offering to God)—12 then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, 13 thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this.” 14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: 15 there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.” 17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 He said to them, “Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, 19 since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, “It is what comes out of a person that defiles. 21 For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, 22 adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Derek Davenport '05/'17

The religious officials return here, for the first time since chapter 2. The last time we saw them, they had determined to kill Jesus. In this passage, we see them putting their plans in motion. They make accusations as if testing their opposition, or perhaps taking the first steps toward building their case.

They accuse the disciples of breaking from tradition, and Jesus responds by pointing them beyond tradition to the commandments of God, and the ways that their traditions can violate God's commands.

The traditions had gotten out of control. They had lost their original intent and become dangerous; they had overshadowed their original purpose. It's important to evaluate our own traditions and practices with this tendency in mind. Our individual routines and even our corporate traditions can fall into the same trap.

Mark 7:24-37

24 From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 28 But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." 30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. 31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. 33 He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. 34 Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35 And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

After the accusations of the scribes, we see Jesus doing the same thing he did to anger them in the first place—healing. But this time, he heals a Gentile in Tyre. The mere sequence of the stories here is so fascinating. As the Jewish officials hurl accusations at Jesus, he leaves, seeking refuge among Gentiles. Word gets out, and Jesus again has mercy on those who come to him, this time healing a Gentile.

Having found no refuge even amongst the Gentiles, Jesus again heads toward the sea, healing on his way there. It's as if nothing can stop Jesus from healing. It happens wherever he goes. No feature of the landscape, no threats from the authorities, no danger from the elements can stop healing from pouring forth from an encounter with Jesus.

Ronnie Cox '23

Different genders, different cultures, different nations, different races. So much separated this woman from Jesus. They could hardly have been more polarized, and their people could not have hated the other more. Yet she comes to Jesus. She comes to Jesus because she is desperate in only the way a parent can be to save the little child they love. And the interaction between the two of them is brief and yet very profound. Christ's response to her begging seems harsh and unkind; to call her a dog was even worse in that time than it is today if he had called her *κυσίον*, which he used in Matthew 7:6 but instead, he names her among the *κυνάρια*. The Greek differentiates between a pet and a wild scavenging dog or even a farm dog.

Yet Christ does place her beneath the Jewish people—a people who were weaker and often persecuted by the more powerful Tyre. For many in our world, this humbling comment would have pushed us from Christ. Our blood boils when life forces us to be brought low and challenges us to admit we are not always on top. Humility is a large part of the practice of Lent, not only as a time for remembrance and self-sacrifice but also as a time for humility.

Now, we have a choice to respond with self-righteous indignation or to respond in the same fashion as the Canaanites. In the only words she speaks, she acknowledges her place as an outsider who is adopted, not as one born into the house. She accepts the place of humility, and she expresses her faith that even the tiniest word from Jesus could work miracles.

Her humility and her faith brought down all the walls that divided them. In the Syrophenician Woman, we see a model of healthy humility. Just as Jesus responded to her faith, he is ready to respond to ours with love, compassion, and transformation.

Prayer

This Lent, Lord, remind me that I am beloved by God even though I am not worthy. Even though I am not enough. I am loved, and by the power of your Spirit, I am being transformed into a child of God, perfected in love, molded by grace into the image of your son Jesus our Savior. Amen.

Mark 8:1-10

1 In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, 2 "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. 3 If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance." 4 His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" 5 He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." 6 Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. 7 They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. 8 They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. 9 Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. 10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

Rob Weingartner '82

The familiar story of Jesus' feeding the 4000, related in today's Gospel reading, has troubled scholars a bit. Some see such close parallels with the feeding of the 5000 that they conclude it is the same event. But in Mark 8:19 Jesus himself refers to the two feedings, and Mark 6:30-44 has already recorded the feeding of the 5000.

In today's reading from Mark 8, Jesus is in the region of the Decapolis, on the eastern shore of Galilee—an area populated by Jews and Gentiles. It appears that Jesus is there for an intensive time of teaching, and what seems to occur in this remarkable fellowship meal is that both Jew and Gentile sit together. Jesus has entered pagan territory to give a glimpse of his concern for all peoples and the global scale of the commission he will give his disciples.

Jesus observes the great need of the crowd and asks the disciples what could be done. His disciples reply, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" Do the disciples lack confidence

in Jesus' ability to perform another miracle? I don't think so. Are they just being cautious, not wanting to appear to be directing Jesus in a course of action? Perhaps. Or maybe they are still trying to figure out who this Jesus is and what it means for him to be at work in the world and their lives. Mark tells us after the first feeding that they "did not understand about the loaves" (6:52).

There is much that I don't understand about what it means for Jesus to be at work in my life. Why does God seem to act in some moments but not in others? What is the connection between our prayer and God's action? We can gain insight into those questions as we live with the stories of Jesus told in the Gospels. I see myself in those stories, with the crowds that have begun to gather around Jesus—those who come to him with broken hopes and broken hearts and broken bodies. I have discovered that I, too, am hungry for things that one can find only in Jesus.

Prayer

Lord, as we follow Jesus and commit ourselves afresh to living for him in the world, we pray not only for ourselves and others who trust in Jesus—we ask that you will also hear our prayers in behalf of people who do not yet know him. May we share and show God's love to all whom you bring our way. Amen.

Mark 8:11-26

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?" 22 They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" 24 And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." 25 Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

The religious authorities continue to test Jesus. They ask for a sign. Thus far, Jesus has cured paralytics, healed the sick, fed the hungry, cast out demons, calmed storms, walked on water, and even raised the dead. Then they ask for a sign. Jesus' response is perfect. "No sign will be given to this generation." Just a few short verses later he restores sight to a blind man. This is quite a humorous juxtaposition. If they can't see the cured, the healed, the fed, the raised, then they won't get a sign. A sign isn't much good if you don't see it.

Yet, the man who asks to see has his sight restored. The authorities don't ask to see, they ask for a sign. They (like us) overestimate their own abilities to see.

Audra Krise '10

"God, give me a sign . . ." How many of us have uttered those words with the hope that God would deliver a clear-cut sign, so we knew exactly what to do next in our life?

The truth is God is always speaking to us through our loved ones, the little voice in the back of our mind, and through Scripture. And no matter what path we choose, the promise remains the same: God is with us. Through good and bad, through poor decisions and the best ones, God remains at our side bringing us comfort, support, and love.

Our walk this Lent is about recognizing where Jesus is in our life and the best way is through an avid prayer life and reading the Bible. We don't need to test Jesus and ask him to give us a sign; Jesus already gave us all we need in this life by giving us eternal salvation. I know you want clear answers to the problems in your life, but that isn't faith. That is not God's purpose.

God gave us Jesus to cleanse us from our sins, from our temptations like asking for signs. Jesus sighed, deep in his soul because he knew the Pharisees had a sign standing before them and they didn't SEE. And as long as we keep trying to test God and asking him to make the decisions for us, we won't see either.

The point of our existence is choice. God gave humanity free will. Choose whichever option speaks to your heart and God will keep you going even if it's a bumpy walk. We're not always going to get it right, but that's why Jesus's life, death, and resurrection is so important to our faith. Jesus makes the pathways straight and our destination is heaven.

Let go of asking God for the clear cut answers and instead embrace the unknown and enjoy the journey.

Prayer

Beautiful Savior, in our quest for certainty we forget only one thing is certain and that is our salvation through your sacrifice. Cleanse us of our need for answers and may we find you in the unexpected simplicity of realizing you never leave us nor forsake us. In Jesus' precious name we pray, Amen.

Mark 8:27-9:1

27 Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" 28 And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." 30 And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. 31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." 34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the

gospel, will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” 9:1 And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”

Derek Davenport '05/'17

Here it is. Peter makes his confession of faith, which he doesn't seem to fully understand. That's such a great feature of Peter. His faith isn't dependent on full understanding. Peter follows Jesus, learns from him, and grows in his understanding, but his faith isn't a product of perfect wisdom. It doesn't result from his intellectual pursuit; his faith fuels it. His faith spurs his intellectual pursuit to greater heights—and he will make mistakes. It's just a few verses later that Jesus calls Peter “Satan.” But imperfect as he is, Peter continues to strive, to grow, and to learn.

