



# Big Book of Lenten Devotionals—Year 2

Based on the Daily Lectionary of the  
*Book of Common Worship*

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary’s 2025 “Big Book of Lenten Devotionals—Year 2” 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 2, 2025

This compendium of devotionals follows the Daily Lectionary readings for Lent 2025. 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; Isaiah 49:1-7; John 4:5-42 (with John 5:5-29); 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 – March 5 (Ash Wednesday)

- Morning [Psalms 5](#); [147:1-11](#)
- First Reading [Jonah 3:1-4:11](#)
- Second Reading [Hebrews 12:1-14](#)
- Gospel Reading [Luke 18:9-14](#)
- Evening Psalms [27](#); [51](#)

### Day 2 – March 6

- Morning Psalms [27](#); [147:12-20](#)
- First Reading [Deuteronomy 7:6-11](#)
- Second Reading [Titus 1:1-16](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 1:29-34](#)
- Evening Psalms [126](#); [102](#)

### Day 3 – March 7

- Morning [Psalms 22](#); [148](#)
- First Reading [Deuteronomy 7:12-16](#)
- Second Reading [Titus 2:1-15](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 1:35-42](#)
- Evening Psalms [105](#); [130](#)

### Day 4 – March 8

- Morning [Psalms 43](#); [149](#)
- First Reading [Deuteronomy 7:17-26](#)
- Second Reading [Titus 3:1-15](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 1:43-51](#)
- Evening [Psalms 31](#); [143](#)

### Day 5 – March 9

- Morning [Psalms 84](#); [150](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 9:23-24](#)
- Second Reading [1 Corinthians 1:18-31](#)
- Gospel Reading [Mark 2:18-22](#)
- Evening Psalms [42](#); [32](#)

### Day 6 – March 10

- Morning [Psalms 119:73-80](#); [145](#)
- First Reading [Deuteronomy 8:1-20](#)
- Second Reading [Hebrews 2:11-18](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 2:1-12](#)
- Evening Psalms [121](#); [6](#)

#### Day 7 – March 11

- Morning [Psalms 34](#); [146](#)
- First Reading [Deuteronomy 9:1-12](#)
- Second Reading [Hebrews 3:1-11](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 2:13-22](#)
- Evening Psalms [25](#); [91](#)

#### Day 8 – March 12

- Morning [Psalms 5](#); [147:1-11](#)
- First Reading [Deuteronomy 9:13-21](#)
- Second Reading [Hebrews 3:12-19](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 2:23-3:15](#)
- Evening Psalms [27](#); [51](#)

#### Day 9 – March 13

- Morning Psalms [27](#); [147:12-20](#)
- First Reading [Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5](#)
- Second Reading [Hebrews 4:1-10](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 3:16-21](#)
- Evening Psalms [126](#); [102](#)

#### Day 10 – March 14

- Morning Psalms [22](#); [148](#)
- First Reading [Deuteronomy 10:12-22](#)
- Second Reading [Hebrews 4:11-16](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 3:22-36](#)
- Evening Psalms [105](#); [130](#)

#### Day 11 – March 15

- Morning [Psalms 43](#); [149](#)
- First Reading [Deuteronomy 11:18-28](#)
- Second Reading [Hebrews 5:1-10](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 4:1-26](#)
- Evening Psalms [31](#); [143](#)

#### Day 12 – March 16

- Morning Psalms [84](#); [150](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 1:1-10](#)
- Second Reading [1 Corinthians 3:11-23](#)
- Gospel Reading [Mark 3:31-4:9](#)
- Evening Psalm [42](#); [32](#)

#### Day 13 – March 17

- Morning Psalms [119:73-80](#); [145](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 1:11-19](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 1:1-15](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 4:27-42](#)
- Evening Psalm [121](#); [Psalm 6](#)

#### Day 14 – March 18

- Morning Psalm [34](#); [146](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 2:1-13, 29-32](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 1:16-25](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 4:43-54](#)
- Evening Psalms [25](#); [91](#)

#### Day 15 – March 19

- Morning [Psalms 5](#); [147:1-11](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 3:6-18](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 1:26\(28\)-2:11](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 5:1-18](#)
- Evening Psalms [27](#); [51](#)

#### Day 16 – March 20

- Morning [Psalms 27](#); [147:12-20](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 2:12-24](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 5:19-29](#)
- Evening Psalms [126](#); [102](#)

#### Day 17 – March 21

- Morning [Psalms 22; 148](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 5:1-9](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 2:25-3:18](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 5:30-47](#)
- Evening [Psalms 105; 130](#)

#### Day 18 – March 22

- Morning [Psalm 43; 149](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 5:20-31](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 3:19-31](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 7:1-13](#)
- Evening [Psalms 31; 143](#)

#### Day 19 – March 23

- Morning [Psalms 84; 150](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 6:9-15](#)
- Second Reading [1 Corinthians 6:12-20](#)
- Gospel Reading [Mark 5:1-20](#)
- Evening [Psalms 42; 32](#)

#### Day 20 – March 24

- Morning [Psalms 119:73-80; 145](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 7:1-15](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 4:1-12](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 7:14-36](#)
- Evening [Psalms 121; 6](#)

#### Day 21 – March 25

- Morning [Psalms 34; 146](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 7:21-34](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 4:13-25](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 7:37-52](#)
- Evening [Psalms 25; 91](#)

#### Day 22 – March 26

- Morning [Psalms 5; 147:1-11](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 8:4-7, 18-9:6](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 5:1-11](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 8:12-20](#)
- Evening [Psalms 27; 51](#)

#### Day 23 – March 27

- Morning [Psalm 27; 147:12-20](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 10:11-24](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 5:12-21](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 8:21-32](#)
- Evening [Psalm 126; 102](#)

#### Day 24 – March 28

- Morning [Psalms 22; 148](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 11:1-8, 14-17](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 6:1-11](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 8:33-47](#)
- Evening [Psalms 105; 130](#)

#### Day 25 – March 29

- Morning [Psalms 43; 149](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 13:1-11](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 6:12-23](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 8:47-59](#)
- Evening [Psalms 31; 143](#)

#### Day 26 – March 30

- Morning [Psalm 84; 150](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 14:1-22](#)
- Second Reading [Galatians 4:21-5:1](#)
- Gospel Reading [Mark 8:11-21](#)
- Evening [Psalms 42; 32](#)

#### Day 27 – March 31

- Morning Psalms [119:73-80](#); [145](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 16:1-21](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 7:1-12](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 6:1-15](#)
- Evening Psalms [121](#); [6](#)

#### Day 28 – April 1

- Morning Psalms [34](#); [146](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 17:19-27](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 7:13-25](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 6:16-27](#)
- Evening Psalms [25](#); [91](#)

#### Day 29 – April 2

- Morning Psalms [5](#); [147:1-11](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 18:1-11](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 8:1-11](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 6:27-40](#)
- Evening Psalms [27](#); [51](#)

#### Day 30 – April 3

- Morning Psalms [27](#); [147:12-20](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 22:13-23](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 8:12-27](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 6:41-51](#)
- Evening Psalms [126](#); [102](#)

#### Day 31 – April 4

- Morning Psalms [22](#); [148](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 23:1-8](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 8:28-39](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 6:52-59](#)
- Evening Psalms [105](#); [130](#)

#### Day 32 – April 5

- Morning Psalms [43](#); [149](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 23:9-15](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 9:1-18](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 6:60-71](#)
- Evening Psalms [31](#); [143](#)

#### Day 33 – April 6

- Morning Psalms [84](#); [150](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 23:16-32](#)
- Second Reading [1 Corinthians 9:\(16\)19-27](#)
- Gospel Reading [Mark 8:31-9:1](#)
- Evening Psalm [42](#); [32](#)

#### Day 34 – April 7

- Morning Psalms [119:73-80](#); [145](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 24:1-10](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 9:19-33](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 9:1-17](#)
- Evening Psalms [121](#); [6](#)

#### Day 35 – April 8

- Morning Psalms [34](#); [146](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 25:8-17](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 10:1-13](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 9:18-41](#)
- Evening Psalms [25](#); [91](#)

#### Day 36 – April 9

- Morning Psalms [5](#); [147:1-11](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 25:30-38](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 10:14-21](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 10:1-18](#)
- Evening Psalms [27](#); [51](#)

#### Day 37 – April 10

- Morning Psalms [27](#); [147:12-20](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 26:1-24](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 11:1-12](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 10:19-42](#)
- Evening Psalms [126](#); [102](#)

#### Day 38 – April 11

- Morning Psalms [22](#); [148](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 29:1-14](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 11:13-24](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 11:1-27](#); [12:1-8](#), [10](#)
- Evening Psalms [105](#); [130](#)

#### Day 39 – April 12

- Morning [Psalms 43](#); [149](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 31:27-34](#)
- Second Reading [Romans 11:25-36](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 11:28-44](#); [12:37-50](#)
- Evening [Psalm 31](#); [143](#)

#### Day 40 – April 13

- Morning Psalms [84](#); [150](#)
- First Reading [Zechariah 9:9-12](#)
- Second Reading [1 Timothy 6:12-16](#);  
[Zechariah 12:9-11](#); [13:1](#), [7-9](#)
- Gospel Reading [Matthew 21:12-17](#)
- Evening [Psalms 42](#); [32](#)

#### Day 41 – April 14

- Morning Psalms [119:73-80](#); [145](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 11:18-20](#); [12:1-17](#)
- Second Reading [Philippians 3:1-14](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 12:9-19](#)
- Evening Psalms [121](#); [6](#)

#### Day 42 – April 15

- Morning Psalms [34](#); [146](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 15:10-21](#)
- Second Reading [Philippians 3:15-21](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 12:20-26](#)
- Evening Psalms [25](#); [91](#)

#### Day 43 – April 16

- Morning [Psalms 5](#); [147:1-11](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 17:5-10](#), [14-18](#)
- Second Reading [Philippians 4:1-13](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 12:27-36](#)
- Evening Psalms [27](#); [51](#)

#### Day 44 – April 17

- Morning Psalms [27](#); [147:12-20](#)
- First Reading [Jeremiah 20:7-18](#)
- Second Reading [1 Corinthians 10:14-17](#);  
[11:27-32](#)
- Gospel Reading [John 17:1-26](#)
- Evening [Psalm 126](#); [102](#)

#### Day 45 – April 18 (Good Friday)

- Morning [Psalms 22](#); [148](#)
- First Reading [Genesis 22:1-14](#)
- Second Reading [1 Peter 1:10-20](#)
- Morning Gospel Reading [John 13:36-38](#)
- Evening Gospel Reading [John 19:38-42](#)
- Evening Psalms [105](#) or [130](#)

#### Day 46 – April 19 (Holy Saturday)

- Morning [Psalms 43](#); [149](#)
- First Reading [Job 19:21-27a](#)
- Morning Second Reading [Hebrews 4:1-16](#)
- Evening Second Reading [Romans 8:1-11](#)
- Evening Psalms [31](#); [143](#)

**Day 47 – April 20 (Easter)**

- **Morning** Psalms **93**; [150](#)
- **First Reading** **Exodus 12:1-14**
- **Morning Second Reading** **John 1:1-8**
- **Evening Second Reading** [Isaiah 51:9-11](#)
- **Evening Gospel Reading** [Luke 24:13-35](#) or [John 20:19-23](#)
- **Evening** **Psalms 136; 117**

## Day 1

### **Jonah 3:1-4:11**

<sup>3:1</sup> The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” <sup>3</sup> So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. <sup>4</sup> Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” <sup>5</sup> And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. <sup>6</sup> When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. <sup>7</sup> Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. <sup>8</sup> Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. <sup>9</sup> Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.” <sup>10</sup> When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. <sup>4:1</sup> But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup> He prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. <sup>3</sup> And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” <sup>4</sup> And the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” <sup>5</sup> Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. <sup>6</sup> The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. <sup>7</sup> But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” <sup>9</sup> But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.” <sup>10</sup> Then the LORD said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. <sup>11</sup> And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

### **Michael Ondrick '19**

Jonah just *knew* what would happen when he went to Nineveh, and so much did he dread his seemingly inevitable fate that he attempted to travel to the ends of the earth to escape God’s plan for him. So too did the Romans know what would happen when they executed Jesus of Nazareth. This usurper, this so-called “King of the Jews”? Flogged, crucified, buried. So too did the chief priests and the scribes know what would happen when they set this course of events in motion. It would be the bloody end of this pretender—just another failed messiah who couldn’t save the Jews from oppression. The women who go to the tomb on the third day to anoint Jesus’ lifeless body do so because a tomb is where the dead lie. A tomb is where rotting corpses are put. Nothing but the bleeding, stinking, mad shadow of Jesus remains. Or so they thought.

In the angels’ admonishment of the terrified women at the tomb--“Why do you look for the living, among the dead?” (Luke 24:5)—we might hear something of God’s incredulity at the end of Jonah, where God comically reminds the poor sot just how many animals there are in Nineveh. Frankly, the angels’ question seems unfair, but it is a reminder to the women—as it is to us—that our God promises

release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and right-sided life in the world to come.

**Prayer**

Lord, whether we find ourselves in the belly of a big fish or staring forlornly at the crucified Christ, we know, O God, that not everything is as it seems. Show us the way of the One who lifts the lowly, brings the powerful to their knees—and robs graves. Amen.

**Paul Leone '90**

“The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ‘Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.’” I am writing this reflection while practicing social distancing, wearing a mask in public, and churches worship virtually in response to a virus that has literally sickened to death this globe.

Concurrently, a pandemic of another sort has shaken this country to its core—a disease unveiled by a video of a dying black man gasping for air. In angry response, a collective “Jonah” (protestors and demonstrators) has taken to the streets of Nineveh (think Minneapolis and beyond) proclaiming a message: “I can’t breathe,” “Get your knee off our necks,” “No justice, no peace.”

“Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’” Day after day the voice of the people in our city streets has grown larger and louder. The sin and wickedness they rail against? Racism, discrimination, and police brutality.

God’s message through Jonah stirred the hearts and minds of the people of Nineveh. “They proclaimed a fast and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.” Even the King of Nineveh rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. What is *our* country doing? Will God’s message through the collective street voice stir the hearts and minds of national, state, and local government? Will our leaders heed the prophetic word “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). Will this commitment infiltrate the decisions, policies, and reform desperately needed?

Further, what are we as individual Christians doing? Today is Ash Wednesday, the first day of 40 in this season of Lent, which takes its name from the imposition of ashes on the foreheads of worshipers as a sign of human sin and mortality. Are we sincere when we pray, with the psalmist, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). Do we take seriously *both* parts of Jesus’ call to “Repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15)?

I heard a black man telling his children they are in danger, not because of anything they have done, but because of the color of their skin. He said, “The skin is the sin.” Let *all* of us remember—we are dust, and to dust we shall return (Gen. 3:19b).

**Prayer**

“Breathe on us, breath of God, fill us with life anew, that we may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.” Amen.

**Dr. Steve Tuell, faculty emeritus**

Mostly, what folks know about Jonah is that he was swallowed by a fish. Our text today begins *after* that fish story, when Jonah set out a second time (his attempt to flee from God’s call had put him in the fish’s

belly in the first place) to deliver God's message of destruction to wicked Nineveh (3:4). But when the people of Nineveh repented, "God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it" (3:10). Jonah was furious—but not at all surprised. This, he said, is why he had fled earlier: "I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment" (4:2).

Jonah is (mis)quoting the Divine self-declaration in Exodus 34:6-7, which describes God as *wenaqqeh lo' yinaqqeh* ("by no means clearing the guilty"). Instead, he punningly describes God as *wenikham 'al-hara'ah* ("relenting from punishment"): sparing undeserving Nineveh, in conflict with God's own word. Jonah—rightly—accuses God of inconstancy. As Abraham Heschel observed, "God's answer to Jonah, stressing the supremacy of compassion, upsets the possibility of looking for a rational coherence of God's ways with the world."

On Ash Wednesday, as we reflect on ourselves as made from and returning to dust (Gen 2:7; 3:19), we may ask, with Jonah: shouldn't life, shouldn't God, be *fair*? But Scripture says no—that instead, God is gracious and compassionate. This offends our sense of fairness—until we are the ones in need of grace and compassion. Friends, as people made in God's image (Gen 1:26-27), may we extend to others the grace and compassion God has undeservedly lavished on us.

#### **Prayer**

Thank you, God, for showering your grace and compassion upon us. Teach us through these forty days to be ourselves gracious and compassionate—to love as we have been loved, to forgive as we have been forgiven. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our crucified Lord. 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."*

#### **Steve Shussett '93**

With Ash Wednesday beginning the forty days of Lent, many Christians undertake a spiritual discipline to connect with Jesus' time in the desert. This can mean prayer practices that take them out of their comfort zone, just as Jesus was taken out of his. Perhaps fasting from a favorite food, or more intentional devotional reading.

But what if you could pray just as meaningfully by simply remembering who God is and who you are? Instead of avoiding alcohol or reading a long book, you can just repeat a twelve-word phrase. From a handful of verses comes a handful of words that have changed the lives of many, particularly, but not only, of our Orthodox siblings.

Jesus' parable tells of a Pharisee celebrating his own goodness, crowning his self-congratulatory prayer by thanking God that he isn't like other people. Meanwhile, a nearby tax collector beats his chest, begging God to show him mercy.

This parable is at the core of the Jesus Prayer, frequently prayed as “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” A repetition of twelve words that acknowledge who Jesus is, who we are, and what we desperately need.

Unlike more challenging spiritual disciplines, this simple prayer is like the widow’s two mites: few words spoken faithfully that mean so much. An experienced practitioner might pray this hundreds or thousands of times daily, until it is prayed with every heartbeat, as in *The Way of a Pilgrim*.

You’re not there. But starting today, you might get one step closer. Begin hourly, and increase day by day, until it becomes a more natural impulse. Anytime, especially when your mind wanders to where angels fear to tread, these twelve little words are a faithful response to our God who in Christ first reached out to you.

### **Prayer**

“Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Jesus, I can’t begin to understand your depths, but you know me better than I know myself, and still you show me mercy. May I know myself and every sibling as a sinner, yes, but forgiven all the more. Amen.

## **Day 2**

### **Titus 1:1-16**

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness, <sup>2</sup> in the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised before the ages began—<sup>3</sup> in due time he revealed his word through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> To Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. <sup>5</sup> I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you: <sup>6</sup> someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious. <sup>7</sup> For a bishop, as God’s steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; <sup>8</sup> but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. <sup>9</sup> He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it. <sup>10</sup> There are also many rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision; <sup>11</sup> they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for sordid gain what it is not right to teach. <sup>12</sup> It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said, “Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons.” <sup>13</sup> That testimony is true. For this reason rebuke them sharply, so that they may become sound in the faith, <sup>14</sup> not paying attention to Jewish myths or to commandments of those who reject the truth. <sup>15</sup> To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are corrupted. <sup>16</sup> They profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

### **Lori Liller Arnold, staff (retired)**

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

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

### **Prayer**

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

### **Jon Mathieu '21**

On the one hand, let's not make too much of religious leaders. There is enough hero-worship of certain pastors, and pastors are no more important than anyone else. On the other hand, a clergyperson holds outsized influence in the particular community they shepherd, and sometimes a congregation will either soar to new heights of love or endure shipwrecks of crisis at the hands of its leader. This has seemingly always been the case, and so the first chapter of the letter to Titus gives ample attention to the qualifications of a pastoral leader.

Some of these strictures may seem outdated and draconian, and they certainly aren't followed by most traditions today. At least in my experience, synods or vestries aren't firing pastors who are married for a second time or whose adult children don't practice Christianity. But other items on this chapter's lists of dos and don'ts feel timelessly wise, as relevant in late-stage U.S. capitalism as they were in Rome-occupied Crete. Avoiding leaders who are arrogant, greedy for gain, deceivers. Choosing and forming leaders who are hospitable, self-controlled, lovers of goodness.

Lent is a time when all of us—not just clergy—are invited to reflect on our ways. These lists might help guide that work. Are there any seeds of arrogance, greed, or deception in our lives? How have we, and how will we, show hospitality? How will we love goodness?

### **Prayer**

God, you have shown us in Jesus what a life can look like when it is hospitable, self-controlled, and loves goodness. May our lives show more and more of your ways as your Spirit guides us. Allow us and our communities to soar to new heights together. Amen.

### **John 1:29-34**

<sup>29</sup>The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" <sup>30</sup>This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' <sup>31</sup>I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." <sup>32</sup>And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." <sup>33</sup>I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup>And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

### **Doris Calian, McMillan Society Member**

In this season of Lent, we renew our baptismal vows and begin afresh our journey with Jesus. We read and listen to Christ's teachings; we are inspired by His actions of kindness, healing, putting the needs of others before His own needs. We notice and respect His continually praying and seeking strength to know and follow God's will. We tend to be students of the wondrous biblical stories. But can we be more than students? Can we reach out to use and act on what we have learned and witnessed from the

example of Christ? Our actions do not earn God's love and forgiveness, but our actions are evidence of our joy and appreciation of God's gift to us. Let us step out by sharing our food, our comfort, our hospitality, and especially our love.

**Prayer**

Dear God, Thank you for the gift of your Son and His sacrifice for us. Give us the guidance and the courage to follow His teachings and His example by giving ourselves to others. Amen.

**Eric McIntosh '12**

Ok, straight to the point. John the Baptizer commands all to see what God has allowed him to see! Sometimes reflecting is an exercise of seeing. Poetically we are being asked to hold with our eyes, and deeper still, our mind, heart, soul, and spirit. For me, *see* is poetically bearing the weight of something with the inner me. I ponder what it was like for John the Baptizer to be given the privilege of seeing what the Holy Spirit looked like. God gave him the gift of seeing what no human has since declared seeing, The Spirit of God! John saw, beheld, took it all in, received and understood, in his mind, soul, heart, his inner man, his spirit! The magnitude and weight must have been overwhelming. The one who gave the Baptizer his calling and his sending, gave him the gaze of his Holy Spirit and the promise that this Jesus would be a baptizer of this Spirit! If that was not enough, John beheld, saw, understood, discerned that this Jesus was not only the Lamb of God, but the Son of God! This one takes away the sin of the world. John after seeing, proclaimed it!

What keeps us from proclaiming it today? This Jesus, who is the Lamb of God, takes away sin, and can do so because he is also the Son of God. Could it be that we do not see our sin? Could it be that we do not believe we sin? Could it be that we have let go of eternal punishment? Could it be that we are just so entitled that we are blind and cannot see? Maybe we have yet to behold him! How about we behold him this Lenten season.

**Prayer**

God almighty, stop us in our tracks and make us to see you, to see your only begotten Son, our savior who takes away our sin. Give us the capacity to hold with our hearts, with our eyes, with our spirits, who he is. Make us to humble ourselves to see our sin and with gratitude rise to proclaim to the world, our worlds, the magnitude of this one who would die for us, Jesus, our Lord and Savior, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God now and forever. Amen.

**Psalm 102**

<sup>1</sup> Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry come to you. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. <sup>4</sup> My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread. <sup>5</sup> Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my skin. <sup>6</sup> I am like an owl of the wilderness, like a little owl of the waste places. <sup>7</sup> I lie awake; I am like a lonely bird on the housetop. <sup>8</sup> All day long my enemies taunt me; those who deride me use my name for a curse. <sup>9</sup> For I eat ashes like bread, and mingle tears with my drink, <sup>10</sup> because of your indignation and anger; for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside. <sup>11</sup> My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass. <sup>12</sup> But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever; your name endures to all generations. <sup>13</sup> You will rise up and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to favor it; the appointed time has come. <sup>14</sup> For your servants hold its stones dear, and have pity on its dust. <sup>15</sup> The nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth your glory. <sup>16</sup> For the LORD will build up Zion; he will appear in his glory. <sup>17</sup> He will regard the

*prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer.* <sup>18</sup> *Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet unborn may praise the LORD:* <sup>19</sup> *that he looked down from his holy height, from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,* <sup>20</sup> *to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die;* <sup>21</sup> *so that the name of the LORD may be declared in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem,* <sup>22</sup> *when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.* <sup>23</sup> *He has broken my strength in midcourse; he has shortened my days.* <sup>24</sup> *“O my God,” I say, “do not take me away at the mid-point of my life, you whose years endure throughout all generations.”* <sup>25</sup> *Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.* <sup>26</sup> *They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away;* <sup>27</sup> *but you are the same, and your years have no end.* <sup>28</sup> *The children of your servants shall live secure; their offspring shall be established in your presence.*

### **Rebecca Dix '15/'16**

“For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace . . . I wither away like grass” (vv. 3, 11b). When time does its job well, what tends to be left behind are our bones.

We place a lot of trust in bones. They house and protect many vital organs. They provide structure, support, and enable mobility. If a house is solid and trustworthy to weather tempests and time, we say it has “good bones.” And in a number of cultures and civilizations, bones were depended on for tools, crafts, agriculture, and medicine. Bones have played a vital role in our current existence and also in learning about where we have been as a human species.

Yet as formidable and important as they seem, even bones are not permanent. Bones ache and break. They burn. One day they hold us upright, the next they pull us down. Back to the earth. Back to the dust. Back to the beginning.

Even our bones will perish and pass away. So during this Lenten season, place your trust in something that has weathered all time. Place your trust in the One who laid the foundation of the earth.

#### **Prayer**

God who hears the groans from our weary hearts and who knows the worn aches of our bones, whose name endures to all generations, hear our prayers. Walk with us as our days lengthen like evening shadows, and fix our sight on you alone. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

### **Day 3**

#### **Psalm 22**

- <sup>1</sup> *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?*
- <sup>2</sup> *O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;  
and by night, but find no rest.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Yet you are holy,  
enthroned on the praises of Israel.*
- <sup>4</sup> *In you our ancestors trusted;  
they trusted, and you delivered them.*
- <sup>5</sup> *To you they cried, and were saved;  
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.*

<sup>6</sup> *But I am a worm, and not human;  
scorned by others, and despised by the people.*

<sup>7</sup> *All who see me mock at me;  
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;*

<sup>8</sup> *“Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver —  
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”*

<sup>9</sup> *Yet it was you who took me from the womb;  
you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.*

<sup>10</sup> *On you I was cast from my birth,  
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.*

<sup>11</sup> *Do not be far from me,  
for trouble is near  
and there is no one to help.*

<sup>12</sup> *Many bulls encircle me,  
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;*

<sup>13</sup> *they open wide their mouths at me,  
like a ravening and roaring lion.*

<sup>14</sup> *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;*

<sup>15</sup> *my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,  
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;  
you lay me in the dust of death.*

<sup>16</sup> *For dogs are all around me;  
a company of evildoers encircles me.  
My hands and feet have shriveled;*

<sup>17</sup> *I can count all my bones.  
They stare and gloat over me;*

<sup>18</sup> *they divide my clothes among themselves,  
and for my clothing they cast lots.*

<sup>19</sup> *But you, O LORD, do not be far away!  
O my help, come quickly to my aid!*

<sup>20</sup> *Deliver my soul from the sword,  
life from the power of the dog!*

<sup>21</sup> *Save me from the mouth of the lion!  
from the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.*

<sup>22</sup> *I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:*

<sup>23</sup> *You who fear the LORD, praise him!  
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;  
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!*

<sup>24</sup> *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.*

<sup>25</sup> *From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.*

- <sup>26</sup> *The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.  
May your hearts live forever!*
- <sup>27</sup> *All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the LORD;  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before him.*
- <sup>28</sup> *For dominion belongs to the LORD,  
and he rules over the nations.*
- <sup>29</sup> *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.*
- <sup>30</sup> *Posterity will serve him;  
future generations will be told about the Lord,*
- <sup>31</sup> *and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
saying that he has done it.*

### **Michelle Keane Domeisen '12/'16**

There are times in our lives when we cry out to God with a sense of mistrust about whether He will answer us. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The grief of the psalmist is deeply palpable, yet the call to trust permeates the plea just as much. As mired as we are in the trials that afflict us, this psalm is a source of acknowledgement that our cries are worthy but our mistrust of God to answer us is not.

When we seek this psalm for comfort, our souls walk through the reminder and the revelation that God hears and answers. In some way, in His way, He answers. And in the process of waiting for the answer, we praise Him. We will glorify God in our pain and loss because, as Christians, we have been given the grace of eternal hope and comfort.

#### ***Prayer***

Precious Lord, we cry out to you from the depths of our souls. It is in glorifying you while in the midst of our pain that we come to understand the suffering you have experienced on our behalf. Help us always to remember to trust that you will hear and answer us in our grief. It is in your most holy name that we pray these words—You who are the Alpha and the Omega, from ages unto ages.

### **Rebecca D. Reeder '19**

Psalm 22 begins with the raw and familiar cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” These words, echoed by Jesus on the cross, speak to the dark nights of the soul we all experience. When I faced the devastation of a major loss recently, my prayer was raw: “Please, God, not this, not this death.” Although I didn’t feel forsaken, the silence was heavy. Still, the psalmist declares, “you [God] are holy.” Even in the pain I felt, I saw glimpses of God—like a stranger in an airport bathroom saying, “It’s gonna get worse, but you’ll get through it.”

The psalm’s further lament, “But I am a worm, and not human,” reflects the deep pain of feeling unseen and rejected. Yet even amid those feelings, the psalmist remembers: “You [God] kept me safe on my mother’s breast.” This duality of despair and trust resonates deeply. God’s past faithfulness reminds me that even in my hardest moments, I am not abandoned.

Psalm 130 offers a similar hope. It meets us in the depths of our sorrow, where we cry out to God, not as perfect people, but as those upheld by mercy. “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand?” These words assure us that God’s love is unending and unconditional. In this season of grief and waiting—waiting for healing, clarity, and renewal—my soul longs for God. God’s steadfast love is constant, and in God’s presence, I know we find hope.

These psalms remind us that God is present in our deepest struggles. They show us that our pain is not the end of the story. As Psalm 22 concludes, “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord.” Even (and maybe especially) through suffering, our lives can proclaim God’s faithfulness and deliverance to future generations.

### **Prayer**

God of steadfast love, meet us in the depths of our sorrow. When silence feels heavy and hope seems distant, remind us of your faithfulness. Sustain us through the pain, and help us trust that you are present, redeeming our struggles for your glory and our renewal. Amen.

### **Deuteronomy 7:12-16**

*<sup>12</sup> If you heed these ordinances, by diligently observing them, the LORD your God will maintain with you the covenant loyalty that he swore to your ancestors; <sup>13</sup> he will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock, in the land that he swore to your ancestors to give you. <sup>14</sup> You shall be the most blessed of peoples, with neither sterility nor barrenness among you or your livestock. <sup>15</sup> The LORD will turn away from you every illness; all the dread diseases of Egypt that you experienced, he will not inflict on you, but he will lay them on all who hate you. <sup>16</sup> You shall devour all the peoples that the LORD your God is giving over to you, showing them no pity; you shall not serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.*

### **John Culp '98**

“That’s not fair!” Most of us probably said it a time or two—or 20—to our parents when we were small. Some of us tend to feel that way on a regular basis through most of our lives. We may even be inclined to make the accusation against God.

These lines from Deuteronomy 7 give us ammunition for that charge, don’t they? Along with many other verses from the Old Testament, they paint for us a picture of a deity who showers blessings on his people Israel—routinely at the expense of innumerable Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, and an unfortunate army of assorted other “ites.”

But that decidedly—outrageously!—unequal treatment is of course baked into the cake of what it means to be God’s chosen people. It’s his recurring pattern: Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau; David, not Eliab or Abinadab or Shammah. And to magnify His “unfair” preference, the Lord stubbornly *continued* to bless the children of Abraham (droughts, plagues, and victorious oppressive enemies notwithstanding), even through their wearying, seemingly incessant rebellion and rejection of his rule over them. “. . . *heed these ordinances . . .*”? Not even close!

If Lent teaches us anything, it should surely be that time and again *we* are those maddeningly disobedient, ungrateful children of Abraham. We can’t even lay claim to the family tie, most of us, on the basis of blood. At least not our own. And if we’re ever inclined to shake a fist heavenward, railing against divine injustice (isn’t that at least *most* of us, from time to time?), we do well to remember also that the *last* thing any of us should ever demand from God is justice. Mark Twain may have been a

skeptic, even an unbeliever. But he surely got this much right: "If heaven went by merit instead of grace, your dog would get in and you would not."

May these days of somber preparation send each of us to our knees in genuine confession and sincere repentance. May they send us to the cross, where we can rejoice that God gives us infinitely better than justice. He gives us mercy. He gives us Christ.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, how amazing is the love in which you have provided a Savior for us in your beloved Son! Thank you, dear Lord! Please give us the further grace to glorify you in these days of Lent by growing ever more into his image. Send us to our neighbors near and far with the message of hope you have given us in Jesus. We ask it in his glorious name. Amen.

### **John 1:35-42**

<sup>35</sup> The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup> and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" <sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup> When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" <sup>39</sup> He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. <sup>40</sup> One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. <sup>41</sup> He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). <sup>42</sup> He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

### **Angela Rishell '18**

This story of John and his disciples is a great reminder of what discipleship is really supposed to look like. We don't know how long the two had been following John, but we know from their being called "disciples" that these men had been committed to their teacher. The moment John recognized the "Lamb of God," they immediately dropped their post and changed direction. Too often, as Christians we find ourselves going through the motions of busy daily lives. We believe that the life to which we have committed ourselves is pleasing to God, but we rarely allow God to intervene in our routine. I wonder what kind of powerful impact it would have if we followed the example of these two disciples by asking Jesus every day the all-important question, "Where are you staying?" and then, in response to that answer, dwell in that place with Him, thereby encouraging others to do the same. This season of Lent is an ideal time to reevaluate what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Take time at the beginning of this day to ask that question, discern Christ's response, and see what amazing things God will do with you.

### **Prayer**

Lord, where are you staying? Where are you going? Where are you leading? I desire to be a committed disciple to you, and I am willing to go wherever you lead. Guide my heart to love what you love. Guide my mouth to speak your words. Guide my mind to think your thoughts. Guide my hands and feet to go and serve your people with joy and love. Amen.

### **Cindy Parker '10**

In 2008, during my first year attending the Master of Divinity program at PTS, I was fortunate to travel to Israel with Dr. Barnes and a large group of folks from PTS and Shadyside Presbyterian Church. Our travels took us to Jerusalem where I met and conversed with an olive wood merchant about purchasing a nativity set. Eventually, the topic of religion came up. He asked if I was a follower of Christ, explaining

he was a Muslim, and then he laughed long and hard at the irony: a Muslim who sold Christian religious goods to tourists. During our conversation he mentioned that we were more alike than we realized because we worshipped the same God; we just called God different names.

When I returned home my 7-year-old daughter helped me unpack the nativity set, her delight in the smooth olive wood evident as she moved the pieces around on the coffee table. One day I came downstairs to find a lamb resting in the manger (baby Jesus was under the coffee table). When she saw me looking quizzically at the pieces, she replied, "Look Mom, it's the Lamb of God!"

We have so many names for the One we worship, for the One in whose image we've been created: Rabbi, Teacher, Messiah, Anointed, Allah, Lamb of God. No matter what name you call the One who continues to invite us to "Come and see" (v 39), the invitation continues to be extended. "Come and see" what new thing God is doing through you and those around you.

### **Prayer**

Lamb of God, you continue to invite us to "come and see." Help us have the courage this Lenten season to do just that. Amen.

### **Psalm 130**

<sup>1</sup> *Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.*

<sup>2</sup> *Lord, hear my voice!*

*Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications!*

<sup>3</sup> *If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?*

<sup>4</sup> *But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.*

<sup>5</sup> *I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;*

<sup>6</sup> *my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.*

<sup>7</sup> *O Israel, hope in the LORD!  
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.*

<sup>8</sup> *It is he who will redeem Israel  
from all its iniquities.*

### **Tyler Bayless '15**

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

### **Prayer**

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

### **Rebecca D. Reeder '19**

Psalm 22 begins with the raw and familiar cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" These words, echoed by Jesus on the cross, speak to the dark nights of the soul we all experience. When I faced the devastation of a major loss recently, my prayer was raw: "Please, God, not this, not this death." Although I didn't feel forsaken, the silence was heavy. Still, the psalmist declares, "you [God] are holy." Even in the pain I felt, I saw glimpses of God—like a stranger in an airport bathroom saying, "It's gonna get worse, but you'll get through it."

The psalm's further lament, "But I am a worm, and not human," reflects the deep pain of feeling unseen and rejected. Yet even amid those feelings, the psalmist remembers: "You [God] kept me safe on my mother's breast." This duality of despair and trust resonates deeply. God's past faithfulness reminds me that even in my hardest moments, I am not abandoned.

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### **Prayer**

God of steadfast love, meet us in the depths of our sorrow. When silence feels heavy and hope seems distant, remind us of your faithfulness. Sustain us through the pain, and help us trust that you are present, redeeming our struggles for your glory and our renewal. Amen.

## **Day 4**

### **Psalm 43**

- <sup>1</sup> *Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause  
against an ungodly people;  
from those who are deceitful and unjust  
deliver me!*
- <sup>2</sup> *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?*
- <sup>3</sup> *O send out your light and your truth;  
let them lead me;*

*let them bring me to your holy hill  
and to your dwelling.*

<sup>4</sup> *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.*

<sup>5</sup> *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.*

### **Ron Cole-Turner, faculty emeritus**

The Psalmist uses graphic language to describe what we call depression. It is the feeling of being “cast down” from within, as though the soul itself is being pushed down. It is the sense of being “disquieted,” agitated for no good reason. For millions of people, this describes reality.

When night closes in, what should we do? Turn to God, the Psalmist seems to suggest. Does that help? Not exactly. Notice how verse 4 (I “go . . . to God my exceeding joy”) comes before verse 5 (but I am still “cast down”).

Our text offers no quick fix. Hope in God and there’s no more depression? Wouldn’t that be nice? The truth is that God is no magic pill. The dark night of the soul can be long and frightening, empty except for bitter tears.

Hope in God, not because it lifts the despair, but because sometimes it is the only thing we can do. Hope and hang on.

#### ***Prayer***

Even in my sorrow, O God, speak to me. Use my darkness to help to reveal your light. Use the empty silence within me to help me hear you. Do not let me despair without your blessing me through it all, in Christ, I pray. Amen.

### ***Deuteronomy 7:17-26***

<sup>17</sup> *If you say to yourself, “These nations are more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them?”* <sup>18</sup> *do not be afraid of them. Just remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt,* <sup>19</sup> *the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the LORD your God brought you out. The LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples of whom you are afraid.* <sup>20</sup> *Moreover, the LORD your God will send the pestilence against them, until even the survivors and the fugitives are destroyed.* <sup>21</sup> *Have no dread of them, for the LORD your God, who is present with you, is a great and awesome God.* <sup>22</sup> *The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to make a quick end of them, otherwise the wild animals would become too numerous for you.* <sup>23</sup> *But the LORD your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great panic, until they are destroyed.* <sup>24</sup> *He will hand their kings over to you and you shall blot out their name from under heaven; no one will be able to stand against you, until you have destroyed them.* <sup>25</sup> *The images of their gods you shall burn with fire. Do not covet the silver or the gold that is on them and take it for yourself, because you could be ensnared by it; for it is abhorrent to the LORD your God.* <sup>26</sup> *Do not bring an abhorrent thing into your house, or you will be set apart for destruction like it. You must utterly detest and abhor it, for it is set apart for destruction.*

## **Jeanine Haven '00**

It is so easy to get caught up in the “big picture” of Deuteronomy 7:17-26 and to read it as a message of divine retribution. But sometimes in exploring specific verses, we discover what they may be saying to us today. So here, let’s consider Deuteronomy 7:22: “The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to make a quick end of them, otherwise the wild animals would become too numerous for you.”

Yes, it’s easy to discount this verse as being simply about God’s plan for his people in entering Canaan and therefore not applicable to life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But consider the fact that God tells the Hebrews not to try entering all at once, rather, little by little. And note the divine reminder that God will be present as they travel on this great new adventure—present to give guidance, strength, and encouragement every step along the way.

Now, think of all the times you have witnessed God’s helping someone little by little. The determined infant who keeps stumbling and finally, triumphantly, takes a first step! The cancer patient learning he’s in remission after going through rounds of treatments and multiple “clean” tests.

When we have a “life event” that initially seems overwhelming, if we take it one step at a time we have the potential to get through it successfully. We just need to remember that God is with us in each *little* step along the way!

### **Prayer**

God of grace and love, help us to realize that it is okay to lean on you. When we feel overwhelmed by life’s obstacles, remind us of your presence as we explore each new day little by little. We thank you Lord for your loving support! Amen.

### **Titus 3:1-15**

<sup>1</sup> Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup> to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone. <sup>3</sup> For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. <sup>6</sup> This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. <sup>8</sup> The saying is sure. I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone. <sup>9</sup> But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. <sup>10</sup> After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions, <sup>11</sup> since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned. <sup>12</sup> When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. <sup>13</sup> Make every effort to send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way, and see that they lack nothing. <sup>14</sup> And let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs, so that they may not be unproductive. <sup>15</sup> All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with all of you.

### **Christopher Graham Jr. '18**

“For we ourselves were . . . passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another.” Such is our modus operandi, our standard operating procedure, our way of living in the world. In our fallen world, we do not come pre-programmed with the way of love for other people. This place of malice is where we start and where we stand. Yet “according to his mercy” we need not stand, sit, or stay there. For the Spirit of God is poured out on the world through Jesus to enable our doing of good works. Speaking a bad word about our companions in the fellowship of humanity is at best stupid, Paul reminds us, while at worst such speech is a death-dealing false witness. So let us work on this flaw. Not that anything we do merits the kindness of our savior, but let us act as the heirs we are—heirs who are productive even though our inheritance is assured. Let us learn the new way of our Lord and Master: the way of subjection, obedience, benediction, genteelness, tenderness, and consideration to the taking on of our full humanity in him until we know no other way than his.

#### ***Prayer***

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, we acknowledge you as the one God who made humanity of one blood for your own inheritance. Might we be made good and kind to our fellow creatures, indeed to your whole creation, even as you have shown us goodness and kindness in the appearance of your Son. Have mercy upon us and forgive us according to your goodness and loving kindness. Renew us by your Spirit that we might be justified by your grace, leading us to the one hope of eternal life in your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

### **Stephanie Backus '24**

My family lost my grandfather this year. He was an incredibly pious man—the one who I looked up to in my own walk with faith. As I was gathering memories from all of the grandchildren for my eulogy for grandpa, I heard this theme over and over again: my grandfather was slow to anger. He was slow to tell someone they were wrong; whether he disagreed with their opinion or not. He valued different opinions and if we didn't have an opinion, he was quick to give us a middle of the road view on the topic so we could form our own thoughts. As I grew older I learned that theologically, we had very different beliefs, but they largely came from the same place: our faith in Christ.

As I read this passage for today, it reminds me of my relationship with my grandfather. Paul was clear: we may not agree with our political leaders, and we may not agree with one another. But because we put our faith in God, we have to devote ourselves to doing good. We have to focus on that instead of on what divides us. If we surround ourselves with those who share our love in Christ, no matter the differences we may have in our political beliefs or even in how we interpret the Bible, we can recognize that we aren't of this world—we are of God's kingdom. Together.

#### ***Prayer***

God of creation, we pray today that you will continue to remind us that we live in your creation. We pray that you will remind us that we are your children and are to continue living the life Christ taught us to in his ministry—the life where all are welcome in your kingdom. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

### ***John 1:43-51***

<sup>43</sup> *The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”* <sup>44</sup> *Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.* <sup>45</sup> *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.”* <sup>46</sup> *Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him,*

*“Come and see.”<sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”<sup>48</sup> Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”<sup>49</sup> Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”<sup>50</sup> Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”<sup>51</sup> And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”*

### **Jim Davison '69**

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

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

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

#### ***Prayer***

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

### **Tara Woodard-Lehman '03**

Today's passage opens with Jesus inviting Philip to “Follow me.” Philip, in turn, finds his friend Nathanael and tells him about “the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote— Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

At first, Nathanael is skeptical and asks, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Philip seems to brush off Nathanael's low view of Nazareth and responds, “Come and see.”

Philip doesn't clapback or correct Nathanael. He doesn't bombard him with information, bludgeon him with facts, or blame him for doubting. He refrains from heated debate and soaring rhetoric. Philip doesn't seek to proselytize or persuade. Instead, Philip simply invites Nathanael to “Come and see.”

But before Nathanael has a chance to see Jesus, Jesus sees him. Jesus declares, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” Here, Jesus sees with a kind of holy double-vision. It's not merely sight. It's also insight. Jesus doesn't just look at Nathanael; he understands him. Once he is seen and known, the once-skeptic declares, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”

Today's gospel reminds us of whom we follow: a savior who sees us fully, knows us deeply, and loves us beyond what we can imagine. Because of Christ's immense love for us, we are encouraged to invite others to simply "come and see" for themselves.

**Prayer**

God of Grace,

Thank you for seeing and understanding us. Lend us clarity and vision as we seek to follow Jesus these Lenten days. Show us how to serve our neighbors in a way that makes them feel seen, known, and deeply loved. Amen.