After this confession, Jesus tells the disciples what we, as readers, already know. He explains quite clearly that he will be killed, but that the story won't end there.

Dave Keys, staff

Who is Jesus? Great Prophet, Preacher, Teacher. That is who the people of the villages of Caesarea Philippi say Jesus is. Theologically speaking, “That is just the tip of the iceberg.”

Jesus picked this exact moment to announce his true divine self. Through Peter's great faith we discover that Jesus is the anointed one, the Christ, the Messiah. Peter is the first disciple to come to this astonishing realization.

Then Jesus discloses to his disciples that he must endure extreme suffering, humiliation, and torture leading to his death. Peter's faith waivers as he takes Jesus aside to question this shocking declaration. Jesus is angered at Peter and makes it perfectly clear that the disciples are not to dwell on human suffering but on the divine way. He will die human and then rise again three days later in order to win our salvation by defeating sin and death. The Son of the Living God.

“Take up the cross and follow me.” To do this, we must deny ourselves and commit fully to Jesus. This is the only way to stand in the glory of the Father and enter his Kingdom. There is only one answer to the question, “Who am I?” And that is, “You are my Christ!”

Prayer

Gracious God, help us to overcome our great unbelief. Let the Holy Spirit fill us with the faith of Peter as he proclaimed Jesus the Messiah. Make us holy. Make us people who pray. Make us people who believe. Make us like Jesus. Amen.

Tom Hoeke '03

One thing that troubles me about the decision to retire is my identity. I know my identities are as a husband, father, grandfather, and son. However, my occupation is where I have spent a lot of time in the last 47, first in secular positions as an information technology manager and then as a United Methodist pastor.

We often define people we meet based on what they do. One of the first questions asked is, “What do you do?” Something similar was happening with the crowd around Jesus. People wanted to define him

by what he did. Before this scene, Jesus healed a blind man and a deaf person. For the second time, he multiplied loaves and fish to feed people.

Then Jesus puts his disciples on the spot, "What about you? Who do you say that I am?" Jesus wants to know if his trusted inner circle has a clue.

Peter says that Jesus is the Messiah. Right answer! However, does he know what it means that Jesus is the Messiah? Jesus doesn't think so and tells him, "You are not thinking God's thoughts, and you are thinking human thoughts." In other words, you are not open to God's ways.

Jesus is a different kind of Messiah than how Peter identifies him. Jesus is the Messiah who brings people back to God. That required his suffering on the cross to take away sins and get all of humanity back into a right relationship with God.

When you think about who Jesus is to you, think about God's purposes and God being in control, even amid hardships and difficulties. Know that the weight Jesus bore on the cross was for you. Trust in his grace, power, and sustaining work in your life. He is the one who can and does change our lives.

Deep down, I know no matter which stage of life I am about to enter, I am always, first and foremost, a child of God. My identity is in God.

What about you? Who do you say Jesus is?

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, thank you for identifying us as your children. We realize nothing is more important than our relationship with you through Christ. We admit that too often, we try to identify others and ourselves according to the world's ways. We pray that you constantly remind us that our identity is in you. In Christ we pray, Amen.

Mark 9:2-13

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" 8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10 So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. 11 Then they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 12 He said to them, "Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? 13 But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

The transfiguration is a passage that raises so many questions and so many thoughts. I can't pretend to understand all that happens on that mountain. I do understand Peter though. He's such a lovable character in this part of the Gospel. He's just confessed his faith, and immediately after he is given this

incredible vision. Naturally it terrifies him. But look how he responds. He doesn't let his fear paralyze him—he attempts to take action. He tries to do something. It may not have been a great plan, but he was trying to be faithful.

This is one of Peter's characteristics that is worthy of emulation. When he doesn't know what to do, he does his best to do something, anything, that's faithful. His decisions aren't always perfect, but at his best, he tries to be faithful.

B.T. Gilligan '11

Imagine being in this event. Imagine being with Jesus as he transfigures, and then two giants of the faith show up in front of you. Elijah and Moses have been dead for generations, and now they are standing in front of Peter, James, and John. If that were you, what would you say? Peter certainly doesn't know what to say. He has nothing brilliant to add to the moment. As a result, he says, "Let's build a monument."

Peter is in an amazing situation and has nothing of value to add. Instead of enjoying the moment and being in it, he decides it is necessary to make noise. Instead of simply being terrified, Peter decides to fake confidence by speaking nonsense that Jesus doesn't even acknowledge. How often do we do the same?

How often do we come face to face with the full beauty of God and our first response is to add noise? Lent is a season of quiet and contemplation, focused on all that Jesus accomplishes in three days; how often is our response to fill it with noisy words and noisy actions? Those actions might even look spiritual, but sometimes they are only a means to cover up the fact that we are terrified by what Jesus is doing in our midst.

During Lent, we are face to face with the divine work of Christ. May we do the opposite of Peter and remain quiet. May we simply allow ourselves to be terrified and quiet in the presence of the holy work of Christ in our midst this Lenten season.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, so often we are terrified of what you are doing in our lives. Help us to be quiet and to hear what you are up to, so that we might more fully experience your presence in our lives. Amen.

Mark 9:14-29

14 When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. 15 When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. 16 He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" 17 Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; 18 and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so." 19 He answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me." 20 And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. 21 Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us

and help us.” 23 Jesus said to him, “If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.” 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!” 26 After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. 28 When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” 29 He said to them, “This kind can come out only through prayer.”

Derek Davenport '05/'17

They were arguing. A child was sick and they fought about it. It was easier to fight than to heal him.

We do this all the time. As people, as churches, as organizations, we all have these fights. They're different from situation to situation, but you know what they are in your own context. These are the fights that have no clear winner, and continue far longer than they should. They steal our focus from the people in our midst that need our help. The topics change from day to day or decade to decade or generation to generation, but it's rare for us to be without one.

Notice that Jesus asks what they're fighting about, and they don't answer. This fight that was so important just moments ago disappears from their lips when Jesus asks about it. Throughout the rest of the book, we never find out what they were fighting about.

Joel Peterson '18

The place where a crowd has gathered in today's passage is a passing town not even worth naming. Context tells the reader only that it is a place in Galilee between the Mount of Transfiguration and Capernaum. As Jesus and his disciples attempt to sneak through to Jerusalem, they are delayed by a pressing need: a boy with an afflicting spirit.

Those who travel through my particular Pennsylvania passing town might stop in a small restaurant surrounded by empty hardware stores and banks. The lone server rises from the jigsaw puzzle that has momentarily kept their attention and brings your menus. As you wonder which selection might get you on your way the fastest, the server tells you the history of the town and recounts her trip to Woodstock '69. But the anecdotes turn a corner as she begins to tell you about her family. The stories of overdose deaths and addictions are enlivened in her telling. And yes, there's a boy—just 8 years old—with an afflicting spirit.

A passer-through might initially be taken aback by her vulnerability, but regulars know that this never-busy restaurant is a place of prayer. The boy, just like the nameless child in Mark's Gospel, has an ailment that makes normal life impossible. The doctors have diagnostic terms for his condition. They have treatments and medications that insurance won't cover. The need is no different than it was for the disciples of Jesus. “Why can we not cast it out and set the boy free?” we ask.

Lent invites us to spend time in the places of little importance, to stop in the town where most only pass through. This season invites us to spend time with the unanswerable questions, with people who cry out for a healing that seems like a fantasy. As we pray, we say “I believe; help my unbelief.” We hold fast to the promise that the one who travels through the valley of the shadow of death with us rebukes the spirit of death itself. We declare our belief that the children of God whom the world does not even stop to notice will be taken by the hand and enlivened with the Spirit who gives abundant life to all.

Prayer

Savior, remind us of the world's need for your healing power from the spirits of affliction. Help us to believe even when we find ourselves unbelieving. Lift us up with the determination to seek your liberating power in places where we might otherwise give up. Fill us with awe at the wonders you will show us in unlikely places. Amen.

Graham D. S. Deans '06

It's remarkable how frequently great occasions are so swiftly followed by great challenges that drive us almost to despair. Today's post-Transfiguration narrative is a case in point—for after scaling the heights, we plunge to the depths, as we are confronted with a situation where failure loomed large. Back to reality with a bump!

Our Lord's disciples found themselves unable to heal a young man who was clearly deeply disturbed—psychologically, physically, and spiritually—and his father was at his wits' end. His faith was being challenged by circumstances that he could not control; and we feel for him. The disciples had tried to help, but had failed to cure the boy's distressing and self-destructive behaviour (which was attributed to demon-possession); and their confidence must have been at a pretty low ebb. Even Jesus was exasperated by their failure. So he had to take charge of the situation himself.

The curse of failure affects all who are called to ministry—for none of us is ever omni-competent. We need to have the grace and the humility to accept that we don't have all the answers to life's deepest and most challenging questions—but like the disciples, we do know someone who does.

The causes of failure are many and varied. But pressure, stress, pastoral inexperience, lack of spiritual perception and wisdom, and sometimes, even over-confidence in one's own abilities are surely significant. The necessary qualities to enable us to exercise an effective ministry may take a lifetime to develop properly.

The same goes for the cure for failure: it does not come instantaneously, but results from the discipline of lifelong learning from the Master—whose strategy for overcoming failure may be summarised by the exhortation: "If at first you don't succeed, pray, pray, pray again!"

Prayer

Almighty and eternal God,
whose Spirit helps us in our weakness,
and guides us in our prayers;
give us the grace and humility
to learn of him who was gentle and lowly of heart;
that we may find rest for our souls
in accordance with our Saviour's promise,
and thus be enabled to minister effectively
in his name. Amen.

Mark 9:30-41

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." 32 But they did not understand

what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. 33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" 34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." 38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 Whoever is not against us is for us. 41 For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

In case we missed it in the previous chapter, Jesus again explains what's coming. We've come through the halfway point of the book now, and once again Jesus points us to what is coming. We also see a continuation of a theme that popped up earlier in this chapter, this attention to children. We saw Jesus heal the child at the foot of the mountain, and here we see Jesus doing something interesting. In the previous story, the people were focused on an argument, which caused them to neglect a child in need. In this passage, Jesus physically places a child in their midst. We actually get a lot of physical description in the story—at least compared to the rest of Mark. We're told that Jesus sat down, that he put a child in the middle of the conversation, and then picked the child up in his own arms. Mark actually describes Jesus' posture here, and what we see is Jesus sitting down, holding a child. He is physically correcting the errors of the previous passage. In the midst of another argument, Jesus is forcing them to focus on a child. He then takes it even farther and encourages them not only to notice children, but to welcome children as if they were welcoming Jesus himself. Once again, he highlights how silly some of their arguments are when the arguments overshadow the people around them.

Jessica Kelecava '13

Do we ever notice how patiently Jesus teaches, enlightens, and corrects his disciples? He has had the chance to tell them once more what will come of him. The disciples are still bothered and shocked by this revelation. So they distract themselves with bragging rights of the greatest in saying, "Well, I'm the best at this important thing—surely I'm more important than you," and back and forth they go along the road. And Jesus stops and challenges them once more and says, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (Mk 9:35).

Are we not the same as the disciples? How quickly do we forget or misunderstand the sacrifice Jesus made for us? In our own struggles we turn to ways of bettering ourselves and doing our best. We become the best at something and find the right to brag to others about it. Jesus is showing the disciples not just to serve for themselves or selflessly, but to remember him. The disciples were only beginning to understand the miracle of Jesus himself as the Son of God. And every day and through every pain in life and every puff of pride or burst of anger, we can try to remember how Jesus serves us through his sacrifice to bring us life. Jesus is the greatest of all. May we strive to be like him, but in all blessings and good things may we recognize him.

Prayer

Dear Lord, as we walk through the wilderness of life and reflect on how you did the same, may we remember your humble service to us. May we remember the ultimate sacrifice you willingly gave so that we in turn may show your greatness and life to all. Amen.

Joshua Demi '20

Easter and Christmas, Lent and Advent: it is utterly unexpected that the two great festivals and two great seasons of the church year surround times when God was vulnerable. Eternity, infinity, majesty, and glory, cooed and cried, bled and died. The Almighty One became small, in order to lift up the lowly. The Immortal One died, to lead those held captive by death through the grave and out the other side, into a new creation, into a world made whole, made new.

There is a lot of talk in the world today, even (or perhaps particularly) in ministry settings, about success. Discussions of “What is a successful ministry?” often quickly become discussions of “Who is the greatest?” What constitutes success? What is greatness? Where do we find it, and how ought we to measure it? Is it in the size of our platform? Is it in our talents, or skills, or personal charisma? What Jesus teaches in both word and deed is that greatness is found in humility and love.

Do not let anyone tell you that you are too small, too poor, too weak to matter. Do not let anyone tell you that you or your church is too small, too weak to matter. Every act of humility and love is a fragrant offering to God. In every community that shares the love of God with the lowly and welcomes the outcast, in every person who comforts the afflicted and loves their neighbor, there is greatness.

Prayer

God of humble glory and glorious humility, who lifts up the lowly and comforts the afflicted, may we not seek to be great in the eyes of the world, but seek the greatness revealed in you. Thank you for the ways you are at work in countless small communities—feeding the hungry, welcoming the outcast, and comforting the afflicted. In the name of Christ, the Incarnate One, who cooed and cried, bled and died, we pray. Amen.

Exodus 5:1-6:1

1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.’” 2 But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go.” 3 Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword.” 4 But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!” 5 Pharaoh continued, “Now they are more numerous than the people of the land and yet you want them to stop working!” 6 That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors, 7 “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ 9 Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words.” 10 So the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you straw. 11 Go and get straw yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.’” 12 So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw. 13 The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, the same daily assignment as when you were given straw.” 14 And the supervisors of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, “Why did you not finish the required quantity of bricks yesterday and today, as you did before?” 15 Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, “Why do you treat your servants like this? 16 No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people.” 17 He said, “You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to

the LORD.’ 18 Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks.” 19 The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, “You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks.” 20 As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them. 21 They said to them, “The LORD look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.” 22 Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, “O LORD, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? 23 Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people.” 1 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land.”

Derek Davenport '05/'17

This passage is in Mark one of the most frightening passages in the book. Jesus threatens to tie stones around people’s necks and throw them into the sea.

Again we see this strange familiarity with the sea, and in this passage, the sea assists Jesus in defending the defenseless. It’s interesting that the Exodus reading for today is the beginning of Moses’ encounter with Pharaoh—which will culminate with the sea assisting the Lord in defending the defenseless. Notice that the defenseless, in this case, are children. This continues the theme we’ve encountered over the last few days.

We haven’t seen much of this kind of anger from Jesus up to this point in Mark—it’s a threat to the helpless that brings it out. This should be comforting when we feel helpless and frightening when we threaten those who are.

Mark 10:1-16

1 He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around him; and, as was his custom, he again taught them. 2 Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” 3 He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” 4 They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” 5 But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. 6 But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ 7 ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” 10 Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11 He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” 13 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 15 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” 16 And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

Jesus teaches. That’s not surprising; he’s spent much of his time throughout the gospel doing just that, and the people had a chance to sit and learn from Jesus. But notice what the Pharisees do. They try to test Jesus. The students test the teacher. They’ve got it backwards! How can a student learn if she is too busy testing the teacher?

Yet, look at Christ's response. He doesn't admonish them for asking. He handles the test and teaches them from it. Perhaps it's not as much as they could have learned if they had listened obediently, but even then, the Teacher teaches.

Mark 10:17-31

17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" 20 He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." 21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." 22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. 23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." 26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." 28 Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." 29 Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

"He went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions."

We typically read this story with the assumption that the rich man is sorrowful because he won't sell his possessions, but sometimes I wonder. The story doesn't necessarily say that. Could it be that the man grieves precisely because he intends to obey? Perhaps he knows exactly who Jesus is, and he intends to follow the command. He's been told to give away his "stuff," and it's not easy. Giving is tough. Obedience is tough. He grieves the loss of his favorite things. He grieves the loss of the little luxuries that he knows he doesn't need, but enjoys nonetheless. Perhaps he grieves at the loss of the old, because he's not yet ready to rejoice at the birth of the new.