**Day 5**

**Psalm 84**

- <sup>1</sup> *How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O LORD of hosts!*
- <sup>2</sup> *My soul longs, indeed it faints  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and my flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.*
- <sup>3</sup> *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.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Happy are those who live in your house,  
ever singing your praise. Selah*
- <sup>5</sup> *Happy are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.*
- <sup>6</sup> *As they go through the valley of Baca  
they make it a place of springs;  
the early rain also covers it with pools.*
- <sup>7</sup> *They go from strength to strength;  
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.*
- <sup>8</sup> *O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah*
- <sup>9</sup> *Behold our shield, O God;  
look on the face of your anointed.*
- <sup>10</sup> *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.*
- <sup>11</sup> *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.*
- <sup>12</sup> *O LORD of hosts,  
happy is everyone who trusts in you.*

### **Robin Sharp '18**

Here in the midst of Lent, this season of intense contemplation for Christians as we prepare for that joyful Eastertide celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, we glimpse the times of trial found in both Testaments but most particularly those of Jesus in the wilderness. Over this 40-day period, some of us may engage this opportunity for renewal by fasting from certain foods. Others might fast from “screen time” to encounter the Lord personally in those nearest to them. Still others may take on a new task, such as meditation, prayer, Bible reading, or volunteering. Our common bond in all such activities is that each participant is seeking the “lovely dwelling place” of the Lord.

Psalms 84, at the time of its writing, most likely reflected the sense of people on a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem to seek God’s company. To us, however, this psalm can also have contemporary meaning in the light of God’s loving gift of the Holy Spirit. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we know each of us is a temple of the Lord’s. As a consequence, in all that we do, others should see that Love within us—in the care we take of our physical world, the earth, which we see as God’s dwelling place, and of all its inhabitants as well. And let us seek God’s goodness and love for all those with whom we walk.

We need not travel far to seek the Lord of Hosts; the Lord is here.

#### ***Prayer***

Oh Lord God of Hosts, we joyfully give you thanks that we need not search far to find your Holy Shelter, for it surrounds us and is in us. In this season of Lent, we look to the birds merrily building their nests throughout creation in anticipation of the glorious spectacle of the Renewed Life to come. Let it be so. Amen.

### **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.

### **Sara Lawson '18**

Several months back, I started praying for a house. I wanted a place where people would gather and I could offer them hospitality. It would have a front house that a family I know could rent and a little cottage in the back for me. In the spacious backyard between the two houses, we could plant a church. Weather is nice in Southern California, so meeting outside would typically be a pleasant experience, but we could move inside if it rained or on scorching hot days. Maybe we could even plant a garden to give back to the community and steward the resources God gave us.

While that house hasn't materialized, Psalm 84 reminds us of a different house, one in which we are not the hosts, but the guests. The psalmist longed for such a house, longed to dwell in God's house. Similar to my dream, it's a house of hospitality and blessing. "Blessed are those who dwell in your house" (Ps. 84:4).

But the psalm also reminds us that we are on a pilgrimage. We're caught in the tension between what we hope for and where we find ourselves. A longing for something better, something more, something dreamed of, and something that is still not yet. The journey is often challenging—treacherous, even. And as much as we long to be at the destination, or even a rest stop, we must continue on, relying on God alone to sustain us. "Blessed are those whose strength is in you" (Ps. 84:5).

I don't know what the future holds—if God will give me the house of my dreams or if he will reveal other, better dreams. But I pray that my deepest desire will be not for the house—even the house of God—but for God himself.

#### ***Prayer***

Lord God, in you I place my hope and all my trust. I surrender the dreams that are too small to be worthy of you. Help me to be faithful on this journey and to place my trust in you that I may one day dwell in your house and gaze upon your face.

### ***Jeremiah 9:23-24***

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

### **Michelle Snyder '09**

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

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

#### ***Prayer***

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

### **1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” <sup>20</sup> 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? <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup> He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

### **Mark Gaskill '03**

This passage is a terrible sales pitch. I will paraphrase a few of the highlights: “The cross is a ridiculous way to save the world,” “God picks stuff that doesn’t make sense to anyone, Jew or Greek,” “Oh, and all of us who follow Jesus, we’re pretty much just a bunch of losers—that’s how we know this is really God working in us.”

The reality today is that churches are failing. Some of us are failing numerically; declining attendance, membership, and commitment can be plotted on gloomy graphs and dire charts. In that scenario, we think we have to find a better sales pitch, so we try (too hard) to be something other than what we are. Others may be growing numerically but failing spiritually. They have abandoned the message of the cross to some degree in favor of something that seems less foolish to the comfortable and the privileged, and there they have found a market niche.

It is difficult for the human ego to accept the terms Christ offers us. Paul was no exception; he had to do it the hard way. He fought with himself and with others to keep focused on the reality that he was not the one who was responsible for doing the saving—God had to do it.

How do you “sell” *your* church? Do you tell people how ridiculous you are? Do you admit that you can’t do anything that’s good on your own? Do you confess that you are a sinner, for real, and that some of your sins are pretty bad?

False humility will not avail in this world—people are too used to being lied to and sold scams. The only place to be right now, if we want to live, is with God’s foolishness, which is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness, which is stronger than human strength.

### **Prayer**

Help us, Holy God, for we want so badly to be wise and strong. We spend so much time and energy seeking to project positivity and success. It is exhausting. We need to be vulnerable, but we just can’t seem to trust that it will work. Teach us what it means to offer our broken hearts

to you. Bind up the wounds we carry from trying too hard. If we fail, let us fail as Christ failed on the cross—if we succeed, it will only be in Christ. Amen.

**Brett M. Dinger '09**

As I read through the various texts for today, I found myself drawn to Paul's invitation to "consider your own call" (v 26). So I did just that. I enjoyed reliving old memories of the surprising and unlikely ways God called me into a life of discipleship and ministry. I recalled conversations with unusual characters—farmers and janitors among them—who named the Holy Spirit's work in me. I remembered encounters with strangers who saw something in me that I could not see in myself. And I recounted times in college when fellow students would randomly knock on my door to ask for spiritual advice. Looking back, I can testify to the truth of the Lord's words in Isaiah 55: 8, where we read that the Lord's thoughts are not *our* thoughts, nor are the Lord's ways *our* ways. God was clearly writing a story that only God could write!

I don't know if Paul was thinking about Isaiah 55:8 when he penned 1 Corinthians 1, but he clearly understood that God's ways in this world sometimes look foolish. Only God would choose to take on human flesh to birth a new kingdom. Only God would count fishermen and tax collectors and sinners as worthy messengers of good news. And only God would defeat the darkness of death through the cross of Christ! Take heart, friends. What may look absurd and foolish in your life may very well be the redeeming and restoring work of a loving God.

***Prayer***

Lord Jesus, thank you for authoring the story of my life. Grow my trust in you when I encounter surprising twists and turns along the way. Remind me that your thoughts and ways are far better than my own. Amen.

**Graham D. S. Deans '06**

It seems decidedly odd that such a brilliant scholar as the Apostle Paul should appear to be so disparaging of wisdom. The truth is, however, that he had realized that what often passes for wisdom amounts to mere intellectual snobbery, such as he had previously encountered amongst the Athenian intelligentsia, who had a reputation for seeking out the latest novelty for discussion and debate (Acts 17:21).

Following in that tradition would be Scotland's King James VI, who was said to be "possessed of an overweening intellectual arrogance...as though he had been over-educated." No wonder that he was described as "the wisest fool in Christendom." He seems to have known too much, but to have understood too little.

While the Church has always valued an educated clergy, it should be alert to the problem of highly qualified ministers who empty their churches by degrees! Preachers who regularly get carried away with the sound of their own rhetoric—which few can understand—will only succeed in driving people from the pews, while the gospel of the Cross of Christ is emptied of its power.

What the Apostle deplored at Corinth was the pretentious attitude of those intellectuals who spent too much time providing clever answers to questions that nobody was actually asking, or who were meddling in affairs that were none of their concern, thereby making their supposed wisdom irrelevant. Scholarship should never be paraded shamelessly. As Alexander Pope reminds us, "A little learning is a dangerous thing!"

Like the prophet before him (Jer 9:23), Paul knew that boasting about the extent of one's wisdom was inadvisable. As a positive virtue, it remained highly elusive (Job 28:12). It begins only with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7), Whose perfect wisdom, as the apostle concludes, really is something to celebrate!

**Prayer**

God of all truth;  
guide us through each perplexing path of life,  
that we may grow in wisdom and understanding,  
until we reach full maturity of faith,  
that at the last,  
we may enter into the joy of our salvation  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Mark 2:18-22**

<sup>18</sup>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?" <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. <sup>21</sup>"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. <sup>22</sup>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."

**John Welch '02**

Living a perfect life is not easy, and for anyone to claim that he or she does fools no one. However, living a holy life is possible, but also not easy. To live holy is to be holy; but to be holy requires an acknowledgment of the tension caused by sin. Being holy is to be sanctified, to be set apart by the Spirit of God, marked as a child of God and destined for the eternal reward in glory. But sin won't let us forget that glory is not yet here. And so, the tension between who we should be and who we are persists. We are new creatures in sinful bodies, new wine in old wineskins, stressing the weakest parts of our very being. It's this type of suffering we openly confess, and it's this type of suffering we remember during the 40 days of Lent. We fast in a sense of self-denial; our parched souls seek spiritual refreshment. One day, we will be in our new wineskins.

**Prayer**

Most Holy God, continue to walk with us in the midst of our tension and show us your grace. You reminded us that our suffering is not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall later be revealed, but the journey is nonetheless difficult. Thank you for Calvary, and the cross, the symbol of our freedom.

**Day 6**

**Psalm 119:73-80**

<sup>73</sup> Your hands have made and fashioned me;  
give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.  
<sup>74</sup> Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice,  
because I have hoped in your word.

- <sup>75</sup> *I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right,  
and that in faithfulness you have humbled me.*
- <sup>76</sup> *Let your steadfast love become my comfort  
according to your promise to your servant.*
- <sup>77</sup> *Let your mercy come to me, that I may live;  
for your law is my delight.*
- <sup>78</sup> *Let the arrogant be put to shame,  
because they have subverted me with guile;  
as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.*
- <sup>79</sup> *Let those who fear you turn to me,  
so that they may know your decrees.*
- <sup>80</sup> *May my heart be blameless in your statutes,  
so that I may not be put to shame.*

### **Jerome Creach, faculty**

I suspect few modern Christians have ever read Psalm 119 closely. One reason for that is it is simply so long and so repetitive. It has 176 verses that seem to go over the same ground again and again. But more off-putting than that is the subject: the Law and its benefits. Many readers will undoubtedly say, "But I thought we were freed from the Law" (Galatians 3:23-29). A close reading of this psalm reveals, however, that it is neither pedantically repetitive nor naively touting legalism. The "law" the psalm speaks of is simply God's instructions in their many forms. The story of salvation is part of that instruction. So in today's reading the psalmist first confesses that God is the only source of goodness and life: "Your hands have made and fashioned me" (v. 73a). The commandments come into play as the psalmist asks for greater understanding of how to respond to God's goodness (v. 73b); therefore, it is possible for us to say, with the psalmist, "your law is my delight" (v. 77b).

### **Prayer**

How delightful it is, O God, to be obedient to you. In our better moments we recognize that serving you is not binding or restrictive. Your people Israel learned long ago that they had a choice: serving Pharaoh or serving you. Help us to choose you, the one who supplies all our needs. Truly in your care alone we are able to say, "I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1b). Amen.

### **Corey Rugh '18**

When reading these verses from Psalm 119 one easily sees the intimate language between "me," the fragile human, and "you," the Lord, the one to be feared (v. 74), the one who judges (v. 75), the one who is faithful (v. 75), and the one who loves (v. 76). The psalm welcomes us into sharing a tender moment with the Lord. But this psalm is not *merely* a prayer flowing from a deep relationship with the Lord, though it certainly is that; it is also the psalmist's expression for the desire to know and follow the Lord "commandments," "word" (v. 73), "law" (v. 77), "precepts" (v. 78), "decrees" (v. 79), and "statutes" (v. 80).

Does this combination seem foreign to us? How many of us would naturally use "mercy" and "law" in the same sentence (v. 77)? Are we comfortable meditating on the Lord precepts as well as delighting in the law? Do we feel the threat of shame if our hearts are not found blameless in the statutes of our Lord (v. 80)? Do we hope that others who "fear" the Lord will "see" us and "turn" to us because we have hoped in His word and know His decrees?

As followers of Christ, we know that, many years after the writing of this psalm, a King, a Savior, was born in the small town of Bethlehem. He walked the earth proclaiming the kingdom of God, healing the sick, clashing with other Jewish leaders, and teaching the crowds who came to hear Him. He possessed abundant mercy, and all those to whom he showed mercy were given life (see v. 77). He corrected the misuse of the law by other Jewish leaders, such as the Pharisees, and showed his vast knowledge of and love for the Lord's commandments, precepts, decrees, and statutes. He taught a rich man that the two greatest commandments are to love God with all that we are and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. He promised that all who "see" and "turn" to Him will know the Lord and His ways. Thus, not only can we imagine Jesus praying these verses from Psalm 119, but we can also imagine that it is He to whom we have been praying this psalm all along.

### ***Prayer***

Loving Father, we thank you for welcoming us into sharing a tender moment with you through the words of your servant. We pray that your steadfast love becomes our comfort and that we may take delight in your law and precepts. We thank you for our faithful King and Savior, Jesus Christ, who through his life, death, and resurrection has made it possible for our hearts to be found blameless in your statutes. We are grateful that our faith in Jesus is enough for you. May the Holy Spirit give us the fruits of love so that we may serve those around us. We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Kori Robbins '22**

In college, a mentor of mine always said, "Show me your friends, and I'll show you your future." When he said this—to the middle schoolers at the summer camp he helped organize, to the high schoolers desperately trying to fit in, or to the college students that worked as camp counselors—it was always in reference as to how the world, and people, around us shape who we are ourselves. Human beings are shaped by many things: our upbringing, our education and social settings, our economic and political standing. We are shaped by the events of our lives: the exhilarating adventurous parts, and the mundane, everyday ordinary stuff.

In these specific verses from Psalm 119, we are reminded of all the ways in which we are also shaped by God. In my first year of seminary, Dr. Ron Tappy taught "Introduction to the Old Testament," and one of the most poignant images that he talked about that sticks with me is that of an "anthropomorphic God." Dr. Tappy talked of Genesis, and of the dust that formed humans, the type of dust that comes out when you hit the ground hard and a little puff of dust rises up. And he talked of God walking about the garden, acting as gardener, shaping and loving God's creation.

Now, this image has always stuck in my head a bit, because I like the idea of an anthropomorphic God. I like the idea of God walking around and interacting with God's creation, a la Morgan Freeman style. I like the idea of God having hands and feet and a face, just like you and me. I like the idea of a God that can shape things with their hands, forming each one of us from the dust of dust.

While I doubt the psalmist was thinking of an anthropomorphic God, I do think that the psalmist is asking to be shaped by God, to be shaped by God's words and actions. To be shaped by God's love and mercy, so that the psalmist can then in turn share God's love with others. God created humans for relationship, with love, and we are called to manifest our participation in the image of God through that same love. God so loved the world, so cared for the beings made in God's own image, that God made the ultimate declaration of love in sending Jesus to be our Savior.

### **Prayer**

Holy God, Loving God: we give thanks and praise for the way your hands shaped and made us. We give thanks for the words you've given to us, shaped like paint on a canvas, slowly creating an image that reflects you. As we continue to move through the Lenten season and beyond, we ask for wisdom, reflecting on the beauty of us made in the image of you, and the ability to share your vivid love throughout the world. Amen.

### **Deuteronomy 8:1-20**

<sup>1</sup> This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors. <sup>2</sup> Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. <sup>3</sup> He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>4</sup> The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years. <sup>5</sup> Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the LORD your God disciplines you. <sup>6</sup> Therefore keep the commandments of the LORD your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him. <sup>7</sup> For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, <sup>8</sup> a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, <sup>9</sup> a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. <sup>10</sup> You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you. <sup>11</sup> Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. <sup>12</sup> When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup> then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, <sup>15</sup> who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, <sup>16</sup> and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. <sup>17</sup> Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." <sup>18</sup> But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. <sup>19</sup> If you do forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. <sup>20</sup> Like the nations that the LORD is destroying before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.

### **Sarina Odden Meyer '07**

Many of us have experienced a wilderness in life—a time of trial or difficulty that forced us to drill down to the essentials of who we are, especially we who are in Christ. That is what the Israelites experienced in the wilderness. They were totally dependent on God. Their dependence was always at the forefront of their minds, because they were literally helpless without God's provision (vv. 2-4). As they neared the land of plenty, God exhorted them to continue to follow God's commandments, to continue to live in the fear of the Lord (v. 6).

Living in the fear of the Lord is a liberating concept. It is an invitation to worry only about what God thinks over and above what anyone else thinks, even ourselves. Times of wilderness are often blessings that bring us back to the essentials of who we are in Christ. It's times of plenty that we have to worry

about. In times of plenty, we think we can strike out on our own and live by the bread we make with our own hands. Instead of blessing God for all that God has given to us (v. 10), we go astray, no longer living for God but living for ourselves or other people. Verse 11 reminds us as we approach a time of plenty, "Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God."

God has called each one of us uniquely to participate in the redemption of the world. When we forget God and start living for other things or other people, we forsake that which God has uniquely called us to do. During Lent, let us fast from the fear of other people, the fear of other things, even the fear of our own thoughts. Let us instead turn back to God and live in the fear of God only by remembering that "one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (v. 3).

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, you know how easy it is for us to be driven by the fear of other people, other things, and even our own thoughts. Help us to be motivated instead only in fear of you. Help us to see that fearing you is an invitation to living fully into the calling you have uniquely given to us. Help us to seek you in times of wilderness *and* in times of plenty, so that in all the times we live through we will faithfully reflect your love in the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **John 2:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup> Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." <sup>6</sup> Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup> and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." <sup>11</sup> Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. <sup>12</sup> After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there for a few days.

### **Michele Ward '18**

The first miracle of Jesus compels us to think of its darker connections to the suffering that both Mary and Jesus will endure at his crucifixion. Readily comes to mind the image of Jesus' body pouring out blood and water when the soldiers pierced his side. ("But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out" [John 19:33-34]). Jesus, knowing what is to come, resists performing the miracle at Cana. He tells Mary it is not yet his time. He would often refer to his death as "my hour," as he does here.

Jesus refers to his coming death many times through his ministry. These references reveal how present on his mind is the suffering yet to come. Perhaps here in Cana he wanted simply to take in this wedding celebration with his friends and family. Perhaps he did not want to contemplate his death or expose himself to others. But his mother had other plans in mind . . . and Jesus complied, thus setting aside his agency to say "no" and choosing to say "yes" to this "sign," as the Gospel of John calls the miracles of

Jesus. And each sign Jesus enacts is a small step toward his death, the ultimate sign of who he is and why he came into the world.

Lent is a season of small deaths for each one of us who chooses to journey on this road to the cross. As we daily let go of something in order to reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf, let us contemplate the Sign-giver, who gives his very life.

***Prayer***

Suffering God, thank you for the sacrifice you made on my behalf. You teach me how to persist in the face of the darkness around me. I ask that in my life, too, you would turn water into wine, no matter the cost to me. Reveal to me where I need to resist evil and, by the power of your Holy Spirit, participate in transforming the ordinary into the miraculous. In the name of your son Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

**Sarina Odden Meyer '07**

It is no surprise to anyone that in the first few centuries following Jesus' earthly ministry and before the canonization of Scripture, women's leadership in the early church was a hotly contested topic. The journey of my recent research has led me into the realm of New Testament redaction criticism, specifically asking questions about gender. There is substantial evidence that women's stories have been redacted out of many early Christian texts. In a context when redactors erased women's names, silenced their voices, diminished their actions, and erased their leadership, the Gospel of John kept this story. John 2:1-12—about a named woman who speaks and leads others—is a treasure. Mary's words and leadership were recorded in this story. Because of that redactional choice, her voice and leadership remain important to this day.

This story, and the choices of its redactors, remind us of the importance of listening to the voices on the margins. Mary is the miracle-maker in this story. Sure, Jesus is the one who changed the water to wine, but Mary noticed the problem, implored Jesus to act, and directed the servants to act as well. Without her, we would not have this miracle. Often, it is the people silenced by the dominant culture who, like Mary, understand the needs in our communities and how to solve them. Just like Mary, they know how to make miracles happen. One of the lessons of this passage is to listen to people on the margins and to follow their lead.

Who in your community is marginalized and ignored? How can you build bridges to give them a voice? What internal reflection do you need to do in order to open your ears and listen to them? What would it take for you to learn how to follow their lead?

***Prayer***

Gracious God, at a time when women's stories were being erased, we thank you that this story was not erased from the Gospel of John. Thank you for the reminder that the people on the margins have important voices and leadership skills in our communities. Just as Jesus and the servants listened to Mary and followed her lead, transform our hearts and minds to listen to and follow marginalized people in our own communities. Amen.

## Day 7

### Psalm 34

- <sup>1</sup> I will bless the LORD at all times;  
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
- <sup>2</sup> My soul makes its boast in the LORD;  
let the humble hear and be glad.
- <sup>3</sup> O magnify the LORD with me,  
and let us exalt his name together.
- <sup>4</sup> I sought the LORD, and he answered me,  
and delivered me from all my fears.
- <sup>5</sup> Look to him, and be radiant;  
so your faces shall never be ashamed.
- <sup>6</sup> This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,  
and was saved from every trouble.
- <sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD encamps  
around those who fear him, and delivers them.
- <sup>8</sup> O taste and see that the LORD is good;  
happy are those who take refuge in him.
- <sup>9</sup> O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,  
for those who fear him have no want.
- <sup>10</sup> The young lions suffer want and hunger,  
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
- <sup>11</sup> Come, O children, listen to me;  
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
- <sup>12</sup> Which of you desires life,  
and covets many days to enjoy good?
- <sup>13</sup> Keep your tongue from evil,  
and your lips from speaking deceit.
- <sup>14</sup> Depart from evil, and do good;  
seek peace, and pursue it.
- <sup>15</sup> The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,  
and his ears are open to their cry.
- <sup>16</sup> The face of the LORD is against evildoers,  
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.
- <sup>17</sup> When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,  
and rescues them from all their troubles.
- <sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,  
and saves the crushed in spirit.
- <sup>19</sup> Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
but the LORD rescues them from them all.
- <sup>20</sup> He keeps all their bones;  
not one of them will be broken.
- <sup>21</sup> Evil brings death to the wicked,  
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
- <sup>22</sup> The LORD redeems the life of his servants;  
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

**Derek Davenport '05/'17**

Reading this psalm is somewhat shocking because it is so physical. The psalmist writes about mouths, lips, and tongues. We read of eyes, faces, and bones.

This psalm accomplishes two things with such physical words. First, it encourages us to consider how physical and tangible faith can be. Living our faith requires us to use our bodies, not just our minds. The words that come out our mouths are just as important as the thoughts we have in our minds. Second, the physicality of expression in this psalm emphasizes God as immanent. The psalmist says so explicitly—"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted"—and also implicitly with the language of God's face and eyes and ears.

As we observe Lent, let us consider both of these lessons. Let's consider how to be faithful with everything that we are, body and mind. Also, let's spend time simply enjoying a God who chose to be Emmanuel, God with us.

***Prayer***

Lord, thank you for choosing to be near, even when we feel you are far away. Help us to live out our faith with all that we are. Amen.

**BJ Woodworth '07**

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

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

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

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

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

***Prayer***

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

### **Connie Bennett Hoeke '94**

This psalm calls us to continually bring praises before the Lord. God is near to us and sees us as beloved children. Even when things are going wrong, or we are struggling or brokenhearted, God surrounds us and loves us through these times. However, God also desires our praises and gratitude. When we are alone with God or when we gather as a community of faith, we are to praise God continually and bless God's holy name. God wants our desire and our longing to be for God and not for material things. God does exhibit anger when we love other things more than God. He was angered by the Israelites in the wilderness when they grumbled and complained to Moses because the wilderness was not a comfortable place for them to be. They wanted to return to captivity and Egypt because they did not trust God to provide for their needs.

Jesus drove out the money changers from the Temple because it was not being used to praise God. He made a promise at that time that he would "raise this Temple in 3 days" (John 2:19). He was referring to his body and the resurrection that would come. Through Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, God was praised and glorified and we were given eternal life and forgiveness. We will stray from God but we are loved deeply. We are called to repent. God will walk with us through difficult times and they will not overcome us. Let us praise God and give ourselves to God that we may glorify God in all that we say or do and with all that we are!

#### ***Prayer***

Almighty and most merciful God, We love you and offer praise to you because you are God. We confess that we often turn away from you, but we know of your forgiveness and love. Thank you for meeting our needs and loving us as we are. We are filled with gratitude for the gift of your son, Jesus, and the gift of what his resurrection means. May we forever bless your name and bask in your love. Guide us to follow your will. Amen.

### **Hebrews 3:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, <sup>2</sup> was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also "was faithful in all God's house."<sup>3</sup> Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. <sup>4</sup> (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.)<sup>5</sup> Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. <sup>6</sup> Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice,

<sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness, <sup>9</sup> where your ancestors put me to the test, though they had seen my works <sup>10</sup> for forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'They always go astray in their hearts, and they have not known my ways.'

<sup>11</sup> As in my anger I swore, 'They will not enter my rest.'"

### **Lynn Holden, certificate in spiritual formation**

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

Holy . . .  
Partners . . .  
In . . .  
Heavenly . . .  
Calling . . . .

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

#### ***Prayer***

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

### **Andrew Taylor-Troutman '24**

Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews is an ancient question, and recently contentious even on *Jeopardy!* While most scholars deny that the Apostle Paul penned the letter, there is no doubt that the text quotes extensively from the Hebrew Scriptures. Crucial to modern interpretation is an understanding of Hebrew words.

This passage’s “unbelieving heart” might confuse modern English readers, for “belief” in our culture is often conceptualized as intellectual assent, while matters of the heart are typically thought of as emotions. But in the Hebrew Scriptures, such a phrase referred not to what was thought or felt, but to what was done: “Hear, O Israel . . . You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 6:4).

Today’s passage cites the Israelites in the wilderness as a negative example of following the Shema — they heard and yet did not obey (Heb 3:16). As Maya Angelou said, “When you know better, do better.” Desiring to do better, I appreciate the call to “exhort one another every day” (Heb 3:13). A decade after graduation, I still maintain relationships with faculty, staff and fellow M.Div. students. Currently, I not only learn from my cohort of D.Min. students, but their support is also life-giving. Though no one has all the answers (even winners of *Jeopardy!*), our colleagues can inspire us to use our learning in service to God and the larger community.

#### ***Prayer***

Lord of the star fields, be God with us during Lent. Inspire us to do what we say and say what we mean. We thank you for the faculty, staff and students who journey with us. Bind us together to exhort and encourage one another in love. May it be so.

### **John 2:13-22**

<sup>13</sup> The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup> Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup> The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup> But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup> After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

### **John (Jay) Howell '18**

Sometimes it's easy to trash the moneychangers. They make an easy target. But did they really just set up shop with the intention of making a quick buck selling cattle, sheep, and doves? It was once explained to me that the whole apparatus for the sale of animals at the Temple was set up for the sake of removing a burden from travelers—people coming to worship at the Temple would not need to bring their own animals for sacrifice but could purchase an animal right there. The impetus was to make the process more convenient, more accessible. But how quickly convenience can lead to something else. It appears that in this passage, that's exactly what had happened. Instead of offering a service—instead of constituting a reasonable means of obtaining sacrifices—the system had turned into an opportunity for exploitation of the vulnerable traveler, those who lacked their own livestock, or those otherwise not already plugged into the system.

During this Lenten season, may we reflect on what we have done for the sake of convenience and discern whether that convenience has turned into something else—and if it has, let us repent . . . and let the Lord overturn the tables in our hearts and rebuild.

#### **Prayer**

Holy God, guide our spirits to discern where we have become too comfortable and where that comfort has turned to the sin of complacency. Help us ever to keep our focus on worshipping you in truth and in joy. In the name of Christ Jesus, we pray. Amen.

### **Jane Larson '17/20**

We are a people familiar with political and social unrest. We continue to witness the pursuit of justice in new forms that join a long history of prophetic responses to oppression. For many, there is a deep desire to dismantle the racial and economic systems tearing apart our nation and our neighborhoods. Yet, it is quite controversial in the church to suggest how we ought to respond to these calls for justice.

It can feel uncomfortable to try to navigate a world of chaos and division. Afraid that we might create even more division, we sometimes cling to the familiar. Yet, when we turn to this story of Jesus overturning tables in the temple, we see that our God does not shy away from the uncomfortable or controversial.

During the season of Passover, Jesus entered the temple to find people selling cattle, sheep, and doves. In order for people to make the necessary sacrifices, there needed to be an exchange of goods. For the

travelers coming from afar to celebrate in Jerusalem, they could purchase their sacrificial animals conveniently upon arrival. This might seem reasonable to us, but Jesus' reaction is to pour out all their money, turn over tables, and order those selling animals: "stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

In the Gospel of John, Jesus does not focus in on individual greed, but he seems to critique and order a dismantling of the entire system. This system of the marketplace is not necessary, and he makes no promise to rebuild it. Instead, Jesus turns the disciples' attention to his own physical body. It is not the physical temple that will be resurrected after 3 days—it is the person of Jesus who will continue to draw near to offer life even after death.

In this season of Lent, we practice releasing our clenched fists that cling to what is familiar. This is not an easy or passive task; it requires our constant attention to untangle ourselves from systems that seek to dehumanize and to profit off the soul of humanity.

As we engage in this work, this passage reminds us where our God may be found. God is not idly strolling through the marketplace. No, the God we follow breaks through division to bring about justice. We find our God sitting at the well with the Samaritan woman. We find our God sharing the table with those deemed outcasts by religious leaders. We find God not in the foundation of unjust systems, but in the person of Jesus- the one who overturns tables, transgresses boundaries, and continues to draw near.

### **Prayer**

God of Justice, continue to draw near to us, for we know the journey is not always convenient or comfortable. When we find ourselves in seasons of despair, give us perseverance to continue on the journey, wisdom to untangle ourselves from systems of injustice, and courage to be enactors of justice. May we seek your comfort not in the systems that are familiar, but in the one who draws near. Amen.

## **Day 8**

### **Deuteronomy 9:13-21**

*<sup>13</sup>Furthermore the LORD said to me, "I have seen that this people is indeed a stubborn people. <sup>14</sup>Let me alone that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and more numerous than they." <sup>15</sup>So I turned and went down from the mountain, while the mountain was ablaze; the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. <sup>16</sup>Then I saw that you had indeed sinned against the LORD your God, by casting for yourselves an image of a calf; you had been quick to turn from the way that the LORD had commanded you. <sup>17</sup>So I took hold of the two tablets and flung them from my two hands, smashing them before your eyes. <sup>18</sup>Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin you had committed, provoking the LORD by doing what was evil in his sight. <sup>19</sup>For I was afraid that the anger that the LORD bore against you was so fierce that he would destroy you. But the LORD listened to me that time also. <sup>20</sup>The LORD was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him, but I interceded also on behalf of Aaron at that same time. <sup>21</sup>Then I took the sinful thing you had made, the calf, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it thoroughly, until it was reduced to dust; and I threw the dust of it into the stream that runs down the mountain.*

## **Leanna Fuller, faculty**

In our reading for today, Moses comes down from the mountain carrying the two tablets of the covenant, only to discover that the Israelites have built a golden calf and are worshipping it. Perhaps we can understand why the people have done so: they had been wandering in the wilderness for many years and their future probably felt very uncertain. When Moses, their leader, disappeared to go talk with God, their fear and anxiety likely overwhelmed them, and this feeling may be what convinced them to create something tangible in which to place their faith and trust. God becomes angry with the people not because they felt fearful and anxious, but because they dealt with those feelings by making an idol for themselves instead of trusting God's promises. In this Lenten season of self-examination, we are challenged to look at our own lives and ask ourselves, When I am fearful and anxious, what idols am I tempted to worship? What statues do I need to destroy so that I can again place my faith in God alone?

### **Prayer**

Merciful God, we thank you that even when you become angry with us for our sinful ways, you do not destroy us or cast us away from your presence. Instead, you continue to love us and welcome us back each time we stray. Help us to recognize those places in our lives where we are trusting in the wrong things, and bring us back into right relationship with you. Amen.

### **Hebrews 3:12-19**

*<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end. <sup>15</sup> As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." <sup>16</sup> Now who were they who heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? <sup>17</sup> But with whom was he angry forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup> And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who were disobedient? <sup>19</sup> So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*

### **Hannah Loughman '11**

"But exhort one another every single day, as long as it is called 'today,' so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." As a parent of a four-year-old child, every day I find myself repeating the instructions I gave to her "yesterday," and the day before that, and the day before that, and the day before that. You get the picture. You might just know the drill. Sometimes my daughter responds with, "I know, you already told me that."

Does her response mean that I will stop telling her? No—not until she takes the initiative to "do it on her own." And there are many activities—such as taking her plate to the sink and throwing away her candy wrappers—she *has* begun to do on her own. But every once in a while she needs a reminder. I give her these reminders because I want her to grow to the fullness of maturity physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. I tell her these things because I love her.

I think that often times we misunderstand what it means to "exhort" someone. Exhortation isn't a punishment or a condemnation—it's an act of love. The author of Hebrews 3 isn't giving permission for Christians to run around putting each other in their "place"; rather, the writer is pleading with the family of God to lift one another up and to help each other stand firmly against sin.

So don't let your heart be hardened the next time someone exhorts you. Instead, with gratitude and humility, praise the Lord for the people who care enough to help you through.

### **Prayer**

Almighty God, we thank you for your constant love in our lives. We thank you for the people you have placed around us who encourage us to stand strong against sin. May we also faithfully seek to enact that love for one another. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen!

### **John 2:23-3:15**

*2:23 When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone. 3:1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." 3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? 11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."*

### **Lezley Stewart '18**

When did you last have one of those nights when you couldn't sleep because questions were buzzing around in your mind? Were you thinking about work or family life? Or were your questions about God and faith?

I have always been a sympathetic reader of the story of Nicodemus. I have never believed that Nicodemus went to visit Jesus by night just so he could hide in the shadows. Instead, I like to assume that his questions were just so important that they couldn't wait till the morning to be asked. Why spend a sleepless night mulling over such big questions of life and faith when Jesus could be approached right there and then?

Do we sometimes hold back our searching questions for no reason? If we trust and believe in the presence of the Spirit, we can approach God at any time.

Do we sometimes forget our enthusiasm to learn something new? Have we forgotten the first flush of faith, when we were excited to be always learning?

The adventure of faith that Nicodemus embarked on that dark night, with Jesus, is the same adventure that lies before us each color-filled day. So seize the day—the moment. For God, in mystery, is in all our questions and wondering.

***Prayer***

God of surprises,  
You bless us by your presence  
Even in the dark places.

You dwell with us,  
And live in our deepest questions.  
You inspire new discoveries  
In all who have open hearts and minds.

God, you are our eternal home—  
In you, we are already found.  
Keep us faithful and full of faith,  
For you have much to teach us, Day by day.  
Amen.

**Connie Bennett Hoeke '94**

Jesus knows all about human nature. Therefore he knows how we think, judge, mistrust, love and care. He knows everything about us.

Enter Nicodemus. Jesus decides to impart spiritual things to him—a Pharisee who dared to interact with Jesus in secret. He did not want to ask questions to trip him up; rather Nicodemus wanted to learn from him.

Nicodemus knew that Jesus could not be doing miraculous signs without being sent from God. What he didn't understand was that Jesus was the Son of God and had been with God before he was sent by God to live on the earth. Jesus explains that in order to understand his reason for coming to earth, he must be seen as more than a miracle worker. God desires for us to be baptized by water, as John the Baptist was doing, but there was more. We must be born of the Spirit, and therefore be spiritual beings, as this subdues our worldly nature. Nicodemus cannot understand this because he was too much of the world. He couldn't understand the heavenly things that Jesus knew, and he was stuck.

Jesus speaks of the freedom of the Holy Spirit to go wherever it wills and enter into human beings. Then Jesus foretells the way that he will die and how that brings to humans an eternal life with God, which begins while we live on earth.

How important it is for us to be open to receive the Holy Spirit and be involved in spiritual practices that lift us up to know heavenly things. We are lifted up to be with Jesus and let him love us and care for us. In this way, we are drawn closer to Jesus Christ and drawn away from the worldly nature which dares to bind us. Let us receive the Holy Spirit and know ourselves in a way we cannot know without God's deep presence. Let us live our spiritual lives and love Jesus Christ, praising him for each day of our lives.

***Prayer***

Almighty and ever-loving God, we praise you for your Son Jesus, who desires to lift us up to be in your care. You love us in a deep and powerful way and care for our souls. May we dwell in our spiritual lives, given to us by the Holy Spirit. Wrap your loving arms around us and fill us with your Spirit and truth. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

## **Psalm 27**

- <sup>1</sup> *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?*
- <sup>2</sup> *When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh —  
my adversaries and foes —  
they shall stumble and fall.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war rise up against me,  
yet I will be confident.*
- <sup>4</sup> *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.*
- <sup>5</sup> *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.*
- <sup>6</sup> *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.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,  
be gracious to me and answer me!*
- <sup>8</sup> *“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”  
Your face, LORD, do I seek.*
- <sup>9</sup> *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!*
- <sup>10</sup> *If my father and mother forsake me,  
the LORD will take me up.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Teach me your way, O LORD,  
and lead me on a level path  
because of my enemies.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,  
for false witnesses have risen against me,  
and they are breathing out violence.*
- <sup>13</sup> *I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Wait for the LORD;*

*be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the LORD!*

**Liddy Barlow, community partner**

In the dystopian novel *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, young people must enter a “fear landscape” as part of an initiation ritual. With group leaders monitoring their brain activity, they must endure a simulation of each one of their fears, one after another.

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

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

***Prayer***

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

**Melissa Goodman '10**

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

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

***Prayer***

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

**Rebecca Dix '15/'16**

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

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

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

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

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

***Prayer***

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

**Erin Davenport '05**

Refuge, sanctuary, safety: these are words that describe the desires of tired, worried humans. Whether it be looking for refuge at home from a busy chaotic world outside or finding sanctuary in the church building that you know so well, we are all seeking quiet and safety in our own ways. David illustrates this for us time and again in his life. Though the authorship of the Psalms is always in question, each time I read Psalm 27 I am transported to 1 Samuel 20-23, when David begins running from Saul. The first place David goes is the Tabernacle at Nob. David runs to a makeshift church to find refuge and safety from those who are attacking him. At the Tabernacle he finds the tools he needs for safety. From there his journey begins that will eventually lead to him becoming King. David's desire, as he seeks refuge in the midst of trouble, is the same as ours. He is looking for safety; he is looking for God; he is looking for hope. The Psalmist reminds us that the journey of life is long and requires a great deal of waiting. It is in the waiting that we are able to find moments of refuge, receive the tools we need for safety, and go out and do it all over again.

***Prayer***

God our refuge, hear us as we pray this day. Help us to find rest and the tools we need for safety. Grant us willingness to offer grace and mercy to all those we encounter this day. Amen.

**Luke Farwell '18**

What would you do if someone offered you the thing you've been desiring and dreaming about? Would you accept that gift if it meant radically changing your life and perhaps the lives of those you love?

The Psalmist describes God as "my light and my salvation," "the stronghold of my life" that banishes fear. His heart calls him to "seek [God's] face," his earnest request is "to live in the house of the Lord" and "to behold the beauty of the Lord," and he finishes the poem believing: "I shall see the goodness of the Lord." His earnest yearning for God as the utmost object of his desire is evident; he earnestly seeks a life dwelling with God as his treasure.

The gospels invite us to ponder the question: what would I do if someone offered me the thing I've been desiring and dreaming about? After all, Jesus proclaimed "the kingdom of God is at hand." The Psalmist's desire is within reach; God has come to dwell with us on earth.

If we are honest, we spend most of our lives focusing on what we believe will give us joy. When, in truth, Jesus tells us that we might be closer to that treasure than we can imagine. Regardless, we spend our time looking for that elusive treasure everywhere except where we are. Why is this? Could it be that we know in our hearts that the treasure is so real and within our grasp that we are afraid of what

discovering such a treasure would do to our lives? And that is precisely why we persist in looking elsewhere.

This Lenten season, let us reflect on what the kingdom of heaven would look like if we were to find it. How would it change us? Are we ready for such an incredible gift? In his Letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul writes that through Christ, God has “. . . blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” With the knowledge of this revelation, are we prepared to accept such a gift? Let us pray that we dare to claim such a gift and to live with such joy that others would notice this day. Our discovery of this treasure could not only transform us but also inspire and bless those around us.

### **Prayer**

Help me, dear God, to look for your kingdom in the place where I reside, like the one who found a treasure buried in a field. Let me have the courage to dig into the soil of my soul to discover your grace and kingdom, which is as near to me as my very breath. In trusting you, I may find my true purpose and joy in life. Amen.

## **Day 9**

### **Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5**

*9:23 And when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, “Go up and occupy the land that I have given you,” you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God, neither trusting him nor obeying him. <sup>24</sup> You have been rebellious against the LORD as long as he has known you. <sup>25</sup> Throughout the forty days and forty nights that I lay prostrate before the LORD when the LORD intended to destroy you, <sup>26</sup> I prayed to the LORD and said, “Lord GOD, do not destroy the people who are your very own possession, whom you redeemed in your greatness, whom you brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. <sup>27</sup> Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; pay no attention to the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin, <sup>28</sup> otherwise the land from which you have brought us might say, ‘Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to let them die in the wilderness.’ <sup>29</sup> For they are the people of your very own possession, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.” <sup>10:1</sup> At that time the LORD said to me, “Carve out two tablets of stone like the former ones, and come up to me on the mountain, and make an ark of wood. <sup>2</sup> I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you smashed, and you shall put them in the ark.” <sup>3</sup> So I made an ark of acacia wood, cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and went up the mountain with the two tablets in my hand. <sup>4</sup> Then he wrote on the tablets the same words as before, the ten commandments that the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain out of the fire on the day of the assembly; and the LORD gave them to me. <sup>5</sup> So I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark that I had made; and there they are, as the LORD commanded me.*

### **David Schell '18**

Carve. Come. Make.

Moses spent 40 days and nights on Mt. Horeb pleading with God not to destroy Israel, and the first words credited to God are three actions: Carve, Come, and Make.

*Carve* the tablets.

*Come* to the mountain.

*Make* an ark of wood.

Moses' first required action was not to come to God, but to *prepare* to come to God. Do the hard hammer work of carving out a space to receive God's word. *Carve* this chunk of stone into something suitable for receiving what God had to say.

Then, once he was prepared, Moses was to *Come* to the mountain. Come and hear the words of God, who says, "I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets."

Finally, *Make*. After carving a space for God's word, and coming to God to receive it, Moses is to *Make* a space for God's word—a physical space where God's word will be kept and honored and, hopefully, obeyed.

How often do we casually flip open our Bibles without having done the work in advance to carve our hearts of stone into the kind of surface onto which God can speak God's word? How often do we fail to come to hear God's word at all? And how often do we climb down from the mountain and deposit the word God has spoken to us in any old place, rather than in a specially made place of privilege in our hearts to be honored and obeyed?

#### ***Prayer***

God who still speaks, remind us to listen. Remind us to prepare our hearts to hear, as Moses prepared the tablets. Remind us to come in eagerness to hear the word you speak. And help us to keep that word close in our hearts—and by your loving power obey it.

#### ***John 3:16-21***

<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

#### **Daniel Voigt '11**

There is an old story about a wealthy family whose home was going to be the first in their town to have electricity installed. To commemorate the occasion, they invited everyone they could to come out for the initial lighting. People began to cram together in the house that evening expecting to see a miracle. Finally, the moment arrived, and as the sun went down, with great fanfare the light switch was turned on and the lights began to glow. Immediately, everyone gasped in amazement at the sight, but then, just as immediately, their gasps turned to sounds of disgust as the new, bright, electric lights made every spider's web in every corner pop out in astonishing clarity and laid bare every smudge and stain on the walls and floor for all the guests to see.

You can feel the family's embarrassment as the filth of their house was on display. It is a feeling we know all too well when our errors, sins, and grandiose shortcomings become visible. What is most fascinating to me, though, is the predictableness of the next feeling: we wish the light would never have

shined at all. But that is when and where the true danger lurks—in beginning to hate the light, when all the light really did was show us where we still needed to clean.

All responses to the light on our darkness start with embarrassment. But the mature response ends in gratitude. After all, God so loved us that, really, the light was sent to bring us life.

**Prayer**

To the God who loves us, thank you for sending us your light—not to condemn us but to save us. May we have the courage to look at what your light shows us and, ultimately, be thankful for it. Amen.

**Cindy Parker '10**

Have you ever attended a candlelight service? The warmth and coziness of the darkened space illuminated by the soft, flickering glow of the candles, seeing the candlelight reflected on the faces of the folks holding the candles—everywhere one looks, one can see the LIGHT has come into the world!

But once the candles are extinguished, and we leave the coziness, the softness of that surrounding light, and enter the darkness of the real world . . . it's us against them, me versus you—divisiveness abounds everywhere in this darkness. Families divided over election results, those attempting to cross borders because the horrors they leave behind are worse than the dangers that lie ahead, those being persecuted because of who they love. With such pervasive darkness, it is sometimes difficult to believe in a God who so loves the world.