Scott Hagley, faculty

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The question comes from a man bowing before Jesus, still heaving to catch his breath. The wealthy man catches Jesus just before his journey to Jerusalem. Jesus' short response leaves the man in grief and the disciples perplexed. If a man with such wealth, intentionality, and moral certitude cannot be saved, then who can?

We find ourselves asking the same question today. Saturated with middle-class anxieties, we wonder whether Jesus really meant for the man to sell all he has, or what it means to leave family for the sake of God's call. But Jesus' response to the disciples rebukes their (and our) concerns. The wealthy man will not achieve God's salvation; neither will we. The point is not where God draws the line for acceptable

sacrifice, but rather the proximity and mobility of the disciple in relationship to the living Lord. Jesus asks: “will you go with me even to places of suffering, poverty, death?” The man’s wealth and the disciples’ family offer ready excuses to answer Jesus with a well-meaning “not yet.”

Verse 32 shows a small band of disciples walking behind Jesus in amazement and fear. Mark seems to suggest that this is eternal life; even better, this is the way of eternal life. Lent is about turning and returning to this way in repentance and belief. Let us find ourselves on the road and in our neighborhood with Jesus, wherever he may be heading.

Prayer (Psalm 27:1-5)

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? When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh—my adversaries and foes—they shall stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. 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. 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. Amen.

Chad Bogdewic '10/'13

What do you have to lose? This is an interesting response to the prospect of trying something new. For some, this question is an automatic reaction to the presentation of a different possibility. The rich man in today’s passage had a very real chance of losing everything. In his mind, he could not follow Jesus, because it was too expensive.

Jesus, I would imagine, was quite sad about this exchange. The rich man asked the wrong question, as people tend to do. The question was not “What do I have to lose?” but “What do I have to gain?” We are sometimes afraid to try new things or experiences because of the potential cost. A former professor of mine said, “People prefer the misery they know to the mystery they don’t.”

We can get stuck at times—stuck in the things that we own and stuck in the things that own us. We get stuck because we are afraid of change, because our identities are intricately tied to and interwoven with the various things we have. If the rich man would have given away all the things he owned, he would no longer be “the rich man,” causing an existential identity crisis. But unbeknownst to him, there was a new and better identity waiting for him in the arms of Jesus: an identity of love, an identity a community, an identity of care and concern, an identity of baptism, an identity of adoption. An identity that transforms us, molds us, and completes us.

Sometimes we get stuck not knowing who we truly are, unaware of the truth that Jesus offers us: not just a *new* identity, but a *better* identity. In our search for identity, we pick up a few needless things along the way, but the waters of baptism can wash them off as we put on the garments of humility and grace. When we do this, we learn who we are and whose we are, and that identity is better than anything the world can offer.

Prayer

Wondrous Lord, we often don’t know who we are. We think we do, but then we get lost in the things that weigh us down. Free us from our misery and lead us into your mystery. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Greg Steible '14

I was having pad thai with a photographer friend of mine a few weeks ago. He was telling me about an upcoming trip to Central America and all the packing required. Three or four days in the jungle looking for the most beautiful birds and three or four days relaxing on the beach requires a good deal of packing. Not only does he have to dress appropriately for the places he'll be, but he has all these different (and expensive) lenses he brings with him—and a laptop, several memory cards, and an external hard drive. It's significant packing.

Sure, Central American birds are likely beautiful and the beach down there must be amazing. But he and I both live on islands in the Puget Sound. We have beauty all around us here, too. He's captured some amazing orca pictures in what amounts to his backyard. But his desires to see new things and encounter new bits of God's creation and witness unique wildlife moments is unwavering. He makes significant sacrifices to be able to make these sorts of trips. They're expensive, they're time away from family, friends, and comfort, there's jetlag involved. I love the passion he has. He is pumped for this trip, and this is just one of several he's been on. I'm inspired by him—and his art.

Following Jesus is something akin to the passion of my photography buddy. It means being willing and excited to go to great lengths for Jesus' purposes and tasks. There may be sacrifices to be made, but when we exude the passion of following Jesus, they sure don't feel that way. By God's grace, the things we give up for the sake of Jesus are liberating and Jesus' call is life-giving.

Prayer

Lord, strengthen us. As we are challenged to follow you every moment of every day, help us to see the joy you offer as we recognize the hope you provide. Amen.

Mark 10:32-45

32 They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, 33 saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; 34 they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again." 35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" 39 They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." 41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

Look at these guys! They're not even listening. Jesus attempts to prepare them, again, for what is to come, and they're so busy thinking about what they'll say next that they don't even listen. They're too busy hatching a scheme, and look what happens.

They don't get what they ask for, instead they get something they didn't expect. They get something that they may not want, but something connected to the request.

Do they end up in the right and left hand seats? Jesus doesn't say. Ultimately, it doesn't really even matter.

Mark Allio '11

In these verses, Jesus reveals the gravity of the mission ahead, foretelling his imminent suffering and death. Remarkably, amidst this revelation, he teaches a crucial lesson on servant leadership. Jesus, the Son of God, models humility on the journey to the cross, dismantling earthly expectations of power and prestige.

In a society driven by ambition and the pursuit of greatness, Jesus redefines leadership. He contrasts the world's hierarchical structure, where rulers lord over their subjects, with the kingdom's radical model. True leadership, he asserts, is not about dominating but about serving.

Jesus uses the metaphor of drinking from the cup he drinks and undergoing the baptism he undergoes. This imagery symbolizes the sacrificial nature of leadership, where leaders are called to share in the sufferings of those they serve. And both baptism and cup point to the sacraments connecting us both to Christ's sacrifice and Christ's victory. Lent beckons us to consider our willingness to embrace this sacrificial cup in our own lives.

Jesus points to himself as the ultimate servant, declaring that even the Son of Man came "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." This powerful proclamation encapsulates the essence of Lent—a season of introspection, repentance, and a renewed commitment to selfless service.

As we journey through Lent, let us ponder the implications of Christ's call to servant leadership. How can we, in our roles and spheres of influence, emulate Jesus' humility and sacrificial love? This season prompts us to examine the motives behind our actions, inviting a shift from self-centered ambitions to a posture of genuine service.

May this Lenten journey be a transformative one, as we embrace the model of Jesus, the Servant-King, and allow his selfless love to shape our hearts and actions.

Prayer

Dear God, during this Lenten journey, we seek your guidance in understanding and embodying servant leadership as modeled by Jesus. May his humility inspire us to serve with selflessness and compassion. Grant us the strength to drink from the cup of sacrifice, embracing your call to love and serve others as we follow the example of our Servant-King. Amen.

Mark 10:46-52

46 They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." 50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." 52 Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

Bartimaeus has an incredibly energetic faith. He shouts. Then he shouts louder. Then when the people who seem to be silencing him suddenly tell him to get up, he springs to his feet. He is excited about Christ. The apparently healthy people around him don't seem to share that excitement. It's the blind man who seems to truly see what's happening—we've seen this before in Mark. Notice how Jesus responds to Bartimaeus. Jesus doesn't say, "Your sight is restored." Jesus responds by saying, "Your faith has made you well." This emphasis on being "well" should also sound familiar. Jesus isn't only concerned with Bartimaeus' sight, Jesus is concerned with making him well. Even better than that, Jesus charges him to "go." Bartimaeus is made well in order that he can go out and live. He is called to action.

Ellen Dawson '09

"... When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'"

When reading the story of Bartimaeus, we often focus on his actual healing from being blind. But instead, I encourage us to notice the first thing Bartimaeus says: He asks for mercy—and he continues to ask for mercy despite the reprimands from the crowd. Now that took faith.

Perhaps we too can ask for mercy today and let this be an expression of our own faith. Praying the Jesus Prayer is one way to do just that. Take a moment now to pray the Jesus Prayer aloud or in silence several times: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Jesus says to Bartimaeus, "Your faith has healed you." May this prayer for Christ's mercy bring healing today.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, may the mercy you have washed us in bring us the healing for which our brokenness so desperately hungers and thirsts. Amen.