And yet there are glimmers of light . . . a diverse group of volunteers working together to eradicate world hunger, a smattering of pastors officiating weddings for couples others have turned away, an employer who gives those impacted by incarceration a second chance. You see, Beloved, God is not where people often say God is—God doesn't thrive on human darkness and dread. God is found in the light and love we share in the midst of the darkness in the world God so loves.

Thankfully, we are reminded that God's love for the world is not dependent on the world's response. Even from a cross. Especially from a cross.

**Prayer**

God of wondrous presence, how grateful we are that your love is not dependent on the world's response. Continue to shower your light and love on us, so that when our capacity to love is spent, others may experience your love through us. Amen.

**Psalm 126**

- <sup>1</sup> *When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.*
- <sup>2</sup> *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."*
- <sup>3</sup> *The LORD has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Restore our fortunes, O LORD,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.*

<sup>5</sup> *May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.*

<sup>6</sup> *Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.*

### **Brenda Barnes '07/'18**

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

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

#### ***Prayer***

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

### **Katelyn Fisher '22**

In February, among the drab and drab of Pittsburgh's darkest days, I set in motion the early processes of my summer garden. In the darkness of my chilly basement, a hopeful stirring begins as I delicately fold tiny snapdragon seeds into soil and set them under a grow light, awaiting the glory of their beauty that will appear after the passing of many days.

Just as my summer seeds are grown in the darkness of winter, our psalmist is intimately aware of a hope that persists amongst difficult circumstances. At one time the Israelites rejoiced, but now there is only sorrow. She recalls the days the Lord “restored the fortunes of Zion” (v 1) as a way of remembering the goodness of what once was and declaring the possibility of what will be again.

So many of the stories we most cherish speak of triumph and overcoming, but here the psalmist is offering the gift of what it means to endure. We know God's promise of restoration is coming, but in the interim, it's good and right to weep over all that is broken. It is our tears that go on to water the soil from which all future abundance will grow. In the midst of our suffering, sometimes the only thing we have to cling to is a dream; a vision of the Kingdom as it will be. It is in our dreaming, however, that God gives us the courage to continue; enduring each day and sowing seeds that paint a picture of all that is possible in the Kingdom of God.

#### ***Prayer***

As we await the future restoration of all things, give us the patience to endure, and the courage to sow seeds even when the climate seems inhospitable. Comfort us in our mourning and allow our tears to knit us closer to you and to the world; for the glory of your name and to the restoration of shalom. Amen.

## Day 10

### **Deuteronomy 10:12-22**

*<sup>12</sup> So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. <sup>14</sup> Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the LORD your God, the earth with all that is in it, <sup>15</sup> yet the LORD set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today. <sup>16</sup> Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer. <sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, <sup>18</sup> who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. <sup>20</sup> You shall fear the LORD your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. <sup>21</sup> He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. <sup>22</sup> Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven.*

### **Judith McMillan '18**

When from my backyard I look up at the sky at night, I see tall trees and a few tall buildings with neon signs. Sometimes, when the lights are off, I can see a few stars. This is city living. When I am on retreat in the desert, it is the night sky, glimmering and moving with light and color against a dark background, where I feel a different kind of awe. All those stars—they are images of God's promises fulfilled. And they remind me that God's promises involve enacting justice and service to the weak and powerless—and require the same by me.

God places God's very heart "in love on [Israel's] ancestors." In love, God is with creation, with God's people, with the world. As partakers in God's nature, we are called to follow God—not in fear, but for our own "well-being." We are commanded to serve God, heart and soul, for well-being that pursues the well-being of others also. While we may not see the stars each night, we can and do trust the divine promises they remind us of, and we take care to seek out the light in the darkness. Let us take care to see with our own eyes the beauty of serving and worshiping God alone.

#### **Prayer**

Holy God, we are to worship you alone. In doing so, help us to serve the "least of these" and take care to listen to those who seek out your light in their lives. As people who wander bright city streets, minister to others during quiet retreats, or sit with those who grieve, inspire in us awe and wonder at the ways we are privileged to join in your work, in good and faithful company with you. Amen.

### **John 3:22-36**

*22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized—24 John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison. 25 Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. 26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. 28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah,*

*but I have been sent ahead of him.’ 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.” 31 The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. 33 Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. 34 He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God’s wrath.*

### **Christie Sweeny Gravely ’16**

Can’t you hear the resentment and envy in the words of John’s followers: “But John, everyone is now going to *him*”? To them, Jesus’ building popularity posed a threat to John’s ministry. So it was entirely natural for them to ask, “What about Jesus, Master? He is baptizing. He has taken a page from *your* book; he is using *your* method—and *everyone is going to him!*”

But what an astonishing reply they get back from faithful John. When other men would have found some subtle way to express their envy, John says, “It was all the Lord’s doing. The Lord called me to this ministry. But I am merely the forerunner to this Jesus. He is the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world. The age of the Messiah is dawning over the world.”

This situation, where crowds are flocking to Jesus, was only the beginning. John knew that it must continue to be like that until everyone was with Jesus and no one was left with John himself. “Jesus must increase, I must decrease.” Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of sinners; John is not. Jesus is the Messiah who baptizes with the Holy Spirit; John is not. Put simply, if Jesus is the Son of God now come into the world to take away our sins, then it is not enough that we simply acknowledge these things to be true. Our lives must be the demonstration of our faith, a response of heart and mind. Our commitment to Jesus must put him in the position of ascendancy in our lives. He absolutely must have the first place in our hearts. “*He must increase, but I must decrease.*”

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, as we draw closer to the cross in this Lenten season, we, like the disciples, seek to understand the mystery of Jesus Christ, who draws all people to himself. Though we do not deserve your mercy, we nevertheless receive it with thankful hearts. Help us to trust that you give us what we truly need, for you are the One who made us. In Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

### **Daniel Voigt ’11**

When I was a student at PTS, there was, roped off in the library, Karl Barth’s desk, with a depiction of the center section of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* by Matthias Grünewald mounted on the wall behind it. You should look up this piece of art to see it for yourselves, but in it, Jesus hangs on the cross in the center. On the left is a woman weeping, with the beloved disciple holding Mary. On the right, anachronistically placed, is a messy John the Baptist, holding the New Testament and pointing at the crucified messiah.

This image of John the Baptist in particular is said to have left a significant mark on Barth. And, if I’m honest, on me too. An image exemplifying that the whole point of John’s work and/or the New Testament is only any good as long as it points toward Christ. I suspect Barth felt the same.

In the passage today from John 3, we find what seem to be people coming to John expecting him to be jealous of Jesus' success. But nothing could be further from the truth. The news that people are finally looking to Christ fills him with joy—a joy he chose to express in words that must have sounded strange to those who came to him, "He must increase, and I must decrease."

We must admit that for us, too, the part that longs to be recognized for doing important work finds this phrase disheartening. But for John, his greatest joy was in knowing that people weren't getting caught up in him or his message but were (hopefully) directed by these to go further until they found the source of the good news.

Could there be a better mantra for our lives of faith? Or the church?

It is worth noting that Grünewald, of all the words in the New Testament, chose these from John to inscribe on his work—choosing to make the desire of John's heart his own.

### **Prayer**

Holy one, we confess that we love to have our egos fed. Something deep in us loves to be noticed and feel important. But John the Baptist reminds us that our most purposeful role is when we make a pathway for you. By your creative hand, you have given me many gifts, breath in my lungs, and a mind of my own. May they be used for more than just getting people to think highly of me. May they be used for their highest good. May they, in their best moments, point others to you. And may that desire be my joy.

### **Psalm 105**

- <sup>1</sup> *O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Sing to him, sing praises to him;  
tell of all his wonderful works.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Glory in his holy name;  
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Seek the LORD and his strength;  
seek his presence continually.*
- <sup>5</sup> *Remember the wonderful works he has done,  
his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered,*
- <sup>6</sup> *O offspring of his servant Abraham,  
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.*
- <sup>7</sup> *He is the LORD our God;  
his judgments are in all the earth.*
- <sup>8</sup> *He is mindful of his covenant forever,  
of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,*
- <sup>9</sup> *the covenant that he made with Abraham,  
his sworn promise to Isaac,*
- <sup>10</sup> *which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,  
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,*
- <sup>11</sup> *saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan  
as your portion for an inheritance."*
- <sup>12</sup> *When they were few in number,  
of little account, and strangers in it,*
- <sup>13</sup> *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.*

<sup>37</sup> *Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold,  
and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.*  
<sup>38</sup> *Egypt was glad when they departed,  
for dread of them had fallen upon it.*  
<sup>39</sup> *He spread a cloud for a covering,  
and fire to give light by night.*  
<sup>40</sup> *They asked, and he brought quails,  
and gave them food from heaven in abundance.*  
<sup>41</sup> *He opened the rock, and water gushed out;  
it flowed through the desert like a river.*  
<sup>42</sup> *For he remembered his holy promise,  
and Abraham, his servant.*  
<sup>43</sup> *So he brought his people out with joy,  
his chosen ones with singing.*  
<sup>44</sup> *He gave them the lands of the nations,  
and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples,*  
<sup>45</sup> *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.

### **Karris May Jackson '22**

When my daughter was six, she asked me, "Mom, how do you know there is a God?" I shared a story with her: When you were just a few days old, the pediatrician discovered a white, cloudy film in your right eye. It was determined that you needed surgery immediately. I was heartbroken. You were only

weeks old, and the thought of you undergoing surgery was terrifying. A few days before the operation, we met with the doctor, who told us, "I've never performed this surgery before. There is a 10% chance I can do it without causing any damage to her eye." The day of the surgery was one of the hardest of my life—I was filled with fear. After the procedure, the doctor entered the waiting room, astonished, and said, "I removed the cloudy film from her eye and didn't damage the lens." The room erupted in joy and thanksgiving. I had witnessed a miracle. Every time I reflect on that miracle, I am reminded that there is a God.

In Psalm 105, David recounts the history of Israel and the miracles God performed in delivering the Israelites from the Egyptians. He reflects on the plagues God sent upon the Egyptians, which served as a reminder of God's faithfulness to His chosen people. David also remembers how God miraculously provided for them, using a cloud to cover them by day and a fire to give them light at night. He concludes with "Praise the Lord."

Remembering, reflecting, and sharing stories of God's miracles—both in our lives and in Scripture—is a powerful way to honor Him, praise Him, and make His name known to others. It's a way to share His faithfulness with our families and friends.

#### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, thank You for providing daily miracles. Help us remember the stories that reveal who You are and remind us of all You have done.

### **Day 11**

#### **Psalm 43**

- <sup>1</sup> *Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause  
against an ungodly people;  
from those who are deceitful and unjust  
deliver me!*
- <sup>2</sup> *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?*
- <sup>3</sup> *O send out your light and your truth;  
let them lead me;  
let them bring me to your holy hill  
and to your dwelling.*
- <sup>4</sup> *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.*
- <sup>5</sup> *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.*

**Don Dawson, staff (retired)**

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

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

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

**Prayer**

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

**Deuteronomy 11:18-28**

*<sup>18</sup>You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. <sup>19</sup>Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. <sup>20</sup>Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, <sup>21</sup>so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth. <sup>22</sup>If you will diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving the LORD your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, <sup>3</sup>then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and mightier than yourselves. <sup>24</sup>Every place on which you set foot shall be yours; your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the Western Sea. <sup>25</sup>No one will be able to stand against you; the LORD your God will put the fear and dread of you on all the land on which you set foot, as he promised you. <sup>26</sup>See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: <sup>27</sup>the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today; <sup>28</sup>and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn from the way that I am commanding you today, to follow other gods that you have not known.*

**Erin Davenport '05**

“Loving the Lord your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul”—this is the command from verse 13 that is referenced throughout our passage today. This command is so important that the Israelites are implored to tell it to their children constantly—at home, away from home, when they sleep, when they wake up. There is no hour or situation when this command is not of utmost importance: Love the Lord your God and serve him. This passage is the foundation of my life. It is the reason I do what I do every single day. I encourage you today to let these words rush over you and through you, to tell them passionately to your children and your children’s children and the children you

are blessed to be around through everything you do, every word you speak. Let us love the Lord our God and serve him with all our hearts and with all our souls.

***Prayer***

Lord, no matter who our children are today—biological, young, old, neighbors, friends—help us to see them as children who need to hear this command today. Give us wisdom to share your love through our actions and words in times of joy and strife. Amen.

**Alan Olson '14/'24**

I love the Book of Deuteronomy. As I write, I can almost see a meme on Facebook that reads: “‘I love the Book of Deuteronomy!’ Said no one ever.” There’s a lot of material in Deuteronomy that fits into a very old, and mistaken, impression that the God of the Old Testament is angry and vengeful, more concerned with obedience to the law than with grace and mercy. That’s the danger of a superficial reading of any text, especially Deuteronomy.

The name Deuteronomy means “second law”; it’s a retelling or resetting of the law of Moses. It was written for a people who were constantly turning away from God, a people who failed to put their full trust in God and then created idols for worship.

The God who is speaking in this passage is inviting Israel, the chosen people, to return to a righteous relationship with God. God is offering Israel yet another chance to turn back to God. That’s the grace. Sometimes we get hung up on the curses and we forget about the grace and the blessings.

God’s blessings are not a reward for obedience. We live into God’s blessings when we turn toward God and away from the idols we make and worship. The curses happen not because God is punishing us but because we turn our focus to the idols we make: money, work, activities, and general busyness, to name a few. When we focus on these things, we’re not busy looking to God. We build stumbling blocks. We trip. We fall. We fail to get out of our own way.

In this season, let us look within and search for all the idols and stumbling blocks that we create, all the curses that we heap upon ourselves. Let us look for ways to smash these idols and turn back toward God—the God who tells Abraham that his children will be a blessing to the whole world—so that we may live more fully into God’s blessings, and then share those blessings with the world.

***Prayer***

God of grace and mercy, in this season of Lent, we ask that you open our eyes and ears and hearts. We ask that you let us see all our idolatries, so that we may repent and return to you. We ask that you pour out your Holy Spirit, so that we might see all those with whom we can share your blessings. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Suzanne C. Hager '24**

I live in Squirrel Hill, a historically Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Pittsburgh. I live across from a Yeshiva school, and most of my neighbors are Orthodox or Hasidic. So, it came as no surprise to me to see the old outline of a mezuzah on the doorframe of my apartment. I see them all over my building. The mezuzah is typically set to each doorframe of the home. The ancient Israelites would place them on the jams intended for the door, which swings into the threshold of the home.

The mezuzah (מְזוּזָה), meaning “doorpost, doorway, posts, jams,” dates back all the way to the command in Deuteronomy 11 to place the Shema (שמע) prayer on the doorframe. The Shema, “Hear O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one,” is first mentioned in Deuteronomy 6:4 and later hinted at in 11:13. God is instructing the people on the importance and implications of the Shema and how to grasp it as a commandment.

Commandments are not rules; they are connections to God. They are opportunities to learn and to grow in our faith. Though we Christians do not practice using a mezuzah or practice tefillin (binding the Shema to the head and hands), we are in a baptismal covenant with a God whose commandments allow us to build on our relationship to God. The covenant relationship we have with God allows us to have a lasting relationship. We are given commandments that will help secure our faith and keep our faith communities alive and well. We are to place the words at the center of our hearts and minds (11:18). We are to love God and to walk in God’s ways, holding fast to him (11:22). We are to teach our children the Shema and the other commandments (11:19).

As the church, we affirm and receive these promises from God for our communities today. In a growing secular world, church attendance is declining—especially the Protestant denominations. In teaching the love of God, we need to show the world God’s love through loving our neighbor. If we continue to follow in Christ’s likeness, keep the commandments, and teach our children the love of God, the world will see the true meaning of our faith: love.

### **Prayer**

God of all ages, thank you for the teachings you have given us to build up our relationship with you. Teach us to hear (“shema”) your words, that we may be formed into Christ’s likeness and shine your love to all. Amen.

### **John 4:1-26**

<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John”—<sup>2</sup> although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—<sup>3</sup> he left Judea and started back to Galilee. <sup>4</sup> But he had to go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup> So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. <sup>7</sup> A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” <sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” <sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? <sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” <sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” <sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” <sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; <sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” <sup>19</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour

*is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” <sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” <sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”*

### **Ryan Lucas '18**

In the Coptic Orthodox tradition, St. Bishoy (320-417) had two encounters with the living Christ. Once, when on a pilgrimage, Bishoy discovered an old man lying on the side of the road. He picked up and carried the old man, but his load began to lighten. Eventually Bishoy realized that he was carrying the Lord. Jesus disappeared after promising to keep Bishoy's body from decaying. (It is still entombed today.) Later, as Bishoy washed the feet of visitors, he was amazed when he realized he was washing the scarred feet of Jesus.

Copts today still recognize Bishoy as a pure and holy Saint. Last year, with others from Pittsburgh Seminary, I visited St. Bishoy's monastery in northern Egypt. The desert that surrounds the monastery is bone dry, but life still exists here. And now, when I read John 4 I can well imagine Jesus and Bishoy's having some great conversations in the desert. Hospitality and love for neighbor extend fully when we find ourselves in inhospitable places.

To the woman at Samaria, Jesus gave a gift that goes beyond a simple drink of water in the desert. He gave her the assurance of life now and hereafter. As we venture through our own journeys in the often inhospitable world, let us exercise the ability and opportunities we are given to share with others this loving, living water of Jesus Christ.

### ***Prayer***

Lord, when we find ourselves lost in the desert, provide for us something to drink. When we journey through life's uncertainty, grant us peace and welcoming. O God, like our brother Bishoy, find your favor in us as we continue to welcome strangers, help them on their journeys, and share the loving, living water of Christ with all we meet. Amen.

### **April Roebuck '14/'19**

She doesn't have a name in the text. She is marginalized. She is a woman. She is demonstrating some sense of shame because she goes to the well when no one is there. I wonder if her life decisions have caused her to live in the shadows. She cast her bucket one too many times for things and people who were not fulfilling. She has experienced one strained relationship after the next. Probably looking for love in all the wrong places. Jesus is not so much concerned with any of that. He sees her. Not only does he see her. He sees all of who she is. Then he asks for something from her.

This Lenten season it doesn't matter about your background, your life decisions or where you are in life right now. Jesus wants something from you. That something is your "yes" to go deeper with him. Cast your bucket into the well that never runs dry. The well that restores and replenishes.

This season is about preparation and reflection. What would it look like to prepare the way for the King in your heart? What would it look like to let go of your inhibitions and go deeper with God? What would it look like to see yourself as Jesus sees you? Forgiven. Free. Whole. His.

### **Prayer**

God, help us to see ourselves the way that you see us. Help us to exchange shame for salvation, guardedness for grace, and emptiness for your eternal fulfilling love. Everything we need is found in you. Lead us to the well that never runs dry, for a deeper dive with you. Amen.

## **Day 12**

### **Jeremiah 1:1-10**

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

<sup>4</sup> *Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,*

<sup>5</sup> *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”*

<sup>6</sup> *Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”<sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to me,*

*“Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’;  
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,  
and you shall speak whatever I command you.*

<sup>8</sup> *Do not be afraid of them,  
for I am with you to deliver you,  
says the LORD.”*

<sup>9</sup> *Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,  
“Now I have put my words in your mouth.*

<sup>10</sup> *See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,  
to pluck up and to pull down,  
to destroy and to overthrow,  
to build and to plant.”*

### **Brad Rito '15**

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

### **Prayer**

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

### **1 Corinthians 3:11-23**

<sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If the work is burned, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire. <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. <sup>18</sup> Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," <sup>20</sup> and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." <sup>21</sup> So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, <sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future — all belong to you, <sup>23</sup> and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

### **Brad Rito '15**

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

#### **Prayer**

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

### **Trevor Jamison '01**

I live in the North of East of England, less than one hour's drive from the city of Durham. Prominently positioned in its historic center is Durham Cathedral. The religious community associated with it began a thousand years ago. The present building was substantially completed a century later. It is vast, beautiful, and awe-inspiring. It attracts thousands of visitors each year, though how many as pilgrims and how many as tourists is a good question.

The Apostle Paul, had he ever travelled this far north, could have used Durham Cathedral as a visual aid to speak not only of church buildings, but about church institutions, about human leadership, about congregations, and even about individuals like you and me.

The Corinthian congregation, he writes, is a living temple, as long as God's Spirit resides within it and its members. That temple's foundation is Jesus Christ, not admired leaders such as Paul, Apollos, or

Cephas. As long as such leaders build upon the right foundation, though, their work becomes a beautiful adornment, like the columns, arches, and glasswork in Durham Cathedral.

Two thousand years after Paul, many of us live in settings where the spiritual climate has become less hospitable to faith and belief. It is tempting to focus on religious traditions (including impressive cathedrals), still-powerful church institutions, talented leaders, and lively church activities to see us through.

We should be grateful for them all, but Paul reminds us that if we substitute any one of them for Jesus Christ as the foundation of church life, rather than recognizing them as an adornment, they will not sustain us. How helpful, then, to have a period such as Lent, when we focus upon Jesus and his journey to the cross, remembering who and what is foundational for our faith.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of the Church, with all that is good in its traditions, institutions, leaders, and activities. Fill us with your Spirit, we pray, so that we remain focused upon your Son, Jesus, the foundation of that faith we hold and share. Amen.

### **Mark 3:31-4:9**

*<sup>3:31</sup>Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup>A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." <sup>33</sup>And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" <sup>34</sup>And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup>Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." <sup>4:1</sup>Again he began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. <sup>2</sup>He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: <sup>3</sup>"Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. <sup>8</sup>Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." <sup>9</sup>And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"*

### **Scott Hagley, faculty**

There's always hope

Hope in death

It brands these bonds

Refines the rest

(from "These Days are Numbered" by The Head and the Heart)

Our Gospel text for today narrates the death of a preferred image of Jesus. Mark 3:31 begins in the middle of a cluster of stories held together by Jesus' return home in 3:19b. After teaching, drawing crowds, and performing miraculous signs, Jesus returns home, and his family, certain that Jesus has gone crazy, attempts to restrain him. At the same time, the Scribes accuse him of demonic dealings. After telling the Scribes that "a house divided against itself cannot stand," Mark turns the story back to Jesus' family, where Jesus indirectly addresses their concerns by redefining kinship. Mark narrates an enigma. Jesus refuses to be defined by the images that skeptics (the Scribes) and the faithful (the family) have for him. In his mercy toward us, he is wholly his own. We, therefore, can receive and respond to

him, but we cannot construct or contain him. May we hear, see, and receive Jesus in unexpected ways this day.

***Prayer (Psalm 103)***

Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and do not forget all his benefits—  
who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,  
who redeems your life from the Pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,  
who satisfies you with good as long as you live  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.  
The Lord works vindication  
and justice for all who are oppressed.  
He made known his ways to Moses,  
his acts to the people of Israel.  
The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

**Carmen Lee '19**

“Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” During Jesus’ time, farmers used plows to prepare the soil for planting seeds rather than scattering them haphazardly on the ground. If seeds fell on a path, rocky ground, or among thorns, the problem could just as easily have been the harsh conditions in which the farmer labored as it could have been the planter’s error. Yet in this parable there was enough good soil to yield an abundant crop, thus compensating for difficult conditions—and the seeds had to have been of good quality to grow even slightly in poor soil.

We know—because later Jesus tells his disciples so—that the seed is God’s word of truth, and the soil represents the hearts of people who hear the word. But who are the people listening? We might assume that they are unbelievers—the unchurched or non-religious, lacking previous familiarity with God’s word. But the crowds around Jesus usually represented the entire community, from religious leaders who questioned or wanted to sabotage him to working-class people who attended synagogue with varying degrees of regularity to “sinners” who were social and religious outcasts. It was that mix of people who heard Jesus’ teaching and into whose hearts he planted God’s word.

The situation is similar today. The mixed “soil” hearing God’s word could include people we would consider church leaders or consistent church attenders, as well as those we might view as distant from God for whatever reason. The “seed” of God’s word explains salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, but it also encompasses God’s truth about justice and mercy as Jesus himself declares in passages such as Luke 4:16-21. There may be times when individuals who identify as Christians will not listen to God’s truth about addressing injustice and oppression, just as there might be occasions when those who do not follow Christ reject the message of salvation.

The Parable of the Sower is often viewed as a warning to listeners to examine what type of soil represents the condition of their heart, but for those wanting to be used by God in others' lives, it is also an alert about what to expect. The world in which we live is a harsh environment, with much rocky and thorny soil; yet we should not judge anyone's heart. The good seed, God's word of truth, is hearty and robust, capable of yielding an abundance of love, justice, mercy, compassion, and faith. The quality of the soil will reveal itself in due time; and as followers of Christ, we need to be aware of the challenges ahead while also being prepared to welcome a harvest.

Let anyone with ears to hear, hear.

**Prayer**

Gracious Lord with whom we co-labor, help us not to be discouraged by our world's difficulties but to find joy in your presence. As we look forward to celebrating our risen savior, Jesus Christ, enable us also to look forward to times of good harvest in its various forms. Amen.

**Asa Lee, president**

When I was a child, we always went down south to Georgia or North Carolina in the summer months for our family reunion. Returning to our ancestral roots in Georgia and North Carolina reminded us of our humble beginnings but also re-established the familial bonds with those loved ones we hadn't seen in months or even years. But it also allowed us the important opportunity to be introduced to the new members of our family. Through births, marriages, and other new iterations of relationships, our family increased in number with new members young and old. With excitement we welcomed these new people as part of our family with all of the rights, privileges, and burdens who had just been strangers moments before.

Jesus in this curious encounter abruptly redefines the bonds of family. When his mother and brother come to see him, Jesus declares an expansive view of the familial bond and connections. Those who do the will of God are Jesus' brother and sister and mother. Like my family reunion moment, those of us working the will of God now come to meet new family members. In the light of this declaration we, like Jesus' family, must come to grips with the fact that those who do God's will are now members of one family. We have the joy of knowing that no matter what we face, in God we have a family and belong one to another.

**Prayer**

This Lenten season, we pray for the openness to meet disciples as family and to commit to working toward God's will here on earth. Amen.

**Psalm 42**

<sup>1</sup> *As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
so my soul longs for you, O God.*

<sup>2</sup> *My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.*

*When shall I come and behold  
the face of God?*

<sup>3</sup> *My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
while people say to me continually,  
"Where is your God?"*

- <sup>4</sup> *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.*
- <sup>5</sup> *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 <sup>6</sup>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.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Deep calls to deep  
at the thunder of your cataracts;  
all your waves and your billows  
have gone over me.*
- <sup>8</sup> *By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,  
and at night his song is with me,  
a prayer to the God of my life.*
- <sup>9</sup> *I say to God, my rock,  
“Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I walk about mournfully  
because the enemy oppresses me?”*
- <sup>10</sup> *As with a deadly wound in my body,  
my adversaries taunt me,  
while they say to me continually,  
“Where is your God?”*
- <sup>11</sup> *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.*

### **Jennifer Stroud '18**

Anyone who has spent time in the desert learns, very quickly, how precious water is to every living thing. Without water one's mouth dries up, one's skin withers, one's internal organs begin to shut down. Without water one's physical body fades away and dies. So it is with our spirit's need for God.

Without our Lord, our lives are naught but a restless yearning, a thirst that is never abated. But when we discover Jesus our souls drink deeply, and we are refreshed and renewed in the life-giving water offered to us by our loving Creator, the Source of All Being. The Psalmist understands this truth and begins his song by declaring his great need for the Holy Other. But just as our faith can wax and wane through the joys and tribulations of this life's journey, so, too, is the Psalmist's faith challenged. He feels anxiety and depression come upon him, and he wonders why. Why has he forgotten how much the Lord has done for him? Why do we?

By the end of the Psalm, the writer has remembered that only the Lord can keep us sane and safe in this world. Only God can quench every thirst and fulfill every need. By God's grace we also will recall to our minds and our hearts this astounding truth as we experience the ups and downs of our own journeys. This day, thirstily partake of the peace, the joy, and the love given to you by our great God. Meditate on the unending blessings given to you by the Lover of your soul. Remember, drink deeply, and be renewed!

### **Prayer**

Lord I am dry—as brittle as branches in a parched and arid land. I am thirsty for the things this world cannot give me. Fill me, Lord, to overflowing. I need the joy of knowing that You love me more than I will ever understand. I need the comfort of remembering that I am never alone—that Your presence is always with me. I need the power of Your Holy Spirit to strengthen me and teach me so that I do not lose my way. Remind me of the blessings You have showered upon me when the world tries to darken my day. Help me to shine the brightness of Your love and light! In Jesus Holy Name I pray. Amen!

### **Ciera (Cici) James '21**

As we walk through this season of Lent we are reminded of our need for God. In our penitence we are reminded not only of God's faithfulness but also of our dependence on God. Yet sometimes we feel alone—sometimes as we face our struggles God seems absent. They ask, "Where is your God?" We cry out in despair from yearning to feel the presence of the Lord again, from knowing our need for our rock. We ask ourselves, "Where is *my* God?" In our longing, we know God is constant. In our anguish, we know the day will come when we will again rejoice in the Lord. "Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God." Our souls long for healing, peace, and comfort from the Lord—our rock in our distress. Because we know, in truth, that a time is coming when we will again praise the Lord, we can have hope in God even in the midst of our despair.

### **Prayer**

Lord, you are our rock. You are our foundation in times of darkness, and we know we can trust in you. Yet sometimes we cannot feel your presence. Give us strength to praise you and hope in you when we do not have the strength on our own. Meet us in our despair, gracious God, and hear us when we cry out. You are the one our souls long for. We praise and pray to you now in your Holy name. Amen.

## **Day 13**

### **Jeremiah 1:11-19**

<sup>11</sup>The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, "I see a branch of an almond tree." <sup>12</sup>Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it." <sup>13</sup>The word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a boiling pot, tilted away from the north."

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD said to me: Out of the north disaster shall break out on all the inhabitants of the land. <sup>15</sup>For now I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, says the LORD; and they shall come and all of them shall set their thrones at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its surrounding walls and against all the cities of Judah. <sup>16</sup>And I will utter my judgments against them, for all their wickedness in forsaking me; they have made offerings to other gods, and worshiped the works of

*their own hands. <sup>17</sup>But you, gird up your loins; stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not break down before them, or I will break you before them. <sup>18</sup>And I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. <sup>19</sup>They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you.*

### **Jeff Sterling '88/'98**

Lent is a great time to get your eyesight checked, as this passage from Jeremiah reminds us. For those of us who seek to live according to God's truth, there are three kinds of "eyesight" we may evaluate: The eyesight with which we see light. Our natural eyes see two kinds of light: light from primary sources, and light reflected off objects around us. The obvious analogy raises two important questions—what are your primary sources of light, and what kinds of things do you gaze at to see reflected light? I'll let you draw your own metaphorical conclusions from these questions, but don't forget to regularly have your "real" vision checked!

The *eyesight of the mind*. Evaluating *what* we are seeing is the realm of our mind. If we don't keep it progressing and sharp, we can too easily be deluded as to what we are *seeing* when we take stock of our *sitz im leben*, where God *is* in it, and what God is *up* to in the midst of it.

The *eyesight of the Spirit*. Just as there are wavelengths of light we can't see without filters or special instruments, so there are images we miss if we ignore the agency of God's Holy Spirit. This eyesight is kept astute by exercising it.

The important "word" to Jeremiah here is: "What do you see?" Whatever God is going to do almost always begins with this question. And the best answer requires us drilling down on what we "see" using all three forms of eyesight!

### **Prayer**

God who pronounced the light "good," Jesus, the light of the world, and Holy Spirit of reflection, illuminate what I see today and teach me what the images mean, as I seek to stay on the lighted path and to please you! Amen.

### **Romans 1:1-15**

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup> which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, <sup>3</sup> the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup> and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup> through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, <sup>6</sup> including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, <sup>7</sup> To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup> First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. <sup>9</sup> For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, <sup>10</sup> asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. <sup>11</sup> For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—<sup>12</sup> or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. <sup>13</sup> I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I

*have among the rest of the Gentiles. <sup>14</sup> I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish <sup>15</sup> —hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

### **Steven H. Shussett '93**

Publishing calendars being what they are, I write this devotional in the middle of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, meaning that I don't know how the story will unfold. Are these words read with relief over a return to normalcy, or with a sigh, knowing difficulties yet unimagined?

For Paul, writing to a Roman church he hoped to visit, the future was no more secure. He knew his mission's intention, but not its outcome, even as he was among the first to articulate what he understood God's desired outcome to be.

This present generation today will remember what it means to be "set apart." If for the gospel, this theology of the cross means following the One who laid down his life, which for us includes loving God and neighbor by keeping physical distance. We don't go out, we don't touch even many whom we love. In so doing—or actually, in so not doing—we lay down the life that wants to do what we have always done. Sometimes loving one another is best achieved by not seeing one another face to face, but as through a mirror dimly.

Yet even then the Spirit calls us to be with God by being with others. We pray for one another even when we are prevented from being physically present with one another. We share some spiritual gift to strengthen and mutually encourage one another, whether it be greeting a wizened veteran walking in his backyard, singing from a balcony, or group celebrating-by-Zoom.

To you, 2021 Christian, the question before you is whether the lessons of 2020 have been taken to heart or swept into the dustbin of history. Is compassion our watchword? Is creativity still allowed—in worship and in mutual encouragement? Or have we already forgotten how precious and appreciated simple acts of love and generosity can be?

### **Prayer**

Holy One, we are indebted to you, and to those who have heard you, for inspiring us and calling us to the better angels of our nature. Having reaped some harvest, strengthen us with the Spiritual gifts necessary to sow seeds that eagerly proclaim your gospel. In the name of the Sower himself do we pray. Amen.

### **John 4:27-42**

*<sup>27</sup> Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" <sup>28</sup> Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, <sup>29</sup> "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" <sup>30</sup> They left the city and were on their way to him. <sup>31</sup> Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." <sup>32</sup> But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." <sup>33</sup> So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. <sup>35</sup> Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. <sup>36</sup> The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. <sup>37</sup> For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' <sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored,*

*and you have entered into their labor.”<sup>39</sup> Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.”<sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days.<sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of his word.<sup>42</sup> They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”*

### **Debbie Smith '18**

The account of the woman at the well tells a story of unexpected abundance and harvest. After encountering Jesus, this woman leaves her water jug behind and invites the town to “come and see.” Jesus has sown the seeds of hope during their conversation and reaps the harvest of new discipleship. The woman is transformed: formerly an outsider, now she is an exuberant follower, so excited about meeting Jesus that she sows seeds of Good News among the townspeople, thus bringing them to abide with Jesus. What a harvest we see here! Outsiders recognizing what many insiders had not: Jesus is the Savior of the World—a world that includes even Gentiles! Praise God for unexpected sowers and reapers who can see what others have not yet seen!

#### ***Prayer***

Gracious Lord, who plants seeds of grace in our hearts, give us the courage to sow the seeds of our experience of the Good News with those you place in our path. Lead us to expect an abundant harvest that draws people to you as it nourishes us and brings more seeds, more sowers, and more reapers. In the name of Christ, our Savior, amen.

### **Jennifer L. Stroud '18**

Jesus is exhausted by the thousands thirsting for God’s presence. Our Lord sits by a well in shunned Samaria. A woman enters to draw water. Women were the least of society, unvalued and invisible, their only worth was found in bearing children for their masters/husbands.

When Jesus speaks to her asking for a drink, she replies, “Why are you talking to me? You are a Jew and I am just a woman—and a Samaritan as well!”

Jesus values women and enters into a theological discussion with her, even though both Samaritan and Jewish women were often prohibited from studying the Torah.

Christ tells the woman that if she knew Him, she would be asking Him for living water. She asks Him for this special water not understanding that what Jesus offers her, and all of us, sates us beyond our earthly needs. Christ offers us the gift of salvation and spiritual power.

Jesus then tells the woman to call her husband. The woman tells the Lord the truth. She has had five men in her life who have been her “Baali,” which is Aramaic for husband but also for master. This woman’s entire sense of self-worth was found in the man/master who possessed her as wife.

Jesus commends the woman for her honesty. He was not demanding a confession. Christ was testing her for her openness to truth. For if we cannot be honest with ourselves, we cannot be honest with God. Jesus tells her of the good news for all those who wish to “worship the Father in Spirit and truth.” This woman, who has sought to know God, even though it has been forbidden her, tells Jesus a Messiah is coming, and Christ, in truth, tells her, “I, who speak to you, am He.”

We, all of us, are the woman at the well. We have drifted from one idol, one master/husband to another, yearning to quench our need for self-worth in societies' mandates of success. But, even as we achieve them, we still find ourselves thirsting.

The Samaritan woman's honest heart discerns the truth and runs to tell the townspeople that she has found "The Chosen One!" The people cannot deny that something, someone has changed her. For standing before them is an empowered person—one whose sense of self-esteem is now grounded in her relationship with the Creator of all things. She has found her true Master—the One who elevates rather than subjugates. The people enthusiastically follow her to meet Jesus. May we do the same! Amen!

### **Prayer**

Lead us, Lord, to be honest and open as we lay our hearts bare to Your presence and truth. Fill us with the same excitement as the woman at the well. Transform us through Your living water, so all who see us will be drawn to You! In Jesus' holy Name we pray. Amen!

### **Psalm 121**

- <sup>1</sup> *I lift up my eyes to the mountains—  
where does my help come from?*
- <sup>2</sup> *My help comes from the LORD,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.*
- <sup>3</sup> *The Lord will not let your foot slip—  
the One who watches over you will not slumber;*
- <sup>4</sup> *indeed, the One who watches over Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.*
- <sup>5</sup> *The LORD watches over you—  
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;*
- <sup>6</sup> *the sun will not harm you by day,  
nor the moon by night.*
- <sup>7</sup> *The LORD will keep you from all harm—  
the Lord will watch over your life;*
- <sup>8</sup> *the LORD will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore.*

### **Kimberly Gonxhe '07**

Tragedy. Trauma. Pain. There are so many moments in the vicissitudes of life when we ask, Where is God in this? Why do the righteous suffer? Why do devout Christians die in pain? Why did tragedy strike my family? Why was this disease allowed to attack my body?

This life is full of mountains and valleys, joys and pains, triumphs and disappointments, but the God we serve is bigger than them all. As we trust and surrender ourselves to the Lord, things work out for our good. God uses both the beautiful and horrific to shape us into people we would never have dared to become on our own. Somehow, through this pruning and growing we become agents of influence and change able to influence others around us positively. As we look back, we can truly see that the eyes of God were watching over us all throughout our journey and protecting us along the way.

### **Prayer**

Lord, you are faithful. May we be still enough to see your hand in our lives. May we be always grateful for your unfailing love. May we trust you to do what you have said.

### **L. Roger Owens, faculty**

When I noticed several occurrences of the verb “keep” in this psalm, a translation of the Hebrew word *shamar*, I thought of the penalty shootout that climaxed the 2022 World Cup soccer tournament. With the kickers having a distinct advantage, the goalkeepers faced enormous pressure to prevent the ball from entering the goal. More often than not, they failed.

I struggled to imagine God that way—diving in front of evil, keeping us from danger. Sometimes deflecting it, sometimes not. Is that what “he will keep your life” means in this passage? Is a harried goalkeeper an appropriate image for God?

Perhaps Genesis 2:15 can help: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till and to keep it.” The word *shamar* occurs for the first time in Scripture in this verse. The image here is of a gardener, patiently caring for the soil, working to preserve its health and fruitfulness.

What would happen if we read Psalm 121 with that connotation in mind? We’d get an image of a God who tends us as a faithful gardener tends the soil, a God who keeps us—not diving to deflect every evil and pain, sometimes missing—but tending us despite pain, caring for us in the midst of a life where things sometimes go wrong, working faithful for our flourishing and fruitfulness.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, we pray that as we journey to the cross, we might understand ourselves as fruitful soil, kept by your grace, care, and love. Amen.

### **Hunter Farrell, staff**

During the 1980s and 90s, Peru’s Andes Mountains reverberated with acts of violence on an order of cruelty rarely experienced in modern history. Shining Path Liberation Army fighters killed and dismembered farmers, teachers, and children, leaving whole communities traumatized and families frozen in grief. Tragically, the Peruvian Army responded in kind, inflicting gross violations of human rights, especially among indigenous communities. “For 12 long years, we went to bed each night not knowing if the violence was coming for us,” said Presbyterian elder and my research colleague Olmedo Huamaní of the indigenous community of Santa Barbara, Huancavelica.

In the face of such profound moral injury, I found what the social psychologists expected: the erosion of interpersonal trust, intimate relationships, and the capacity to plan for tomorrow. What surprised me, though, was the deep resilience I found among so many of the region’s Christians. The biblical narrative of an all-powerful God who abides among God’s people, knows them by name, and will not stop loving them—*despite* their experience—was celebrated and shared in every prayer meeting, worship service, and family devotional time I attended in Huancavelica. By evoking God’s watchcare, people were enabled to hold on to each other.

It won’t surprise you, then, that the most popular hymn by far among Christians in the region is Psalm 121. The Psalm’s laser-like focus on God’s protection helps me in my perceived self-sufficiency to “right-size” my sense of importance—and remember in whose gracious hands I live.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, you are our rock and our shield. Remind us of life's fragility and of our need to hold on to each other even as we look to you for protection and nurture. In the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Mary Robin Craig '10**

As I write this devotional months before Lent, my eyes frequently pause upon news photographs of the mountains of western North Carolina. For those of us with ties to the southeastern United States, the plight of the Blue Ridge Mountains and all who inhabit them have been high on our list of concerns since Hurricane Helene. I don't know what other catastrophes will make headlines in the upcoming season, so I will stay with the mountains I know for now: Looking Glass Rock, Mount Pisgah, Chimney Rock.

How often have we looked upward for help? For some of us, snow-covered peaks—the Rockies, the Alps—set the scale. For others, the ancient Appalachians call, or perhaps rolling hilltops close to home are more likely possibilities. Some of us have to make do with the rooftops of urban skyscrapers. For anyone who has encountered mountaintops, they seem to have been constructed with proximity to God in mind.

If we have been to the Holy Land (as I have not) or searched maps and photographs for clues to the lives of biblical peoples, we know that Jesus, in addition to clambering up and around mountaintops on occasion, must have often looked upward to the heights that frequently surrounded him. Especially toward the end of his earthy life, he probably uttered these very words: "I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where will my help come?" We are in good company when we gaze upward and ask the same question.

Whenever I have hiked up a (very small) mountain, I look upward and imagine a minor personal triumph. Then, when I reach the top, with the immediate world spread below me, I imagine the Creator, delighted with the beauty of the view, and ready to respond to the prayers rising upward.

### **Prayer**

God of the Heights, hear our prayer. May we lift our gaze from our troubled and hurting world toward the help that drifts our way from the mountaintops, through the clouds and across the rivers, and reaches our comings and our goings. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

### **Tom Harrison '24**

In January 2023, my wife, Cherie, and I found ourselves in Bethlehem for 10 days, thanks to Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's World Mission Initiative.

We stood atop the Mount of Olives, gazing east from the Ha-Masu'ot Lookout across the Judean wilderness, where two days earlier we had eaten lunch in the home of Bedouin shepherds. Beyond the desert, we could make out the northern tip of the Dead Sea, where a day earlier we'd bobbed about like corks on wind-driven waves. Before that, we helped prepare the dinner we shared with residents of a Palestinian refugee camp.

I thought of all the history and drama that had unfolded on these hills—how Jesus fasted and met the devil in the wilderness before us, how he'd descended the slope behind us, riding a donkey. I thought of his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection—and of the endless antagonism that has played out ever since on that lower hill behind us, the Temple Mount.

What does it mean? How will it end? And to what purpose? God could easily get along without the bother of humanity. God doesn't need us.

But God does love us.

I remember a quote by Elie Wiesel, a Nazi concentration camp survivor and Nobel laureate. In the forward to his novel *The Gates of the Forest*, Wiesel wrote: "God made man because he loves stories."

God doesn't need our prayers or praises but does desire them. God doesn't need our help but desires partnership. God is not impressed with our attempts at righteousness but loves our confession. God's pure love compels and inspires us to strive for righteousness that we can't achieve. And when we confess our faults and failures, God gladly forgives and exhorts us to keep trying.

That's the makings of a great story. That's God's story. We are God's story.

### **Prayer**

Divine Maker of heaven and earth, you watch tirelessly over your holy city. You shield us by day and stand guard by night. You direct our footsteps along the hills and highways of your creation, even as your son, our Messiah, walked this earth and showed us the way. Continue to lead and protect us as we humbly walk with your son, Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

## **Day 14**

### **Jeremiah 2:1-13, 29-32**

<sup>1</sup> *The word of the LORD came to me, saying: <sup>2</sup> Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD:*

*I remember the devotion of your youth,  
your love as a bride,  
how you followed me in the wilderness,  
in a land not sown.*

<sup>3</sup> *Israel was holy to the LORD,  
the first fruits of his harvest.  
All who ate of it were held guilty;  
disaster came upon them,*

*says the LORD.*

<sup>4</sup> *Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. <sup>5</sup> Thus says the LORD:*

*What wrong did your ancestors find in me  
that they went far from me,  
and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?*

<sup>6</sup> *They did not say, "Where is the LORD  
who brought us up from the land of Egypt,  
who led us in the wilderness,  
in a land of deserts and pits,  
in a land of drought and deep darkness,  
in a land that no one passes through,  
where no one lives?"*

<sup>7</sup> *I brought you into a plentiful land*

*to eat its fruits and its good things.  
 But when you entered you defiled my land,  
 and made my heritage an abomination.*

<sup>8</sup> *The priests did not say, "Where is the LORD?"  
 Those who handle the law did not know me;  
 the rulers transgressed against me;  
 the prophets prophesied by Baal,  
 and went after things that do not profit.*

<sup>9</sup> *Therefore once more I accuse you,  
 says the LORD,  
 and I accuse your children's children.*

<sup>10</sup> *Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look,  
 send to Kedar and examine with care;  
 see if there has ever been such a thing.*

<sup>11</sup> *Has a nation changed its gods,  
 even though they are no gods?  
 But my people have changed their glory  
 for something that does not profit.*

<sup>12</sup> *Be appalled, O heavens, at this,  
 be shocked, be utterly desolate,  
 says the LORD,  
 for my people have committed two evils:  
 they have forsaken me,  
 the fountain of living water,  
 and dug out cisterns for themselves,  
 cracked cisterns  
 that can hold no water.*

<sup>29</sup> *Why do you complain against me?  
 You have all rebelled against me,  
 says the LORD.*

<sup>30</sup> *In vain I have struck down your children;  
 they accepted no correction.  
 Your own sword devoured your prophets  
 like a ravaging lion.*

<sup>31</sup> *And you, O generation, behold the word of the LORD!  
 Have I been a wilderness to Israel,  
 or a land of thick darkness?  
 Why then do my people say, "We are free,  
 we will come to you no more"?*

<sup>32</sup> *Can a girl forget her ornaments,  
 or a bride her attire?  
 Yet my people have forgotten me,  
 days without number.*

### **C. Mark Scott '18**

Jeremiah did the thankless task of telling his fellow Israelites they were wrong! He found no joy in it. Yet he was obedient and said to them what the Lord gave him to say. It is easier to confront people you don't know than people you do know. Jeremiah knew, lived among, and identified with those to whom

he prophesied. It is a sensitive matter to confront those near and familiar to you, for often they take offense and fight back!

Jeremiah was hurt and rejected for his obedience to the Lord. I respect him for what he did. I feel sympathy for his pain. I know what it feels like to be rejected by others for obeying the Lord. Jeremiah's own people had forsaken the "fountain of living water"!

Why do people turn away from what is life-giving? Why do I myself do so? Why did Jeremiah's people build "cracked cisterns that can hold no water"? Where have you and I replaced truth with a lie?

Today, can we listen to the Jeremiahs in our lives and repent? Or will we keep living a lie, keep following "the deceitful waywardness of the human heart" (R. E. Clements)?

### ***Prayer***

Lord, help me to listen to You when I don't like what You are saying—at those times I need to hear You the most. Your words warn me against willfully abandoning You. Thank You for caring enough to confront me. In Christ Jesus I pray. Amen!

### **Ben Beres '10**

We grew up hearing, "You are what you eat." In the case of my household, my siblings and I really ought to be hot dogs and mac and cheese by now! It's not that my mom couldn't cook, but at the end of the work day, dealing with everyone else's children leaves one a little sapped for serving one's own brood with the most complex and nutritionally diverse menus. Honestly, I still like hot dogs and macaroni and cheese, so I'm not sure it's the end of the world.

Now according to Jeremiah, the Lord did better by his children, Israel. He gave them a land that overflowed in abundance, bringing them from a land of deserts and ravines to one with rich and fertile produce. They had an abundance given to them. They had every good thing to eat. They wandered away from the Lord anyway.

They weren't mistreated. They weren't overtaxed. They weren't in need of, well, anything. But as the prophet describes it, they defiled the land, started pretending they could meet their own needs, and forgot about the Lord. They stopped asking each other "Where is the Lord?" Even the priests stopped asking it. God hadn't made himself less available; they just stopped looking for him.

If they looked for him, they might feel compelled to follow. They might remember how good they had it, walking in his footsteps. The people might not go chasing after the idols their neighbors fashioned or be contented to watch the water trickle out of the broken cisterns they'd dug. And more than the truth of their history, their reality, and their hope, they wanted to do what they wanted to do. They valued freedom to roam over faithfulness.

They had the best stuff to eat, but it didn't make them good. Maybe, you aren't what you eat, but are a reflection of what you follow? This Lent, do you need to turn aside from the way you've been going? Have you been following all sorts of things, but forgetting to ask, "Where is the Lord?" You aren't what you eat, but your faithfulness reflects your following.

### ***Prayer***

Holy One, there is none like you, and all we have ever needed is found in you. Forgive us for

wandering away, for defiling good gifts, and for pretending that we can do what you alone are capable of. Help us to follow you better, beginning with our very next step. In your Name, Amen.

#### **John 4:43-54**

*43 When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee 44 (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in the prophet's own country). 45 When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival. 46 Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. 47 When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. 48 Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." 49 The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." 50 Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. 51 As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. 52 So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him." 53 The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household. 54 Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.*

#### **Brian Lays '15/'16**

In many of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' healings, Jesus heals face to face, taking the hand of a sick girl, or telling a paralytic to pick up his mat and walk. But our passage today is different. Jesus assures the royal official, whom he meets in Cana, that his sick son, who is in Capernaum, "will live." Although the official wants Jesus to come with him to Capernaum and heal his son in person, Jesus doesn't offer to take the detour. Instead, he offers a word of promise, and the official is left to "walk by faith and not by sight" and journey home alone. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. Upon returning to Capernaum, the official discovers that, sure enough, his son was healed the previous day right when Jesus proclaimed it would be so.

The life of faith is often lived in the interim between promise and fulfillment. When we see God's promises fulfilled, we celebrate and give thanks, as we should. Yet we don't always reflect on how long we waited to see the promise fulfilled. And when we are in the midst of waiting on a promise, we don't always reflect on the times we've seen God fulfill other promises. There's no escaping it: faith is a waiting game. The good news is that many who have gone before us have "started on their way" trusting that God's word would be fulfilled. May we join that great cloud of witnesses this day—and continue on our way with the hope that God is faithful still.

#### **Prayer**

Faithful God, we give you thanks that your word does not return to you empty. Give us patience and faith to wait upon you, trusting that your promises are sure, even when the best is yet to come. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

#### **Psalm 25**

<sup>1</sup> *To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.*

<sup>2</sup> *O my God, in you I trust;*

*do not let me be put to shame;*

*do not let my enemies exult over me.*

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

### **Jacob Judy '19**

What I see as the fundamental ask in Psalm 25 is for God to change the circumstances of the psalmist's situation. I assume many people would sympathize with the psalmist's request. But even when change is sought, many individuals still experience elevated anxiety levels, often leading to avoidance of the situation altogether. Before 2015 I had not sat in a classroom, listened to an academic lecture, or taken

notes for nine years. Honestly, I was not particularly good at doing any of those things. The last time I was enrolled in a four-year academic program, it took me five years to complete.

Nonetheless, I sat in Dr. Tappy's Old Testament class—my first class in nine years—and let me say I had more than a few doubts about how I would do this time around. Have you ever felt as if there was a continuously wide and infinitely deep chasm between where you are in life and where you desire to be, without any discernable way to get across? That is the exact feeling I had in the pit of my stomach when I looked at the chalkboard and saw several lines of text written in Hebrew.

Seminary proved to be a lesson in understanding that the most effective way to change circumstances is by allowing God to change the person in the midst of them. Just as the psalmist cried out for God to help change, what seemed to be, a desperate situation, my cry to God during those four years in the master of divinity program was the same. I wondered whether God had meant to call me or if I was just supposed to relay that message to someone else. Even though I expected change would happen, I did not expect that the thing that would change so drastically would be me. Psalm 25:4-5 states, "Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long." If I had fought the circumstances as I intended to, I am sure my doubts and fears would have overtaken me. If I had tried to create my own route instead of waiting on God to reveal the right path, I would never have had a chance to experience the life waiting for me on the other side of that chasm.

### ***Prayer***

Merciful and wise God, thank you for the life-changing gift of your son, Jesus the Christ. Help me see all others in light of Christ's love displayed on the cross for me. Let me receive that mercy and grace as an invitation to be better in chaotic circumstances according to your plans and not my own. I pray these things in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

### **Kristen Renee Barner '97**

The question of theodicy comes up regularly for me. I had a spinal stroke in 2017. I'm partially paralyzed. Life is tricky.

People often presume: "You must be angry with God!" To all of this, I say, "I am not angry with God. All kinds of people are subject to a hard time. I am not excluded from this."

They ask, "Why did this terrible thing happen to a good person?" To this, I say, "You presume I am good. I am as human, as fragile, as faulty as the next person. (I just really hope God isn't keeping score.)"

People offer, "I shall pray for your recovery." To all of this, I say, "I am deeply grateful. I will take all the good will that is offered. But I don't think science and biology work quite that way."

My Dad, as retired PC(USA) minister, asked me once, "What does it mean to you when people say they are praying for you?"

I explained how the history of applause comes from the ancient Greek theater—or so I've been told. The audience wanted to reach out and touch the performers, but this was impossible. Instead, they reached their hands together and clapped. Prayer felt to me like clapping. It was a way for people to reach out, to touch God, to touch me, to touch whatever was the subject of their prayer. Knowing that the intent was to connect with me, I was strengthened, empowered, buoyed. The action of prayer didn't/doesn't

necessarily feel like miracle-making, but rather, Community. A reminder to me that we all, regardless of how we worship, share the same God, the only God. Therefore, we are connected.

My hunch, from the community that we live in, the global community of citizens of this world, we seek the same things: comfort, forgiveness, grace, strength, courage, support, community, love, kindness.

### **Prayer**

O God of All of Us, whatever my failures—whatever our failures—let us applaud one another, clapping and praying for one another, recognizing that we are merely creatures inhabiting one space. For better or worse. God forgive us. May we forgive one another. May we strive to do better for ourselves and for one another. Let it be so. Amen.

## **Day 15**

### **Jeremiah 3:6-18**

*<sup>6</sup> The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and played the whore there? <sup>7</sup> And I thought, "After she has done all this she will return to me"; but she did not return, and her false sister Judah saw it. <sup>8</sup> She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce; yet her false sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. <sup>9</sup> Because she took her whoredom so lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree. <sup>10</sup> Yet for all this her false sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but only in pretense, says the LORD. <sup>11</sup> Then the LORD said to me: Faithless Israel has shown herself less guilty than false Judah. <sup>12</sup> Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: Return, faithless Israel, says the LORD. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, says the LORD; I will not be angry for ever. <sup>13</sup> Only acknowledge your guilt, that you have rebelled against the LORD your God, and scattered your favors among strangers under every green tree, and have not obeyed my voice, says the LORD. <sup>14</sup> Return, O faithless children, says the LORD, for I am your master; I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. <sup>15</sup> I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. <sup>16</sup> And when you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says the LORD, they shall no longer say, "The ark of the covenant of the LORD." It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made. <sup>17</sup> At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no longer stubbornly follow their own evil will. <sup>18</sup> In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your ancestors for a heritage.*

### **Minh Towner '13**

We live in a world that encourages us to be independent, self-reliant. With an attitude of entitlement, we work hard to pursue the world's view of happiness to meet our fleshly desires. No matter how hard we try, failure is inevitable, and disappointment follows. We question God when things don't turn out favorably for us. We even question God's existence, or we live wearing a mask pretending who we are not.

God knows our imperfection. God knows us more than we know ourselves. We are "faithless Israel . . . false Judah." We are sinners, but God still loves us unconditionally. God is calling us "return" to him no matter what. The desire of God's heart is to care for us, even though we are sinners, as long as we truly repent. If we do so, his promise will be delivered as he has said: "I will give you shepherds after my own

heart.” In Isaiah 40 God says to his people, “I will save you. I have called you by name—you are mine”—a promise that today also holds true for us.

### **Prayer**

God of love, God of mercy, you know our weaknesses and our sinful nature more than we know ourselves. We run after our heart’s desire instead of being obedient and following your will. We live our lives for this world and not for you. We ask you for your forgiveness. Thank you for your unfailing love. We pray that our souls will always be on fire as we run after your heart. In the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Romans 1:28–2:11**

*1:28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. <sup>29</sup> They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, <sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. <sup>32</sup> They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them. <sup>2:1</sup> Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. <sup>2</sup> You say, “We know that God’s judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth.” <sup>3</sup> Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup> Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup> But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup> For he will repay according to each one’s deeds: <sup>7</sup> to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; <sup>8</sup> while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. <sup>9</sup> There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, <sup>10</sup> but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. <sup>11</sup> For God shows no partiality.*

### **Marjorie Davis ’18**

In 1992, my son Carl got AIDS. As African Americans, we first sought help from within that community, but it was the openly gay white community whom God used to change Carl’s heart, though Carl wasn’t gay. That community quickly embraced us unconditionally, poured out their love on us, shared their resources, even invited us on retreats, which we attended. We met some of the most funny, happy, and loving people. They knew they were loved and supported among themselves and countered the blame and condemnation from others. Carl began seeing them as individuals, not society’s image of them, and through their acceptance of Carl God changed his heart. One day he said to me, “Mom, if I hadn’t gotten AIDS, I wouldn’t have come to know Jesus.”

During this season of Lent, let us confess that we all need a change of heart, and it begins with accepting Jesus and knowing the truth of God’s word. In 1992, Carl passed. Oh, thank you Father for changing his heart, for saving him and showing him that we are all sinners saved by grace. Oh, to be loved by you.

Our text from Romans warns against all kinds of lifestyles that dishonor God. Too many of us excuse our sinful ways by pointing fingers at others. But let us not deny anyone the same access to God’s forgiveness, love, and grace as the rest of humanity. As Christians, our witness should be to the unsaved—to those who do “not see fit to acknowledge God” (1:28). Let us not pass judgment, for in

doing so we “condemn” ourselves, since we are also sinners. Let us humbly recognize today that, indeed, “God shows no partiality” (2:11).

### **Prayer**

Dear great and loving Father, how foolish so many of us show ourselves to be. Yet how gracious and unconditional you are in your love for and patience with us in spite of our blame and shame. Oh, how your heart must grieve seeing how we continue to condemn those we believe do not deserve your love, often because we feel we don’t deserve it ourselves. How beautiful that your family consists of all kinds of people. Thank you, Abba, that you are no respecter of persons, that you show no partiality. Chastise us, Lord, for always asking for help and praying for forgiveness, yet never allowing you to change our attitudes and hearts. Forgive us, oh God.

### **John 5:1-18**

<sup>1</sup>After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. <sup>3</sup>In these lay many invalids — blind, lame, and paralyzed. <sup>5</sup>One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup>When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” <sup>7</sup>The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” <sup>8</sup>Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” <sup>9</sup>At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. <sup>10</sup>So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” <sup>11</sup>But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” <sup>12</sup>They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk’?” <sup>13</sup>Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. <sup>14</sup>Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.” <sup>15</sup>The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. <sup>16</sup>Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. <sup>17</sup>But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” <sup>18</sup>For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

### **Ben Phipps '15**

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

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

### **Prayer**

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

### **Patrice Fowler-Searcy '13/'24**

Jesus went up to Jerusalem, the place where he ultimately would be lifted up and crucified, would draw all people unto himself, and would be recognized as the Son of God. Yet in this passage Jesus is near the Sheep Gate at the “House of Mercy” (Beth-zatha), where he finds a man who had been ill for 38 years. And Jesus queries the man, “Do you want to be made well?”

That is the question we each face daily: Do we want to be made well? Do we want to be made whole and cleansed of our sin, iniquities, proclivities, and faithlessness that cause us to be outside the will of God? Much like the Israelites whose faithlessness led them to wander in the desert for 38 years, our faithlessness leads us to dry places—or finds us sitting at the House of Mercy, yet unable to lift up our mats and walk. During this Lenten season, as we contemplate the faithfulness of God and the sacrifice of Christ, may we realize that we are healed, whole, and redeemed by God’s grace, mercy, and love.

### **Prayer**

Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks that your faithfulness is from everlasting to everlasting. As we contemplate the sacrifice of Christ, may we realize that we are empowered by your mercy to leave behind every weight that might cause us to stumble and to live faithfully as your children. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

## **Day 16**

### **Psalm 27**

<sup>1</sup> *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?*

<sup>2</sup> *When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh —  
my adversaries and foes —  
they shall stumble and fall.*

<sup>3</sup> *Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war rise up against me,  
yet I will be confident.*

<sup>4</sup> *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.*

<sup>5</sup> *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.*
- <sup>6</sup> *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.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,  
be gracious to me and answer me!*
- <sup>8</sup> *"Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"  
Your face, LORD, do I seek.*
- <sup>9</sup> *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!*
- <sup>10</sup> *If my father and mother forsake me,  
the LORD will take me up.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Teach me your way, O LORD,  
and lead me on a level path  
because of my enemies.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,  
for false witnesses have risen against me,  
and they are breathing out violence.*
- <sup>13</sup> *I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Wait for the LORD;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the LORD!*

### **Melissa Goodman '10**

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

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

#### **Prayer**

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

**Liddy Barlow, community partner**

In the dystopian novel *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, young people must enter a “fear landscape” as part of an initiation ritual. With group leaders monitoring their brain activity, they must endure a simulation of each one of their fears, one after another.

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

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

***Prayer***

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

**Rebecca Dix '15/'16**

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

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

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

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

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

***Prayer***

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

**Annamarie Groenenboom '17**

One of my favorite classes in seminary was Psalms with Dr. Creach. The lectures, discussions, and readings were interesting but the thing that inspired me most was our final projects. We were given a psalm to research, learn about, become an expert on, and present creatively. I had the opportunity to delve into Psalm 27.

Whether you are reading the Psalm of the Day in a worship service or needing some personal encouragement in the depths and busyness of Lent, Psalm 27 is filled with inspiration, beauty, and

comforting truths. The psalm starts out with God's light. March is still considered winter in Michigan and continues to plunge us into days of darkness and dreariness. Yet this psalm starts by reminding us that no matter what is going on in life, whether it's a dark day or a somber season, we still can rely on God's beautiful shining light piercing through the darkness.

Verse 11 is also especially appropriate for this season of Lent: "Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies." As we try to remember, respond to, proclaim, and prepare for the death of Jesus Christ, let us be inspired to be taught the ways of God. Let us be encouraged to follow the path that God has set for each one of us and trust in the grace that God gives to us.

As we wait and prepare for Holy Week, let us wait for the Lord; be strong, and let our hearts take courage.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, you are our light and our salvation. As we journey through this Lenten season, gives us grace to learn your ways and to walk the paths that you have set out for us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

### **Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28**

<sup>9</sup>On that day, says the LORD, courage shall fail the king and the officials; the priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded. <sup>10</sup>Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD, how utterly you have deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'It shall be well with you,' even while the sword is at the throat!"

<sup>19</sup> My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!

Oh, the walls of my heart!

My heart is beating wildly;

I cannot keep silent;

for I hear the sound of the trumpet,

the alarm of war.

<sup>20</sup> Disaster overtakes disaster,  
the whole land is laid waste.

Suddenly my tents are destroyed,  
my curtains in a moment.

<sup>21</sup> How long must I see the standard,  
and hear the sound of the trumpet?

<sup>22</sup> "For my people are foolish,  
they do not know me;

they are stupid children,  
they have no understanding.

They are skilled in doing evil,  
but do not know how to do good."

<sup>23</sup> I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;  
and to the heavens, and they had no light.

<sup>24</sup> I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,  
and all the hills moved to and fro.

<sup>25</sup> I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,  
and all the birds of the air had fled.

<sup>26</sup> I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,  
and all its cities were laid in ruins  
before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

<sup>27</sup> For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a desolation;  
yet I will not make a full end.

<sup>28</sup> Because of this the earth shall mourn,  
and the heavens above grow black;  
for I have spoken, I have purposed;  
I have not relented nor will I turn back.

### **Kendra Buckwalter Smith '12/'13**

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God has been calling His people to repentance, but Judah will not turn. This passage gives us a pretty bleak picture of wrath and destruction. The consequences of sin play out in a startling reversal of the creation narrative as Jeremiah “looks on” at the world’s de-creation back to the chaos from which it was called (vv. 23-26).

As we journey to the cross this Lenten season, we are invited to “look on” along with Jeremiah—to look upon ourselves and our world; to look upon the painful reality of injustice and broken relationships caused and perpetuated by our own failures to love God and one another fully. In short, to look upon all to which we would rather turn a blind eye. Our hearts will be broken along with God’s, and we will cry out with Him in anguish. But it is when we have truly looked at all that separates us from God and one another that we are able to “look on” as it is all put to death—nailed to the cross—that we might be freed to live as new creations in Christ.

#### **Prayer**

Loving God, you have put to death the sin that separates us from you and one another. In you there is a new creation. In that assurance, allow us the grace to see ourselves clearly, that we may turn again to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **Romans 2:12-24**

<sup>12</sup> All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. <sup>13</sup> For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified. <sup>14</sup> When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. <sup>15</sup> They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them <sup>16</sup> on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all. <sup>17</sup> But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God <sup>18</sup> and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law, <sup>19</sup> and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, <sup>20</sup> a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, <sup>21</sup> you, then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? <sup>22</sup> You that forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You that abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup> You that boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? <sup>24</sup> For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

### **Nicholas Stavlund '17**

Paul wrote in Romans 2 that there were some Gentiles who instinctively did what the Law required (v. 14). Apparently, these outsiders had the Law of the insiders, the chosen people, bubbling up in their gut, overflowing in their behavior. The requirements of the Mosaic law were, in Paul’s words, written on their hearts. Presumably they were never taught this stuff in a classroom. Yet, despite their disposition as outsiders and their dispossession of the law, their conscience bore witness to the light of God.

In the spring of 2017, while the battle for western Mosul continued to grow increasingly violent, I saw an ISIS fighter surrender to an Iraqi military officer. Months earlier, members of this Iraqi officer's family were murdered as they tried to flee invading ISIS fighters. Surprisingly, the Iraqi officer grabbed the dejected ISIS fighter by his shoulders, looked him the eyes, and prayed that God's peace would reign in the man's heart. He didn't punch him. He didn't shoot him. He prayed for him.

I think I saw the light of God that day, not in an Anglican or Presbyterian, but in an Iraqi Army officer who's heart was broken from the violence of war. Perhaps this is what Paul was pointing to: Doers of the law of God are everywhere, even in the most surprising of places.

**Prayer**

O God, with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light. Quench our thirst with living water, and flood our darkened minds with heavenly light. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever, we pray. Amen.

**John 5:19-29**

<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. <sup>22</sup> The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; <sup>27</sup> and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> 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."

**Michael Clark '18**

In this discourse Jesus makes clear his identity with God. Whoever sees and hears Jesus sees and hears God. Whoever honors Jesus honors God. Jesus is Immanuel, God-with-us. The name does not tell us where God is; rather, it tells us where we are—we who know Jesus are in the presence of God. It is for this reason that we can trust in the authority of Jesus to judge, and we can rejoice in the grace of Jesus to give life.

Jesus both assures us of eternal life in the future resurrection and declares that "the hour . . . is now here" when we who were dead in sin may have new life in Christ. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). As we wait and prepare to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, let us remember that we need not wait for the presence of God to bring life and hope and joy to our lives and our communities.

**Prayer**

O Lord our God, we thank You and praise You. Teach us to celebrate the resurrection not only as something that will come, but also as something that is already happening. Even as you granted

to Jesus to have life in himself, hallelujah, you have given us life in Jesus, in whose name we say:  
Amen!

### **Anthony Hita '13**

If five random non-believers in your social circle were asked what top three things define you, would “Christian” make the list? Our identity in Christ is besieged, not from outsiders, but from our very selves. We let our jobs, nation, politics, sports teams, and hobbies define us first, giving Christ only the leftovers. During the Church’s early years, “Christian” was a pejorative. In the Roman system, society was organized around the rituals of the Greco-Roman gods. By following Jesus, Christians became outcasts from the social network surrounding the temple cults. To be called “Christian” was to be called a cultural traitor, as by not participating in the dominant religion, people worried Christians would bring the wrath of the gods on everyone. Christians were identified as atheists (“denier of the gods”), a status having intense stigma attached to it. New Christians in this environment converted not because Christianity was attractive, but because they saw how Christians lived, heard how Christians talked, and realized Jesus was worth following as a result.

Accepting Jesus Christ is not merely an intellectual assent to some philosophical truth—it is a completely new primary identity. The point of being a Christian is to so closely identify with Christ that you are always introducing others to Jesus in both your actions and words. When Christians act, speak, or treat others contrary to how Jesus behaved, we corrupt our identity and introduce others to a false Christ. To lead to Christ, we must lead *with* Christ.

### **Prayer**

Lord, help me to decrease that you might increase; that acting or speaking, others might see you more and me less. Take first place in my life and let me use my unique individuality to more fully serve you so that others too may participate in the bounty you have given and promised all those who claim your name. Amen.

## **Day 17**

### **Psalm 148**

<sup>1</sup> *Praise the Lord!*

*Praise the Lord from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights!*

<sup>2</sup> *Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his host!*

<sup>3</sup> *Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars!*

<sup>4</sup> *Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!*

<sup>5</sup> *Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for he commanded and they were created.*

<sup>6</sup> *He established them forever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.*

<sup>7</sup> *Praise the Lord from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,*

<sup>8</sup> *fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!*  
<sup>9</sup> *Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!*  
<sup>10</sup> *Wild animals and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!*  
<sup>11</sup> *Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!*  
<sup>12</sup> *Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!*  
<sup>13</sup> *Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.*  
<sup>14</sup> *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!*

### **Roger Owens, faculty**

Lent is a season of penitence. We engage in self-examination and seek forgiveness; we remember that we are humans, from “humus”—the earth.

And yet in the midst of Lent, Psalm 148 intrudes as a reminder: We are still a people of praise. We may have buried the “Alleluias,” but we don’t need to forget what God has done. God has created and established all that is—including us. And so the psalm calls all of creation—sea monsters, fruit trees, mountains—to praise, which it can’t not do. By its very existence, creation praises God.

That’s what makes us different from the rest of creation. We can choose to turn away from our ultimate purpose—to worship, glorify, and enjoy God. In Lent we remember our habit of turning away from our true end and what God did in Christ to turn us back.

And so even in Lent, let us dare to let praise slip from our lips. Let’s not leave the mountains and fruit trees to rejoice alone.

### ***Prayer***

Forgiving God, we praise you for the work of creation, but most especially for the work of re-creating us in Christ, for forgiving us our sins and turning us back to the direction of our true purpose and end—to praise you forever. This we pray in the name of Christ, our Savior. Amen.

### **Sarina Odden Meyer ’07**

“A society with harmony-way values cares for the most marginalized—for the poor and needy—because how we treat those who are most in need reveals the heart of who we are. Such a society will protect Mother Earth, our source of life, at every turn.” - Randy Woodley in *Becoming Rooted: 100 Days of Reconnecting with Sacred Earth*

Psalm 148 reminds us that we are interconnected with all of life on earth. God created everything to live in harmony together. But now, the biodiversity of our planet is in crisis. We are the image of God on this planet, called to nurture life in everything we do. Can anything we do make a difference? Just as God

saved the world by becoming one person (Jesus), willing to make a personal sacrifice (death on the cross), God can work through each of us to make a difference for biodiversity.

For example, what is our relationship like with the land on which we live? We can control the habitats in our yards and create life for biodiversity. Is our yard a habitat for soil microbes, pollinators, and migrating birds? Or is it filled with a non-flowering monoculture? How would the land on which we live cry out to God? With praises for the humans who dwell there, or with laments?

As we prepare to remember Jesus' death and resurrection, let us contemplate how we might bring the good news of new life to the land on which we live. Let us take up our cross and make personal sacrifices to invest in creating life-filled habitats for the least-of-these who live in our yards. Let us be the image of God, enabling life to thrive, so that all of Creation who knows us will cry out in praise to God.

### ***Prayer***

God of all Creation, we confess that we have forgotten our calling to nurture life on earth. Help us to bear your image in Creation by enabling life to thrive. Give us courage and determination to change our ways so that all of Creation who knows us would cry out to you in praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Roderick Mason '18**

Life moves fast—there's always another meeting, event, or errand to run. Some days, it feels impossible to keep up with everything.

But Psalm 148 invites us to pause and join the ultimate anthem of praise. This psalm is a breathtaking call to worship, where everything in creation—angels, stars, mountains, trees, animals, and even the weather—proclaims God's majesty. And humanity, as His image-bearers, is uniquely invited to lift our voices, too.

What strikes me is that worship isn't just about singing in church. It's woven into the world around us. The rustling of leaves, the glow of the stars, and the warmth of the sun—they all silently reflect God's beauty, power, and grace. As Psalm 19:1 reminds us, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands."

But while creation praises God simply by existing as He designed, we are called to something more. We are invited to worship intentionally—with our voices, choices, and lives. This means acknowledging God's sovereignty, showing gratitude for His blessings, and living in ways that reflect His love and character.

In a busy, sometimes harsh world, it's important for us as believers to reflect Christ. How can you join this universal song of praise today? Maybe it's through thanking a loved one, encouraging a friend, or simply pausing to notice the beauty around you. Even in small ways, you can reflect God's glory.

Take a moment today to look at creation and see how it praises God. Let it inspire you to add your voice to the symphony of praise. In the chaos of life, remember the simple truth: Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

### ***Prayer***

Heavenly Father, in a world full of challenges, help us embrace the beauty of all creation praising

You. Inspire us to join this vision daily, lifting our voices and lives in worship, from the depths to the heights. Let our praise reflect Your glory. Amen.

**Jeremiah 5:1-9**

- <sup>1</sup> *Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,  
look around and take note!  
Search its squares and see  
if you can find one person  
who acts justly  
and seeks truth —  
so that I may pardon Jerusalem.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Although they say, "As the LORD lives,"  
yet they swear falsely.*
- <sup>3</sup> *O LORD, do your eyes not look for truth?  
You have struck them,  
but they felt no anguish;  
you have consumed them,  
but they refused to take correction.  
They have made their faces harder than rock;  
they have refused to turn back.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Then I said, "These are only the poor, they have no sense;  
for they do not know the way of the LORD,  
the law of their God.*
- <sup>5</sup> *Let me go to the rich  
and speak to them;  
surely they know the way of the LORD,  
the law of their God."  
But they all alike had broken the yoke,  
they had burst the bonds.*
- <sup>6</sup> *Therefore a lion from the forest shall kill them,  
a wolf from the desert shall destroy them.  
A leopard is watching against their cities;  
everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces —  
because their transgressions are many,  
their apostasies are great.*
- <sup>7</sup> *How can I pardon you?  
Your children have forsaken me,  
and have sworn by those who are no gods.  
When I fed them to the full,  
they committed adultery  
and trooped to the houses of prostitutes.*
- <sup>8</sup> *They were well-fed lusty stallions,  
each neighing for his neighbor's wife.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Shall I not punish them for these things?  
says the LORD;  
and shall I not bring retribution  
on a nation such as this?*

## **Rebecca Dix '15/'16**

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

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

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

### **Prayer**

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

## **Romans 2:25-3:18**

*<sup>2:25</sup> Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup> So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? <sup>27</sup> Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have the written code and circumcision but break the law. <sup>28</sup> For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. <sup>29</sup> Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart — it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God. <sup>3:1</sup> Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Much, in every way. For in the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. <sup>3</sup> What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? <sup>4</sup> By no means! Although everyone is a liar, let God be proved true, as it is written,*

*"So that you may be justified in your words,  
and prevail in your judging."*

*<sup>5</sup> But if our injustice serves to confirm the justice of God, what should we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) <sup>6</sup> By no means! For then how could God judge the world? <sup>7</sup> But if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? <sup>8</sup> And why not say (as some people slander us by saying that we say), "Let us do evil so that good may come"? Their condemnation is deserved! <sup>9</sup> What then? Are we any better off? No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, <sup>10</sup> as it is written:*

*"There is no one who is righteous, not even one;*

- <sup>11</sup> *there is no one who has understanding,  
there is no one who seeks God.*
- <sup>12</sup> *All have turned aside, together they have become worthless;  
there is no one who shows kindness,  
there is not even one."*
- <sup>13</sup> *"Their throats are opened graves;  
they use their tongues to deceive."  
"The venom of vipers is under their lips."*
- <sup>14</sup> *"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."*
- <sup>15</sup> *"Their feet are swift to shed blood;*
- <sup>16</sup> *ruin and misery are in their paths,*
- <sup>17</sup> *and the way of peace they have not known."*
- <sup>18</sup> *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

### **Amy Jun '18**

The first human beings, made in the image of God, were meant to live their lives as righteous beings. But their disobedience to God brought them under the power of evil, and their sin has tainted all humanity ever since. There is no one who is righteous, not even one. When the God of mercy revealed His righteousness and its requirements of humbled humanity by means of laws, God's people instead boasted in the Law! They misunderstood God's intention. They could not perfectly keep God's law, so it could not make them righteous.

Where, then, can we find our righteousness? In Jesus Christ, who came to the world as the righteousness of God. If we dwell in Christ, his righteousness will shine on us, and we will be instruments of reflecting his righteousness to others. Dwell in Christ!

#### **Prayer**

Loving God, thank you that you've revealed your righteousness to us through Your Son Jesus Christ. Let your righteousness shine on us so that we may dwell in it. Through us, let your righteousness be revealed as power breaking through all darkness and making our world bright. Amen.

### **Scott Hagley, faculty**

I've often felt like Paul gets himself a little too worked up in the second chapter of Romans. Really? No one is righteous? *Everyone* is a liar?

But during Lent it is appropriate—and even good—to step back and consider how it is that all humanity are under “the power of sin” (3:10). For in our hyper-connected world, we can no longer claim ignorance with regard to the ways our buying, selling, and everyday life harms others. Awareness of such destruction might soften its impact—I might burn less gasoline or become vegan—but it fails to make the world and my place in it right.

Of course, we know where this story is heading. God's grace proves sufficient where our achievements fail. But during Lent, it is okay to just camp out a bit with Paul's honesty. The truth is, we live in a world of immense beauty and catastrophic loss; we are sustained by God's grace and yet often live with a numbing sense of moral ambivalence. These things are not easily harmonized, nor should they be. For as Ed Simon has said: “Acknowledging the presence of selfishness, cruelty, greed, rage, intolerance, and, in a word, sin . . . is that which makes the existence of good all the more obvious. Even if sometimes good

only exists as a dim shaft of blurred light in our dark cell.” Paul’s honesty here is also his hope: the “dim shaft of blurred light” that is incarnation and resurrection.

**Prayer**

*From Psalm 22*

But you, O LORD, do not be far away!  
O my help, come quickly to my aid!  
From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.  
The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.  
May your hearts live forever!  
Amen.

**John 5:30-47**

*30 “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. 31 If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. 32 There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. 33 You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. 34 Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. 35 He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. 36 But I have a testimony greater than John’s. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. 37 And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, 38 and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent. 39 You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. 40 Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. 41 I do not accept glory from human beings. 42 But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. 43 I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. 44 How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? 45 Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. 46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. 47 But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”*

**Lynn Cox ’14**

What patience God has with our unbelief! Jesus has healed a sick man physically and spiritually and been repaid with persecution from a group of Jews. Blind to the grace and mercy we readily see in Jesus’ acts toward the man, they have called Jesus to account for performing work forbidden on the sabbath. We enter the middle of Jesus’ response to their accusations confident that we side with him and anticipating his delivery of a theological coup de grace.

Thank God, that is not what Jesus does. Instead, he affirms that he has no power of his own. Like them, he must seek the will of God to be empowered. In a subsequent debate (John 8:14-16), Jesus will claim that he can testify rightly to his own actions, but here he submits to the human standard that requires the testimony of others. He reminds his accusers of the witnesses that testify to them about his identity: God his Father, John the Baptist, the works the Father has assigned to him, the Scriptures, and the law of Moses. Submission to God in love and faith are all that is necessary for them to recognize the truth of their testimony.

Jesus' word to his opponents is also a word to us. We may hear it echoed in the directive to believers in James 1:5-7. God gives wisdom—the ability to recognize and respond to God's truth—generously and without hesitation to those who ask for it in faith. When, like Jesus' accusers, our study, prayer, and worship are shaped more by our devices and desires than by the love of God, we must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

This word to everyone who claims a relationship with the Father is both hard and full of grace. God does not hesitate to call out whatever constitutes our doublemindedness, but in Christ he simultaneously invites us into loving relationship, thus proactively making his will and way available to us by faith through the Scriptures, the testimony of the saints, the fellowship of believers, and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Lent grants us time and space to see where we stand in response to God's invitation.

### **Prayer**

Thank you, Father, that in love you have revealed yourself to us in Jesus and invite us to know you more and more by faith. Match our desire to know you and do your will to your desire for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Day 18**

### **Psalm 43**

- <sup>1</sup> *Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause  
against an ungodly people;  
from those who are deceitful and unjust  
deliver me!*
- <sup>2</sup> *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?*
- <sup>3</sup> *O send out your light and your truth;  
let them lead me;  
let them bring me to your holy hill  
and to your dwelling.*
- <sup>4</sup> *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.*
- <sup>5</sup> *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.*

### **Johnnie Monroe, community partner**

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

himself; “Why are you cast down, O my soul and why are you disquieted within me?” Then he answers his question “Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.”

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

**Prayer**

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

**Lee David Kricher '20/'22**

There are many reasons that we understandably “walk about mournfully.” It is wise during those times to ask God to send light into our darkness. But the psalmist does not just speak to God. He also speaks to himself. “Why are you cast down, O my soul?”

God never calls us to ignore or bury our feelings. Godly counselors and caring friends can help us acknowledge and process our feelings. Yet there is an important insight found in the words of the psalmist. While openly acknowledging the reality and impact of his feelings, he made a choice to not surrender to those feelings.

Clinical Psychologist Dr. Gail Brenner writes, “Shining the spotlight of awareness on emotions changes everything. Instead of avoiding or trying to change your feelings, you become aware of them. Then, amazingly, you realize you don’t need to follow them into chaos and confusion. They don’t have to guide and define you.”

The scriptures are filled with stories of people who became world changers, at least in part, because they did not let their feelings master them. Moses, despite his fears, chose to do what God called him to do. Elijah, despite his despair, chose to do what God called him to do. Peter, James, and John chose to follow Jesus despite their deep feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. All were guests on the Mount of Transfiguration, just before Jesus made the ultimate choice to go to the cross.

God created us to experience a wide range of emotions. But it is encouraging to learn from the examples of so many that the impact of our lives is not defined and determined by the rise and fall of our feelings, but rather by our choices.

**Prayer**

Lord, you know the depths of my feelings. During this Lenten season, please send Your light into my darkness. And help me to say with the psalmist, “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 149**

<sup>1</sup> *Praise the Lord!*

*Sing to the Lord a new song,  
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.*

<sup>2</sup> *Let Israel be glad in its Maker;  
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.*

<sup>3</sup> *Let them praise his name with dancing,  
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.*  
<sup>4</sup> *For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;  
he adorns the humble with victory.*  
<sup>5</sup> *Let the faithful exult in glory;  
let them sing for joy on their couches.*  
<sup>6</sup> *Let the high praises of God be in their throats  
and two-edged swords in their hands,  
<sup>7</sup> to execute vengeance on the nations  
and punishment on the peoples,  
<sup>8</sup> to bind their kings with fetters  
and their nobles with chains of iron,  
<sup>9</sup> to execute on them the judgment decreed.  
This is glory for all his faithful ones.  
Praise the Lord!*

#### **Don McKim '74**

“Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song” (v. 1) commands the Psalm. Praise God for a victory God gave the people. We don’t know what it was. But God “adorns the humble with victory” (v. 4). So sing!

The words “new song” appear in other psalms (33:3; 96:1). They may designate a new composition praising God’s goodness. But Karl Barth suggested that, in the Old Testament, “new song” refers to “the coming and crucial time of the Messiah” (*Church Dogmatics* III/3, 472). If he’s correct, this text is one for Lent.

The “humble” obtained “victory” (in Hebrew, also “salvation”). Jesus the Messiah “humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). Then God exalted him (2:9). Jesus brought victory and salvation. In Lent, we praise the humble Jesus who saves us from the cross—and who triumphs! God’s people “exult in glory” (v. 5). Sing a new song!

#### **Prayer**

O God of goodness and blessing, we praise you that you are always with us. As you protected and helped your ancient people, so through your presence do you do for us now as we know your salvation in Jesus Christ. Thank you for the humble Christ, who triumphs over all! Amen.

#### **Rebecca McGreevy Hickok '93**

It is Saturday, March 13, 2021. But . . . it’s not really Saturday, March 13. As I write these words, it’s late June in 2020, and my deadline for submitting this devotional is in a few days. It’s a sweltering summer day in the mid-Hudson Valley, an area hit particularly hard by “the virus.” Here in New York, we are on a slow march to whatever normal will be for us.

I can’t imagine what next week will bring, much less what our world will look like in nine months, when it really will be March 13th. But I can tell you one thing: there’s a good chance that we will not be singing the praises of God in the congregation of the faithful. Singing is the one thing they’ve told us not to do. All those diagrams and graphs and 8 x 10 colored glossy photographs with circles and arrows and a paragraph on the back have shown us that. NO SINGING! No new songs. No old songs. No songs with dance. No songs with timbrel. No songs with harp. NO . . . SINGING.

Yet it's the one thing we should be doing now—whether it's June or March. New songs, old songs, protest songs, praise songs, lament songs . . . songs that fill our hearts with love; songs that fill our eyes with vision; songs that fill our ears with awareness. Maybe we can't gather together as we used to in pre-Covid-19 days, but that doesn't mean we can't still sing. In fact, do this: close the computer or Ipad or phone or whatever device you are using to read this devotional, stand up, and hoot out your favorite hymn. If we can dance like no one is watching, then we can certainly sing like no one is listening. Except God. Who is listening—and beaming at all God's beloved children standing by themselves in their homes and workplaces and backyards and at traffic lights and by a loved one's hospital bed and in classrooms or church offices, singing. Singing for our lives. Praise God!

### **Prayer**

Loving God, Conductor of the Choir Invisible, we lift our voices to you not just to praise you but also to ask your guidance as we seek to be in harmony with each other. Amen.

### **Joanne Spence '18/'24**

The poems in the Psalter reflect the gamut of human emotions in their expressions of crying out to God for forgiveness and mercy, lamenting pain and our own sinfulness, praising God's majestic nature and all his creation, and much more. Psalm 149, the compendium's penultimate song, invites us to praise the Lord in a "new song." Verse 3 tells us to "praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre"—in other words, to praise God with our whole body. Thus Psalm 149 acknowledges our humanity.

For many of us, Lent is a time when we think of our bodies often—particularly if we are practicing daily fasting from food. At such times, we become more aware of our body's limits and needs. Being human is part of how God created us. He made us in his image, yet human, and he declared us good. How often do we exist disconnected from and disappointed with our bodies? A friend and mentor of mine notes, "We don't just *have* bodies, we *are* bodies." The body is the primary and only vessel in which to live one's life. We are not "brains-on-a-stick." Could acknowledging our finite and limited existence be the point at which we find true freedom to "sing a new song"—sing it in just the same way the psalmist charges us to praise and thus please the Lord?

### **Prayer**

Lord, we are yours, and you are ours. Help us to sing a new song. Let us worship you with the entirety of our bodies, thus bearing witness to the Incarnated One. We pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Jeremiah 5:20-31**

<sup>20</sup> Declare this in the house of Jacob, proclaim it in Judah: <sup>21</sup> Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears, but do not hear. <sup>22</sup> Do you not fear me? says the LORD; Do you not tremble before me? I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail, though they roar, they cannot pass over it. <sup>23</sup> But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone away. <sup>24</sup> They do not say in their hearts, "Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest." <sup>25</sup> Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have deprived you of good. <sup>26</sup> For scoundrels are found among my people; they take over the goods of others. Like fowlers they set a trap; they catch human beings. <sup>27</sup> Like a cage full of birds, their houses are full of treachery; therefore they have become great and rich, <sup>28</sup> they have grown fat and sleek. They know no limits in deeds of wickedness; they do not judge with justice the cause of the

*orphan, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy. <sup>29</sup> Shall I not punish them for these things? says the LORD, and shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this? <sup>30</sup> An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: <sup>31</sup> the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule as the prophets direct; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?*

### **Anthony Hita '13**

In 1961 Stanley Milgram, a psychologist at Yale University, wondered how seemingly normal everyday people in Germany could have followed monstrous orders given to them by their Nazi superiors. Milgram noted that at the Nuremberg trials the most common defense was, “Just following orders.” So Milgram developed an experiment wherein participants were instructed by an authority figure to give electric shocks of increasing intensity to a person, placed out of sight in another room, whenever he or she answered a question incorrectly. Unbeknownst to the participants, the shocks weren’t real; moreover, someone else was also in that other room—an actor, wailing as though the shocks were putting him in mortal danger. Despite the audible agony, 65% of the participants followed the order of the authority figure by, in the end, administering the highest, supposedly fatal shock.

Milgram concluded from this test that otherwise normal people will follow the orders of perceived authority figures even when those orders may result in the death of an innocent person. Later tests by other experimenters found that when a participant was instructed to tell *someone else* to administer the shock, compliance rose to 92.5%. But when participants were placed in the presence of others who *refused* to obey, compliance fell to just 10%. In other words, the less impact a person feels personally, the more likely they are willingly to follow orders that harm someone else—but this willingness can be disrupted by just one or two others who refuse to comply.