Helen Kester '06

Tomorrow is Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week. Today we sit with blind Bartimaeus in the dark unable to see Jesus approaching. As we look at our world, we see wars and murder; we hear of human trafficking and child abduction and addictions to everything from drugs to work, and we yearn to be blind to the needs that surround us and deaf to the cries of pain that assail us. But the words of Mark and the story of Bartimaeus draw us into the hope of belief in the redeeming work of Jesus the Christ. Jesus calls us to him. We can tell him the pain, the sorrow, and our feelings of being overwhelmed by the demands of the world. He hears. Jesus knows all our concerns and asks us, "What do you want me to do for you?"

We are each asked that by our Savior. Too often we forget that Jesus wants us to be honest with ourselves and him. We try to hide our pain, our feelings of inadequacy, and the overwhelming sense that we cannot carry all our burdens. Jesus knows and is calling us to him and asking what we need. We need not hide. Like Bartimaeus, we are invited to shout out to Jesus, "Have mercy on me!" What are you lugging into Holy Week that Jesus wants to help carry? Do you have an illness, are you caring for someone who is ill? Or is it relationship problems, money issues, problems at work, or just a general feeling of dismay with the world in which we live? Whatever the burden that is making you blind to the love and hope of the Easter message, tell it to Jesus. Give it to him and accept his help and the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Jesus who searches and calls to us, help us to hear and respond. Help us to name our needs and accept your help and guidance, in your holy name. Amen.

Mark 11:12-25

12 On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it. 15 Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; 16 and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." 18 And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. 19 And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city. 20 In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. 21 Then Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." 22 Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. 24 So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

After reading Luke's account of the cleansing of the temple, we now turn to Mark's account. As Jesus invades the temple, assaulting the commerce within, he enrages the authorities. They recommit themselves to the plotting that they had started so long ago, and they begin to move forward rapidly. As we continue our journey through Mark, we know that the time is coming. In less than one week we will see the culmination of their schemes—and God's response.

Alice Phillips '94

Today's passage relates to the greatest lesson I learned at PTS.

I was in Doug Hare's Greek Exegesis class. We were never to call him Dr. Hare; it was Doug. During that particular week, a student group was hosting the Rev. Don Bartow. Don was a friend of mine, and he and his wife were both on campus. I was transporting them to various places and making sure they were fed each day. Needless to say, something had to go . . . which was my Greek homework. On this

particular day in class, I “passed” twice. Doug always let students pass when they did not know the answer to a homework question, but it was unusual for a student to pass on two questions in a row. After I passed the second time, Doug asked me how many times I was going to pass. My face obviously showed embarrassment and hurt. With hesitation, I said I also had to leave early as I was responsible for chapel that day.

At the end of the chapel service, I was holding the tray of the remaining communion cups as I began to clean up the chapel. Doug walked up to me and said he realized he was a little sharp with me in class and could tell by my face that my feelings had been hurt. He said it was obvious I had been quite busy that week. Then he asked me if I would forgive him.

That moment has been etched in my mind ever since. Doug taught me the greatest lesson I ever learned in seminary. It wasn't about Greek. It wasn't from a lecture. It didn't come from a class book. It came from the very best book of all: the Bible. You see, Doug had every right to be irritated with me that day in class. After all, I didn't have my homework done. He was a well-respected, well-seasoned professor, and I was just a student. I have never forgotten the example of humility that he showed me in asking for forgiveness. I will never forget what I was holding in my hand—the cup of forgiveness—Jesus' blood which was shed for each one of us. For Doug Hare, for me, and for you.

Almost 20 years later, and not long before his death, I had the wonderful opportunity to write a letter to Doug to remind him of that incident in chapel. He was grateful and moved. Forgiveness is powerful, and the impact lasts well beyond 20 years!

Today's Scripture passage tells us to forgive. If you have anything against anyone, forgive so that God in heaven may also forgive you.

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for this season of Lent. It is a time to reflect upon the tremendous sacrifice your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, made for each one of us in his shed blood on the cross. Lord, we ask that you help us not just to remember and reflect, but also help us daily *to live* with a forgiving spirit toward those who have hurt us and to ask for forgiveness from those whom we have hurt. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Mark 11:27-33

27 Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him 28 and said, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?” 29 Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30 Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me.” 31 They argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ 32 But shall we say, ‘Of human origin?’”—they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. 33 So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

Michael Spezio '96

In loving memory of Pfarrer Wilhelm Handwerk

“By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?” These two questions come to Jesus just after he enters Jerusalem and is walking in God's holy place of prayer. He will choose to answer only one of them.

The leaders are afraid. They question him out of their fear and not from any authentic seeking, not from wanting genuine understanding. Jesus perceives this motivation. For, on his last visit to Jerusalem and the Temple, Jesus drove out those who had turned God's place of prayer into a marketplace, a place of dishonest trade, a place where money was changed, not hearts. The leaders were afraid then, and they are afraid now. So they ask their questions.

Their questions were about Jesus' authority, about his "creative power," as the two words read in Greek. By what creative power is Jesus doing these things, these shocking things, in their city? Jesus, always the compassionate one, does not turn aside from these leaders and their fearful questions. He promises them that he will answer, if only they will kindly answer him. He asks them about John the Baptizer: Was his baptism really of heaven, or was it a deception that issued only from the mind of one man?

But why does Jesus ask them this question about the Baptizer at this time, about the one who once stood in a river outside the city, the wild one clothed in camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey? Jesus knew John. Jesus had joined the Baptizer in the waters of the river. And so he asks the leaders a question to which they should know the answer very clearly: that John preached a baptism of repentance, of renewal, of an inevitable change brought about by the forgiveness of sins. How could the leaders have failed to perceive the answer to their own question when John walked among them? If they failed to understand the ministry of John, surrounded as he was by crowds of people coming up out of the water to new life, what possible answer could they now want from Jesus about his own wondrous acts?

When the leaders in their fear turn back to Jesus with a non-answer, Jesus nevertheless and in compassion answers them through his own non-answer. He bypasses their question about who might have given him the creative power by which he acts. Jesus is not John. Instead, Jesus chooses to say that he will not tell them of his own creative power, the power which he himself holds and by which he is doing all of these things. In making his choice about which question he will *not* answer, Jesus states clearly the reality of his own creative power, his power and authority, by which he not only calls all to seek the forgiveness of sins but gives assurance of the forgiveness of sins to all as well. May we have ears to hear both the call and the assurance of Jesus.

Prayer

Compassionate Jesus, you are full of wisdom and creative power. You stand and receive our questions, relentless as they are, driven by fear as they are, and you grant us the forgiveness of our sins. You do not turn away, but are ever ready to answer us in forgiveness. Open our ears to hear your answers, to perceive your meaning in them. Grant us the grace of discernment. Help us to release our fear as we turn more and more toward you, to let go our fearful questions, the questions to which we in your grace already know the answers. Bring us to the feeling of your gentle voice and of your full welcome, the feeling of the sure trust that we are ever held aloft in and by your creative power.

Mark 12:1-11

1 Then he began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. 2 When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. 3 But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. 4 And again he

sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. 5 Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. 6 He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 7 But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 8 So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. 9 What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. 10 Have you not read this scripture: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 11 this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?"

Hunter Farrell, staff

The Gospel of Mark's hard-hitting parable echoes the violent story told in Isaiah 5, where "the house of Israel" is identified as a chosen, privileged vineyard. Even though Yahweh had done everything possible to prepare His vineyard to produce fruits of justice and righteousness, it yielded only "bloodshed" and injustice. So the Lord destroyed the vineyard. Today's text from Mark takes the Isaiah story a step further by introducing the vineyard-owner's son into the story: when the unruly vineyard workers refuse to listen to the pleas of the owner's messengers to produce desirable fruit, the owner sends his own son, but "they seized him, killed him and threw him out of the vineyard."

The temptation to early Christians was to misinterpret their "chosenness" as license to disobey God's call to right relationship with God and neighbor—wrongly to assume, as Israel had done, that God's saving acts in history did not require from them the fruits of repentance and justice. American Christians have been abundantly blessed: we have enjoyed economic prosperity (relative to many parts of the world), freedom of religion and expression, and a strong democratic tradition. Yet many global Christians question whether U.S. Christians allow our faith to guide our social and political choices. Has our *privileged* position as "the redeemed" dulled our memory of the time when we were immigrants?