For Christians—especially those in positions of authority—Milgram’s experiment demonstrates the necessity of modeling noncompliance with systems we know are harmful. We must stand against discrimination, economic deprivation, abuse of power, corruption, and immorality as the shore resists the sea or people *will* be led astray. Right behavior issues from peers and authorities who actively resist wrong in word and deed. It only takes one or two objectors to turn aside others who might otherwise comply with wrong. Injustice in the world today is not inflicted upon us—it is allowed *by* us when we choose not to stand against it. As Christians we are all called to take that stand.

### ***Prayer***

Lord God, from whom all blessings flow, you have taught us by the words of the prophets and the example of Christ how we are to behave. We acknowledge that we live in a world with corrupt authorities who seek to ensnare us and lead us astray. You who control the seas, we ask that you would grant us the courage to resist oppression, injustice, and evil with our voices, hands, and feet in whatever forms they present themselves, so that we may not be false prophets but instead a people, called by your name, rightly proclaiming the Word of Truth and thus enabling others to resist with us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### **William Robbins '21**

Jeremiah 5 crosses the boundaries of polite piety. While we have a few passages from Jeremiah that we keep close for comfort, the rest is, well, too close for comfort. A pastor like me (one of a declining, politically divided, and aging church) would do well to keep these words outside the boundaries of worship, because, frankly, we need hope.

Of course, that is the thing with prophets like Jeremiah. They are not called to maintain comfortable boundaries.

In Jeremiah 5, the prophet speaks of boundaries crossed geo-politically and covenantally, socially and (look out!) environmentally. Here, we have the sense of widespread chaos that results from a way of being that knows “no bounds in deeds of wickedness” (5:28). And what is Jeremiah’s call but to “stay in your lane,” to respect the theologically defined boundaries of the created (5:22-24) and social order (5:28)?

Yet we get the feeling that simply returning to one’s lane, whatever, wherever, and whenever that is, will not be enough to make things right. Like Jeremiah, we have the sense that new covenantal boundaries are needed (33:31-34). Who will set them?

Do we have to read past the boundaries of Jeremiah’s text to find the answer? One could continue past Jeremiah to Jesus, the one who redefines the boundaries of neighbors and nations, the one who ultimately redefines the boundary between death and life. Yes, that’s more comfortable, but what if you stay within the lines of Jeremiah? Is there hope there? I think so. In Jeremiah, we find one called by God to speak across the boundaries of despair and instill hope. In Jeremiah, we find one called to speak of God’s faithfulness across time, beyond individual existence, to those yet to be. Might God be calling you to do the same?

#### **Prayer**

O God, the one who through the Holy Spirit enables us to follow Jesus within and beyond our time, guide us to paths of gritty faithfulness. Lead us not into the temptations of quick solutions that betray Your truth, and grant us the patience and perseverance of Your eternity. Amen.

#### **John 7:1-13**

<sup>1</sup> After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. <sup>2</sup> Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. <sup>3</sup> So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; <sup>4</sup> for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” <sup>5</sup> (For not even his brothers believed in him.) <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to them, “My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. <sup>7</sup> The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil. <sup>8</sup> Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come.” <sup>9</sup> After saying this, he remained in Galilee. <sup>10</sup> But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. <sup>11</sup> The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, “Where is he?” <sup>12</sup> And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying, “He is a good man,” others were saying, “No, he is deceiving the crowd.” <sup>13</sup> Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.

#### **Robin Sharp ’18**

“ . . . for my time has not yet fully come.” Jesus had little doubt he would be arrested if he attended the Festival of Booths, a harvest-time event. He also knew the Jewish leaders wished to have him killed. If he had been arrested then, would the leaders’ wish have been fulfilled? Or instead, would his “infractions” have been seen as “misdemeanors,” with his arrest a mere annoyance to the Roman courts? His arrest for many “minor” incidents could have weakened the impact of the final drama in Jerusalem. And instead of the people’s transition from acclaiming him “Hosanna!” to calling out “Crucify!” their last response might have been “Ho-hum—this again?”

Jesus knew his crucifixion could only occur with the backing of Rome. Pontius Pilot had to be put in a position to order Jesus' death. Without the additional crowds journeying to the Temple for Passover, would that necessity have transpired?

Jesus perhaps understood that his death, and therefore also his resurrection, had to take place in the time of planting and renewal. Spring is that time. Would the ultimate joy be as overwhelming in another season? Jesus understood that "right-timing" his death on the cross was essential. Easter had to come when his Father had planned it. Jesus' death could not be rushed, nor could it be avoided. In the end, Christ knew when his time had come.

### **Prayer**

Dear Jesus, help us to remember the importance of not rushing to a goal. In our life with you, help us to recognize our need to step back and ponder the journey. As you did, so also help us to understand when the time has fully come to accomplish your purposes in our lives. Amen.

### **Kristen Renee Barner '97**

Eleanor Roosevelt famously said: "What other people think of me is none of my business."

Even Jesus can't help himself. He *is* a tiny bit curious. Jesus *is* human, right? He's got siblings who don't quite believe in him and push him to prove himself. He has no interest in going to a place where people want to kill him. He knows himself well enough to know when it is and isn't "his time"—except for that time his mom made him help the wedding host in Cana.

Imagine him standing there, after his brothers left for Judea, pacing around in the dust, muttering to himself, and finally deciding, "Fine. I'll go. But I'm sneaking in. Thank you, God, that social media hasn't been invented yet."

He goes. He listens. He hears what people think of him and people only mutter because they are afraid of one another. His goal was to go unnoticed.

Do yourself a favor and read where the story goes from there. God calls us. God is calling to us. Jesus tried to be stealth. We find ourselves there. Doubted and pushed, threatened or praised, challenged or flattered. Dig deep this Lent and listen for the call of God. Oftentimes, it is in these deep, dark, difficult, and dangerous places that we will be compelled to spring forth and be the very people we are called to be. It's possible. Pace around in the dust and mutter to yourself if it helps. (*I think it helps.*)

### **Prayer**

O God, we try to go unnoticed, but you see us. You know us. Jesus says that our time is always here. Is it, God? If it is, and you say it is, help us to know, to see, to be. As we pace in the dust and mutter to ourselves, let us hear you. Thanks. We need you more than ever. Amen.

## **Day 19**

### **Psalm 150**

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD!

Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise him in his mighty firmament!<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Praise him for his mighty deeds;  
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!  
<sup>3</sup> Praise him with trumpet sound;  
praise him with lute and harp!  
<sup>4</sup> Praise him with tambourine and dance;  
praise him with strings and pipe!  
<sup>5</sup> Praise him with clanging cymbals;  
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!  
<sup>6</sup> Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!  
Praise the LORD!

### **Paul James Pfeuffer '12/'18**

“Praise.” But wait—have I been good enough, present enough, self-bettering enough since Lent of last year? Sometimes praise can be the farthest thing from our minds as we make our mental self-examination checklists during Lent. But into the din comes the voice of the psalmist: “Praise.”

The 150<sup>th</sup> Psalm closes the Psalter with a glorious crescendo exhorting the reader or listener time and time again to “praise.” In this ending to a collection of poetry that covers the broad spectrum of human emotions, that gives voice to the agony of despair, we are faced with the overwhelming refrain that we are called to worship. All creation is called to worship alongside us with whatever noise, whatever breath it can muster. There is no room for negativity and self-doubt in the midst of such celebration. Even, perhaps especially in this season of reflection and repentance, let us find great joy in the Lord—and praise him!

#### **Prayer**

Praise you in your sanctuary, Lord. Praise you in your mighty firmament! Praise you for your mighty deeds! Praise you for your surpassing greatness! We praise you with music and dance, with loud celebration and quiet breath. O Lord, we praise you!

### **Erik Hoeke, staff**

I have a friend and colleague whose presence is always noticed. Her voice, though friendly, is the loudest in any room. Since we are both clergy, we often see each other at meetings in large sanctuaries that amplify her voice, which reverberates in those spaces like LOUD, CLASHING CYMBALS!

“Loud” is not often how people describe me. I’m more like the lute and harp you probably didn’t notice in this psalm’s praise band amidst the trumpets and tambourines and clanging cymbals and dancing worshippers. There’s a lot of unrestrained energy in this psalm’s worship.

But in Lent, pastors and church musicians exercise restraint. Worship is contemplative; the organ and praise band are softer and quieter; we even embrace silence as much as we can stand the discomfort. Then on Easter morning, we *pull out all the stops*—a phrase originating in organ-playing, describing the time when all the pipes are used to get the fullest possible sound.

Some of us are Lent people. We are good at quiet contemplation and drawing others into a silence that notices things more deeply. Others of us are loud Easter people—the life of the party!—who pull out all the stops and release unrestrained energy and excitement reminding us of God’s mighty deeds and surpassing greatness.

God's holy praise band has soft and loud people and soft and loud instruments. Each have their time and purpose. Each reflect the God we worship, who sometimes spoke in thunderclaps and other times as a whispering wind. People who are soft or loud, or somewhere in between, each bear the image of God.

**Prayer**

God of the trumpet and tambourine, of the lute and harp and the clashing cymbals: quiet us so we may notice you. Pull out all the stops to remind us of unrestrained joy. Make music in our sanctuaries and our hearts, so we may worship you in every way. Praise the Lord! Amen.

**Stephanie Backus '24**

"Praise the Lord" the psalmist writes. "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." It's been a hard year. We've watched as students lost their lives in school shootings, as the nation became deeply divided in a particularly difficult presidential election, and as the increasing severity of weather from winter storms to hurricanes has left communities devastated by damages. In these moments, it can be hard to find the spirit with which one can praise the Lord. But after a particularly devastating hurricane, two communities showed us all what the Psalmist meant when they wrote "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."

Montreat, N.C., and adjacent Black Mountain, N.C., were devastated by Hurricane Helene as the onslaught of rain led nearby creeks and rivers to leave their banks and rush through communities in the western part of the state. Some towns were destroyed, and while Montreat and Black Mountain suffered considerable damage, it's what happened after the storm that so aptly illustrates Psalm 150.

The Montreat Conference Center holds a particular place in my heart. Coming into seminary in 2021, I did not even know it existed, but after my first summer experience there with the Presbyterian Association of Music's Worship Conference, I fell in love. I had found a place where everything that has breath praised God. Even the bears tried to come into the conference center's worship space one Sunday morning!

After Hurricane Helene, the conference center became a place for information for the community. It became a place where people could come together to learn when power and water would be restored and what they could do to help their neighbors. Nearby Black Mountain Presbyterian Church became a place where people found fellowship over a meal. Eventually, the church had to rent a nearby warehouse for all of the supplies being donated. It would have been easy for both to close for a period of time, so that they could evaluate their own damage and care for their own people. But they didn't. They opened to care for all people. What a beautiful example of praising the Lord, in unusual ways, outside of Sunday morning worship. We praise the Lord always—for God is powerful, and nothing can surpass God's greatness.

**Prayer**

Good and gracious God, in creation, you gave us breath with which to praise you for all of our days. When times get tough, I pray you strengthen me in order that I may be able to continue praising you. I know tough days are to come. I pray you continue to pour your Spirit out upon me. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

**Jeremiah 6:9-15**

<sup>9</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts: Glean thoroughly as a vine the remnant of Israel; like a grape-gatherer, pass your hand again over its branches. <sup>10</sup> To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? See, their ears are closed, they cannot listen. The word of the LORD is to them an object of scorn; they

take no pleasure in it. <sup>11</sup> But I am full of the wrath of the LORD; I am weary of holding it in. Pour it out on the children in the street, and on the gatherings of young men as well; both husband and wife shall be taken, the old folk and the very aged. <sup>12</sup> Their houses shall be turned over to others, their fields and wives together; for I will stretch out my hand against the inhabitants of the land, says the LORD. <sup>13</sup> For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. <sup>14</sup> They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. <sup>15</sup> They acted shamefully, they committed abomination; yet they were not ashamed, they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the LORD.

### **Rebecca Reeder '19**

"They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace." I am struck by these words as I write in the midst of widespread social unrest, and I wonder where the battle specifically for racial equity will be by the time this devotional is read. I hear God shouting these words from Jeremiah 6 about our own society, in which deep wounds and ongoing intergenerational trauma have too often been treated carelessly. Too long the refrain, "Peace, peace," has been proclaimed when there really was no peace for the wounded.

I also hear God convicting us all that we often treat the wounds of Jesus carelessly—we throw them about as though the cross were a weapon instead of representing Jesus present with the least of these. Yet, as we move closer to the cross this Lenten season, we discover anew that every wound of our own that was treated carelessly, as well as every wound of others whom we ourselves have treated carelessly, is borne in the wounds of Christ. So let us lay both our wounds and our carelessness once more at the foot of the cross, be assured of God's justice and mercy, and then follow in the way of Jesus by doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.

### **Prayer**

Loving and gracious God, as we journey through this Lenten season, give us ears to hear your word and eyes to see where injustice continues to be rampant. Give us a holy unrest to continue caring for the wounds of your people until Christ's peace reigns supreme. In name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

<sup>12</sup>"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. <sup>13</sup>"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. <sup>14</sup>And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. <sup>15</sup>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! <sup>16</sup>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." <sup>17</sup>But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. <sup>18</sup>Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. <sup>19</sup>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? <sup>20</sup>For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

### **Martha Robbins, faculty emerita**

"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. Here Paul is chiding those among the Corinthian community who falsely

claim a freedom to enact carnal desires without discerning the effects such actions have on the individual and on the community. Paul thus provides the foundation and a principle for discerning whether something is beneficial or harmful to individuals, the community, and creation. He asks them and us to step back and reflect on the source and purpose of our lives. Why were we created, redeemed, and gifted with the Holy Spirit if it were not for God's desire for us to be united in love with God, one another, and all creation as living members of Christ's Body, glorifying God? That's the foundation! Every desire, thought, word, and action leads us either toward or away from the purpose for which we were created. The principle for discerning our choices, then, is twofold: (1) do I recognize which direction this particular desire, thought, word, or action is leading me or could lead me, and (2) do I choose and act upon that which glorifies God or that which further enslaves me, the community, or creation?

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, in your loving mercy and for the sake of your glory, help me each day to notice more accurately those desires, thoughts, words, and actions that are leading me toward you and those that are leading me away from you, and grant me the grace to act or reject them accordingly. Amen.

### **Mark 5:1-20**

<sup>1</sup> They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup> And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. <sup>3</sup> He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain; <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. <sup>6</sup> When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." <sup>10</sup> He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. <sup>11</sup> Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; <sup>12</sup> and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." <sup>13</sup> So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. <sup>17</sup> Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. <sup>18</sup> As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

### **Sue Thorn, community partner**

The man who calls himself Legion, meaning an army of thousands, asks Jesus if he might work with him. Although in Mark 1 the disciples needed encouragement and attention from Jesus, the demoniac clearly understood what he was requesting and Jesus sent him on a preaching mission, which was extremely successful and unexpected by others. This scripture was a struggle for me, as it may be for many Christians, those of us who tend to spend little time focused on the role of Satan. Through Jesus

demonstrating tremendous power in dealing with Satan, and the fear that the demonstration created among people, I was forced to reflect that Jesus is willing to free us from what controls us. The question is: Are we willing to part with the elements of our lives that keep us from accepting His love and the power He has to transform our lives?

### **Prayer**

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

## **Day 20**

### **Jeremiah 7:1-15**

<sup>1</sup> The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship the LORD. <sup>3</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. <sup>4</sup> Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD." <sup>5</sup> For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, <sup>6</sup> if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, <sup>7</sup> then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever. <sup>8</sup> Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. <sup>9</sup> Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, <sup>10</sup> and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, "We are safe!"—only to go on doing all these abominations? <sup>11</sup> Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? You know, I too am watching, says the LORD. <sup>12</sup> Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. <sup>13</sup> And now, because you have done all these things, says the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, <sup>14</sup> therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh. <sup>15</sup> And I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out all your kinsfolk, all the offspring of Ephraim.

### **Bernard Nti '17**

The word of God through Jeremiah called the people of Judah to reevaluate their worship and spiritual practices. They worshiped God wholeheartedly in the temple, yet their deeds outside the temple were appalling. They lied and cheated. They oppressed the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. They shed innocent blood. Relegating their worship of God to within the four corners of the temple, they ignored the law of Moses' command to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:15).

Jeremiah reminded the Judahites that God was interested in their day-to-day lives. To God, receiving their worship was just as important as their loving the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow—just as important as the negotiations they made in their day-to-day lives in private and in public. God watches!

In this period of Lent, God is reminding us that he's concerned about the "mundane" aspects of our lives just as much as he's concerned with the "sacred" aspects. For worshipping God is not one particular act—

worshiping God is a *lifestyle* that should permeate all the areas of our lives. In Romans 12:1 Paul writes, "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." The hymn *All to Jesus I Surrender* articulates one's personal commitment to enacting this verse.

To what areas of your life have you relegated God? Have you surrendered your all to God? God is calling us to reexamine and surrender fully to him everything about our lives.

### **Prayer**

Lord, teach me to surrender my soul, my body, and my spirit to you. Let me not hold back any area of my life from your lordship and control. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

### **John 7:14-36**

<sup>14</sup> About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. <sup>15</sup> The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?" <sup>16</sup> Then Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. <sup>17</sup> Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. <sup>18</sup> Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him. <sup>19</sup> "Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?" <sup>20</sup> The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?" <sup>21</sup> Jesus answered them, "I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. <sup>22</sup> Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. <sup>23</sup> If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath? <sup>24</sup> Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." <sup>25</sup> Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? <sup>26</sup> And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? <sup>27</sup> Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. <sup>29</sup> I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me." <sup>30</sup> Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. <sup>31</sup> Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, "When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?" <sup>32</sup> The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him. <sup>33</sup> Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. <sup>34</sup> You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." <sup>35</sup> The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? <sup>36</sup> What does he mean by saying, 'You will search for me and you will not find me' and, 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

### **Jon Chillinsky '18**

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

### **Prayer**

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

### **Melanie Kim Hamill '12**

As we know, teaching and healing were intrinsic parts of Jesus' ministry. He taught right up to the very end. He healed right up to the end. During his last trip to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus deliberately chose to heal a man on the Sabbath. This violation of the Sabbath Law greatly angered the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders, who believed that their interpretation of the law was the only path toward being "right" with God. Jesus set out to remove the pillars of power from the religious leaders of his time. That he was well versed without any formal teaching threatened the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders. Jesus publicly questioned and revealed a fatal flaw in the belief system they had established. They were so bound by their understanding of the Law that they missed the true character of God revealed in the Law. Jesus wanted his captive audience to understand that honoring God by tending to the needs of others will always be the priority of the Kingdom of God over following the rules for rules' sake.

### **Prayer**

May we follow Jesus . . .

May we teach like Jesus . . .

May we question those in power like Jesus . . .

May we work to serve like Jesus . . .

May we bring healing like Jesus . . .

May we point to Jesus . . .

May we hope in Jesus . . .

May we do all these things in the mighty name of Jesus . . . . Amen.

### **Psalm 6**

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger,  
or discipline me in your wrath.

<sup>2</sup> Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;  
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.

<sup>3</sup> My soul also is struck with terror,  
while you, O LORD — how long?

<sup>4</sup> Turn, O LORD, save my life;  
deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.

<sup>5</sup> For in death there is no remembrance of you;  
in Sheol who can give you praise?

<sup>6</sup> I am weary with my moaning;  
every night I flood my bed with tears;  
I drench my couch with my weeping.

<sup>7</sup> My eyes waste away because of grief;  
they grow weak because of all my foes.

<sup>8</sup> Depart from me, all you workers of evil,  
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.

<sup>9</sup> The LORD has heard my supplication;

*the LORD accepts my prayer.*

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

### **Colin Pritchard '18**

The Psalmist speaks in a singular voice, yet the petition rings true for all creation. In these days, too, there are moments of languishing and terror, tears and a sense of separation from the source of all joy. With floods and fire, increasing fatal acts of violence, political strife, and momentary victories for darkness, it can be easy to join the Psalmist in weary weeping. Yet we are not rebuked for our tears.

“Turn, O Lord.” How we long to see the face of God. Could it be that the gracious, whispered reply of the Holy is simply this: “Return”? It is true that God’s love is steadfast, and our prayers are accepted. God longs for us as well. In the eternal turning of God to us, and our returning to God, one thing must flee: Be gone weary hopelessness, for the Lord has heard our supplication. The stone rolls away, for that has always been the story of Grace.

#### **Prayer**

Most Holy God, this day we pray that you will accept our prayers once again. May your promise release our fear. May your love inform our hope. May the requirements of your compassion guide our repentance. Return us to our labors as bearers of your light. May fear be the only thing afraid as we walk with you this day. Amen.

## **Day 21**

### **Jeremiah 7:21-34**

<sup>21</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. <sup>22</sup>For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. <sup>23</sup>But this command I gave them, “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you.” <sup>24</sup>Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels, and looked backward rather than forward. <sup>25</sup>From the day that your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day; <sup>26</sup>yet they did not listen to me, or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their ancestors did. <sup>27</sup>So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. <sup>28</sup>You shall say to them: This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.

<sup>29</sup> Cut off your hair and throw it away;  
raise a lamentation on the bare heights,  
for the LORD has rejected and forsaken  
the generation that provoked his wrath.

<sup>30</sup>For the people of Judah have done evil in my sight, says the LORD; they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name, defiling it. <sup>31</sup>And they go on building the high place of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire—which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. <sup>32</sup>Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter: for they will bury in Topheth until there is no more room. <sup>33</sup>The corpses of this people will be food for the

*birds of the air, and for the animals of the earth; and no one will frighten them away. <sup>34</sup>And I will bring to an end the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of the bride and bridegroom in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for the land shall become a waste.*

### **Steve Tuell, faculty emeritus**

Critics of religion often claim that God is nothing more than human arrogance “writ large against the sky.” It is sadly true that, rather than pursuing what it means for us to be made in God’s image, we often try to remake God into ours! Jeremiah confronts a people persuaded that God is like them: unjust and bloodthirsty. They are sacrificing their own children to this “god” in the Valley of Hinnom—or, as the Gospels call it, Gehenna (Matt 5:22; Mark 9:34). Jeremiah calls his people, and us, back to the true worship of the true God, who requires not blood, but love and justice: “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you” (Jer 7:23).

### **Prayer**

Open our eyes, O Lord, to who you are, and to who we are. Grant us the clarity of vision never to confuse the two. This we pray in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, who alone “is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Heb 1:3). Amen.

### **Romans 4:13-25**

<sup>13</sup> For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup> For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. <sup>16</sup> For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, <sup>17</sup> as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) — the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. <sup>18</sup> Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” <sup>19</sup> He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. <sup>20</sup> No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup> Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” <sup>23</sup> Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup> who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

### **Brian Lays ’15/’16**

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

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

### **Prayer**

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

### **Valerie McDonald Roberts, community partner**

In the 1970s, I purchased a sweatshirt with the Christian fish symbol, an *ichthys*, swimming against a wave of a school of many large ominous fish (the world), referencing Romans 12:2. Though this sweatshirt long ago entered "rag heaven", this image remains a reminder that though we are not of this world, we are fully in it, and should rely on God not to be transformed to the world nor consumed by it. As Abraham believed against all odds, we too are to be that *ichthys*, to swim with unwavering faith and strength in God against all odds, purposefully helping those in need along the way. The *ichthys* didn't swim with self-piety and judgment, but seemed to mingle love and acceptance with courage and principle. Abraham fully checked his ego at the door; then God blessed him. I bet that *ichthys* was swimming toward blessings too, but likewise had to first dump the weight of ego at his/her "door."

### **Prayer**

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

### **John 7:37-52**

<sup>37</sup> On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, <sup>38</sup> and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" <sup>39</sup> Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. <sup>40</sup> When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, "This is really the prophet." <sup>41</sup> Others said, "This is the Messiah." But some asked, "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?" <sup>42</sup> Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?" <sup>43</sup> So there was a division in the crowd because of him. <sup>44</sup> Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. <sup>45</sup> Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why did you not arrest him?" <sup>46</sup> The police answered, "Never has anyone spoken like this!" <sup>47</sup> Then the Pharisees replied, "Surely you have not been deceived too, have you?" <sup>48</sup> Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? <sup>49</sup> But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed." <sup>50</sup> Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, <sup>51</sup> "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?" <sup>52</sup> They replied, "Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee."

**Alyce Weaver Dunn '88**

Growing up, I frequently attended summer camp at Jumonville, one of our United Methodist camps in the Western Pennsylvania Conference. An annual highlight was stopping by Moses' Rock on a hot, summer afternoon. I would hold my hand for a moment over the water that was gently bubbling up from the rock. Then, as I would release my hand, the water would gush up! I would lean over and drink from the fountain of water. Nothing was more satisfying to my parched mouth than a drink of cold, mountain spring water!

Nothing is more satisfying to a parched soul than a deep drink of the living water offered in our scripture lesson! Jesus said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

Jesus spoke these words to believers on the final day of the Feast of the Tabernacles, a joyous festival that remembered God's provision for the people of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness. The image of a priest drawing water out of the pool of Siloam and pouring it into a bowl in the temple would have been fresh on the peoples' minds. The prayer of the priest for God to send rain would have been ringing in their ears. The remembrance of God's gift of water in the wilderness when Moses struck the rock would have been burning in their hearts.

As the Festival neared the end, the people wanted the joy to continue. They did not want to wait until next year to experience again the joy of God's presence flooding their lives. They did not want their Spirit-saturated hearts to become parched again as they went home to an arid existence.

So Jesus' offer of living water was captivating. Although there were detractors who did not want dependency on ritual and hierarchy to end, the invitation to be in relationship with the God who daily provided the satisfaction of living water was powerful. The opportunity never again to experience a parched spirit was a gift to those who were oppressed, beaten down, broken, and in need of resuscitation. They craved such living water!

As we journey through the wilderness of Lent, many of us realize our spirits are parched, our joy has run dry. Bitterness and brokenness have beaten us down. We need our conviction of faith revived! We need our thirst for justice quenched! We need the aridness of our hearts saturated anew with Jesus the Christ!

As you pray, fast, read Scripture, and worship during Lent, may you discover anew the living water of our Lord Jesus and never be thirsty again!

***Prayer***

My heart is dry, O Lord, and my spirit is arid. Joy and hope have been wrung out of my life by disappointments, misunderstandings, tension, and pain. I need your living water to refresh my heart, to saturate my spirit. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

**Debbie Smith '18**

What a vision! No one is thirsty! No one is hungry! Imagine no more news stories of starving children and refugees. Don't we all yearn for such a world? A place where every person of any ability can thrive with grace and dignity. A place where nothing stands in the way of God's reflected image shining forth from each one to bring him glory.

As compelling as that picture is, we see people responding in different ways. Some catch the vision and can't wait to jump on board. Some aren't sure what to think but are curious. Others find the notion of 'living water for everyone' to be ludicrous or even dangerous. Imagine all the changes in society, government, business, and politics that would be needed for this to happen. Some of those changes are complicated and difficult—isn't it just less disruptive to keep things as they are? If we can cast doubt on the messenger as a Galilean poser or an unrealistic rube, perhaps that gets us off the hook for considering how life might be different. After all, some of those changes might require giving up something. Is my loss worth this wild kingdom vision?

Lent offers us a time of lament and repentance. A time to yearn for Jesus' vision of the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. A time to notice what gets in the way of dignity and grace for all. Lent is a time to expand our imagination for what is possible, even if it requires letting go of what we are comfortable with.

### **Prayer**

Lord, your vision of the kingdom is lovely and yet feels impossible. But this is what you have promised and invited us into. And if you have promised and invited, then we can trust that your Spirit will lead us. Help us release anything that hinders our energy, imagination, intelligence, and love so that we can embrace the work of the kingdom you have called us to. Amen.

### **Psalm 91**

- <sup>1</sup> *You who live in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,*
- <sup>2</sup> *will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust."*
- <sup>3</sup> *For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
and from the deadly pestilence;*
- <sup>4</sup> *he will cover you with his pinions,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.*
- <sup>5</sup> *You will not fear the terror of the night,  
or the arrow that flies by day,*
- <sup>6</sup> *or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,  
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.*
- <sup>7</sup> *A thousand may fall at your side,  
ten thousand at your right hand,  
but it will not come near you.*
- <sup>8</sup> *You will only look with your eyes  
and see the punishment of the wicked.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Because you have made the LORD your refuge,  
the Most High your dwelling place,*
- <sup>10</sup> *no evil shall befall you,  
no scourge come near your tent.*
- <sup>11</sup> *For he will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways.*
- <sup>12</sup> *On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.*

<sup>13</sup> *You will tread on the lion and the adder,  
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.*

<sup>14</sup> *Those who love me, I will deliver;  
I will protect those who know my name.*

<sup>15</sup> *When they call to me, I will answer them;  
I will be with them in trouble,  
I will rescue them and honor them.*

<sup>16</sup> *With long life I will satisfy them,  
and show them my salvation.*

### **M. Courtenay Willcox '18**

The Psalms address the span of human emotions, from praise to lament, from gratitude to grief. Especially during Lent, as I seek to find my wilderness footing, Psalm 91 grounds and convicts me of God's profound care, love, and presence. This Psalm offers hope of God's protection. We live in a world where that need of protection is a daily reality. We face natural disasters, but daily we witness or read about disasters made from human hands. Those human misunderstandings and misinterpretations play out through hateful words, acts of violence, and not recognizing or caring for our neighbor. But consider the whole of humankind huddled under the shelter of the Most High—what might it be like? What a wonderful place to gather. The promise that God is our refuge and fortress and the realization that we rest in the shadow of the Almighty makes for powerful and heady stuff. But they do not occur by default. They require our trust in God. That trust comes from a relationship, not with a God who is "over us" or "for us," but rather a God who is "with us." The triune God walks with us, knows us, and loves us; and so, in return, we trust in God.

#### ***Prayer***

Hearer of our hearts, show up in our lives in unmistakable ways; startle us to notice your presence and call. Challenge us to walk with you in all that we are and all that we do; challenge us to walk with our neighbor. Let us discern the path you have put before us. As we trust in you, let us seek refuge in the shadow of the Almighty and live in the shelter of the Most High.

### **Rebecca McGee '09**

An unusual thing happened when I began serving a new church. As I would randomly walk through the sanctuary, I would find a Bible open on the communion rail. It was there every time I just happened to be in the sanctuary. So, each time, I would put the Bible back in the pew where there was an open spot. It was a bit of a mystery to me. By about the third time, I realized that the Bible was always open to Psalm 91, a beautiful Psalm calling on God for protection—protection from "the hunter's trap," "deadly sickness," the "terrors at night," and "arrows that fly in daylight." And, of course, God does protect and save us, giving us all refuge, serving as our "protective shield" from anything which threatens to harm us.

A month or two later, I shared the "mystery" of the open Bible during a leadership meeting. It was then that the lay leader shared that he has keys to the church (something I had not known) and that ever since his youngest child, a son, who was a member of a special forces unit of the Army, had been deployed to Afghanistan, he had been starting his day in the sanctuary praying Psalm 91 on behalf of his son. He continued to do this every day, for about a year and a half in total, until his son returned safely to the United States. What incredible faithfulness this father demonstrated in praying fervently for the safety of his son!

Hopefully, we all know we can trust our heavenly Father to protect us, like this earthly father trusted God to protect his son. For God tells us in Psalm 91:15,

“Whenever you cry out to me, I’ll answer.  
I’ll be with you in troubling times.  
I’ll save you and glorify you.”

We aren’t always spared from the hazards of life, but we are promised the presence of the One who will serve as our refuge, the One who will save us, the One who will always answer us when we cry out.

**Prayer**

Almighty God, we are so incredibly grateful to you for protecting us from those things which could endanger us. Help us to trust you and to know that whatever circumstances may arise in our lives, you will always hear our cries and accompany us.

**Day 22**

**Psalm 5**

- <sup>1</sup> Give ear to my words, O LORD;  
give heed to my sighing.
- <sup>2</sup> Listen to the sound of my cry,  
my King and my God,  
for to you I pray.
- <sup>3</sup> O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;  
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.
- <sup>4</sup> For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;  
evil will not sojourn with you.
- <sup>5</sup> The boastful will not stand before your eyes;  
you hate all evildoers.
- <sup>6</sup> You destroy those who speak lies;  
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.
- <sup>7</sup> 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.
- <sup>8</sup> Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness  
because of my enemies;  
make your way straight before me.
- <sup>9</sup> For there is no truth in their mouths;  
their hearts are destruction;  
their throats are open graves;  
they flatter with their tongues.
- <sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> *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.*

<sup>12</sup> *For you bless the righteous, O LORD;  
you cover them with favor as with a shield.*

### **Drew Himes '13**

What we sigh to God reveals a lot about us. If we have harmed others, we will sigh with guilt. If we have been harmed by others, we will sigh with pain and anguish. Strangely we all find ourselves looking for the same thing: God's ear.

The Hebrew word translated as "sighing" in this Psalm is *hagigi*, which can alternately be rendered as "groaning." Our groaning, aching sighs show the depth of our painful prayers to God, seeking intervention, reconciliation, and the renewal of God's image among our communities.

Lent offers each of us a time to reflect on our guilt or our hurt. We are offered a time of introspection and investigation and ultimately an invitation: commit your prayers to our loving and liberating God. Each of the other readings for today work with these themes. Jeremiah 8 offers an indictment to the people who have dishonored God's image in the holy community. Paul in Romans 5:1-11 reminds us of God's grace, given by the truckload for the victims of the broken world, oppressor and oppressed alike. And the apex comes to us from John 8:12-20. "I am the light of the world," Jesus tells his disciples. When we commit our cause to God—our groaning, our pain, our guilt—we find that Christ's light is the one that shines in the darkness of our souls, offering each of us a more excellent way and the perfect embodiment of God's image made real in his flesh.

#### ***Prayer***

Holy, loving, liberating, and grace-giving God: In the flesh of Jesus our Christ, you make your light shine. In Jesus' healing touch, we are offered a new way. Commit our lives by your Spirit to this new way of living that we too could bear your holy image in this world. Amen.

### **Rebecca D. Reeder '19**

I notice there is a repetition of phrases relating to speaking, listening, and words. Tied to these phrases are truth or lies, joy or deceit. The NRSV adds the heading, "Trust in God for Deliverance from Enemies." Oh how often our "enemies"—anyone or anything that is against us in some way—use words to harm us! Maybe it's the voice of a colleague or boss, a spouse or sibling, or sometimes worst of all, the face in the mirror. I hear the psalmist cry for God to hear what's really going on inside the psalmist—for God to bring to the surface only that which is true, and cast out the lies that seek to destroy.

There are so many voices in our world telling us who we are or should be, telling us we are not good enough, or fill-in-the-blank enough. And the more we listen to those voices, the more we start to believe what they say. But "there is no truth in their mouths . . . their throats are open graves" (v 9), seeking to swallow us whole. Yet God hears the deeper cries of our hearts, attending to our sighs of heartache, grief, or doubt—sighs of defeat. Into that space God speaks blessing and favor: "You are my beloved child" (Mark 1:11, Matt 3:17, Luke 3:22). As we near the end of Lent, may you rest in those words; take refuge and rejoice in the One who sees and hears the real you; the you that God created and loves and accepts even when the world would tell you otherwise.

### **Prayer**

Listen to my words, O Lord; attend to my sighing. Listen to the sound of my cry, and speak words of truth, words of love. Especially when the world would have me believe differently, remind me again that I am loved, and in Jesus Christ I am accepted just as I am—I do not have to prove myself to you, my God and my Savior. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

### **Dave Dack '11**

Waiting feels like a waste of time. I suspect that's why we're bad at it.

Airports have discovered it's no good reducing baggage wait times. People still complain. But if the airport can make it so people spend more of that time walking to the claim area than standing around the carousel, the complaints stop, even if the total wait time stays the same. People don't mind as long as they're moving, as long as they don't feel like they're wasting their time.

In verse 3, David shares his morning routine: "I plead my case to you and watch" (other translations say, "wait expectantly"). Hardly the best use of his time, we might say, especially considering the threat of bloodthirsty enemies. Prayer, yes, but watching and waiting? Isn't that a waste of time?

Unless David knows something we don't—or that we've forgotten. Ironically, our obsession with productivity has blinded us to the holiness God produces in us while we wait. Waiting on God makes us watchful. It keeps us attentive to the presence of God here and now, making every step righteous, every moment holy. Suddenly, our long walk becomes not only bearable, but blessed.

Isn't that what we're really after, to live every day in God's blessed company? Even with David's enemies still on the loose, he found refuge in God's house and rejoiced in God's righteousness. It was precisely in the waiting that he encountered God. Waiting for God to answer our prayers is its own spiritual discipline. It can transform any trial into a temple of worship.

Waiting on God is never a waste of your time; it is the holiest purpose your life could have. You could spend your whole life waiting on God, and it would not be a wasted life.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, listen to our prayers for help. To you we plead our sad case and that of this broken world, wondering how long your salvation will take. Make holy our waiting with the joy of your presence, that we would never tire of seeking your Kingdom. Through Christ, Amen.

### **Jeremiah 8:4-7, 18-9:6**

<sup>4</sup> You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD: When people fall, do they not get up again? If they go astray, do they not turn back? <sup>5</sup> Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding? They have held fast to deceit, they have refused to return. <sup>6</sup> I have given heed and listened, but they do not speak honestly; no one repents of wickedness, saying, "What have I done!" All of them turn to their own course, like a horse plunging headlong into battle. <sup>7</sup> Even the stork in the heavens knows its times; and the turtle-dove, swallow, and crane observe the time of their coming; but my people do not know the ordinance of the LORD. <sup>18</sup> My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. <sup>19</sup> Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?" ("Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their foreign idols?") <sup>20</sup> "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." <sup>21</sup> For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. <sup>22</sup> Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored? <sup>9:1</sup> O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of

tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people! <sup>2</sup> O that I had in the desert a traveler's lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them! For they are all adulterers, a band of traitors. <sup>3</sup> They bend their tongues like bows; they have grown strong in the land for falsehood, and not for truth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, says the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Beware of your neighbors, and put no trust in any of your kin; for all your kin are supplanters, and every neighbor goes around like a slanderer. <sup>5</sup> They all deceive their neighbors, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongues to speak lies; they commit iniquity and are too weary to repent. <sup>6</sup> Oppression upon oppression, deceit upon deceit! They refuse to know me, says the LORD.

### **Mark Ioset '87/'86**

As I write this devotional there is a jackhammer pounding away outside our apartment, as well as construction trucks with backup beepers going full tilt. I'm thinking this is rather appropriate and perhaps a moment of God-incidence. Jeremiah and his message were, at times, not unlike a jackhammer. He hammered home concussively that the people, his people, God's people, needed to get back to God and what God had to say to them and then to act on God's word.

The verses before leave us shaken and unsettled, which I suspect is their intent. They are hard-hitting. No "warm fuzzies" here. They deliver a scathing critique of a society in shambles, almost as devastatingly bleak as Ezekiel's valley of the dry bones. Jeremiah's soul is raw with the words he delivers, right down to *his* bones. To be a prophet is to find oneself in the "foul rag and bone shop of the heart," with a nod to William Butler Yeats. It is a calling that exacts all. Jeremiah spends himself. He is spent by his allegiance to that call.

Our call leads us into the same endeavor. As I write, society is reeling from two deadly scourges: COVID-19 and racism. God, however, sends us into this society that we might not only speak words of critique but also, as Jeremiah does elsewhere, words of hope grounded in God's yearning that we, in listening to him, in knowing him, might know his peace, his shalom . . . and God's shalom means wholeness. We could sure use some of that. Just now, the jackhammer has gone silent, but the backup beepers are still sounding.

### **Prayer**

Holy and gracious God, knock some sense into us. Give us the courage to take your word seriously. Split us open to receive it and, with it, your purposes for us in this time. May we accept your call as irrevocable and spend ourselves in allegiance to you, your Son, and those to whom you send us. Amen.

### **Romans 5:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. <sup>6</sup> For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person — though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his

*Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

**Lisa Slayton, community partner**

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

**Prayer**

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

**Greg Steible '14**

I was 16 years old. You’ve been there? Everything is dramatic, everything is over the top, everything is either the greatest thing on earth or the worst reality imaginable. Come to think of it, that sounds about like my current reality, too. But I was 16 years old and I was new to the faith. I stumbled on this passage one Sunday morning, bored during a sermon, flipping through the blue pew Bible. To say this passage changed my life would be a little bit of an understatement.

We boast in our hope of sharing the glory, and we boast in our suffering. That dichotomous truth struck me as so deeply real, and good, and helpful. Few are strangers to suffering. This season is, in many ways, structured as a remembrance of suffering, and the idea that our friend Paul reminds us that this suffering has transcendent value is powerful. Suffering, endurance, character, and hope in Christ— these, each of them, are gifts. We revel in our suffering, not as masochists enjoying the pain, but as transformed and transforming beloved children of God. These sufferings are opportunities for the most poignant of love, the gentlest of grace, the rowdiest of justices, the fullest opportunities to glimpse Jesus. I didn’t get that at 16, but as I’ve sat with these words in more tangible sufferings, I’ve come to see a much more full image of Jesus in a suffering world.

Friends, I’d like to invite you into that boasting—into moments of seeing Christ’s hope this week. Even as we may see suffering all around, we know that Jesus is right there with us.

**Prayer**

Holy Christ, suffering and glorifying Lord, sit with us. Help us to see the hope we have in you, which transcends all. Help us to be instruments of that hope in your beautiful world. Amen.

### **John 8:12-20**

<sup>12</sup> Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." <sup>13</sup> Then the Pharisees said to him, "You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid." <sup>14</sup> Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. <sup>15</sup> You judge by human standards; I judge no one. <sup>16</sup> Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. <sup>17</sup> In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. <sup>18</sup> I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf." <sup>19</sup> Then they said to him, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also." <sup>20</sup> He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

### **John Cowie '18**

"Then the Pharisees said to him, 'You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.'" One has to feel sympathy for people confronted by Jesus. He did not behave or talk the way they expected, so it was easier to judge his testimony to be invalid. Making assumptions about people is part of human nature. We learn by making associations and noticing patterns. My baby granddaughter is learning to identify human faces; soon it will be cars, trees, animals, and birds. She will learn to generalize and classify—doing so saves time and brainpower. Adults judge people by their appearance, color, accent, dress, speech, and by what we already know. We then make assumptions about what we can't see—intelligence, trustworthiness, education, religious and political reliability, and so on. Listening to Jesus, the Pharisees could not make sense of who he was, so they relied on their knowledge and experience to disregard him.

When we talk about Jesus, we will meet people who disregard him, and who regard our testimony to him as invalid. We should never underestimate how persistent, consistent, and understanding of others we must be in our witness about Christ, nor should we underestimate the great personal cost that our hearers' setting aside their hard-won knowledge and experience will involve.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, we pray for the church's witness to Jesus Christ—a witness that is often colored more by our preferences than by the light of Christ. Illuminate our understanding so that our faith and worship reflect you more clearly. And to you be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus from generation to generation for evermore! Amen.

### **Psalm 51**

- <sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.
- <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.
- <sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.
- <sup>4</sup> 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.*  
<sup>5</sup> *Indeed, I was born guilty,  
 a sinner when my mother conceived me.*  
<sup>6</sup> *You desire truth in the inward being;  
 therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.*  
<sup>7</sup> *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
 wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*  
<sup>8</sup> *Let me hear joy and gladness;  
 let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.*  
<sup>9</sup> *Hide your face from my sins,  
 and blot out all my iniquities.*  
<sup>10</sup> *Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
 and put a new and right spirit within me.*  
<sup>11</sup> *Do not cast me away from your presence,  
 and do not take your holy spirit from me.*  
<sup>12</sup> *Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
 and sustain in me a willing spirit.*  
<sup>13</sup> *Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
 and sinners will return to you.*  
<sup>14</sup> *Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,  
 O God of my salvation,  
 and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.*  
<sup>15</sup> *O Lord, open my lips,  
 and my mouth will declare your praise.*  
<sup>16</sup> *For you have no delight in sacrifice;  
 if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.*  
<sup>17</sup> *The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
 a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*  
<sup>18</sup> *Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;  
 rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,  
<sup>19</sup> then you will delight in right sacrifices,  
 in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;  
 then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

### **Stephen Franklin '09**

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” When I was in high school, we had a visiting missionary from the Philippines stay with our church for a few months. It was one of those mild winters, with very little snow. The day before our guest was scheduled to leave, we were hit with a blizzard, a total white out. In Northeast Ohio, this isn’t anything new. But for our visitor from the Philippines it was an astonishing thing to experience. After seeing snow for the very first time, she said with tears in her eyes, “I finally understand what it means when the Bible tells me that I’ve been washed whiter than snow.”

Lent is a journey that teaches us about the incredible grace of a God, who hears our prayers of confession and washes us clean. We are constantly reminded of the sin that entangles humanity—not just the world around us but the heart within us. As we look forward to the day of resurrection, may we rejoice in the assurance of our salvation. May we journey with joy because God shows us mercy

according to God's steadfast love. May we be filled with tears of joy, like my friend from the Philippines, because we have been made clean, washed whiter than snow.

***Prayer***

With the psalmist, let us pray, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, . . ." Forgive what my lips tremble to name, that I may forever dwell in the house of the Lord. Amen.

**Rick Willhite '86**

Years ago, I regularly attended Sunday worship with a Christian fellowship that introduced me to Psalm 51. Often, as worship opened, we sang several simple hymns, including one composed upon verses 10-12, the beating heart of Psalm 51:

"Create in me a clean heart, Oh God  
And renew a right spirit within me;  
And cast me not from thy presence.  
And take not thy Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,  
And renew a right spirit within me."

The simple tune was catchy, the words too: plain, humble repentance and a prayer for refuge in God's presence. We'd sing the verses two or three times, letting the meaning sink in deeply. It becomes a meditation. I can hear it still.

Years later, I'm struck by how well the prayer speaks to different seasons of the human spirit. One whose choices and actions have created a sense of distance from God can relate to the prayer's longing for forgiveness, a welcoming home to God's grace. One lost in doubt might resonate with the restored faith and trust implicit in the prayer. The fearful might find shelter in the prayer's plea for the joy of knowing one's true ground in God's eternal love. The song, the prayer—they sound our depths of need.

All that seems required is the humility of admitting one's need for these gifts. The prayer at the heart of Psalm 51 sings from just that space, empty for God's love.

You can find almost anything on YouTube. I recently found the same Psalm 51 hymn that I learned years ago alive and well presented by several artists. It's still lovely, still speaks to me. "Create in me a clean heart, Oh God." It's a prayer for people like us.

***Prayer***

"Create in me a clean heart, Oh God  
And renew a right spirit within me;  
And cast me not from thy presence.  
|And take not thy Holy Spirit from me. |  
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,  
And renew a right spirit within me."

## Day 23

### **Jeremiah 10:11-24**

<sup>11</sup> Thus shall you say to them: The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.

<sup>12</sup> It is he who made the earth by his power,  
who established the world by his wisdom,  
and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.

<sup>13</sup> When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens,  
and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth.  
He makes lightnings for the rain,  
and he brings out the wind from his storehouses.

<sup>14</sup> Everyone is stupid and without knowledge;  
goldsmiths are all put to shame by their idols;  
for their images are false,  
and there is no breath in them.

<sup>15</sup> They are worthless, a work of delusion;  
at the time of their punishment they shall perish.

<sup>16</sup> Not like these is the LORD, the portion of Jacob,  
for he is the one who formed all things,  
and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance;  
the LORD of hosts is his name.

<sup>17</sup> Gather up your bundle from the ground,  
O you who live under siege!

<sup>18</sup> For thus says the LORD:  
I am going to sling out the inhabitants of the land  
at this time,  
and I will bring distress on them,  
so that they shall feel it.

<sup>19</sup> Woe is me because of my hurt!  
My wound is severe.  
But I said, "Truly this is my punishment,  
and I must bear it."

<sup>20</sup> My tent is destroyed,  
and all my cords are broken;  
my children have gone from me,  
and they are no more;  
there is no one to spread my tent again,  
and to set up my curtains.

<sup>21</sup> For the shepherds are stupid,  
and do not inquire of the LORD;  
therefore they have not prospered,  
and all their flock is scattered.

<sup>22</sup> Hear, a noise! Listen, it is coming —  
a great commotion from the land of the north  
to make the cities of Judah a desolation,  
lair of jackals.

<sup>23</sup> *I know, O LORD, that the way of human beings is not in their control,  
that mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps.*

<sup>24</sup> *Correct me, O LORD, but in just measure;  
not in your anger, or you will bring me to nothing.*

### **Eric McIntosh '12**

I read this passage and all I have are questions for us today. I wonder, Who are today's "goldsmiths" put to shame by their idols? Who are today's "stupid shepherds" who do not "inquire of the LORD" and whose "flocks," therefore, "have not prospered" but instead have "scattered"? What today might be the "great commotion" coming from the "land of the north" to bring desolation on those who have forsaken the God who "made the earth by his power" and "established the world by his wisdom"? I perceive that desolation is an equal-opportunity affliction.

If I ask these questions about the world around me—and I do want to ask them—I then must wonder whether that world might be asking these questions about me! As I look at America, I am awake to the fact that America cannot claim she knows God. Can we who live within her borders claim to know God if we keep silent to that which angers God?

Do I know you God? I *do* know that I should not fear man, political elections, the new administration, or rising racial tension. But I *should* fear you, Lord! I should fear seeing this prophecy of old be answered on us—and that fear should move me to actions that do not anger but instead *honor* you.

### **Prayer**

Oh Lord, God of "another chance," have we run out of ours? Are you sending a "great commotion" on us as a nation? Correct us, Lord, "but in just measure, not in your anger." Bring us to full repentance, not "to nothing." We beg you, turn us to you and do not turn away. Lord hear our prayer!

### **Romans 5:12-21**

<sup>12</sup> *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—<sup>13</sup> sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. <sup>14</sup> Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. <sup>15</sup> But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. <sup>16</sup> And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. <sup>17</sup> If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. <sup>19</sup> For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. <sup>20</sup> But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup> so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

### **T. Ann Daniel '92**

The renowned Greek philosopher Aristotle has left a legacy for logical thinking. It has influenced many since the fourth century BCE. There is a logic that the first century CE writer Paul adopted in Romans 5:12-21—a logic he expects us to follow in order that we may not miss the depth of the argument. The argument is the power that one individual can have over the entire world. It can be demonstrated positively and negatively. As I write, the world is grappling over the death trail of the pandemic novel coronavirus disease, no doubt caused by one individual or one group of individuals.

Our text states that the first human creature sinned and all humans inherited this original sin; the full context is in Genesis 3. The New Testament speaks of the first person who was both truly human and truly God, Jesus Christ, who broke the power of sin so that all humans may receive salvation and inherit eternal life. The impact of the original sin is double death, both physically and spiritually. The impact of sin canceled is maintaining forever our spiritual life, which begins when we accept Jesus Christ as Lord and continues eternally, even beyond physical death. To accomplish this, Jesus gave his life on Calvary's cross as the purchase price for eternal life available to the entire world. Then he conquered physical death by rising on the first Easter day.

The dominion of physical death caused by disobedience, trespasses, and condemnation is intercepted and interrupted by God's grace as a free gift, perfect peace, and endless life. Let us accept this new status now: life with hope to live after physical death. The Lenten season invites us to hit the pause button, be reflective, be penitent, and remember that Jesus died for us. All that is required from us is to seek forgiveness, claim the gift, and die to whatever originally caused us not to live in full recognition of the love of God for the world generally and the salvation of our souls personally. Receive new life—your sins are washed away!

#### ***Prayer***

Dear God, the architect of all plans, the giver of new life, the transformer of souls, we look to you for redemption, salvation, and life forever in your presence. Help us to dwell with you, whether it is currently in the human body, where your grace is being infused, or in the future beyond the grave, where there will be no temporal interruptions or distractions. Set us free from sin, shame, and skepticism; then bring us to the place where we may fully trust you, confidently obey you, and joyfully accept your gift of salvation. This we pray in the name of the sacrificial Lamb, Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

### **Paul Leone '90**

Adjoining our home property in Baden is the convent and motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph. In caring for the 80 acres of land and facility, the Sisters "believe in a 'sacramental universe' of wondrous diversity—a gift that requires our care and respect. God entrusts these resources to us so that we may nurture and sustain them for our dear neighbors now and into the future."

As "a dear neighbor," I have the awesome freedom to walk and pray on this sacred terra, to which the Sisters joyfully welcome all who come.

A pathway, marked with the stations of the cross, leads to the Sisters' cemetery. Overlooking the multiple rows of grave sites stands a thirty-five foot crucifix, engraved with the words, "*Ego sum resurrectio et vita.*"

Whenever I pause beneath this graveyard crucifix, I pray aloud the words of Saint Paul: "For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore, all have died. And he

died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them." 2 Corinthians 5:12-15

Anyone who has worshipped with the Sisters at Sunday morning Mass has experienced the gracious, inclusive welcome extended. The late Catholic priest, Henri Nouwen, has written words that call us to self-examination in this season of Lent:

"In the Eucharist, Jesus gives all. As God becomes fully present for us in Jesus, so Jesus becomes fully present to us in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Communion with Jesus means becoming like him. With him we are nailed on the cross, with him we are laid in the tomb, with him we are raised up to accompany lost travelers on their journey. Communion, becoming Christ, leads us to a new realm of being."

I believe, and so speak: this invitation is open and inclusive to all.

### **Prayer**

"We do not presume to come to this your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your abundant and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table; but you are the same Lord whose character is always to have mercy. Amen."

### **John 8:21-32**

<sup>21</sup> Again he said to them, "I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." <sup>22</sup> Then the Jews said, "Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?" <sup>23</sup> He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. <sup>24</sup> I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." <sup>25</sup> They said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Why do I speak to you at all? <sup>26</sup> I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him." <sup>27</sup> They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. <sup>28</sup> So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. <sup>29</sup> And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him." <sup>30</sup> As he was saying these things, many believed in him. <sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

### **Luke Farwell '18**

In the United States, a free press is understood to function in society as a counterbalance to the government's inherent inclination toward the abuse of power. The inestimable value of the press is therefore tied to the veracity of its reporting. The free press is useful to its citizens, and preserving of their freedoms, insofar as it can be trusted.

In John 8:21-32 we find Jesus engaged in a heated debate with his peers concerning the truth of His identity and their general misunderstanding His ministry and mission. The Gospel of John portrays Jesus as besought and beleaguered by those who are in need of the truth but who struggle to trust His words. In today's reading, we are challenged by the crowd's question to Jesus, "Who are you?" Never has there been uttered a more important question. Who is this person called Jesus of Nazareth?

In our nation, we are at crisis point regarding people's distrust of the very news they hear on a daily basis. As Christians, we proclaim that the source of our Truth allows us to understand in His light all other truths so that we might discern and recognize what can be trusted. Jesus promised his disciples, "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." This Lent let us commit ourselves in deepening our understanding of God's Truth as it has been disclosed to us in the person of Jesus Christ. By doing so we will be better equipped to seek, uphold, and share the truth of God's love with the world.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, You are the Truth that sets us free to be citizens of your kingdom. Let us, therefore, rejoice in the truth as we seek to follow your Son, who came to set all people free from the chains of ignorance and injustice. Help us to recognize our own duplicitous nature in spreading falsehoods and seeking to mislead others. Bring us into the light of your Son, that we might repent of our sins and recommit ourselves to the sharing of your Good News. Amen.

## **Day 24**

### **Psalm 22**

<sup>1</sup> *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?*

<sup>2</sup> *O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;  
and by night, but find no rest.*

<sup>3</sup> *Yet you are holy,  
enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

<sup>4</sup> *In you our ancestors trusted;  
they trusted, and you delivered them.*

<sup>5</sup> *To you they cried, and were saved;  
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.*

<sup>6</sup> *But I am a worm, and not human;  
scorned by others, and despised by the people.*

<sup>7</sup> *All who see me mock at me;  
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;*

<sup>8</sup> *"Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver —  
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"*

<sup>9</sup> *Yet it was you who took me from the womb;  
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.*

<sup>10</sup> *On you I was cast from my birth,  
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.*

<sup>11</sup> *Do not be far from me,  
for trouble is near  
and there is no one to help.*

<sup>12</sup> *Many bulls encircle me,  
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;*

<sup>13</sup> *they open wide their mouths at me,  
like a ravening and roaring lion.*

<sup>14</sup> *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;  
<sup>15</sup> my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,  
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;  
you lay me in the dust of death.  
<sup>16</sup> For dogs are all around me;  
a company of evildoers encircles me.  
My hands and feet have shriveled;  
<sup>17</sup> I can count all my bones.  
They stare and gloat over me;  
<sup>18</sup> they divide my clothes among themselves,  
and for my clothing they cast lots.  
<sup>19</sup> But you, O LORD, do not be far away!  
O my help, come quickly to my aid!  
<sup>20</sup> Deliver my soul from the sword,  
life from the power of the dog!  
<sup>21</sup> Save me from the mouth of the lion!  
From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.  
<sup>22</sup> I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:  
<sup>23</sup> You who fear the LORD, praise him!  
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;  
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!  
<sup>24</sup> 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.  
<sup>25</sup> From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.  
<sup>26</sup> The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.  
May your hearts live forever!  
<sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the LORD;  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before him.  
<sup>28</sup> For dominion belongs to the LORD,  
and he rules over the nations.  
<sup>29</sup> 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.  
<sup>30</sup> Posterity will serve him;  
future generations will be told about the Lord,  
<sup>31</sup> and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
saying that he has done it.*

## **Kimberly Gonxhe '07**

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

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

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

### **Prayer**

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

## **Jeremiah 11:1-8, 14-17**

*<sup>1</sup> The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant, <sup>4</sup> which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron-smelter, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, <sup>5</sup> that I may perform the oath that I swore to your ancestors, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day. Then I answered, "So be it, LORD." <sup>6</sup> And the LORD said to me: Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. <sup>7</sup> For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. <sup>8</sup> Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will. So I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not. . . . <sup>14</sup> As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble. <sup>15</sup> What right has my beloved in my house, when she has done vile deeds? Can vows and sacrificial flesh avert your doom? Can you then exult? <sup>16</sup> The LORD once called you, "A green olive tree, fair with goodly fruit"; but with the roar of a great tempest he will set fire to it, and its branches will be consumed. <sup>17</sup> The LORD of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced evil against you, because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done, provoking me to anger by making offerings to Baal.*

## **Joseph W. Hedden Jr. '97**

Is there a more hopeless verse than Jeremiah 11:14? How can a prophet be commanded not to pray for the people? Would it ever reach the point for you pastors and your ministry to stop praying for your congregation? I think we would all say, "I certainly hope not." Indeed, prayer for me is sometimes a last refuge when I can't think of what else I could do for or with someone!

But here in Jeremiah we are not dealing with normal times or a normal command. First, this passage is not about what Jeremiah wants so much as what God wants. Jeremiah may desire to pray—we don't know. But God commands the prophet not to "waste his breath," so to speak. Second, what might cause

God to issue such a command? Perhaps God will only work with those who want to be part of the covenant agreement. If there is no mutuality, there can be no prayer, in other words. Have the sinful so tested God's patience and willfully ignored God's warning (v. 7) that prayers fall unheard to the ground?

I don't pretend to know. But there is one thing I do notice here, and it is God's command to listen in verse 4. In my best moments of prayer, I listen well to God and try to follow the divine command. In my worst, my prayer time is devoid of listening; I'm too busy speaking to let God speak!

#### **Prayer**

God, when I think I have it all figured out, correct me. When I think I know better than you do how to run the world, enlighten me. When I can hear every other sound under the sun but your voice, help me to listen. Amen.

#### **Greg Steible '14**

There's grace here, you know.

These are some hard words from the prophet Jeremiah. But then again, prophets are good at that: sharing hard words with people who need to hear them. I suppose sometimes we need to hear it. Many of us have people in our lives who will call us to task, lovingly, when we do something wrong. Occasionally, trusted friends will say things to us like, "Hey, maybe you need to apologize to that person." I hope you have a friend like that.

But here, the prophet is sharing this message of God with the people, and it's more than, "Hey, maybe you need to apologize." This is a message of cursing and condemnation for unfaithful people. Even gentle corrections are hard to hear, but this is eardrum-piercing. The people have shown covenantal infidelity, and the Lord is furious.

And yet, there's a subtler side to this passage as well. God is faithful to the covenant. God is gracious. Just like when our friends don't write us off when we put our foot in our mouth, neither does God. God doesn't abandon the people. God calls them to task. At their core they are God's people, as are we. We are made in God's image, with goodness and mercy in us. It doesn't always shine through, but instead of abandoning us, God graciously calls us to task, graciously calls us to change, graciously calls us to something new.

#### **Prayer**

Covenant Lord, we look to you for help. We, your faithless people, turn to you because you continue to be faithful to us, and we are grateful. Guide us this season as we turn our hearts and minds to you. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

#### **John 8:33-47**

<sup>33</sup> They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. <sup>37</sup> I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. <sup>38</sup> I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father." <sup>39</sup> They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, <sup>40</sup> but now you are trying to kill me, a man

who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. <sup>41</sup> You are indeed doing what your father does." They said to him, "We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself." <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. <sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. <sup>44</sup> You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. <sup>45</sup> But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. <sup>46</sup> Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? <sup>47</sup> Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God."

### **Daniel DeBrucker '18**

"'We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me'" (vv. 41-42). During these 40 days of reflection on Jesus' death for our sins and the renewal of our baptismal commitment, a lot is at stake. Are we following Jesus, or our own sinful desires?

My work with homeless and low-income individuals allows me to ask this question of myself when I am on the streets. Jesus tells us, "everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). When we pass by someone in need in order to take care of our own needs first, that is sin. And "the slave has no permanent place in the household" (v. 35). When we feed the hungry, house the homeless, put clothes on the naked, we are following Jesus, who invited all to feast at the table.

A couple of years ago in Portland, I stopped under a bridge to escape an approaching rainstorm. There I met Charlie. Charlie had lost his home and family, but not his dignity. Charlie had also lost his church—it had kicked him out because of his substance use and joblessness—but not his faith. We prayed, and when I asked him what he missed about church, his response was, "Communion." He knew that his sins were hurting himself and others, and it had been close to twenty-years since he had taken Communion. I told him to hang on, then brought a pastor friend, some coffee, and a sandwich, and the three of us, under the bridge, shared Communion. We all cried; then Charlie blessed us on our way. I left with the amazing feeling that we had pleased God, and the Spirit was alive in Charlie. Charlie had prayed for our visit for nearly two decades. Isn't it amazing how the Holy Spirit works!

### **Prayer**

Creator and sustainer, here we are, thanking you for the day of Easter ahead and the laughter of your children of all ages. Lord, we sometimes fall off the wagon and think of ourselves before others, including the strangers we have yet to meet. You remind us of this failing, yet stick by us through all our errors. Lord, we are blessed to be children in your kingdom, and though we are not perfect, we know you understand and are there to guide us. Please keep our brothers and sisters safe, give us the hope we are seeking, and remind us of our baptism, especially during this Lenten season. In your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

### **Psalm 130**

<sup>1</sup> *Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.*

<sup>2</sup> *Lord, hear my voice!*

*Let your ears be attentive*

*to the voice of my supplications!*

<sup>3</sup> *If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?*  
<sup>4</sup> *But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.*  
<sup>5</sup> *I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;*  
<sup>6</sup> *my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.*  
<sup>7</sup> *O Israel, hope in the LORD!  
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.*  
<sup>8</sup> *It is he who will redeem Israel  
from all its iniquities.*

### **Tyler Bayless '15**

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

#### **Prayer**

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

## **Day 25**

### **Psalm 149**

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

### **Rebecca McGreevy Hickok '93**

It is Saturday, March 13, 2021. But . . . it’s not really Saturday, March 13. As I write these words, it’s late June in 2020, and my deadline for submitting this devotional is in a few days. It’s a sweltering summer day in the mid-Hudson Valley, an area hit particularly hard by “the virus.” Here in New York, we are on a slow march to whatever normal will be for us.

I can't imagine what next week will bring, much less what our world will look like in nine months, when it really will be March 13th. But I can tell you one thing: there's a good chance that we will not be singing the praises of God in the congregation of the faithful. Singing is the one thing they've told us not to do. All those diagrams and graphs and 8 x 10 colored glossy photographs with circles and arrows and a paragraph on the back have shown us that. NO SINGING! No new songs. No old songs. No songs with dance. No songs with timbrel. No songs with harp. NO . . . SINGING.

Yet it's the one thing we should be doing now—whether it's June or March. New songs, old songs, protest songs, praise songs, lament songs . . . songs that fill our hearts with love; songs that fill our eyes with vision; songs that fill our ears with awareness. Maybe we can't gather together as we used to in pre-Covid-19 days, but that doesn't mean we can't still sing. In fact, do this: close the computer or Ipad or phone or whatever device you are using to read this devotional, stand up, and hoot out your favorite hymn. If we can dance like no one is watching, then we can certainly sing like no one is listening. Except God. Who is listening—and beaming at all God's beloved children standing by themselves in their homes and workplaces and backyards and at traffic lights and by a loved one's hospital bed and in classrooms or church offices, singing. Singing for our lives. Praise God!

**Prayer**

Loving God, Conductor of the Choir Invisible, we lift our voices to you not just to praise you but also to ask your guidance as we seek to be in harmony with each other. Amen.

**Don McKim '74**

"Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song" (v. 1) commands the Psalm. Praise God for a victory God gave the people. We don't know what it was. But God "adorns the humble with victory" (v. 4). So sing!

The words "new song" appear in other psalms (33:3; 96:1). They may designate a new composition praising God's goodness. But Karl Barth suggested that, in the Old Testament, "new song" refers to "the coming and crucial time of the Messiah" (*Church Dogmatics* III/3, 472). If he's correct, this text is one for Lent.

The "humble" obtained "victory" (in Hebrew, also "salvation"). Jesus the Messiah "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). Then God exalted him (2:9). Jesus brought victory and salvation. In Lent, we praise the humble Jesus who saves us from the cross—and who triumphs! God's people "exult in glory" (v. 5). Sing a new song!

**Prayer**

O God of goodness and blessing, we praise you that you are always with us. As you protected and helped your ancient people, so through your presence do you do for us now as we know your salvation in Jesus Christ. Thank you for the humble Christ, who triumphs over all! Amen.

**Joanne Spence '18/'24**

The poems in the Psalter reflect the gamut of human emotions in their expressions of crying out to God for forgiveness and mercy, lamenting pain and our own sinfulness, praising God's majestic nature and all his creation, and much more. Psalm 149, the compendium's penultimate song, invites us to praise the Lord in a "new song." Verse 3 tells us to "praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre"—in other words, to praise God with our whole body. Thus Psalm 149 acknowledges our humanity.

For many of us, Lent is a time when we think of our bodies often—particularly if we are practicing daily fasting from food. At such times, we become more aware of our body’s limits and needs. Being human is part of how God created us. He made us in his image, yet human, and he declared us good. How often do we exist disconnected from and disappointed with our bodies? A friend and mentor of mine notes, “We don’t just *have* bodies, we *are* bodies.” The body is the primary and only vessel in which to live one’s life. We are not “brains-on-a-stick.” Could acknowledging our finite and limited existence be the point at which we find true freedom to “sing a new song”—sing it in just the same way the psalmist charges us to praise and thus please the Lord?

### **Prayer**

Lord, we are yours, and you are ours. Help us to sing a new song. Let us worship you with the entirety of our bodies, thus bearing witness to the Incarnated One. We pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Jeremiah 13:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>Thus said the LORD to me, “Go and buy yourself a linen loincloth, and put it on your loins, but do not dip it in water.” <sup>2</sup>So I bought a loincloth according to the word of the LORD, and put it on my loins. <sup>3</sup>And the word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, <sup>4</sup>“Take the loincloth that you bought and are wearing, and go now to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a cleft of the rock.” <sup>5</sup>So I went, and hid it by the Euphrates, as the LORD commanded me. <sup>6</sup>And after many days the LORD said to me, “Go now to the Euphrates, and take from there the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there.” <sup>7</sup>Then I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. But now the loincloth was ruined; it was good for nothing.

<sup>8</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>9</sup>Thus says the LORD: Just so I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup>This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own will and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing. <sup>11</sup>For as the loincloth clings to one’s loins, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the LORD, in order that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory. But they would not listen.

### **Catherine (Kay) Day '97**

In this story of the ruined, useless belt, we see a contrast between Jeremiah and the proud of Israel. Look at the instructions given to Jeremiah: *Go and buy . . . So I bought . . . Take the loincloth . . . and hide it . . . Go now to the Euphrates and get the loincloth . . . I went to the Euphrates and dug.* (vv 1-2, 4-7). In all of this, Jeremiah promptly obeyed God. The belt is symbolic of Israel’s holiness as a kingdom of priests, a symbol of the intimate relationship between God and Judah. It becomes dirty and useless. The symbol of obedience and faithfulness becomes worthless. The contrast with Jeremiah’s obedience is striking.

This image is discouraging and encouraging at the same time. Here were a people created in the image of God, created to be his faithful servants, his obedient and grateful people, and they became proud and arrogant. They easily tarnished and abused the privilege that God had given them as those created in his image. We, too, can lose ourselves in pride that we are God’s people. We can abuse that position. The contrast is Jeremiah’s faithful obedience, even when he didn’t fully understand what was meant by all of this. We can choose to obey, to hear God’s voice and follow. The choice is ours to hold onto the image of God, or to tarnish that image. Choose wisely.

### **Prayer**

Holy God, you have created us in your image, but we know that we have a choice to honor your image and to be faithful to you, or to tarnish and abuse your image. Give us the strength and the wisdom to uphold your image within us, to honor you in all we do. Amen.

### **Raymond Pelling '23**

Please don't be grossed out or offended; I'm just the messenger. I didn't expect to have underwear as a subject for Lent, either.

So, if my feet are uncomfortable, I know it all day. One day in shoes that don't fit, and I'm done with them. The same goes for other clothing. If my pajamas aren't a good fit, I know about it all night long. I'm miserable.

Two main points in this passage need our attention: pride and intimacy. God says that the pride of the people needs to be broken, because they have become as useless as underwear buried in the ground down by the river for "many days." God would have God's people close—as close as underwear. But the elastic quit. The underwear does what it wants.

This is what pride does: we do what we want. God says God loves people. We find ways to demonize them. God counts acts of love far more than any sacrifice, but we outsource our obedience, letting others serve on our behalf. We make excuses to do and think what we want, searing our conscience against the truth.

Where have we placed our pride this season? Do we grow in love or tell the scriptures what we want them to say? Can we face our issues of intimacy with God and tell the truth to our Lord, our loved ones? Will we soberly admit the truth to ourselves? The alternative is not the best use, like my old boxers in the rag box.

Thankfully, no matter how worn out we think we are, or may feel, God continually beckons us to redemption. Our Lord is quite taken with salvage, repair, and growth. God wants us close. Don't blame me, I'm just the messenger.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, our redemption; abide with us, even when we try to ignore you. Holy Spirit, work to keep our pride in check. Help us, Holy Spirit, pride in the God who is Love, and learn to look to Love first. In the name of Jesus we pray, amen.

### **Romans 6:12-23**

*<sup>12</sup>Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. <sup>15</sup>What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup>Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup>But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, <sup>18</sup>and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. <sup>19</sup>I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present*

*your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.<sup>20</sup>When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. <sup>21</sup>So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. <sup>22</sup>But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. <sup>23</sup>For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

### **Edwin van Driel, faculty**

In a culture that admires self-made people who pull themselves up by their bootstraps, Lent's time of introspection can easily become another one of these times in which we try to get ourselves in shape. "Striving for holiness" and "living in obedience" are seductive temptations for those who have "accepted Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior."

Careful reading of Paul suggests that the gift we have received in Christ Jesus goes much deeper than that. "Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life," he says (Rom 6:13). In Christ we, who were dead, have been united with him in his resurrection, we read yesterday. That's way bigger than "choosing for Jesus." To be resurrected from the dead is not something we do ourselves. It needs to be done to us.

And yes, because of this, we live differently. An imperative follows the indicative. But our living differently is exactly a resting in the fact that we no longer have to shape our own lives. That we no longer have to be the masters of our own destiny, but that we have become slaves of the righteous One—of Jesus. That's the gift of Lent.

#### ***Prayer***

Lord our God, Thank you for bringing us to life. Will you help us today to live as the ones you already have given us to be. Amen.

### **Victoria Voller '18**

To this day I remember that, during my growing-up years, the price for receiving a favor from any one of my sisters was to be that sister's "slave for a week." This price meant that I was obligated to do anything asked of me; at the same time, the "favor" I received meant that, in some ways, I could take on elements of being the "master." I usually made this bargain with the sister who hated to clean—something I too despised but, for the right favor, was willing to obligate myself to.

In contrast, and fortunately for us Christians, we have a God who loves us so much that he gives us grace apart from such a bargain—apart from our following the Law. God's grace brings freedom. It unchains us from the sin and death that we, imperfect people, cannot overcome by perfectly following the Law. It unchains us *for* obedience to God according to the teachings of our faith. "But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification." Sanctification is a refining process that sets us apart from the things of the world—from sin and death. God's grace gifts us with eternal life in Jesus Christ. Being my sister's "slave" only bought me the favor of 30 minutes of television time. Eternal life with Jesus . . . surely that is worth the "price" of the blessings received for our obedience to God.

#### ***Prayer***

Gracious and Heavenly Lord, please watch over us today. Help us to avoid the temptations of this world, for we know that our obedience is to you and you alone. You know the plans for our

lives; please help us to stay on the pathway to your plan. We pray all these things in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Psalm 31**

- <sup>1</sup> *In you, O LORD, I seek refuge;  
do not let me ever be put to shame;  
in your righteousness deliver me.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Incline your ear to me;  
rescue me speedily.  
Be a rock of refuge for me,  
a strong fortress to save me.*
- <sup>3</sup> *You are indeed my rock and my fortress;  
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,*
- <sup>4</sup> *take me out of the net that is hidden for me,  
for you are my refuge.*
- <sup>5</sup> *Into your hand I commit my spirit;  
you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.*
- <sup>6</sup> *You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols,  
but I trust in the LORD.*
- <sup>7</sup> *I will exult and rejoice in your steadfast love,  
because you have seen my affliction;  
you have taken heed of my adversities,*
- <sup>8</sup> *and have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy;  
you have set my feet in a broad place.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;  
my eye wastes away from grief,  
my soul and body also.*
- <sup>10</sup> *For my life is spent with sorrow,  
and my years with sighing;  
my strength fails because of my misery,  
and my bones waste away.*
- <sup>11</sup> *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.*
- <sup>12</sup> *I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;  
I have become like a broken vessel.*
- <sup>13</sup> *For I hear the whispering of many —  
terror all around! —  
as they scheme together against me,  
as they plot to take my life.*
- <sup>14</sup> *But I trust in you, O LORD;  
I say, "You are my God."*
- <sup>15</sup> *My times are in your hand;  
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Let your face shine upon your servant;  
save me in your steadfast love.*
- <sup>17</sup> *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.*
- <sup>18</sup> *Let the lying lips be stilled  
that speak insolently against the righteous  
with pride and contempt.*
- <sup>19</sup> *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!*
- <sup>20</sup> *In the shelter of your presence you hide them  
from human plots;  
you hold them safe under your shelter  
from contentious tongues.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Blessed be the LORD,  
for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me  
when I was beset as a city under siege.*
- <sup>22</sup> *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.*
- <sup>23</sup> *Love the LORD, all you his saints.  
The LORD preserves the faithful,  
but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily.*
- <sup>24</sup> *Be strong, and let your heart take courage,  
all you who wait for the LORD.*

### **Katie Galicic, SYI '09**

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

### **Prayer**

Lord, in this season of repentance we ask you to surround us with your great presence and love. Allow us to see you in every aspect of our lives yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Teach us to turn to you in our good times and bad times, and forgive us for all of the times we try to exclude you from our lives. Lord, we are hurting from things self-inflicted and those brought to us by others. Relieve us of this pain. Lord, we forget to thank you for all of the ways you are there for

us, and all of the ways you show us love. Help us to give better thanks to you, and to worship gladly. We especially thank you for the greatest gift you could have ever given us—your Son, who’s death saves us from our sins and shortcomings. Thank you, God for thinking so much of your people, and extending to us a love that none could ever measure. From our humble lips to your mighty ear. Amen.

**Rebecca McGee '09**

“Into your hand I commit my spirit” were the words that I prayed after my 99-year-old maternal grandmother took her last breath. My mother, brother, and I were with her when she died on March 15, 2011. I would say these words again during her funeral service, the first service I ever officiated.

I have quoted these words from Psalm 31:5—the same words which were the last that Jesus spoke from the cross in Luke 23:46—at every funeral and memorial service since my grandmother’s funeral. I prayed them brokenheartedly shortly after my father died—once I had stopped keening and wailing with an intensity I didn’t think possible.

The Psalms, and in this particular case a personal lament such as Psalm 31, give voice to practically all the emotions we human beings experience, yet sometimes can’t articulate. Our afflictions, distress, sorrows, and grief are poured out to our faithful God, who hears them all and gives us shelter and refuge. Blessed be the LORD, who hears our cries of despair and covers us in God’s incredible, never-ending steadfast love!

***Prayer***

Merciful and compassionate God of all creation, we thank you for your care of our whole beings—body, mind and spirit—in both life and death. Help us to continue to grow in our trust of your abundant goodness and unwavering love so that, whatever we encounter, we know in both our heads and our hearts on whom we can depend. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Carol Divens Roth '85**

Today is March 25. In exactly nine months, it will be Christmas Day. Some church traditions celebrate this day as the Annunciation, when God’s messenger, Gabriel, announces to a young woman that she will conceive a child who will be called Son of God. This reflection is being written on the fourth Sunday of Advent, a season to anticipate the Word made flesh coming into our lives. Today is the 32<sup>nd</sup> day of Lent, a time to ponder the wondrous love of the cross, the empty tomb, and how to live between the already and the not-yet, in the hope that all God’s intentions will be completed.

Psalm 31 sings of a powerful faith in a God for all seasons: a rock and a refuge in the lonesome valley when we are called to face down injustice, a hand that reaches out to wipe away the tears of grief and misery that threaten our ability to take one more step, and a steadfastness that sparks the courage to live and love when “NOs” are omnipresent.

I wonder if Mary learned this psalm at her mother’s knee; if it might have been her earworm as she listened in astonishment to Gabriel, and if it was this image of God she kept in her heart that inspired her astounding “YES.” May we, too, reflect on the ways to enflesh the “YES” of faith in our lives on the Lenten journey.

### **Prayer**

Holy One, in this sacred season, we seek to deepen our faith in you as rock and refuge, as giver of abundant goodness, and as one who hears. Show us how to live as those created in your image as we live and love and give. Amen.

### **Day 26**

#### **Jeremiah 14:1-22**

<sup>1</sup> *The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought:*

<sup>2</sup> *Judah mourns*

*and her gates languish;  
they lie in gloom on the ground,  
and the cry of Jerusalem goes up.*

<sup>3</sup> *Her nobles send their servants for water;*

*they come to the cisterns,  
they find no water,  
they return with their vessels empty.*

*They are ashamed and dismayed  
and cover their heads,*

<sup>4</sup> *because the ground is cracked.*

*Because there has been no rain on the land  
the farmers are dismayed;  
they cover their heads.*

<sup>5</sup> *Even the doe in the field forsakes her newborn fawn*

*because there is no grass.*

<sup>6</sup> *The wild asses stand on the bare heights,*

*they pant for air like jackals;  
their eyes fail  
because there is no herbage.*

<sup>7</sup> *Although our iniquities testify against us,*

*act, O LORD, for your name's sake;  
our apostasies indeed are many,  
and we have sinned against you.*

<sup>8</sup> *O hope of Israel,*

*its savior in time of trouble,  
why should you be like a stranger in the land,  
like a traveller turning aside for the night?*

<sup>9</sup> *Why should you be like someone confused,*

*like a mighty warrior who cannot give help?  
Yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us,  
and we are called by your name;  
do not forsake us!*

<sup>10</sup> *Thus says the LORD concerning this people:*

*Truly they have loved to wander,  
they have not restrained their feet;  
therefore the LORD does not accept them,*

*now he will remember their iniquity  
and punish their sins.*

<sup>11</sup> *The LORD said to me: Do not pray for the welfare of this people. <sup>12</sup> Although they fast, I do not hear their cry, and although they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I do not accept them; but by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence I consume them. <sup>13</sup> Then I said: “Ah, Lord GOD! Here are the prophets saying to them, ‘You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you true peace in this place.’ <sup>14</sup> And the LORD said to me: The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. <sup>15</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name though I did not send them, and who say, “Sword and famine shall not come on this land”: By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed. <sup>16</sup> And the people to whom they prophesy shall be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and sword. There shall be no one to bury them — themselves, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. For I will pour out their wickedness upon them.*

<sup>17</sup> *You shall say to them this word:*

*Let my eyes run down with tears night and day,  
and let them not cease,  
for the virgin daughter — my people — is struck down with a crushing blow,  
with a very grievous wound.*

<sup>18</sup> *If I go out into the field,  
look — those killed by the sword!  
And if I enter the city,  
look — those sick with famine!  
For both prophet and priest ply their trade throughout the land,  
and have no knowledge.*

<sup>19</sup> *Have you completely rejected Judah?  
Does your heart loathe Zion?  
Why have you struck us down  
so that there is no healing for us?  
We look for peace, but find no good;  
for a time of healing, but there is terror instead.*

<sup>20</sup> *We acknowledge our wickedness, O LORD,  
the iniquity of our ancestors,  
for we have sinned against you.*

<sup>21</sup> *Do not spurn us, for your name’s sake;  
do not dishonor your glorious throne;  
remember and do not break your covenant with us.*

<sup>22</sup> *Can any idols of the nations bring rain?  
Or can the heavens give showers?  
Is it not you, O LORD our God?  
We set our hope on you,  
for it is you who do all this.*

### **Benjamin Rumbaugh '18**

Jeremiah’s prophecy is a heavy one. Reading it immediately brings feelings of shame, grief, and sadness. In a word, suffering. The image of thirst conveys the deep suffering of God’s people. Lent is a time to

rest in our suffering, a time to feel “parched” in God’s absence, and this passage certainly fosters that feeling. Hope isn’t easy.

In my work at an inpatient recovery center, I serve as a chaplain to Veterans who suffer from substance use and mental health diagnoses. The insidious nature of addiction and the complexity of the mind has challenged my easy notion of hope. I’ve realized that for much of my life I’ve dwelt securely in the proclamation that I’m part of the beloved community of believers living in the “here, but not yet” Kingdom of God. Jeremiah forces me to reconcile with the “not-yet” dimension of this proclamation.

As I slowly discover abundant life in the bleakest of settings through the ministry of chaplaincy, I’m realizing that suffering and hope aren’t too far distant from each other. Maybe they’re not dichotomous foes, but instead two sides of the same coin. They co-exist. Hope doesn’t blot out suffering, and suffering doesn’t get the final word. In the midst of the drought, Jeremiah asks, “Is it not you, O Lord our God? We set our hope on you.” Indeed, Lent is a time to rest, truly rest, in our suffering so that we may experience the full, soul-quenching source of God’s hope for this world.

#### **Prayer**

God, give me the strength to trust my thirst. Jesus Christ, give me the strength to dwell in my suffering so that I may dwell in your hope. Holy Spirit, give me the strength to discover God’s abundant life.

#### **Galatians 4:21-5:1**

<sup>21</sup> Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. <sup>23</sup> One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. <sup>24</sup> Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. <sup>25</sup> Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup> For it is written,

*“Rejoice, you childless one, you who bear no children,  
burst into song and shout, you who endure no birth pangs;  
for the children of the desolate woman are more numerous  
than the children of the one who is married.”*

<sup>28</sup> Now you, my friends, are children of the promise, like Isaac. <sup>29</sup> But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. <sup>30</sup> But what does the scripture say? “Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman.” <sup>31</sup> So then, friends, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman. <sup>5:1</sup> For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

#### **Errol Conner '99/'12**

How foolish! Who has bewitched you? Do you not know you have abandoned the truth for a lie? But, like a good neighbor, friend or pastor, the Apostle Paul reprimands and reminds us all that “we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman” (Gal. 4:31 NRSV).

Abraham had two sons, one by the slave and one by the free woman. The metaphor of the slave women (Hagar) represents all misguided human efforts to help in the fulfillment of the promise of God. The free

woman (Sarah) represents the faith that takes God at God's word and waits for the promise. Through Abraham and in Jesus, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman.

It is foolish to think that one can be saved by works of the law when Christ Jesus died to save sinners. Yes, it is true that faith without works is dead; however, works apart from faith are a dead end. We become slaves to the law because we are prisoners of sin without Christ. We cannot be made perfect by our own human efforts. No matter how well we keep the law, observe tradition or slavishly follow religious customs. No one is made right with God by obeying the law but by believing in Jesus. All self dependence is but vain. Christ doth our cornerstone remain. "...Justified by faith, we have peace with God." (Romans 5:1 NRSV)

So it is true, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman. As such, we are recipients of grace. Grace means gift: that which we do not deserve, that for which no price nor labor is required. By grace we are saved through faith...not of works...it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9). That's the Promise of the Father: freedom in Christ and empowerment through the Spirit. Child of God, child of the promise, may you ever stand in the grace where Christ makes free.

#### **Prayer**

"Abba!" Father!" Beyond the law, I see your grace in the glory of the Cross. It's finished! Yes, the work is done through Christ, your only Son. And so, I have started on that road of freedom, faith and love. Lord, help me rest, yet daily run the race, and rise with Christ above. Amen!

#### **Mark 8:11-21**

<sup>11</sup> *The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him.* <sup>12</sup> *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."* <sup>13</sup> *And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side.* <sup>14</sup> *Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.* <sup>15</sup> *And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out — beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod."* <sup>16</sup> *They said to one another, "It is because we have no bread."* <sup>17</sup> *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?"* <sup>18</sup> *Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember?"* <sup>19</sup> *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."* <sup>20</sup> *"And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?"* *And they said to him, "Seven."* <sup>21</sup> *Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"*

#### **Ryan Lucas '18**

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

### **Prayer**

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

### **Psalm 32**

- <sup>1</sup> *Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,  
whose sin is covered.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity,  
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*
- <sup>3</sup> *While I kept silence, my body wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.*
- <sup>4</sup> *For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah*
- <sup>5</sup> *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. Selah*
- <sup>6</sup> *Therefore let all who are faithful  
offer prayer to you;  
at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters  
shall not reach them.*
- <sup>7</sup> *You are a hiding place for me;  
you preserve me from trouble;  
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah*
- <sup>8</sup> *I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;  
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*
- <sup>9</sup> *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.*
- <sup>10</sup> *Many are the torments of the wicked,  
but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous,  
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.*

### **Michelle Spomer, faculty**

"I'm sorry." These are often two of the most difficult words to say to someone. Fear, pride, laziness, apathy—these are just a few of the "reasons" we avoid apologizing and taking responsibility for the mistakes we have made. Asking for forgiveness can be even more difficult, for in doing so we make ourselves even more vulnerable than we did when we first apologized. But what a relief when we've taken both of these steps! While we might still have to live with the consequences of our mistakes, the acts of apologizing and asking for forgiveness are the most significant steps toward healing and reconciliation that we can take. Lent is a time of self-examination and reflection on one's relationship with God. Why not use this time to take the first steps in repairing a broken relationship—with a friend, a family member, or God. There may be no better way to prepare for Easter.

### **Prayer**

Lord, you are my hiding place. You preserve me from trouble and surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Thank you for your forgiveness and steadfast love. Give me the strength to mend the broken relationships in my life. Amen.

### **Day 27**

#### **Psalm 145**

- <sup>1</sup> *I will extol you, my God and King,  
and bless your name forever and ever.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Every day I will bless you,  
and praise your name forever and ever.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;  
his greatness is unsearchable.*
- <sup>4</sup> *One generation shall laud your works to another,  
and shall declare your mighty acts.*
- <sup>5</sup> *On the glorious splendor of your majesty,  
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.*
- <sup>6</sup> *The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed,  
and I will declare your greatness.*
- <sup>7</sup> *They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,  
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.*
- <sup>8</sup> *The Lord is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*
- <sup>9</sup> *The Lord is good to all,  
and his compassion is over all that he has made.*
- <sup>10</sup> *All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,  
and all your faithful shall bless you.*
- <sup>11</sup> *They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,  
and tell of your power,*
- <sup>12</sup> *to make known to all people your mighty deeds,  
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.*
- <sup>13</sup> *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.*
- <sup>14</sup> *The Lord upholds all who are falling,  
and raises up all who are bowed down.*
- <sup>15</sup> *The eyes of all look to you,  
and you give them their food in due season.*
- <sup>16</sup> *You open your hand,  
satisfying the desire of every living thing.*
- <sup>17</sup> *The Lord is just in all his ways,  
and kind in all his doings.*
- <sup>18</sup> *The Lord is near to all who call on him,  
to all who call on him in truth.*
- <sup>19</sup> *He fulfills the desire of all who fear him;*

*he also hears their cry, and saves them.*

<sup>20</sup> *The Lord watches over all who love him,  
but all the wicked he will destroy.*

<sup>21</sup> *My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,  
and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.*

### **Roderick Mason '18**

As the Psalmist speaks of the unsearchable greatness of the God we serve and how He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, I am reminded of how often this world that we live in falls short of the greatness of our God.

As I look at my wife, pregnant with our second child, I am filled with excitement and anticipation for holding our little one in our arms. I am equally filled with fear and concern as we bring this innocent child into a dark world, where hate seems to be the norm. At times, when I am walking down the street as a black man in America, I am abundantly aware of my race and how others may perceive me. They make assumptions about me without knowing me, and I in turn make assumptions about them. I am thankful that, though we live in a flawed world where, as a black man, I am not always seen as a person worthy of love and compassion, I can feel confident in the word of God, which declares, "The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made" (v. 9). The same God who created me also created that fearful person walking down the street and created the child growing in my wife's womb.

In this dark world we live in, it is sometimes hard to see the light. But we as children of God are called not only to see the light but also to *be* the light. Part of being that light is using my mouth to speak about the greatness of the Lord and to sing His praises. Just when I am almost overcome with fear, I recall the words of the psalmist, "One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate" (vv. 4-5). I will surely meditate on your wondrous works, Lord! I will rejoice in my opportunity to laud your works and declare your mighty acts to my children—another generation! Thanks, be to God!