Prayer

God of Life, As we consider all you have done for us in Christ, give us hearts that overflow with gratitude and guide our choices in relationship with the poor and oppressed in ways that please You. Show us clearly what the fruits of righteousness look like today around issues of racial justice, immigration, and poverty. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Mark 14:12-25

12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 13 So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, 14 and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' 15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." 16 So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. 17 When it was evening, he came with the twelve. 18 And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." 19 They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" 20 He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. 21 For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." 22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." 23 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to

them, and all of them drank from it. 24 He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Carmen D. Cox Harwell '01

No one wants to be singled out, called out, or the object of a negative shout-out when we've done the wrong thing. We know that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," (Rom. 3:23) but no one wants their "shortness" to be put on blast for the world to see, judge, or condemn. In this text, that's what Jesus does during an evening of fellowship with his disciples over the Passover meal.

After settling into an upper room, out of nowhere, Jesus drops a bomb-shell over the evening: "Truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me" (vv. 17). Distressed by such an emphatic accusation, the disciples questioned who it might be because, "Surely," they all said, "not I?" Without singling out, calling out, or giving a shout-out of the disciple's name, Jesus distresses the brothers further: "It is one of you—one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me" (vv. 20). The disciples think, What? We *all* have—all 12 of us have dipped our hand and our bread into the bowl with you. Are you saying that not just *one* of us will betray you, but all 12 of us will?

No one wants to be "*that one*" who is singled out, or called out with a shout-out of woe for betraying the Lord. But the truth is that we are *all* "*that one*"! Yet even betrayal can't keep Jesus from going to the cross for us!

Prayer

Father, we admit we have dipped our hand into the bowl of betrayal. Help us to be more faithful. Single us out for mercy. Call us out when we are unforgiving. Shout-out *our* name among the many who will one day "drink of the fruit of the vine," new with you, in the kingdom of God." Amen!

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."

Mark Tidd '18

Jesus directs his words to unnamed listeners who were far from what the prophet Micah said the Lord expected: "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). The fasting and tithing of the Pharisee in the parable was contradicted by his arrogance, whereas the tax collector felt profoundly his deep need for God. While it's obvious who our model should be, it can perhaps be tempting to reassure ourselves that we are not like "those Pharisees"—and perhaps to take just a little pride in our humility.

Then comes Ash Wednesday, and with it the words of the liturgy: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return; repent, and believe in the gospel.” We have the obligation and the opportunity to confess our sinfulness and to cry with the tax collector, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” We receive the cross-shaped mark of ashes on our foreheads as an intimate sign that all we can do is accept our dependence on the mercy of God. And we just might recognize that the mercy of God is enough, and is reason enough for deep thanksgiving and joy.

May we give thanks to God on this Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent for the mercy shown to us in Jesus as we prepare our hearts to observe the shattering goodness of Good Friday and the astounding goodness of Easter.

Prayer

God of grace and mercy, grant us the true humility that abandons pretense about our own righteousness. Enable us to repent truly and to believe your Good News with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. Amen.

Wendy Farone '21

There is an old Mac Davis song called “It’s Hard to be Humble” that begins, “Oh, Lord, it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way.” This satirical song points out how quickly we determine our place as above that of others. At times we believe that the blessings we have received are of our own making, due to our brilliance and good works.

In today’s parable, Jesus teaches about the human condition of self-righteousness. The Pharisee is learned, of high status, and follows the rules of fasting and tithing. The Pharisee prays to God, not for his undeserved gifts, but in thanks that he isn’t one of “those people.” One can just envision his upturned nose and eyes scanning others over his robed shoulder. It is as if he is saying, “Lord, it’s hard to be humble, when you’re perfect in every way like me.”

The tax collector also stood before the altar in prayer. In contrast to the Pharisee’s haughty assuredness, the tax collector “would not even look up to heaven” (18:13). He stood away from the others because he felt unworthy before God. He displayed his repentant heart as he cried, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” hoping to be restored to righteousness.

The twist at the end of Jesus’ lesson is that the tax collector who recognized his sinful nature and turned to God for mercy was the one exalted! The Pharisee found no need to repent since he was “perfect.”

Martin Luther wrote about believers not focusing on themselves but rather, by faith, on Christ and their neighbors. We are far from perfect in every way—and that is exactly why we seek the Lord’s mercy.

Prayer

Good and gracious God, thank you for your steadfast mercy. Though I fail, I thank you for your forgiveness and guidance as I try again and again to be humble. I am reminded in your word to look toward you and not within myself. Amen.

Carolyn Cranston '99, staff

A thumb covered in ashes presses against your forehead, making the sign of the cross, while your pastor says, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” On this Ash Wednesday, as we begin the Lenten season, it is once again time to remind ourselves of our mortality and our sinful natures.

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is a vivid example of the grace that God extends to us, despite our penchant to sin. The Pharisee went up to the temple to pray, giving thanks to God because he knows he is better than those who sin. He is righteous and spouts off about achieving all the things that are required of him. When he finishes his prayer, he is the same person that he was when he started. He is still righteous; perhaps we would call it self-righteous.

The tax collector, aware of his sinful nature, could not even gaze up to the heavens. He sees himself as wretched. He shows humility, but it goes deeper than that. The contrite tax collector empties himself, pours himself out before God and asks for mercy. He offers God nothing. He has no good deeds to recount. The tax collector trusts God to provide what he needs. He heads home justified.

God knows our hearts. When we surrender to God and accept that God is in control, our lives are changed. God loves us, claims us as God's own, and helps us live into our potential. We too will go home justified before God, by grace, through our faith in Jesus the Christ.

"You see, a potter can only mold the clay when it lies completely in his hand. It requires complete surrender." - Corrie Ten Boom

Prayer

Holy and all-knowing God, we give you thanks for the many ways that you bless us, even in our imperfection. Teach us, in all humility, to surrender ourselves completely to you—heart, mind, and strength. Then, Lord, mold and shape us to be the persons that you created us to be, a new creation in Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Luke 19:41-48

41 As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. 44 They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.' 45 Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; 46 and he said, 'It is written, "My house shall be a house of prayer"; but you have made it a den of robbers.' 47 Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; 48 but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

At the beginning of Holy Week, the daily lectionary gives us passages that differ from the traditional passages we associate with each event. Today, we read Luke 19:41-48. In Luke, this passage comes immediately after the triumphal entry, and it's not what we would expect. Following the joy and shouts, the excitement and celebration, Jesus weeps. He knows what's coming. Regardless of the joy of the day, Jesus never loses sight of where he's heading.

Luke 24:1-35 (for lectionary passage 24:13-35)

1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside

them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8 Then they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened. 13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19 He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." 25 Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. 28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Wendy S. Farone '21

Do you remember Easter morning when you were a young child? My family did not go to church so it never crossed my mind that connecting Easter with Jesus was a thing. Rethinking, we did go to church one Easter as I remember my sister and I had matching dresses. She wore a cute sailor hat with her ensemble and I wore a really ugly flowered one. The kids made fun of me; I built a resentment; so much for going to church on Easter.

We three siblings did have to wander around the house looking for our Easter baskets filled with candy and a big solid chocolate bunny. The excitement was in the seeking. The joy was in the finding and the moment I took that first bite of solid chocolate bunny ears, I believed in heaven!

I look back on those days with a smile and recognize how much of the meaning of Easter was missed in my youth. I believe that Jesus was there in my ignorance and lack of opportunity. At the time, as with

the women who visited the tomb, "I did not see him." Jesus was there nonetheless in my laughter, my fulfilled expectations, my gratefulness, and my faith that this year, we would have a basket of undeserved plenty.