#### ***Prayer***

Heavenly Father, my God, and King! I come before you in awe of your greatness. I pray that in those times of frustration that I will be gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love as you are so often with us, your children. I thank you, Lord, for upholding me when I am falling and raising me up when I am bowed down. I thank you and praise you for filling all my desires, hearing my cry, and saving me! Amen.

### **Elizabeth Nicodemus-Creach '23**

Psalm 145 demonstrates for us the power of praising God. The text lists many of God's attributes and actions that define God's character. Ancient readers might have used this psalm to sing praises to God because of all that God brought them out of: death and destruction, loss and grief. Today, we might find comfort in remembering that, despite the chaos that surrounds us every day, God watches over all and knows what we are going through.

Even in the midst of life's chaos, the tumult of our world, God is there alongside us, guiding us through all the trials we experience. As James Luther Mays puts it: "God's power is good and God's goodness is powerful." By praising God, we are showing that we want to be in a relationship with the One who is all knowing and all compassionate, who understands us better than we understand ourselves.

As we come to this text during this Lenten season, may we come with open hearts, continuing to praise God even when it feels impossible. May we seek God when it feels like there is no way we can go on. When we feel that everything is crumbling beside us, may we cry out to God for comfort. May we proclaim the greatness of God in the midst of this season in which we await the death of the One sent to show us the powerful depths of God's love. May we realize that God loves us all, no matter what. May we seek the One whose greatness knows no bounds, who provides refuge and strength no matter where we are in our lives of faith. And may we forever seek a relationship with God that shows us the beauty of powerful, unconditional, and never-ending love.

### **Prayer**

God of creation, open our eyes to seek your power. Guide our hearts that we may praise you. Open our minds to your greatness. Teach us to guide others towards your everlasting love. Allow us to be open and loving to others, as Christ loves us. In your name, amen.

### **Jeremiah 16:1-21**

<sup>1</sup> The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place. <sup>3</sup> For thus says the LORD concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bear them and the fathers who beget them in this land: <sup>4</sup> They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried; they shall become like dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall become food for the birds of the air and for the wild animals of the earth. <sup>5</sup> For thus says the LORD: Do not enter the house of mourning, or go to lament, or bemoan them; for I have taken away my peace from this people, says the LORD, my steadfast love and mercy. <sup>6</sup> Both great and small shall die in this land; they shall not be buried, and no one shall lament for them; there shall be no gashing, no shaving of the head for them. <sup>7</sup> No one shall break bread for the mourner, to offer comfort for the dead; nor shall anyone give them the cup of consolation to drink for their fathers or their mothers. <sup>8</sup> You shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and drink. <sup>9</sup> For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to banish from this place, in your days and before your eyes, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride. <sup>10</sup> And when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, "Why has the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?" <sup>11</sup> then you shall say to them: It is because your ancestors have forsaken me, says the LORD, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them, and have forsaken me and have not kept my law; <sup>12</sup> and because you have behaved worse than your ancestors, for here you are, every one of you, following your stubborn evil will, refusing to listen to me. <sup>13</sup> Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your ancestors have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, "As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt," <sup>15</sup> but "As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them." For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their ancestors. <sup>16</sup> I am now sending for many fishermen, says the LORD, and they shall catch them; and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks. <sup>17</sup> For my eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from my presence, nor is their iniquity concealed from my sight. <sup>18</sup> And I will doubly repay their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable idols, and have filled my inheritance with their abominations. <sup>19</sup> O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble, to you shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and say: Our ancestors have inherited nothing but lies, worthless things in which there is no

*profit.* <sup>20</sup> *Can mortals make for themselves gods? Such are no gods!* <sup>21</sup> *“Therefore I am surely going to teach them, this time I am going to teach them my power and my might, and they shall know that my name is the LORD.”*

### **Deborah Evanovich '94**

My house of cards was beginning to fall all around me. Fifteen years of leading ministry in the church was going to disappear to a temporary supply because I could no longer make it through a Celebration of Worship without running to the bathroom. Six months had gone by—months spent suffering pneumonia . . . whooping cough . . . a strep infection . . . the indignity of always hiding behind a bathroom door—before someone was able to put a name on the problem: Crohn’s Disease.

All these infirmities left me stranded on a couch . . . under a quilt . . . staring at the ceiling. No television. No reading. No music. Just biding my time and drug trials until I was so emaciated that, unable to walk, I entered the hospital in a wheelchair. The cards kept falling.

Crohn’s Disease is supposedly an inherited disease, but my genome could not be identified in any of my ancestors that I knew. It was hidden in the very distant lineage only to be shaken awake in my body—probably due to the stress of pastoring a church in crisis.

In the next 14 years there would be surgeries, transfusions, IV drugs, breast cancer and radiation, and more surgery. At least twice there was no assurance I would make it through the night. But I did—with the power and might of God!

God’s power and might,  
seen in the faces of those who prayed when I could not . . .  
felt in the hands that ministered to me through each new hospitalization  
and home recovery . . .  
heard in the voices of those who pulled me out of the mire of self-pity . . .  
inhaled in the fragrance of each new health professional who saved me . . .  
worshipped in my expressions of thanksgiving for all that God had  
restored in my life . . . for just being alive!

God’s power and might,  
restored in those who call on God’s name and abide in God’s hands.

God’s power and might,  
a whisper and a bellow.

God’s power and might,  
made available for all God’s people who trust and believe.

God’s power and might,  
lived out in the life and death and resurrection of God’s Son . . .  
so no one who calls on the name of God will be lost.

### **Prayer**

God of all that is behind us . . . of all that surrounds us now . . . and of all that is yet to be, we shake off the fear of life without you and discover during this season of Lent that you gift us with the power and might of Christ in the center of all life. Amen.

### **Romans 7:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> Do you not know, brothers and sisters — for I am speaking to those who know the law — that the law is binding on a person only during that person's lifetime?<sup>2</sup> Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.<sup>4</sup> In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.<sup>5</sup> While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.<sup>6</sup> But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.<sup>7</sup> What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."<sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead.<sup>9</sup> I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived<sup>10</sup> and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.<sup>11</sup> For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.<sup>12</sup> So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

### **Laura Bentley '16**

Self-improvement. It's our cultural answer to the nagging feeling that we are not quite good enough, that we are falling short of where we ought to be. We aren't doing enough, and we have to change that. Unfortunately, the season of Lent can take on this flavor of self-improvement rather than repentance. But our repentance doesn't come from striving to do better and be better. We have "died to the law through the body of Christ." Jesus, in taking on our human nature and the consequence of our sin, has freed us from the striving to do and be better in order that we might freely bear fruit to God. When we realize the freedom we have in Christ, we also see the sin that holds us back from living out that reality. We see the sin that inhibits the intimate relationship God has initiated with us, and we turn from that sin. So what still holds you back from living as who you are in Christ? How might you repent out of gratitude for what God has already done, rather than out of guilt or keeping score?

### **Prayer**

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

### **John 6:1-15**

<sup>1</sup>After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.<sup>2</sup> A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.<sup>3</sup> Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples.<sup>4</sup> Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.<sup>5</sup> When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"<sup>6</sup> He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.<sup>7</sup> Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."<sup>8</sup> One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,<sup>9</sup> "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"<sup>10</sup> Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all.<sup>11</sup> Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to

those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup> When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." <sup>13</sup> So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. <sup>14</sup> When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." <sup>15</sup> When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

### **Tucker Ferda, faculty**

Just as God provided for Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness, so Jesus miraculously provides food for this crowd. The parallel was not lost on those 5,000 in attendance, as they took Jesus to be "the prophet" whom Moses predicted (Deut 18) and tried to install him as king by force. But Jesus had already resisted the temptations of Satan to seize his kingdom with grandeur and spectacle, and he does the same here. The significance of the miracle, as Jesus will explain later in Capernaum, is far greater than the crowd had thought: Jesus is not just a king, he is the New Manna. He is the bread that comes down from heaven and provides "life" to all. As we wait in the desert of Lent, we put aside what the world offers to sustain us so that we might hunger for the Bread of Life.

### **Prayer**

Lord, we are tempted to eat what should not be eaten, to make our bread from stones. But we live only by your Word come down from heaven to become flesh. Teach us to feast on that Bread and to receive our very life from it. Let it sustain us in our efforts to embody your kingdom in the world. Amen.

## **Day 28**

### **Psalm 34**

- <sup>1</sup> *I will bless the LORD at all times;  
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*
- <sup>2</sup> *My soul makes its boast in the LORD;  
let the humble hear and be glad.*
- <sup>3</sup> *O magnify the LORD with me,  
and let us exalt his name together.*
- <sup>4</sup> *I sought the LORD, and he answered me,  
and delivered me from all my fears.*
- <sup>5</sup> *Look to him, and be radiant;  
so your faces shall never be ashamed.*
- <sup>6</sup> *This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,  
and was saved from every trouble.*
- <sup>7</sup> *The angel of the LORD encamps  
around those who fear him, and delivers them.*
- <sup>8</sup> *O taste and see that the LORD is good;  
happy are those who take refuge in him.*
- <sup>9</sup> *O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,  
for those who fear him have no want.*
- <sup>10</sup> *The young lions suffer want and hunger,  
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*

- <sup>11</sup> *Come, O children, listen to me;  
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Which of you desires life,  
and covets many days to enjoy good?*
- <sup>13</sup> *Keep your tongue from evil,  
and your lips from speaking deceit.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Depart from evil, and do good;  
seek peace, and pursue it.*
- <sup>15</sup> *The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,  
and his ears are open to their cry.*
- <sup>16</sup> *The face of the LORD is against evildoers,  
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.*
- <sup>17</sup> *When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,  
and rescues them from all their troubles.*
- <sup>18</sup> *The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,  
and saves the crushed in spirit.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
but the LORD rescues them from them all.*
- <sup>20</sup> *He keeps all their bones;  
not one of them will be broken.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Evil brings death to the wicked,  
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.*
- <sup>22</sup> *The LORD redeems the life of his servants;  
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.*

### **BJ Woodworth '07**

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

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

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

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

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

***Prayer***

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

**Derek Davenport '05/'17**

Reading this psalm is somewhat shocking because it is so physical. The psalmist writes about mouths, lips, and tongues. We read of eyes, faces, and bones.

This psalm accomplishes two things with such physical words. First, it encourages us to consider how physical and tangible faith can be. Living our faith requires us to use our bodies, not just our minds. The words that come out our mouths are just as important as the thoughts we have in our minds. Second, the physicality of expression in this psalm emphasizes God as immanent. The psalmist says so explicitly— “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted” —and also implicitly with the language of God’s face and eyes and ears.

As we observe Lent, let us consider both of these lessons. Let’s consider how to be faithful with everything that we are, body and mind. Also, let’s spend time simply enjoying a God who chose to be Emmanuel, God with us.

***Prayer***

Lord, thank you for choosing to be near, even when we feel you are far away. Help us to live out our faith with all that we are. Amen.

**Jonathan D. Lawrence '97**

A few years ago, I heard a Jewish colleague say that of all the Torah’s commandments, peace and justice are the only two things that are to be “pursued” because they are the hardest to achieve.

“Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (v 14) appears in the midst of a litany of promises of care and protection for God’s people. At first glance some of these promises might suggest that those who follow God will never suffer, but if that were the case, why would the psalmist need to say in verse 18, “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit”? Many people have held onto their faith despite their suffering, remembering the promise of verse 15: “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.”

What might it look like for God’s people to seek peace and pursue it in the face of suffering? This last year my neighbors in Buffalo have dealt with a racially-motivated massacre, and a year-end blizzard in which many people lost their lives and many others were left shivering in homes without heat or power. Our religious leaders of many faiths struggled to meet people’s basic needs and educate people about the injustices underlying the crises facing the community, even while nursing their own and others’ broken hearts. It is indeed hard to achieve, but pursuing peace can transform the world.

***Prayer***

This Lenten season, may we take refuge in God, listen to others’ cries for help, comfort the brokenhearted, depart from evil, seek peace, and pursue it. Amen.

### **Psalm 146**

<sup>1</sup> *Praise the LORD!*

*Praise the LORD, O my soul!*

<sup>2</sup> *I will praise the LORD as long as I live;*

*I will sing praises to my God all my life long.*

<sup>3</sup> *Do not put your trust in princes,*

*in mortals, in whom there is no help.*

<sup>4</sup> *When their breath departs, they return to the earth;*

*on that very day their plans perish.*

<sup>5</sup> *Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,*

*whose hope is in the LORD their God,*

<sup>6</sup> *who made heaven and earth,*

*the sea, and all that is in them;*

*who keeps faith forever;*

<sup>7</sup> *who executes justice for the oppressed;*

*who gives food to the hungry.*

*The LORD sets the prisoners free;*

<sup>8</sup> *the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.*

*The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;*

*the LORD loves the righteous.*

<sup>9</sup> *The LORD watches over the strangers;*

*he upholds the orphan and the widow,*

*but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

<sup>10</sup> *The LORD will reign forever,*

*your God, O Zion, for all generations.*

*Praise the LORD!*

### **Frances Lin '18**

When God created this world, He intended for it to be beautiful, for all His creations to coexist in serenity, contentment, and harmony. The question is not about how we can ever be in that state of being. It is about when.

Today we may have the most advanced technology and the best quality of life in human history, thanks to God's blessings. Nevertheless, we are also experiencing the harsh reality of becoming our own worst enemy. The technology that is supposed to make our lives stronger, healthier, and happier has become a tool we use to fight against each other. We may think we have everything under our control. But in this Psalm the poet reminds us that the One and Only Lord is the mighty One. And He is forever faithful. He not only loves justice but is also full of compassion. The Lord is the only One who is trustworthy, the Only One we can place our hope in, and the Only One that will and can help when we call. Our Lord is the One—the Only One—who is worthy of all praise, and His original intent will be fulfilled in His time.

### **Prayer**

Merciful God, I am grateful that Your love surpasses all knowledge and understanding. It is impossible to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love You have for me. May you speak to me in my heart to influence, direct, and guide my every step so Your purpose for me will be fulfilled to the fullest. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

### **Steve Shussett '93**

In the horror movie, *The Invisible Man*, no one could see the title character unless he was bandaged and clothed. His hands couldn't be seen without gloves, but what he performed with them was evident to everyone.

The God we know in Jesus is love, not evil as with the movie villain. But God is even less visible than a chemically-altered scientist. Since Moses was told he could not see God's face, we've been repeatedly told that "no one has ever seen God."

What does it mean to be made in the image of God, if ours is the invisible God?

Paul writes that Jesus is "the image of this invisible God," and in 1 John we read that "we know what true love looks like because of Jesus." When we see Jesus we see God, and though we can't see God, through Scripture we can see Jesus and his effect on so many.

Today, God's Spirit still shapes the world. Those baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ, and Psalm 146 is just one link in the long chain of Scripture revealing what our justice-seeking God looks like. What it means for us to look like God in service of all those made and loved by God.

When we help free those imprisoned, whatever their chains, or lift up any who are bowed down, regardless of their burden, these are the effects of the Holy Spirit who daily shapes us into the image of the invisible God.

#### **Prayer**

Holy One, make us pure in heart by water, fire, and Spirit, that we might see you, and find you in everyone and in all things. But rather than as passive observers and guilty bystanders, who see you and say nothing, make us instruments of your peace and justice, that by truth and action all will know we follow Christ. Amen.

#### ***Jeremiah 17:19–27***

*<sup>19</sup>Thus said the LORD to me: Go and stand in the People's Gate, by which the kings of Judah enter and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem, <sup>20</sup>and say to them: Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates. <sup>21</sup>Thus says the LORD: For the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup>And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the sabbath or do any work, but keep the sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors. <sup>23</sup>Yet they did not listen or incline their ear; they stiffened their necks and would not hear or receive instruction. <sup>24</sup>But if you listen to me, says the LORD, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but keep the sabbath day holy and do no work on it, <sup>25</sup>then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall be inhabited forever. <sup>26</sup>And people shall come from the towns of Judah and the places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the Shephelah, from the hill country, and from the Negeb, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and frankincense, and bringing thank offerings to the house of the LORD. <sup>27</sup>But if you do not listen to me, to keep the sabbath day holy, and to carry in no burden through the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates; it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched.*

### **Ken Woo, faculty**

Sabbath keeping is a tricky topic. For some, it conjures up images of, dare we say, puritanical types fixated on the “don’ts.” For others, sabbath equals self-care, “me time” for whatever is most gratifying. For many more, sabbath keeping never crosses their minds—it’s an ancient ceremony irrelevant for Christians today, especially the really busy ones. This is too bad.

In Jeremiah’s day God was serious about sabbath. Even Jesus’ corrective regarding keeping the Sabbath did not retract a gift he linked to his reign (Mark 2). Indeed, the gift *is* his reign: God is God, so we don’t need to be. That is the real burden Judah needed to leave at the gates. It is why God invites us to reorder our time—that our worship, rest, and compassion might point beyond “me” to the one upon whom everything depends. Our exertions are not that important. Thanks be to God!

### **Prayer**

Lord of the Sabbath, in our ever-busy lives show us the limits of our constant striving to remake, redeem, and renew ourselves. Teach us during this Lenten season to repent even of our self-denial if this ever becomes a substitute for trusting you with our past, present, and future. Amen.

### **Romans 7:13-25**

*<sup>13</sup> Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. <sup>14</sup> For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. <sup>15</sup> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.*

### **Trevor Jamison '01**

Do you live your life based on the viewpoint that people are generally good or generally bad? And if you’re a preacher, do you preach from the perspective that people are generally good or generally bad? I have had to rein in my tendency to regard people as good, but preach about them as bad.

One sure sign that not all is well with the world, including the people in it, is the great number of situations for which there is no perfect answer or outcome. Even our best turns out bad in some ways. Industrialization brings great wealth for many (though not all), but it wrecks the planet everyone depends upon for life itself. I seek the best for my child, though I’m aware that in a situation of limited resources my doing so means someone else’s child will have to go without.

Good things, such as wealth creation, parental love, and even God’s gift of “the law,” says Paul, can and often do become occasions for wrong, not right. Sin, it seems, is not just about you or me acting badly—it’s a condition affecting individuals, human systems, and the world itself.

Yet Paul doesn't write to rub our noses in the mess we make of life, individually or collectively, so that we despair. He writes to give us hope. He points us toward God, the Creator of this world, as the One who saves the world: "Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

So, as followers of Jesus, we try to do the right thing—for ourselves, for our nearest and dearest, and for those we hardly know. When that doesn't work out well (as often it doesn't), even if we're tempted to despair we remain hopeful, for salvation from this less-than-good situation depends not on us—it comes from the God made known to us in Jesus Christ.

**Prayer**

God of all creation, thank you for all that's good with your world—and for making yourself known in your Son, Jesus Christ. Encourage me to walk in your ways, and rescue me, I pray, on those occasions I fail to do so; for You are my hope and my salvation.  
Amen.

**Graham Deans '06**

There is no denying that Romans 7 is one of the most difficult passages in the apostle Paul's writings. Here he is revealed as "a man rent in two" (in Karl Barth's memorable phrase), wrestling with the problem of how anyone who, like himself, may be described as *creatus in imagine Dei et a Christo redemptus*, can be beset by such serious doubts as to their ultimate salvation. The reality is, however, that it is often the noblest of saints who feel their personal unworthiness the most acutely.

The passage is almost certainly autobiographical, but it doesn't refer exclusively to Paul's pre-Christian period. He faces an *ongoing* struggle, and the awful possibility of a fall from grace terrifies him (as it did the author of Heb 10:31). Even though those living in covenant loyalty and faithfulness need have no fear of their ultimate destiny, the apostle feels deeply troubled by his inability to act as he knows he ought to do (v 15). That has been a well-recognised condition; such moral perplexity is not confined to Christians, as is clear from the writings of people like Aristotle and Ovid.

Even the law (in which the apostle was an expert) is powerless (despite its inherent goodness) to save him. He knows only too well that he is but a work in progress, and only after the deepest soul-searching does he realise that the answer to humanity's moral dilemma is to be found, not in human wisdom, but uniquely through Jesus Christ.

**Prayer**

While we deeply regret  
that all who are created in the image of God  
have, by their sin, marred it;  
we give thanks  
that it can and will eventually be perfectly restored  
uniquely through the ministry of Jesus Christ,  
to whom,  
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
be all honour, glory, and praise  
for ever and for evermore. Amen.

**John 6:16-27**

*16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. 20 But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." 21 Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.*

*22 The next day the crowd that had stayed on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there. They also saw that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. 23 Then some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. 24 So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.*

*25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26 Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 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."*

**Carol Divens Roth '85**

If you are someone who observes April Fool's Day, today, you may already have been the prankster or the prankee. According to legend—and Rutgers University—the origin of the day goes back to 16<sup>th</sup> century France, when the Julian calendar (new year beginning April 1) was replaced with the Gregorian calendar (new year beginning Jan. 1). Word didn't get around to everyone in a timely manner, so some continued to celebrate on April 1. Hence, in that unkind time when name-calling was more prevalent, the label "April fools" came to be.

In today's passage from John 6, the sense of that label appears to come from Jesus, aimed at the crowds who followed him looking for a repeat of the loaves and fishes multiplication. They have experienced a miracle and, not surprisingly, want more of the same. They have missed the reset on the calendar of faith, failing to recognize that he is the beginning and the ending, the Alpha and Omega. He is the Bread of Life, and by what he says and how he acts, he feeds us the Word of God. He defies gravity, sin, and death. He embodies the Kin-dom of God, which is the time and place where all are to live in rightness and love toward the other, where all are to be fed and all are to feed the other—a multiplication feat of miraculous proportions, where dehumanizing labels are supplanted by "neighbor."

On the Lenten journey, today is a good day to reflect on what it may mean to begin a new counting of our days, daring to defy any status quo that turns us away from God and neighbor, or from daring to claim a proud label: Fool for Christ.

**Prayer**

God of Grace and Glory,

Let this and every day begin with you. Give me courage to follow across uncertain seas, buoyed by your voice, saying, "Do not be afraid." Fill me with the Bread of Life so I, in turn, may break holy bread with the Other and name them as my sisters and brothers. Claim me as your kind, devoted fool. Amen.

## Day 29

### **Jeremiah 18:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup>“Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” <sup>3</sup>So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. <sup>4</sup>The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. <sup>5</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>6</sup>“Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done?” says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. <sup>7</sup>At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, <sup>8</sup>but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. <sup>9</sup>And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, <sup>10</sup>but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. <sup>11</sup>Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

### **Sue Blank '15**

I am a quilter. I love the creative process—working with color and line to craft something expressive and unique. The finished result is usually gratifying. But sometimes, oh sometimes, there is disappointment. Part-way through the process I end up with something quilters call UFOs or PIGS—Unfinished Objects or Projects in Grocery Sacks. These are the creations that just do not work: the colors do not blend, the seams are misaligned, the borders are wonky. So I stuff these creations into plastic bags and tuck them away out of sight. Once the fabric has been cut into pieces and then sewn together, salvaging these “mistakes” is often impossible. Fortunately, salvaging our mistakes is never impossible with God.

In Jeremiah’s oracle, the prophet observes the potter crafting a vessel at his wheel. When that vessel disappointed the craftsman, “he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.” God’s creative process did not end at the seventh day. God continues to create and re-create, bringing hope and new possibilities for us, and for this world.

### **Prayer**

Gracious and loving God, help us to amend our ways, which disappoint. Open our hearts to new possibilities as you form, reform, and transform us according to your good purposes. Our hope is in you. Amen.

### **Romans 8:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. <sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>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, <sup>8</sup>and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life

*because of righteousness.<sup>11</sup> 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.*

**Sara Lawson '18**

“If only I could go back and change that.” “I’m never going to be good enough.” “What was I thinking?” We’ve all heard those voices before, the whispers that tell us we are no more than our past mistakes. Then Paul’s booming voice shouts out the words, “No condemnation.” What a beautiful promise. But what a difficult idea to hold onto. It is easier to dwell on our mistakes and regrets, to relive the past while wishing we could go back and do things differently. Perhaps we even feel that we must punish ourselves for our sins. But Paul reminds us that Christ did for us what we were unable to do for ourselves and that there is no longer any condemnation for those of us who are in Christ. The punishment is over. And a new life is promised to all of us . . . if we can believe it.

So let’s make a choice right now. Let’s choose to believe that Christ’s work on the cross was actually for us. Let’s choose to stop living for the law that continually condemns us and instead live for the God who loved this world by giving His only Son for us. And let’s choose to lay down the mistakes and regrets that hold us back and move forward in a new life characterized by grace and redemption—and thereby also give others a glimpse of the power of the cross.

***Prayer***

Lord God, thank you that through faith in your Son, who died and rose for us, we are no longer condemned. Forgive us when we forget what you have done for us. Remind us that we don’t have to be “good enough” in order to receive your love. And teach us to live for you—no one and nothing else. Amen.

**Karen Anderson '97**

The reality of our existence is that we live in a world marred by sin. Sin, which is driven by seeking our own will rather than God’s. The great "I" in center of the word—s-l-n—reflects our constant need to be in control, to be our own god. Words such as self-will, self-interest, self-centered, and self-reliance come to mind.

Sin infects and harms individual lives, families, social constructs, political systems, and nations. All are the imperfect clay in the hands of our Lord and Creator, who works to shape and mold us to his good and perfect will in spite of our imperfections—our sin. The good news of the gospel is that “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death” (Rom. 8:1-2).

In Christ we have hope, not just for ourselves but also for our world. Sin and death no longer rule. It is God’s will that all should come to know the love of God and the saving grace of Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:4). Where do we start? We start with ourselves by daily surrendering our will into the Potter’s hands to do with us and build with us as he wills. From there we pray for the surrender to him of all those around us in the knowledge that his will, his way, his love are perfect—as demonstrated in the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In him we are a new creation, and through the him we are given the power of the Holy Spirit to help bring change and hope to the world. Praise God! Praise the Potter.

### **Prayer**

Lord, we confess our willfulness and pride. Even in prayer we often give you instructions instead of waiting to hear *your* instructions for *us*. Forgive us, Lord. Give us humble, compliant spirits that patiently listen and wait to know and do your will—spirits which know and trust that what you do can and will be better than anything we could ever conceive or imagine. We pray in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

### **John 6:27-40**

<sup>27</sup> *“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.”* <sup>28</sup> *Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?”* <sup>29</sup> *Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”* <sup>30</sup> *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?”* <sup>31</sup> *Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”* <sup>32</sup> *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.”* <sup>33</sup> *For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”* <sup>34</sup> *They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”* <sup>35</sup> *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.”* <sup>36</sup> *But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.”* <sup>37</sup> *Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away;”* <sup>38</sup> *for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.”* <sup>39</sup> *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.”* <sup>40</sup> *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.”*

### **Chris Brown '08**

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

A short time later in John’s Gospel, Jesus calls us to also seek this same nourishment from him: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.” One works for eternal food not by the sweat of one’s brow, but through “the work of God,” which is “to believe in the one whom he has sent.” Those who believe are also sent, in the same way the Father sent the Son (John 20:21), and are nourished in the same way the Son was nourished—by fulfilling the will of the Father to seek and save the lost.

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

### **Prayer**

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

## Day 30

### **Psalm 147:12-20**

<sup>12</sup> Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem!  
Praise your God, O Zion!

<sup>13</sup> For he strengthens the bars of your gates;  
he blesses your children within you.

<sup>14</sup> He grants peace within your borders;  
he fills you with the finest of wheat.

<sup>15</sup> He sends out his command to the earth;  
his word runs swiftly.

<sup>16</sup> He gives snow like wool;  
he scatters frost like ashes.

<sup>17</sup> He hurls down hail like crumbs—  
who can stand before his cold?

<sup>18</sup> He sends out his word, and melts them;  
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.

<sup>19</sup> He declares his word to Jacob,  
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.

<sup>20</sup> He has not dealt thus with any other nation;  
they do not know his ordinances.

Praise the LORD!

### **Lori Walters '18**

Often we Christians sit in visioning sessions for our congregations and brainstorm about what we can offer people to bring them into our church building—and then, what will make them want to come back. We strategize. We offer child care. We offer cry rooms. We plan out children's church and youth programming. We rehearse praise bands and choirs. Surely people will want to worship here. And in doing so, we sometimes program over the one thing that we can offer that will truly make a difference: God.

God is so powerful and merciful that "He can give snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes" (v. 16). Yet he can also "grant peace within your borders" (v. 14). Nothing in this world can compare to the wonder of the One True God, who comes to us in Triune form. The loving grace of the Father brings God to us as our Creator and Provider. God comes to us incarnate as the Christ to deliver us from sin and death. The wondrous Spirit engulfs us to guide us through the turmoil and blessings of this world and lead us into the next.

In our congregations we can offer a time of worshiping the Lord. We can offer the Scriptures for a better understanding of God. And we can come alongside each other in fellowship and deepen our relationships with God together. But it is the Lord God Almighty who opens the hearts of those who are seeking him. The amazing power and majesty of God are all that is needed for our life eternal. Praise the Lord!

### **Prayer**

You strengthen us and bless us, O Lord, because of Your endless love for us. This love is too great for us to comprehend, but we thank You for it and for the grace You shower upon us. How wonderful You are. You care for us. You grant us Your peace. When we falter, Lord, You pick us

up. When we stray, You lead us home. We long to be in Your presence and ask for Your blessings of strength and comfort, that we may shine Your Light into the world. We love You, Lord, and praise your Name. Amen.

### **Margaret Owusu-Sekyereh '22**

David praises God and brags about His greatness, creative abilities, and compassion to heal the brokenhearted in this psalm. David is now ruling over a united Israel but a Jerusalem that needs rebuilding. However, God had “strengthened its gates and brought peace” within the Temple City.

Metaphorically, the human body represents Jerusalem as it houses God’s temple (1 Cor 3:16-17). God enters your city/temple when you lift/open your gates to Him (Ps 24:7) for spiritual ascension. As Christians, our gates include our five senses, hearts, hands, and souls (Ps 24:4). During this season, let us reflect on how we can strengthen our gates in this digital, information, and media age. We do so by having clean hands, pure hearts, and non-idolatrous souls. We are to apply kingdom principles, and the strong and mighty Lord of Hosts will strengthen our gates that we may ascend and come into His peace, blessings, and glory.

#### **Prayer**

Lord, we acknowledge our need of your help to discern our closed gates and to not hide the Holy Spirit-revealed gates, and equally, we are deficient in using the opened ones to ascend. As we observe man’s world within your creation becoming progressively destructive, we appeal to you to equip our “inner man” with “tools” to strengthen the bars of our gates and experience peace within our borders in this season. Amen!

### **Jeremiah 22:13-23**

<sup>13</sup> *Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,  
and his upper rooms by injustice;*

*who makes his neighbors work for nothing,  
and does not give them their wages;*

<sup>14</sup> *who says, “I will build myself a spacious house  
with large upper rooms,”*

*and who cuts out windows for it,  
paneling it with cedar,  
and painting it with vermilion.*

<sup>15</sup> *Are you a king  
because you compete in cedar?*

*Did not your father eat and drink  
and do justice and righteousness?  
Then it was well with him.*

<sup>16</sup> *He judged the cause of the poor and needy;  
then it was well.*

*Is not this to know me?  
says the LORD.*

<sup>17</sup> *But your eyes and heart  
are only on your dishonest gain,  
for shedding innocent blood,  
and for practicing oppression and violence.*

<sup>18</sup> *Therefore thus says the LORD concerning King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah:  
They shall not lament for him, saying,*

*“Alas, my brother!” or “Alas, sister!”*  
*They shall not lament for him, saying,*  
*“Alas, lord!” or “Alas, his majesty!”*  
<sup>19</sup> *With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried —*  
*dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.*  
<sup>20</sup> *Go up to Lebanon, and cry out,*  
*and lift up your voice in Bashan;*  
*cry out from Abarim,*  
*for all your lovers are crushed.*  
<sup>21</sup> *I spoke to you in your prosperity,*  
*but you said, “I will not listen.”*  
*This has been your way from your youth,*  
*for you have not obeyed my voice.*  
<sup>22</sup> *The wind shall shepherd all your shepherds,*  
*and your lovers shall go into captivity;*  
*then you will be ashamed and dismayed*  
*because of all your wickedness.*  
<sup>23</sup> *O inhabitant of Lebanon,*  
*nested among the cedars,*  
*how you will groan when pangs come upon you,*  
*pain as of a woman in labor!*

### **Michael Gehrling '08**

Jeremiah offers a stinging critique of King Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was doing what we would expect kings to do: build a beautiful castle— “a spacious house with large upper rooms.” But Jeremiah points out the reality that Jehoiakim preferred to ignore or cold-heartedly disregarded: Jehoiakim was building his house on injustice. He was not paying his workers, and he was ignoring the cause of the poor.

None of us are kings, but it’s still easy for us to live like Jehoiakim. We can purchase clothes off of a clearance rack or bite into a chocolate bar without thinking about those who may or may not have been paid fairly for making our “stuff.”

Jeremiah reminds Jehoiakim, and us, that there is another way—the way of Josiah, Jehoiakim’s father. Josiah did “justice and righteousness . . . . He judged the cause of the poor and needy.” This, the Lord says, is what it means to know God. Indeed, this is what it means to know Jesus, who began his most famous sermon by announcing, “Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”

The prophet Jeremiah presents us with two ways of life: the way of Jehoiakim, and the way of Josiah. The way of dishonest gain, and the way of justice. Which will we choose?

### **Prayer**

God of justice, your Son, Jesus Christ, blessed the poor. May they experience Christ’s blessing through our actions. In Christ we pray. Amen.

### **Romans 8:12-27**

<sup>12</sup> *So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh —<sup>13</sup> 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.* <sup>14</sup> *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.* <sup>15</sup> *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!”<sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.<sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;<sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now;<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?<sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.<sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.<sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

### **Vera White, community partner**

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

### **Prayer**

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

### **Brian Wallace '06**

“What if you treated every child like they were made in the image of God?”

This quote, from Reggie Joiner, is one of just a handful of quotes that have fundamentally shaped the way I do ministry. In the abstract, the question is nonsensical—after all, every child is created in the image of God. But the power of this question isn’t in the abstract but in the day-to-day work of ministry. Every ministry I’ve been a part of involving kids has had “that kid.” They’re the kid whose family car you recognize as it pulls into the parking lot and your heart beats a little faster. They’re that kid who you, in theory, want to be at youth group or Sunday school, but also know that when they’re not there, things run smoother. They’re the kid who you love because Jesus commands you to, but they seemingly try to do everything in their power to make that a difficult task.

And yet, these are so often the kids who need to be connected to the church and a community of caring adults. Adults who will, in obedience to Jesus’ commands through the sacrament of baptism, choose to love “that kid.” Who will, in a spiritual sense, adopt “that kid” as their own, just as the Triune God has given us a spirit of adoption and chosen us.

### **Prayer**

God of grace, help us to remember that all whom we encounter are created in your image. When we face the hardest and most challenging situations and people, remind us to draw our strength from your spirit, so that we might reflect your love to those around us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **John 6:41–51**

*<sup>41</sup> Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." <sup>42</sup> They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. <sup>45</sup> It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. <sup>46</sup> Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup> This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."*

### **Jon Ellegood '06**

For the first two years we lived in our home we had a light above our kitchen sink that didn't work. Every day, we would wash dishes and I would think to myself how it would be nice to have this light working. But it never seemed so dark that I couldn't see well enough to get the dishes washed.

One day, something compelled me to finally put in a new light. Having a new light in this space made all the difference. Now I can easily see where I miss spots on dirty dishes and what places need scrubbed a little harder. I realized, now that there is a new light, I can't wash dishes without the light on. When the light is off it's too dark for me to wash dishes. Until the light was on I didn't know how dark things really were.

In his Gospel, John reminds us that Jesus is the light that shines in the dark places for eternity. The people "ate manna in the wilderness and they died," and they drank from a well that only leads to being thirsty again (John 4:13). The people had some light, but it wasn't the true light. Jesus is the one who is the "living bread" and the "spring of water welling up to eternal life (John 4:14)." In Christ, there is no end, only true joy.

As we prepare for the coming of Easter, we must ask ourselves:

- Are there dark places in our lives that need light?
- How much time and energy are we spending on things that are only temporary?

### **Prayer**

God, we are easy to distract. We like shiny objects and easily accessible toys. But what is right in front of us is not always helpful and healthy. Guide us toward you. Lead us to ask hard questions and allow us open ears to hear the responses - even when they are difficult. Amen.

## Day 31

### **Jeremiah 23:1-8**

<sup>1</sup> Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. <sup>2</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. <sup>3</sup> Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. <sup>4</sup> I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD. <sup>5</sup> The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>6</sup> In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness." <sup>7</sup> Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, "As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt," <sup>8</sup> but "As the LORD lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them." Then they shall live in their own land.

### **Kristen Renee Barner '97**

I read this passage from my couch, during quarantine and election season. We live in a time of unknowing—not just not knowing, for what we used to know about this world has been mightily challenged. And that's not a bad thing. A frightening thing? Sure. But not a bad thing.

These verses from Jeremiah 23 speak of shepherds and leaders, people in charge. "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" Has there ever been a time in any nation when the leader has been flawless? Do we not, in every election season, try to find exactly the right leader to satisfy us?

Lent is often a season of fasting—a season that includes a tradition of prayer and giving something up. We know this tradition. Many if not most of us have been familiar with it our whole lives. But . . .

What if we decide that during this particular Lent we will flip the idea of giving something up and instead challenge what we know about our Lenten practices? Suppose that, instead of giving something up, we take something on. What if we take on the leadership role of dealing wisely and justly, with kindness and concern, for all God's people? We cannot all become elected officials (shepherds), but we can all participate in the communities in which we live.

Yes, this is a time of pandemic. Yes, we must social distance. Yes, we must be mindful of the safety of others and ourselves. But what if, for this particular Lent, we heeded this lesson from Jeremiah by looking after one another? What if, for this particular Lent, we looked deeper into the example of God's radically holy Son? What if we spent this particular Lent remembering, in all that we do, that "The Lord is our righteousness"?

### **Prayer**

God of love, you gather us into this life with one another and called us to care for one another. We ask that you would grant us courage to love one another. We ask that we would recognize your sacred presence in all people. In this time of Lent, O God, help us to flip our unknowing so

that we might know you better. We pray in your name, and the name of your radically holy Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**John 6:52-59**

*<sup>52</sup> The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" <sup>53</sup> So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup> Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; <sup>55</sup> for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup> Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup> Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever." <sup>59</sup> He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.*

**Joshua Fisher '14/'18**

I wonder why the author of this Gospel added, "He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum?" It seems like an obscure detail after such a confrontational teaching of Jesus—a teaching that leaves many confused, furious, or a little bit (or a whole lot) of both. And this incident doesn't mark the first time that Capernaum became a conflicted arena of hurt and rejection for Jesus. We read in the other Gospels that Jesus experienced significant rejection in Capernaum, and he has something to say about it: "And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades" (Luke 10:15; Matt. 11:23). Capernaum seems to be a place in Jesus' life where he is simply misunderstood. And in each encounter, Jesus judges the city's rejection of him as a rejection of the Father—a rejection of God and God's Kingdom.

In the season of Lent, we are invited once again to allow the Holy Spirit to enter the Capernaums of our own hearts—the memories, hurts, or places of fear we simply refuse to let Jesus be. They are familiar places to many of us. They're the parts of our lives we hold on to tightly because they matter so dearly to us. Perhaps it is the Capernaums of our hearts that Jesus comes to with the invitation to partake of his life.

Which is precisely why the Church needs to participate in the Eucharistic celebration, to share in the blood and flesh of Christ. For every time we celebrate this meal, we open our hands and hearts before the Son of Man. We open our hands to receive the bread of life and the cup of salvation. We open our hands as an embodied action that life is a gift, given at the expense of the flesh and blood of Christ. In this bread, in this cup, life is found. Many of us approach this table of love with what we cannot let go of; yet something happens to us when we open our hands to receive the bread and cup. It is hard to hang on to something and at the same time open one's hands. In this season of Lent, may we be honest about our Capernaums and allow Christ to be with us there, even if it is uncomfortable and contentious. For whoever eats this bread will live forever.

**Prayer**

Loving God, you are the One who leaves the ninety-nine sheep to find the one lost sheep. Please come again to the Capernaums of our hearts and our world. May we be reminded in this season of Lent that You not only come seeking your sheep, but You also lay down Your life for Your sheep. May the Holy Spirit give us the courage to trust You in the places we do not trust letting go of so that we may know your abundant life, to the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Charles A. Borek '24**

To live in Christ—to abide, dwell, and remain in him, and for Christ to live, abide, dwell, and remain in us—that is the hope of every Christian.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus tells us exactly how to achieve this—we must eat his flesh and drink his blood! Jesus can't really mean this, can he?

And yet he's insistent: he repeats this admonition to eat his flesh and drink his blood no less than four times! Whatever this means, it's no off-the-cuff remark. Jesus wants us to hear this message loud and clear. There can be no doubt about what he's saying.

We should recall how Jesus taught Nicodemus three chapters earlier. There, Jesus invoked another seemingly preposterous notion (that we must be "born again"), and he repeatedly and explicitly tells Nicodemus how to achieve this. Belief is what is needed, he says (John 3:1-21). Now, Jesus goes about telling us just what that belief entails, and he does so in starkly concrete terms.

The belief Jesus describes is no intellectual exercise. It doesn't come about by thinking great thoughts. Rather, this belief comes by plunging our hands into the bowl, scooping up its contents, and ingesting the sustenance. Belief in Christ is something to be consumed like food. When we eat, we absorb nutrients from the food. What we eat becomes part of us; that which sustained its life becomes sustaining to ours.

And so it is with this radical belief Jesus is calling us to. It's an embodied belief, not just something we have, but something we are. It's a belief that must indwell.

If we are to be reborn, we must believe. If we are to abide in Christ, to dwell in Christ, to remain in Christ, and he in us, this belief means nothing less than eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

### **Prayer**

Jesus, help me to abide, dwell, and remain in you  
as you abide, dwell, and remain in me.  
Nourish me with your very flesh and blood,  
so that it may become part of me.  
Help me to indwell you  
as you indwell me.  
Forever and ever, amen.

### **Romans 8:28-39**

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

*<sup>31</sup> What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written,*

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

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

### **Brian Snyder '05**

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

#### **Prayer**

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

### **Ellen Little, staff (retired)**

"Life is good." You've seen the t-shirts, haven't you? The shirts with the wearer's favorite activity performed by a cartoonish figure? The idea is to spread optimism. I always suspect people who wear those shirts of being naïve, however. I mean, have they watched the news? Wars, famines, genocides, kidnapping of young girls in Nigeria, another hurricane with flooding in Haiti, a shooting down the street, a suicide in the family, cancer. The list goes on and on. We aren't left alone with this list, however. We are given this passage from Romans where we are told that *nothing* can come between God and those who love him. What could be more important or more glorious than that!? Yes, the world brings tribulation. Jesus said it would do so, but he gives us himself, his love, his gift of grace and ultimately eternal life! Nothing—did you hear that?!?!—*nothing* can separate us from the God who loved us in action, to the point of sending Jesus to die on a cross to take away our sin. Soon it will be Good Friday, the darkest day of the Christian calendar, but praise God, Good Friday was only the beginning. Easter is coming, and we are God's beloved!!!

#### **Prayer**

Dear God, sometimes life feels overwhelming. Help us to cling to you in these times and to remember that we are your beloved. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

## **Day 32**

### **Jeremiah 23:9-15**

<sup>9</sup> Concerning the prophets:

*My heart is crushed within me,  
all my bones shake;  
I have become like a drunkard,  
like one overcome by wine,  
because of the LORD*

*and because of his holy words.*

<sup>10</sup> *For the land is full of adulterers;  
because of the curse the land mourns,  
and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up.  
Their course has been evil,  
and their might is not right.*

<sup>11</sup> *Both prophet and priest are ungodly;  
even in my house I have found their wickedness,  
says the LORD.*

<sup>12</sup> *Therefore their way shall be to them  
like slippery paths in the darkness,  
into which they shall be driven and fall;  
for I will bring disaster upon them  
in the year of their punishment,  
says the LORD.*

<sup>13</sup> *In the prophets of Samaria  
I saw a disgusting thing:  
they prophesied by Baal  
and led my people Israel astray.*

<sup>14</sup> *But in the prophets of Jerusalem  
I have seen a more shocking thing:  
they commit adultery and walk in lies;  
they strengthen the hands of evildoers,  
so that no one turns from wickedness;  
all of them have become like Sodom to me,  
and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.*

<sup>15</sup> *Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets:  
"I am going to make them eat wormwood,  
and give them poisoned water to drink;  
for from the prophets of Jerusalem  
ungodliness has spread throughout the land."*

### **Jennifer Stroud '18**

Lent is traditionally a time of fasting and prayer—a time when we turn our eyes inward to look honestly at our lives and our walks with the savior we call Lord. Interestingly, the Lenten journey, our faith journey, starts with the birth of Christ into this world and the birth of Christ within us—and the inalterable joy and excitement we feel when we first believe in a God who would join us in this place. Just as when we first accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the celebration of Christmas is often a time of gaiety and celebration, a time when people are encouraged to give presents, write cards, and smile at strangers. For a brief period it appears to be a time of good will and peace among all human beings. Once a year, for a fleeting, shining moment, the world becomes a closer expression of the harmonic life God envisions for us all.