I attend worship for four days in a row during Easter season. I cry at worship on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. I am solemn on Holy Saturday and on Sunday when the doors to the sanctuary are thrown open; the sights of the altar adorned with color and the smell of flowers on Easter Day overwhelm me, and I cry again. "Then [my] eyes are opened, and [I] recognize him." My heart burns "while he [is] opening the scriptures to us!" I seek to understand. I engage in the joy of the glorious gift of God's grace and mercy. The Lord offered his beloved Son to save us from our ignorance and lack of opportunity in order that we may see him clearly. And I know that I am in his presence. Thanks be to God!

Prayer

Good and gracious God, how many times we did not see you when you were right there with us? How many times we settle for those things we believe that we should seek but discover that they are fleeting moments of a childish wish. Lord, our hope is in you; our hope of resurrection into eternal life. This Easter season may we remember the Lord has risen indeed. May we rejoice that "he has been made known in the breaking of the bread" now and forever. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

John 1:1-18

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15 (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

John Campbell '74

During my very first week in Greek class with Dr. William Orr at Pittsburgh Seminary, we were required to memorize the first verses of John 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This, for St. John, and for you and me, is set in the context of God's creation, incarnation, and re-creation.

Easter morning demonstrates God continuing to give the gift of life to his people. This festival of re-creation is God's celebration of humanity. It is God's entrusting of God's self to human beings—to you and to me—through God's incarnation. Divinity was clothed in humanity so that humanity might be clothed in divinity. Easter means that you and I are holy and intended to be holy, not as an achievement

on our own, but as a gift from God. This is the gift of Christmas that culminates in Easter—the gift that empowers us to become children of God.

Have you ever thought of yourself as a sacrament? Have you ever looked at someone across the street and said, “Hey, look! There is the sacramental image of God”? What is it that prevents us, do you think, from seeing that image in ourselves and each other? In Jewish tradition, rabbis recount that each person has a procession of angels walking ahead of him or her and crying out, “Make way for the image of God.” Can we even begin to imagine how very different our lives and our world might be if we lived with this as the reality and truth that guides our lives? It would mean that everywhere we go, God’s angels would go before us shouting out loudly and clearly, “Here comes an image of God!”!

And so, what Easter morning means for us is the fulfillment of the Incarnation, that day known to us as Christmas, as “God with us” to share our joys and bear our sorrows. In truth, 33 years of “God with us” continues today, for us, in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit!

And so, if that is the truth of Easter for us, then it may also be the Easter truth for our next-door neighbor, for those we love, for those we fear, for those who are like us and those who are different, for the stranger, and yes, even for our enemies. It means that we cannot limit Easter to a one-day event. We must begin to think of the “Easter Son-Rise” as a style of daily living and a way of being. We must begin to understand Easter as a verb rather than a noun—and to live out our daily lives with that understanding.

Prayer

Our Lord and our God, on this day when we celebrate your resurrection, help us to come to understand that Easter is much more than a one-day celebration each year. Help all of us to know and understand ourselves as an “image of You.” And empower us to live out our daily lives as your image to our family, friends, neighbors, strangers, and yes, even, our enemies. Amen.

John 5:19-24

19 Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. 20 The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. 21 Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. 22 The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. 24 Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

Derek Davenport '05/'17

In this morning’s passage, it’s striking just how different the Gospels of Mark and John are. The tone, the style, even the vocabulary are completely different. Although the person we encounter is the same, it’s helpful that throughout Lent we have the chance to encounter two different voices in describing Jesus.

In this passage Jesus talks about life. The language is different, the tone is different, but this Jesus is consistent with the accounts we have encountered in the Gospel of Mark—encounters when Jesus heals the paralytic, cures on the Sabbath, and calls sinners. Whether it’s the abstract and poetic words about

moving from death to life, or concrete stories about healing, Jesus is concerned with bringing healing, life, and forgiveness.

John 5:25-29

25 "Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26 For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; 27 and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. 28 Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Derek Davenport '05/'17

One of the wonderful things about the structure of Lent is that each week we are given a reminder of Easter; we have respite in the midst of our intense reflection. In addition to the 40 days of preparation, we are given Sundays to stop and focus on what is coming. Today, we return to the Gospel of John, and once again we read words of death transformed into life—words that send us forward to Easter. As we take refuge from our time of preparation, we are reminded of where this story is going. We are reminded that whatever is coming in the weeks ahead, the ultimate authority rests in Jesus. We are reminded that death does not have the last word. We are reminded that Easter results in life.

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."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

Once again we turn to John. As we have noticed each Sunday, the tone and style of John are completely different from those we've encountered in Mark. Here, Jesus makes a comparison that sends us back to Exodus, reminding us of God's provision to Israel in the wilderness. The story Jesus chooses is one of salvation at a moment of desperation. The people had left their homes to find themselves starving in the wilderness. The manna saved their lives. Jesus is calling to mind a time when God brought life from the jaws of death. Jesus also talks about bread and life, both sending us back just a few days and forward to

the Last Supper, and also to Easter Sunday. Once again, we are given this moment of refuge in the midst of our preparation that provides a glimpse of what is coming.

Cindy Parker '10

In December of 1991 I married my college sweetheart. He was raised Catholic in a small town in western Pennsylvania, and I grew up attending The First Presbyterian Church of Bernardsville, N.J. During the seventeen years we were married, I occasionally accompanied him to mass and agreed to baptize our three daughters in the Catholic Church. Whenever I visited his church, I was never welcome at the Lord's Table. I was invited to walk forward with my children, but was always denied the bread and the cup because I was not Catholic.

We divorced in the spring of 2007, and I began my studies at PTS in the fall of that same year. The following year I was able to travel to Israel with a group from PTS and it was there that I understood Jesus' words for the first time, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Our group spent Saturday night in the small town of Jifna, where we were invited to worship the following morning with Father Emil's Catholic congregation. As the priest stood up at the communion table my stomach sank. "Another table where I won't be welcome," I thought. Then Father Emil did something surprising—he invited all of us up to receive communion!

Tears streamed down my cheeks as I walked forward to celebrate, truly celebrate, that I was excluded no longer, there was a place for me at the Lord's Table!

Prayer

Bread of Life, help us to understand that your grace is sufficient to welcome ALL to your table.
Amen.

John 8:46-59

46 Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? 47 Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God." 48 The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" 49 Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. 50 Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge. 51 Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." 52 The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?" 54 Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, 'He is our God,' 55 though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. 56 Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad." 57 Then the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Joan Reasinger '86

Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am" (v. 58). And once again they attack Jesus. This time they insist that his teachings are demonic in origin; that his power is

evil rather than good; that he is from Satan rather than God; that he proclaims Yahweh, not Abraham, as Father. Jesus ends the controversy with the affirmation that he has existed long before Abraham.

Earlier the leaders had asked him the question, "Who are you?" Jesus told them: "I am the light of the world." Now they ask accusingly, "You're a Samaritan, aren't you? You have a demon, don't you?" Then they add, "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" Jesus brings the controversy to an end when he says "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." With this statement, Jesus declares his deity. He declares that God is his Father. In Jesus, the eternal God showed himself to humanity.

How often have we asked "Jesus, who are you?" and failed to listen for his answer. How often do we set traps for Jesus seeking to challenge his power? How often do we seek our own power to save our troubled world instead of trusting in the power of Jesus? How often do the sounds of our own thoughts drown out the voice of the I AM?

The season of Lent gives us the opportunity to step back from the controversies that fill our lives, to silence the questions that cloud our minds, and to focus on Jesus and what we see God to be through and in Him.

Prayer

Forgive us, Lord Jesus, when we question and doubt, when we challenge and accuse. Fill our hearts and minds with your love and grace, and help us know you are the "I AM," who is all we need. Amen.

John 12:1-8

1 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" 6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Chad Bogdewic '10/'13

I remember that when I was a child I looked forward to my birthday and Christmas every year. I looked forward to receiving gifts; it was a way for people to show their love for me, and it made me feel special. I think there is something about receiving and giving gifts that makes us feel special and loved. I now watch with glee as my kids open their gifts for their birthdays and Christmas.

In the Gospel reading, Mary, the sister of Martha, gives Jesus an extravagant gift, a jar of costly perfume that she used to anoint Jesus' feet. As the scheming Judas watches, Jesus explains the use of the perfume: anointing him for burial. In this small exchange we are reminded of what is to come, the death and burial of our Lord, Jesus Christ. As we prepare for the sacred memory of the death of our Lord, His resurrection, and through that our salvation, let us give to God our gift of devotion. Let us come to our Lord, much like Mary, and offer ourselves to the One who offered Himself to us.

Prayer

Lord, allow us to be like Mary, devoting ourselves to you in heart, soul, and might. Give us the strength to love you more, to be the people you have called us to be. Amen.

John 13:1-17, 31b-38 (see lectionary passage 13:36-38)

1 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. 14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16 Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. . . . 31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33 Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." 36 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward." 37 Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." 38 Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times."

Derek Davenport '05/'17

In the Gospel of Mark we've read both Peter's confession of faith and his confused attempts at faithfulness. We've seen the contrast to his faithfulness in the authorities. Yet here in John, we discover that even Peter will crumble. If we had reason to hope that any disciple would stand firm, it would be Peter. Yet here, we find that Peter will fail not once but three times. Peter naturally disagrees, but we know he's wrong. Not even Peter will stick with Jesus.

Don Dawson, retired staff

"How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me?" the Psalmist asked in Psalm 116 after a near-death experience. We can't! It is all a gift through God's unmerited grace.

Is there anything we can do? Psalm 116:13 says, "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord." Today, many of us will literally lift up the cup of eternal salvation as we participate in the

Lord's Supper (Eucharist = "Thanksgiving"). Proclaiming our thanks to God by our worship and sacramental remembrance is the essential response we can make: "for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

When Jesus initiated the "Thanksgiving," he began by washing the feet of the disciples and telling them that "servants are not greater than the one who sent them." Jesus made plain that their "Thanksgiving" extended from the intimacy of worship to the living of each day in humble service of those around them. He concluded, "Just as I have loved you, you should love one another." By our worship, serving, and proclaiming, we offer thanks to God, whom we can never repay.

Prayer

All praise and thanks to you, Almighty God, for you have created us, redeemed us, and continue to provide for us. As an act of worship and devotion, we offer our witness to the saving love of Jesus. Help us to speak the good news boldly and serve others humbly, so that in all we do, we honor you. Amen.

John 17:1-8

1 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. 6 "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

John Magnuson '13

Through this journey of Lent we slow our pace to a crawl during Holy Week. We pause each day to remember the last moments of Jesus' earthly life before his crucifixion. On Maundy Thursday, we find ourselves with the disciples resting at the feet of Jesus as he offers this prayer, which extends through verse 26.

With Jesus' prayer washing over us, we wish for his words to linger just a little while longer, so that we may bask in his love and care for us. We hold on to these words, for we know that the words to come next are those of betrayal. Together, Jesus' prayer and his subsequent betrayal act for us as a mirror in which we see, simultaneously, both God's desire for us and our own disobedient brokenness.

As we pause to sit with Jesus' prayer, may we also sit with him on the night of his betrayal. Resting in this tension, may we sit still enough to see through the cracks of our lives as his grace shines through to fulfil the hope of his prayer.

Prayer

Ever faithful God, we give you thanks that on the night of your betrayal you were not concerned for yourself but prayed for us, and for all your disciples, that we may be one. By your Spirit unite us through your grace, peace, and love. Amen.

John 17:9-19

9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.

13 But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Sue Sterling Montgomery '77

John's Gospel passage could be called a conundrum of words going 'round and around. They sound a lot like the 1930s song "The Music Goes Round and Round," recorded by Tommy Dorsey:

I blow through here,
The music goes 'round and around—
Whoa-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho—
And it comes out here.
I push the first valve down,
The Music goes down and around—
Whoa-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho—
And it comes out here.
I push the other valve down,
The music goes 'round and around—
Whoa-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho—
And it comes out here.

Jesus' prayer seems a lot like air going 'round and around in a trumpet and coming out as sounds—sounds that are confusing: no longer in the world/in the world, hated by the world/do not belong to the world, not out of the world/no longer in the world, into the world—what?

To understand Jesus' prayer we have to go back in time and understand how two opposite views of life guided ancient thinking. Greek philosophy saw the world as divided into two realms: the earthly and the spiritual. This view led to a major understanding of Christianity that still haunts us today—the belief that Christianity is about life *not* in this world but in the next world. Jesus brings these dual and conflicting images into his prayer. He knows the people listening to him are struggling to understand, just as we are, these dualities as well as the more troubling concepts of heaven and hell. This way of thinking has a long history that isn't going to go away.

But Jesus gives us another way to view our complicated and spinning world. He was nurtured in the Judaic understandings of life and creation: the world—heaven and earth—is one *holy* place created by God. God is *in* the world, and holiness in life is lived *in* the world. Nowhere do we see this view more clearly than in the words of the Lord's Prayer for God's kingdom to come "on earth as it is in heaven."

As the music goes 'round and around in our lives, where is it coming out—in love, or in Law? In grace and forgiveness, or in fear and judgment? Is the song we are singing *in* the world and affirming of life? Or is it a song of separation? May the music of our hearts go 'round and around—and come out with Jesus' glorious and jubilant words of grace, faith, and promise.

Prayer

Most gracious and loving God, on the night of Jesus' birth his cry burst into song, which changed history. As he grew, his teachings became life-changing songs of love. When he was tried, crucified, and died, the world thought his song was silenced. His resurrection brought forth a glorious song of unending love. Help us never to forget that, if Christ's song is to continue, we must do the singing. May we sing a jubilant song of faith, hope, love, and justice "on earth as it is in heaven." In Christ we pray, amen.

Dave Dack '11

Just knowing that Christ prays for us is a tremendous encouragement. Of all that he has done for us, this scene of Jesus' prayer in John 17 is perhaps the most touching. Having loved us so thoroughly in his ministry, and knowing he would soon suffer for our sins, Jesus made the effort to pray for us.

Our Savior's prayer was simpler than the thick grammar of John's Gospel suggests. Jesus asked the Father to protect us from the evil one. Echoing the Lord's Prayer in which we ask to be delivered from evil (or "the evil one"), Jesus asked the same thing on our behalf. Jesus wanted God to protect us from the evil one.

People will pay good money for protection. We buy insurance against loss and theft; we invest money to protect against an impoverished retirement; we vaccinate our children to protect them from disease. In our spiritual life, we try to protect ourselves from the evil one by practicing our faith, keeping busy with religious activity, or even by deciding that evil isn't real and "the evil one" doesn't exist.

But only God in heaven can protect us from the evil one. And according to Jesus, this protection takes a very specific form: unity. "Protect them . . . that they may be one." Unity is the best protection against evil, whether personified or not. Of course, unity does not require uniformity, but our best chance of being protected from evil is to remain united in Christ.

May this season of Lent be an occasion for us to recommit ourselves to Christian unity, not only to guard against the divisive schemes of the evil one, but most of all to enjoy Christ together and so fulfill humanity's chief purpose.

Prayer

O God of reconciliation and peace, who loved us first and initiated our salvation, open our hearts and make us willing to pursue unity within your Church, not waiting for others to meet us where we are, but eager to meet others where they are. Bid us to surrender every priority and pretense that keeps us apart and make us one in Christ, that we may overcome evil with good. Amen.

John 17:20-26

20 "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Karen Baughman '06

The time has come. Change is in the air. Jesus has shared his last meal on earth with his disciples and given them his final instructions and reassurances. Jesus will soon lay his burden down and go to the cross.

Before leaving the safety of the upper room, Jesus begins to pray. He prays for his disciples, but more amazingly, he prays for us who will believe in Jesus in the days, years, and centuries to come.

All of us will know change in our lives. For some of us, it will be as monumental as the disciples knew in the death and resurrection of their Teacher and Lord. For others, it will be small changes throughout our lives. Even our churches and our seminary will know change. Throughout all the changes we will know as individuals and as groups, Jesus prayed for us. He prayed for our unity. He prayed that we will know we are loved by God. He prayed we will live in such a way so that the world may know God.

Amazing! Jesus knew we would need God's love and help through it all.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for loving us before we were even born. Thank you for sending your Son to show us your love and how we should live. Be with us through all the changes in our lives. Help us always to reflect your face in all that we do and say and think. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.