But soon—too soon—the loving inclusion fades. The unity between the diverse and varied expressions of humankind grows faint and all but disappears, like the fire and excitement a new believer feels tends to bank and dim with the passing of years. For often, before we realize it, we find ourselves in the January of our faith journey with our ego, pride, and selfishness back in place and firmly in control. God

watches as many of us who call ourselves Christians, lose our sense of who and whose we are as we place politics over faith, group identity over oneness in the Body of Christ.

God's word tells us that everyone who calls on the Holy Name of Jesus is a member of the priesthood of all believers. Jeremiah warns us to take care that our lives, our actions, our words, and our hearts should reflect our God and the way of love and light. For how we Christians live our lives when the newness of Christ's birth within us fades will be seen and noted—not just by the people we are called to serve and care for, but by our Holy Lord as well. And Jesus warns us that we will, indeed, reap what we sow.

### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, please forgive me when I forget that You are God and the owner of my heart, the caregiver of my life and the teacher of my soul. I confess that the world is convincing in its teaching that the acquisition of material things can bring happiness and that being right and being in power are more important than following You. Forgive me when I choose to judge others because of their politics, their education, the color of their skin, or the amount of money they have in their pockets. The love of power, fame, and material wealth can twist my Christian intentions from selflessness to selfishness, from welcoming to wall-building, and from caring to critical. I repent from my lack of faithfulness and ask that You light the way of love for me to follow, so that I might be guided by the truth and the life found within the way of Jesus Christ, in whose Name I pray. Amen!

### **Romans 9:1-18**

<sup>1</sup> I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—<sup>2</sup> I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; <sup>5</sup> to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. <sup>6</sup> It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, <sup>7</sup> and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants; but "It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named after you." <sup>8</sup> This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants. <sup>9</sup> For this is what the promise said, "About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son." <sup>10</sup> Nor is that all; something similar happened to Rebecca when she had conceived children by one husband, our ancestor Isaac. <sup>11</sup> Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue, <sup>12</sup> not by works but by his call) she was told, "The elder shall serve the younger." <sup>13</sup> As it is written, "I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau." <sup>14</sup> What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! <sup>15</sup> For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." <sup>16</sup> So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy. <sup>17</sup> For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." <sup>18</sup> So then he has mercy on whomsoever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomsoever he chooses.

### **Brian Wallace '06**

"There are clubs you can't belong to, neighborhoods you can't live in, schools you can't get into, but the roads are always open." This marketing slogan, from Nike, has been a source of inspiration for runners such as me for many years.

As I reflect on our passage from Romans 9, I am reminded of this slogan. After all, Paul argues that to be a child of God has nothing to do with who you are, where you come from, what you look like, how much money you have, who your parents are, etc. “This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise who are counted as descendants” (v. 8). To be a child of God is to trust in the promise.

In short, the promise—proclaimed as the coming reign of God by Jesus, the Messiah—is one that is wide open. Wide open to everyone, no exceptions. In this Lenten season we prepare to celebrate the week that sealed this centuries-old, wide-open promise to everyone, no matter what their past or future promise. We prepare to celebrate the week when God won final victory over the power of sin and death on that glorious morning.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, help us, your people, to be those who proclaim your wide-open promise. May we see past the barriers and blind spots that keep us from being your faithful ambassadors to those you love. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

### **John 6:60-71**

<sup>60</sup>When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” <sup>61</sup>But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? <sup>62</sup>Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? <sup>63</sup>It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. <sup>64</sup>But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. <sup>65</sup>And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.” <sup>66</sup>Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. <sup>67</sup>So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” <sup>68</sup>Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup>We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” <sup>70</sup>Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.” <sup>71</sup>He was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for he, though one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

### **Deborah Burgess '06**

“Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.” We live in world where there are so many claims that a thing, a place, or a practice will bring us happiness, a sense of worth or fullness of life. They constantly vie for our attention and allegiance so that we can often find ourselves distracted, confused, lost. Peter’s question is our question. Where else can we go? It reminds us that there is only One whose promises are sufficient. In these days of Lent, we are encouraged by Peter’s question to turn again to Christ—to reject any other claims to sufficiency or redemption, confess our sins, lay our burdens at the Lord’s feet, receive his mercy and hear again the words, “I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35).

### **Prayer**

Merciful Lord, you know how prone your creatures are to distraction, to putting our trust in lesser things, to relying on the flesh instead of the Spirit. Call us to yourself and teach us, again, that you are the only One with the words of eternal life. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Day 33

### **Psalm 84**

- <sup>1</sup> *How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O LORD of hosts!*
- <sup>2</sup> *My soul longs, indeed it faints  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and my flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.*
- <sup>3</sup> *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.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Happy are those who live in your house,  
ever singing your praise. Selah*
- <sup>5</sup> *Happy are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.*
- <sup>6</sup> *As they go through the valley of Baca  
they make it a place of springs;  
the early rain also covers it with pools.*
- <sup>7</sup> *They go from strength to strength;  
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.*
- <sup>8</sup> *O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah*
- <sup>9</sup> *Behold our shield, O God;  
look on the face of your anointed.*
- <sup>10</sup> *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.*
- <sup>11</sup> *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.*
- <sup>12</sup> *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.

**Robin Sharp '18**

Here in the midst of Lent, this season of intense contemplation for Christians as we prepare for that joyful Eastertide celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, we glimpse the times of trial found in both Testaments but most particularly those of Jesus in the wilderness. Over this 40-day period, some of us may engage this opportunity for renewal by fasting from certain foods. Others might fast from “screen time” to encounter the Lord personally in those nearest to them. Still others may take on a new task, such as meditation, prayer, Bible reading, or volunteering. Our common bond in all such activities is that each participant is seeking the “lovely dwelling place” of the Lord.

Psalm 84, at the time of its writing, most likely reflected the sense of people on a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem to seek God’s company. To us, however, this psalm can also have contemporary meaning in the light of God’s loving gift of the Holy Spirit. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we know each of us is a temple of the Lord’s. As a consequence, in all that we do, others should see that Love within us—in the care we take of our physical world, the earth, which we see as God’s dwelling place, and of all its inhabitants as well. And let us seek God’s goodness and love for all those with whom we walk.

We need not travel far to seek the Lord of Hosts; the Lord is here.

***Prayer***

Oh Lord God of Hosts, we joyfully give you thanks that we need not search far to find your Holy Shelter, for it surrounds us and is in us. In this season of Lent, we look to the birds merrily building their nests throughout creation in anticipation of the glorious spectacle of the Renewed Life to come. Let it be so. Amen.

***Psalm 150***

<sup>1</sup> *Praise the Lord!*

*Praise God in his sanctuary;  
praise him in his mighty firmament!*

<sup>2</sup> *Praise him for his mighty deeds;*

*praise him according to his surpassing greatness!*

<sup>3</sup> *Praise him with trumpet sound;*

*praise him with lute and harp!*

<sup>4</sup> *Praise him with tambourine and dance;*

*praise him with strings and pipe!*

<sup>5</sup> *Praise him with clanging cymbals;*

*praise him with loud clashing cymbals!*

<sup>6</sup> *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.

### **Paul James Pfeuffer '12/'18**

“Praise.” But wait—have I been good enough, present enough, self-bettering enough since Lent of last year? Sometimes praise can be the farthest thing from our minds as we make our mental self-examination checklists during Lent. But into the din comes the voice of the psalmist: “Praise.”

The 150<sup>th</sup> Psalm closes the Psalter with a glorious crescendo exhorting the reader or listener time and time again to “praise.” In this ending to a collection of poetry that covers the broad spectrum of human emotions, that gives voice to the agony of despair, we are faced with the overwhelming refrain that we are called to worship. All creation is called to worship alongside us with whatever noise, whatever breath it can muster. There is no room for negativity and self-doubt in the midst of such celebration. Even, perhaps especially in this season of reflection and repentance, let us find great joy in the Lord—and praise him!

#### ***Prayer***

Praise you in your sanctuary, Lord. Praise you in your mighty firmament! Praise you for your mighty deeds! Praise you for your surpassing greatness! We praise you with music and dance, with loud celebration and quiet breath. O Lord, we praise you!

### **1 Corinthians 9:19-27**

<sup>19</sup>*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. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some. <sup>23</sup>I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.*

*<sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one. <sup>26</sup>So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; <sup>27</sup>but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.*

### **David Peters '07**

Lent is about connecting with God. The goal is not self-sacrifice for its own sake, but rather it is about how we can clean out the unnecessary parts of our existence to fully experience who God is. As Paul points out here, we often experience God through our interactions with other people. However, not any interaction will do. We must have purposeful interactions with others, where we listen for God in an effort to hear what he wants for us.

Hearing God through other people is tough. Paul does not say otherwise. It involves meeting people where they are at in their personal and spiritual lives. It can be uncomfortable, like when an athlete pushes their body to the brink. By helping others see God, we experience God. As Paul says, "I have become all things to all people . . . so that I may share in [the gospel's] blessings." When we take the time to listen to those who are lonely, downtrodden, or scared, we experience God. When we help those who seem unworthy of help, we experience God. When we are generous and we don't have to be, we experience God.

However, as Paul says, it is not good acts for the sake of good acts. Like an athlete who reaches the top level, we must go above and beyond. It is only when we do these things with our eyes and ears open to where God wants us to be, that we share in the gospel's blessings.

### ***Prayer***

Dear Lord, in a world full of distractions, help us to see your will. In a world full of noise, help us to listen for you. Help us not to sacrifice during this Lenten season merely for its own sake, but in an effort to find you in all that we do. In Jesus name. Amen.

### **Christopher Brown '08**

It's 12:55 p.m. when I read the e-mail. A younger couple in our congregation tells me they are considering leaving the church. They don't feel like they can worship with integrity any longer if they're standing beside church members with whom they disagree politically. Actually, it's worse than that. The way some other members of the congregation voted has made them feel unsafe. So, this couple says they will take a break from our church and discern if God is calling them elsewhere.

I close my laptop and decide to go for a long afternoon run to work out my frustration. The Apostle Paul's words come to mind: "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" (1 Cor 9:24). What does it mean to "run to win" when pastoring a purple congregation in a small town? Our church has been one of the increasingly rare places where people on both sides of the aisle still share life together. Does running to win mean avoiding conflict and keeping the peace, "making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit" (Eph 4:3)? Or does it mean being prophetic, preaching more sermons that call for "justice to roll down like mighty waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24)? I lament the fact that in churches like ours, these feel like mutually exclusive options.

As I run alongside the lake at the north end of our town, it occurs to me that the first race I need to win is inside myself. That would be the race to master my anger and tame my tongue, to not yell and curse at the worshipers who are driving this couple away. Internally, I also race against fear and people-pleasing, against ego and pride.

Someday I will reach a finish line for all these races, but there's no end in sight today. I pray for strength to endure and wisdom to know which way to turn. Then I keep on running.

### **Prayer**

Holy God, you call us to run with perseverance the race that is set before us (Heb 12:1). Give us courage to continue and guide us along the way, enabling us by your Spirit to become faithful disciples of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

### **Mark 8:31-9:1**

*<sup>31</sup>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. <sup>32</sup>He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>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." <sup>34</sup>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. <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup>Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup>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." <sup>9:1</sup>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."*

### **Kathy Dain '11**

"You old Devil, you!" That was an expression popular with my father's generation, usually spoken man to man in what we today might call the "old boys club." "You old Devil"—an off-handed compliment to someone who has acquired something usually by nefarious means, but certainly an expression never intended to express evil—just a benign phrase one might say jokingly. However, in Jesus' day, and to the ears of Peter, it was a serious slap in the face—an affront to the senses! "You old Devil!" says Jesus—"Get behind me Satan!"

I am writing this Lenten devotional in the season of autumn, as Indian summer turns the landscape to vibrant hues of red and orange and the first hint of frost assaults our senses. It is a precursor to the long months of winter ahead, with the promise of renewal that comes each spring still a distant hope.

And as I write, questions loom as to whether peace, even civility, can be found amid the rancor in so many sectors of our society and world. "You old Devil, you," no longer seems the benign jest it used to be. Instead, it is a reminder of the evil that persists in each one of us. "Get behind me," Jesus commands. Get behind the only truth that leads to the hope of salvation. During this Lenten season, who will we stand behind?

### **Prayer**

Holy God, as we remember once more the way of the cross, may we empty our hearts of the enmity that divides and through the power of the Holy Spirit fall in step behind the only one who leads to salvation. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## **Kristin Widrich '04/'19**

“And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.”

Leave it to Peter. Who but Peter would dare to rebuke Jesus? Brash, impulsive, thick-headed Peter. Peter, so quick to jump out of the boat when he sees Jesus walking towards him on the water, and so quick to sink when he notices the wind. Peter, so quick to draw his sword when the soldiers come to arrest Jesus, and so quick to deny that he even knows him when Jesus stands trial. Peter, so quick to confess that Jesus is the Messiah, and so quick to rebuke him when Jesus explains what that means. Oh, Peter. Rebuking Jesus? Did you really think that you knew better than he?

Of course, I see myself in Peter all the time. More often than I'd like to admit, I catch myself pulling Jesus aside, telling him how it should be. After all, Jesus' way – the way of the Cross – it's not easy. Not for Jesus. Not for Peter. And not for me. I would much prefer to focus on pleasing the crowd than to risk rejection. I would much prefer to alleviate the suffering of others than to endure suffering myself. Like Peter, I set my mind on human things, even when (especially when?) Jesus calls me to focus on the divine.

But this is the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent. In one week, Holy Weeks begins, and we will journey with Jesus, once again, through his suffering, Crucifixion, and death. Jesus has set his face towards Jerusalem, and so shall we.

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, your way is not easy. I struggle to deny myself, to take up the cross, to follow you. I need your help and intervention. Thank you for going before me, to show me the way. Thank you for sending your Spirit, to equip and empower. Fix my eyes on you, today and always. Amen.

## **Day 34**

### **Psalm 119:73-80**

- <sup>73</sup> *Your hands have made and fashioned me;  
give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.*
- <sup>74</sup> *Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice,  
because I have hoped in your word.*
- <sup>75</sup> *I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right,  
and that in faithfulness you have humbled me.*
- <sup>76</sup> *Let your steadfast love become my comfort  
according to your promise to your servant.*
- <sup>77</sup> *Let your mercy come to me, that I may live;  
for your law is my delight.*
- <sup>78</sup> *Let the arrogant be put to shame,  
because they have subverted me with guile;  
as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.*
- <sup>79</sup> *Let those who fear you turn to me,  
so that they may know your decrees.*

<sup>80</sup> *May my heart be blameless in your statutes,  
so that I may not be put to shame.*

### **Corey Rugh '18**

When reading these verses from Psalm 119 one easily sees the intimate language between “me,” the fragile human, and “you,” the Lord, the one to be feared (v. 74), the one who judges (v. 75), the one who is faithful (v. 75), and the one who loves (v. 76). The psalm welcomes us into sharing a tender moment with the Lord. But this psalm is not *merely* a prayer flowing from a deep relationship with the Lord, though it certainly is that; it is also the psalmist’s expression for the desire to know and follow the Lord “commandments,” “word” (v. 73), “law” (v. 77), “precepts” (v. 78), “decrees” (v. 79), and “statutes” (v. 80).

Does this combination seem foreign to us? How many of us would naturally use “mercy” and “law” in the same sentence (v. 77)? Are we comfortable meditating on the Lord precepts as well as delighting in the law? Do we feel the threat of shame if our hearts are not found blameless in the statutes of our Lord (v. 80)? Do we hope that others who “fear” the Lord will “see” us and “turn” to us because we have hoped in His word and know His decrees?

As followers of Christ, we know that, many years after the writing of this psalm, a King, a Savior, was born in the small town of Bethlehem. He walked the earth proclaiming the kingdom of God, healing the sick, clashing with other Jewish leaders, and teaching the crowds who came to hear Him. He possessed abundant mercy, and all those to whom he showed mercy were given life (see v. 77). He corrected the misuse of the law by other Jewish leaders, such as the Pharisees, and showed his vast knowledge of and love for the Lord’s commandments, precepts, decrees, and statutes. He taught a rich man that the two greatest commandments are to love God with all that we are and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. He promised that all who “see” and “turn” to Him will know the Lord and His ways. Thus, not only can we imagine Jesus praying these verses from Psalm 119, but we can also imagine that it is He to whom we have been praying this psalm all along.

### ***Prayer***

Loving Father, we thank you for welcoming us into sharing a tender moment with you through the words of your servant. We pray that your steadfast love becomes our comfort and that we may take delight in your law and precepts. We thank you for our faithful King and Savior, Jesus Christ, who through his life, death, and resurrection has made it possible for our hearts to be found blameless in your statutes. We are grateful that our faith in Jesus is enough for you. May the Holy Spirit give us the fruits of love so that we may serve those around us. We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Jerome Creach, faculty**

I suspect few modern Christians have ever read Psalm 119 closely. One reason for that is it is simply so long and so repetitive. It has 176 verses that seem to go over the same ground again and again. But more off-putting than that is the subject: the Law and its benefits. Many readers will undoubtedly say, “But I thought we were freed from the Law” (Galatians 3:23-29). A close reading of this psalm reveals, however, that it is neither pedantically repetitive nor naively touting legalism. The “law” the psalm speaks of is simply God’s instructions in their many forms. The story of salvation is part of that instruction. So in today’s reading the psalmist first confesses that God is the only source of goodness and life: “Your hands have made and fashioned me” (v. 73a). The commandments come into play as the

psalmist asks for greater understanding of how to respond to God's goodness (v. 73b); therefore, it is possible for us to say, with the psalmist, "your law is my delight" (v. 77b).

### **Prayer**

How delightful it is, O God, to be obedient to you. In our better moments we recognize that serving you is not binding or restrictive. Your people Israel learned long ago that they had a choice: serving Pharaoh or serving you. Help us to choose you, the one who supplies all our needs. Truly in your care alone we are able to say, "I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1b). Amen.

### **Jeremiah 24:1-10**

<sup>1</sup>The LORD showed me two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the LORD. This was after King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon had taken into exile from Jerusalem King Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim of Judah, together with the officials of Judah, the artisans, and the smiths, and had brought them to Babylon. <sup>2</sup>One basket had very good figs, like first-ripe figs, but the other basket had very bad figs, so bad that they could not be eaten. <sup>3</sup>And the LORD said to me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" I said, "Figs, the good figs very good, and the bad figs very bad, so bad that they cannot be eaten."

<sup>4</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>5</sup>Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans. <sup>6</sup>I will set my eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. <sup>7</sup>I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

<sup>8</sup>But thus says the LORD: Like the bad figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten, so will I treat King Zedekiah of Judah, his officials, the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who live in the land of Egypt. <sup>9</sup>I will make them a horror, an evil thing, to all the kingdoms of the earth — a disgrace, a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all the places where I shall drive them. <sup>10</sup>And I will send sword, famine, and pestilence upon them, until they are utterly destroyed from the land that I gave to them and their ancestors.

### **Scott Dennis '13**

During our journey of Lent, we move from our usual, comfortable piety and practices—which can easily become routine and feel like 'cheap grace'—to what seems like a spiritual exile of law and penitence, regret and sorrow. However, the good news for us is that if we did not have special liturgical seasons and changes, like Lententide, then it would be all too easy to be complacent in cheap, easy grace, and thus we would rot like bad figs. Such easy spiritual complacency could rot us to the extreme point that we rotten figs would be "a byword" and "a horror for evil to all" (v 9) before the witnessing world which seeks to mock, denigrate and ignore the Christian faith.

Fortunately, grace means that God, in the freedom of his love, chooses to move us to a better place for a season until it is time to return to the place of comfort, familiarity, and joy. We do not enjoy exiles, be it Babylon or Lententide. Yet such a season may produce a bountiful harvest of good figs for the benefit of us, our brothers and sisters, and those not even born yet, who themselves shall have their own Lententide exiles, if we preserve the fire of the faith tradition into which God calls us to sojourn and serve. Surely this is what is meant by our Lord's promise to give us "hearts to know that I am the Lord and they shall be my people" (v 7).

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, as we continue our Lententide sojourn that ends beholding you upon the cross, give us those hearts which you promise to give us for love and service. Indeed, help us to finish our sojourning exiles by looking forward to beholding your empty tomb and arriving back to our spiritual homes in the promised land of your grace. Amen.

### **Romans 9:19-33**

*<sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, "Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" <sup>20</sup> But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, "Why have you made me like this?" <sup>21</sup> Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use? <sup>22</sup> What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction; <sup>23</sup> and what if he has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— <sup>24</sup> including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? <sup>25</sup> As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" <sup>26</sup> And in the very place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," there they shall be called children of the living God." <sup>27</sup> And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved; <sup>28</sup> for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth quickly and decisively." <sup>29</sup> And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left survivors to us, we would have fared like Sodom and been made like Gomorrah." <sup>30</sup> What then are we to say? Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; <sup>31</sup> but Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is based on the law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law. <sup>32</sup> Why not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, <sup>33</sup> as it is written, "See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."*

### **Richard Kinney '07**

In the epistle reading for today the Apostle Paul ushers us into a spiritual mystery. Why has God ordained a world of vast disparity and unfairness? The Apostle uses the image of God-the-Potter/We-the-Clay and suggests that God makes pottery of different quality. Some people have mental or physical disabilities or early onset of disease. Some children are born into broken families or crippling poverty, while others are born into wealth and privilege, seemingly destined for success. Some people groups are outside the saving work of Christ while others have generational faith. Respectively, Paul calls these people "objects of wrath made for destruction" and "objects of mercy, prepared for glory." That seems so unfair.

The 2014 movie *The Drop Box* documents the story of a church in South Korea with an amazing ministry to disabled, abandoned children. The ministry began when the pastor of the church and his wife gave birth to a child with severe deformities and brain damage. At birth, the child had growing off his cheek a lump the size of a second head. He would never be able to walk, talk, feed, or bathe himself. That he required 14 years of surgeries and therapies before he could be released from the hospital forced the family to sell their home to pay for his medical bills. As you watch the movie, you can't help but think, "Put the poor thing out of his misery." If ever there was a poorly made piece of pottery, "an object of wrath made for destruction," this child would surely seem to be it. Yet God had a purpose for that child's life. Like the words Moses says to Pharaoh, quoted by Paul here in verse 17, "For this very *purpose* I raised you up, in order that I might demonstrate in you, my power, and in order that my name might be proclaimed far and wide in all the earth."

Through that deformed child, the pastor and his wife learned the value of every human life. They have treated their child with great dignity, and it led them and their church to a ministry of rescuing and raising other disabled children. Abandoning babies (especially disabled ones) in dumpsters or back alleys is a huge problem in South Korea, so the church created a Drop Box—an incubated receptacle where desperate mothers can anonymously place their baby, who is then transported through the exterior wall and into the shelter of the church. Thus the disabled orphans are given a chance in life and raised in love. At the time *The Drop Box* was filmed, 500 babies had been saved in this way, and many of them have grown to be well-adjusted members of society. All this goodness came about because of one child whom God allowed to be born with such severe disadvantages.

The Bible never explains why there is disease, inequity, and unfairness in this world. It is a broken, fallen world. But God is calling those of us who have received God's mercy to show God's mercy to others. The weakness we see in others should soften our hearts with compassion and draw us to their aid, and the weakness we see in ourselves should humble our pride and draw us to receiving help from others. God wants the weak, fragile pottery of this world to teach compassion to society, and God wants the seeming objects of wrath to be honored through the ministry of objects of mercy. And in this way God not only brings a broken world back together but also, in the process, weaves a beautiful tapestry out of the glorious and inglorious parts of our humanity.

#### **Prayer**

Abba Father, Thou art the Potter, We are the clay. May we be content with our created limitations; strengthen us with Thy mercy where we are insufficient. And lead us also to others, especially the weaker vessels of Thy Creation, that the mercy we show them may bring glory to Thee. Mold us and fashion us all into the image of Jesus Thy Son. Amen.

#### **John 9:1-17**

<sup>1</sup>As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." <sup>6</sup>When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, <sup>7</sup>saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. <sup>8</sup>The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" <sup>9</sup>Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." <sup>10</sup>But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" <sup>11</sup>He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." <sup>12</sup>They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." <sup>13</sup>They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup>Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." <sup>16</sup>Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. <sup>17</sup>So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

**Jim Davison '69**

Night, Sight, Light, and . . . Blindness.

When the disciples walk by a blind man, they ask Jesus the age-old question: “Who sinned here?” We understand that question, don’t we? When something unfortunate comes our way, aren’t we sometimes tempted to wonder what we did wrong? Or perhaps it’s the other way around: “I’m sorry I did (or thought, or said) that, Lord. Please don’t let anything bad happen!”

Luckily, Jesus denies the link between suffering and sin. He changes the perspective by proclaiming that God will use this tragic situation to reveal Jesus as “the Light of the world.” This man lives in darkness, but Jesus enables him to see light. As the story progresses, he seems to recognize the Light as well.

The authorities also see the results of Jesus’ action, but they can’t accept the obvious conclusion. In spite of possessing healthy eyesight, they are blind to the truth about Jesus’ identity. Or, we might say, they see what they want to see. That is a lesson for me, too. How often do preconceived opinions, views of others or myself, hopes, or fears cloud my sight to something I should recognize? Make me blind to something that is true?

This Lent, whom do I resemble—the blind man whose vision was restored, or the authorities who, denying their blindness, lived in darkness?

***Prayer***

God of Light, thank you for sending your Son to bring light into the world. Let that light illuminate my heart, so that any blindness in me may be taken away. Let that light enflame my spirit, that I may honor you, follow your Son, and serve this world, so often caught in darkness and despair. In Christ I pray. Amen.

**Shannon M. Garrett-Doege '21**

During the Lenten season, Christians are called to a time of reflection, renewal, and reconciliation with Christ Jesus, with one another, and with oneself. One of the ways that we can participate in the work of reconciliation is through widening our lens and experiencing the world from another perspective. There is an approach to theology known as Womanist theology, which is defined as an interpretative approach that centers the experiences of Black women in the biblical narrative. The Womanist approach prioritizes experience as a way of knowing.

In John 9:1-17, the disciples and the Pharisees both want to know something. The disciples want to know who sinned to cause the man’s blindness, and the Pharisees want to know how the blind man’s eyes were opened. Both the disciples and the Pharisees are seeking knowledge through facts and data rather than through experience.

Facts and data are imperative in most aspects of our lives, but sometimes, we place too much emphasis on who, what, when, where, why, and how and forget to feel, to be present, to experience. The gift of Lent is an invitation to feel. It is an invitation to reflect, renew, and reconcile. There is a wealth of knowledge in research and reading, but also in feeling and experiencing.

The Pharisees experienced Jesus performing a miracle. Instead of immersing themselves in the experience as a way of knowing, they launch an investigation. Instead of praise and thanksgiving, they

offer skepticism and ridicule. From their place of privilege, the Pharisees protest Jesus' act of healing on the Sabbath, but for the blind man, even one more day of injustice was too many. Not only was the formerly blind man's vision restored, but his life and livelihood were as well. His life was changed in dramatic fashion. It should have been a celebration, but instead, they launched an investigation.

This Lent, I invite you to prioritize experience as a way of knowing. I invite you to widen your lens. Christ Jesus invites you into the work of reconciliation with him, oneself, and the world.

### **Prayer**

God of justice and love,  
So often we are blind to everyday blessings and miracles.  
We get so caught up in being right instead of being righteous.  
We get so caught up in the investigation that we overlook the celebration.  
We forget about the marginalized and seek to criminalize.  
Cover our eyes in your miraculous mud, so that we may see again.  
Wash us in your healing waters, so that we may feel again.  
Strengthen us through the Holy Spirit, so that we may experience again.  
So may it be. Amen.

## **Day 35**

### **Jeremiah 25:8-17**

*<sup>8</sup>Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, <sup>9</sup>I am going to send for all the tribes of the north, says the LORD, even for King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these nations around; I will utterly destroy them, and make them an object of horror and of hissing, and an everlasting disgrace. <sup>10</sup>And I will banish from them the sound of mirth and the sound of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. <sup>11</sup>This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. <sup>12</sup>Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, says the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste. <sup>13</sup>I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. <sup>14</sup>For many nations and great kings shall make slaves of them also; and I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands. <sup>15</sup>For thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. <sup>16</sup>They shall drink and stagger and go out of their minds because of the sword that I am sending among them. <sup>17</sup>So I took the cup from the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to whom the LORD sent me drink it.*

### **Minh Towner '13**

I spend a lot of time on the road visiting people and churches, so getting from point A to point B is the ultimate goal of my trip. GPS is my companion, my best friend forever (BFF). But after driving the same route over the years, my self-confidence improved, and I started taking shortcuts and ignoring my GPS. I kept hearing "Recalculating, recalculating" each time I took a different turn from what my GPS thought was correct. So I had a solution: I didn't tune it out, I just turned it off. But one day I found myself really, really lost in the middle of nowhere—certainly not where I wanted to be and nowhere that I recognized. Fear slowly took over my body and, as fast as I could, I reached for my GPS. My hands were shaking; my heart was racing. At that moment, I realized the consequence of my "disobedience" in not following the

instructions of my GPS. I also realized my disobedience to God by my excessive self-reliance and by not listening to God's voice, God's "GPS" instructions.

We are just like the people of Judah in today's reading. They were disobedient to the point that God's wrath was inevitable. Verse 12, however, states that God's wrath would not last forever. The Cross and the death of Jesus Christ, God's only Son, demonstrates His deepest love for us and His desire to be in relationship with us.

So where are you now? Are you lost? Is your GPS turned on, or off? God wants us be in communication with Him, to find our way home to Him. Are we willing?

### **Prayer**

Oh God, you are a God of mercy and love even when we are so disobedient to you; even in the depth of your anger, you still love us. Your love is beyond measure. We ask you for forgiveness. Help us to have the ears to hear you, a heart to love you, and a zeal and joy to follow your will and not ours. Renew our minds so we can see and hear through the eyes of Jesus, not our own. Amen.

### **Romans 10:1-13**

*1 Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. 2 I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. 4 For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. 5 Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." 6 But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) 7 "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11 The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13 For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

### **Elizabeth Wallace '07**

"The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (v. 8). In the movie *You've Got Mail* there's a line in which the main character, the owner of a bookshop, says, "When you read a book as a child, it becomes a part of your identity in a way that no other reading in your whole life does."

As a child, in the evenings I would watch my parents and sister read and become entranced by the words on the page. Ever since I myself learned to read, I've been transfixed by the power of words. I remember going into my older sister's room (when she was away at a friend's house) to read not her diary, but her Bible. I knew there was something special about those words in particular, and I couldn't get enough of them.

In Jeremiah 31:33, God talks about the new covenant that will be written on the hearts of God's people. This new covenant won't be engraved on tablets of stone, but engraved on our hearts. When Scripture becomes part of our daily life, it shows up at unexpected times. We might find ourselves reciting a

familiar psalm as we wait for results at the doctor's office. We might hear the words of 1 Corinthians 13 when we are feeling impatient and unkind. And these words from Romans 10 remind us that God is close at hand—and the word of God can be in our hearts and on our lips at all times.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, we give you thanks for your word in Scripture. May it guide and direct us during these 40 days of Lent. Help us to keep your word in our hearts and on our lips. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Amen.

### **John 9:18-41**

<sup>18</sup> The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight <sup>19</sup> and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" <sup>20</sup> His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; <sup>21</sup> but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." <sup>22</sup> His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. <sup>23</sup> Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." <sup>24</sup> So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." <sup>25</sup> He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." <sup>26</sup> They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" <sup>27</sup> He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" <sup>28</sup> Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. <sup>29</sup> We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." <sup>30</sup> The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. <sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. <sup>32</sup> Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. <sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." <sup>34</sup> They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. <sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" <sup>36</sup> He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." <sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." <sup>38</sup> He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." <sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" <sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

### **Jonathon Chillinsky '18**

"... because they were afraid . . ." Fear controls so many aspects of our lives; why let it control the proclamation of God's goodness? I wonder how many miraculous events take place in our world on a daily basis without anyone's ever hearing about them. Fear of what others will think or do in response to our describing our miracle, or attributing that miracle to God, hinders the power that story could have in someone's life! But why should we be afraid? All good things come from God and should be attributed to God! The outcome of the proclamation is in God's hands; our God-given responsibility is simply to share it—to share the story of our miracle. So let us take the example of the blind man, who speaks without fear of harsh punishments. Let us find our strength in God to speak forth the miraculous to everyone we encounter.

### ***Prayer***

Father, we come to you through your Son and our Lord, Jesus, and by the power of the Spirit with thanksgiving. Continue to intervene in our lives in miraculous ways so that we may proclaim Your miracles to those near and far from You. Help us to not be gripped with fear, but instead give us the courage to be your spokespersons. May you be glorified in all we say and do. Amen.

### **Bill Quinn '21**

#### **“Spunky Faith”**

There is humor in the Bible, and John 9:27 contains a snippet of sarcasm worthy of 2025:

“He answered, ‘I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?’”

“Do you want to become his disciples too?” Awesome!

This guy has some spunk, and shouldn't we all possess such spunk when appropriate?

John 9 is singularly devoted to the healing of the blind man—a miracle worthy of throwing a party; instead, the Pharisees stage an inquisition.

After interrogating the man who had been blind since birth, the Pharisees summon his parents who, fearing expulsion from the synagogue, implement damage control by throwing the matter back into their son's lap.

Maybe if the interrogators press him a little harder with manipulative questions, they will receive their desired answers!

The formerly blind man doesn't give an inch, and in fact, he pushes back.

“I have told you already and you did not listen.”

He is fearless. They can't fire him—he's already quit; they just haven't gotten the e-mail yet. Then, for good measure, he throws their incredulity back at them: “Do you want to become his disciples, too?”

The fear of change in the authorities is no surprise. Institutions and their beneficiaries aren't interested in disrupting a status quo that works well for them. The fear of retribution in the parents is understandable: the synagogue centered community is all they've ever known. In their economy, expulsion = death.

But the blind man's life has been radically changed: “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see” (v. 25). This Lent, we have a choice: be a skeptical Pharisee, a terrified parent, or a spunky disciple asking others if they, too, would like to see.

### ***Prayer***

God, open my eyes like those of the blind man, so that I see your glory, faithfully moving beyond whatever ails me. Give me the assuredness of faith shown by him, to stand boldly in the face of doubt, and to remember to invite others on this journey of discipleship. Amen.

## Day 36

### **Romans 10:14-21**

<sup>14</sup> But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" <sup>16</sup> But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" <sup>17</sup> So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

<sup>18</sup> But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for  
"Their voice has gone out to all the earth,  
and their words to the ends of the world."

<sup>19</sup> Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says,  
"I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation;  
with a foolish nation I will make you angry."

<sup>20</sup> Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,  
"I have been found by those who did not seek me;  
I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."

<sup>21</sup> But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

### **Moonkyung Park '18**

These words from Jeremiah sound gruesome. Jeremiah proclaims God's wrath against all nations and all people. No one will escape God's judgment, and complete destruction of the earth is imminent. Is this picture of an angry, merciless, or judgmental God the point of Jeremiah's prophecy? I doubt it. I believe that here Jeremiah is expressing the pathos of God, who was indescribably hurt by His people's wrongdoings and was awaiting their repentance. In Romans 10, Paul confirms God's faithful love even to His "disobedient and contrary people" and emphasizes the need to spread this good news about the love of God through the words of Christ.

What is your own picture of God like? What do you believe it means for your posture and actions toward others? Are God's followers called to judge and exclude, or are we called to proclaim God's love to the ends of the earth and to bring people back to God, who is "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Ps. 145:8)?

Let Christ-followers everywhere remember that God's wrath stems from His love for His own people and is directed toward their repentance and complete union with Him in divine love. For the complete picture of God's love for His people is our salvation through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

### **Prayer**

God of mercy and forgiveness, we acknowledge that we, at times, take wrong paths and sadden you by our foolish choices. Whenever we succumb to wrong paths, guide us to repent and renew our relationship with you. Help us to bask in your mercy and forgiveness so that as living witnesses we may proclaim your love to the ends of the earth.

### **Ryan Lucas '18**

As a paramedic, I am acutely aware of emergency vehicles when I drive my regular vehicle. Upon hearing a siren, I quickly look for the vehicle before giving way to them. This common courtesy is invaluable to the crew's response.

During a shift on the ambulance a couple of years ago, we were responding with lights and sirens to a call for difficulty breathing, or so we thought. It was early in the morning, and I had been working all night, exhausted from running calls into the wee hours of the morning. After passing a police officer who was getting into his patrol car, my partner got a text from the police officer and he informed us that, indeed, we did not turn on our emergency lights and were just driving through town with our siren on. It was slightly embarrassing, but there were not many cars on the road to notice our error.

So, how often do we hear things and immediately look for the source? Do we pay as much attention to God's voice as we do to things in our everyday environment?

In Romans 10:17, we hear: "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ." God's voice is spoken to us daily in the people we meet and in the places we live. Loving our neighbor means that we must also listen to them and commune with them, even in their struggles. God calls us to love through the ministry of presence and through building communities that care for each other by listening and responding to each other's needs. But for us to hear these things, we have to be on full alert for God's voice in the ordinary and the extraordinary people and places.

### **Prayer**

O God, today we give to You our undivided attention as we wait for your voice to guide us. Whether it is through our neighbor's long-winded story or the care of EMS personnel tending to someone with an acute illness, may we hear your call to take part in your everlasting story. Amen.

### **John 10:1-18**

<sup>1</sup> "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. <sup>2</sup> The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. <sup>7</sup> So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. <sup>11</sup> "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away — and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

### **Laura Blank '13**

The neighboring farm has the most unusual flock of "Jacob Sheep". These spotted sheep, with the rams often having four or even six large horns, are descended from an ancient Middle Eastern breed. Their name is a nod to Jacob selecting the spotted sheep from Laban's flock, and their looks quite literally stop

traffic. One frigid day in lambing season, the flock's giant Great Pyrenees guard dog was fiercely protecting a tiny newborn, claiming it as her own. (Not to worry! After a game of distraction, the lamb was returned to its mother.)

We are tempted to do the same. Forgetting the flock belongs not to us, but to the Good Shepherd, we exhaust ourselves with our efforts to corral, control, and direct. Thinking we know best, we fiercely guard our own ideas and plans for the Church. However, we need to be open to hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd telling us to "Heel!" and let Christ lead the flock!

**Prayer**

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

**Jon Draskovic '12**

Confession: I know nothing about shepherding. In his novel *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, Ivan Doig writes about two Scottish immigrants who homesteaded the front range of the Montana Rockies in the 1890s as sheep ranchers. As it turns out, sheep are not smart. Doig writes, "fleecies are a garden that wanders around looking for its own extinction . . . right now they are out there searching for ways to die, and there are many sources willing to oblige their mortal urge."

This less romantic but maybe more accurate understanding of shepherding puts this passage in a new light for me. Being a shepherd of people is a difficult business to be in: We sheep need great care in order not to get lost, much tending in order not to be snatched by wolves and scattered, much prodding in order to see the gate to safety. Thank God that He is the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep.

**Prayer**

Thank you, Father for Jesus, our Good Shepherd, the One who shows us the gate and leads us through it; who tends us and keeps us from getting lost; who lays down his life on our behalf when the wolves come to snatch us. Amen.

**Day 37**

**Jeremiah 26:1-24**

<sup>1</sup>At the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came from the LORD: <sup>2</sup>Thus says the LORD: Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to worship in the house of the LORD; speak to them all the words that I command you; do not hold back a word. <sup>3</sup>It may be that they will listen, all of them, and will turn from their evil way, that I may change my mind about the disaster that I intend to bring on them because of their evil doings. <sup>4</sup>You shall say to them: Thus says the LORD: If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law that I have set before you, <sup>5</sup>and to heed the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently — though you have not heeded—<sup>6</sup>then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth. <sup>7</sup>The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. <sup>8</sup>And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, "You shall die!" <sup>9</sup>Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, 'This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant'?" And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the

house of the LORD. <sup>10</sup> When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the LORD and took their seat in the entry of the New Gate of the house of the LORD. <sup>11</sup> Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears." <sup>12</sup> Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, "It is the LORD who sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. <sup>13</sup> Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will change his mind about the disaster that he has pronounced against you. <sup>14</sup> But as for me, here I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. <sup>15</sup> Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will be bringing innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the LORD sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears." <sup>16</sup> Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve the sentence of death, for he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God." <sup>17</sup> And some of the elders of the land arose and said to all the assembled people, <sup>18</sup> "Micah of Moresheth, who prophesied during the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, said to all the people of Judah: 'Thus says the LORD of hosts,

Zion shall be plowed as a field;  
Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,  
and the mountain of the house a wooded height.'

<sup>19</sup> Did King Hezekiah of Judah and all Judah actually put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and did not the LORD change his mind about the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster on ourselves!" <sup>20</sup> There was another man prophesying in the name of the LORD, Uriah son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim. He prophesied against this city and against this land in words exactly like those of Jeremiah. <sup>21</sup> And when King Jehoiakim, with all his warriors and all the officials, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Uriah heard of it, he was afraid and fled and escaped to Egypt. <sup>22</sup> Then King Jehoiakim sent Elnathan son of Achbor and men with him to Egypt, <sup>23</sup> and they took Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim, who struck him down with the sword and threw his dead body into the burial place of the common people. <sup>24</sup> But the hand of Ahikam son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over into the hands of the people to be put to death.

### **Brenda Barnes '07/'18**

Jeremiah has no choice—he must speak for God with the message God has given to him. The occasion of Jeremiah's prophecy was probably New Year's Day, when many people were to come to the Temple area to see Jehoiakim crowned as king. It was a time of crisis for the nation of Judah—a time of political upheaval. The people came to the Temple to find reassurance and protection in the new leadership.

But Jeremiah's words are not words of comfort and peace. Instead, his words stir up the emotions of the princes, the people, the priests, and the false prophets (LXX vv. 7, 8, 11, 16). "Amend your ways and your doings," Jeremiah says, with full assurance that the words come from God (v. 13). The princes (officials of the king's court) and the people side with Jeremiah because the words come from God. But the priests and false prophets decide he should be put to death. There is an impasse: two groups against two other groups—and Jeremiah, standing in their midst with confidence and power. Let us take note of the bold action of God's faithful, namely, when leadership was found lacking, the people stepped up to voice what they knew to be God's righteous way.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, help our leaders to recognize you in all the ways they lead us. Help us to amend our ways. Give us voice to proclaim injustice and remind others of your word. For the sake of Christ we pray. Amen.

### **Andy Bossardet '23**

"The truth will set you free, but not until it is finished with you." – David Foster Wallace

It is a difficult thing to accept the truth. The road to acceptance may lead through denial, but denial is a tough terrain to cross. In Jeremiah 26, the prophet laments over the state of Jerusalem and pleads for repentance. However, verse seven states that "the priests, the prophets, and all the people" rose up against Jeremiah's words and condemned the audacity with which he spoke against the status quo. The bad news about Judea was rejected by everyone.

For the initial readers of Jeremiah, those living after the exile, Jeremiah 26 is a stirring reminder of the power of denial. They lived in the aftermath of Jeremiah's original audience and of those people's rejection of Jeremiah's words. This passage reminded them how easy it is to ignore one's faults. The chapter served—and serves—as a warning to future generations that we ignore our sins to our own peril.

However, Jeremiah 26 also gives us reason for hope. The prophet is clear: if you are willing to heed the truth and allow God to transform you, the default future of exile and pain is avoidable. For us today, telling the truth about our sin can open us to the life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Sin thrives in secrecy and shame. Sin cannot survive the intense and blinding light of the truth.

May Jeremiah's words stir in you as well. May they remind you that the purpose of self-awareness is not to drag us down but to release us from the burdens which have already dragged us down. May they remind you that the sting of recognizing our sin can also be the key to finding our freedom.

### **Prayer**

Creator God,  
Shine the light of truth in the corners of our hearts. Illuminate the parts of ourselves which we would rather not be seen. May they be held in the gracious love and compassion of your Spirit. May we let the truth do its work in us, that we might be changed into people who can increasingly love you and our neighbor. In the name of the crucified and risen Jesus,  
Amen.

### **Romans 11:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup> God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? <sup>3</sup> "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." <sup>4</sup> But what is the divine reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." <sup>5</sup> So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. <sup>6</sup> But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace. <sup>7</sup> What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, <sup>8</sup> as it is written, "God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day." <sup>9</sup> And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; <sup>10</sup> let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and keep their backs forever bent." <sup>11</sup> So I

*ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. <sup>12</sup> Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!*

### **Susan Rothenberg '08**

When my children were small, one of their favorite books was, *Mama, Do You Love Me?* It is a sweet and simple story of a little girl testing to see whether there are limits to her mother's love for her. The little girl poses questions to her mother, beginning with descriptions of small, mischievous acts like, "Mama would you love me if I threw water on our oil lamp?"—to which the mother replies, "I would still love you." The questions progress to include more and more outrageous behavior, ending with: "Mama would you love me if I turned into the biggest, meanest polar bear with big shiny teeth and I chased you into your tent and you cried?"—to which the mother replies, "I would be very surprised. And very scared. But I would know it is really you inside that polar bear. And I would still love you."

Here in Romans 11:1-12, Paul presents an image of a God who is gracious, kind, and never gives up on God's people, even when they reject God's blessings and become hard-hearted, mean, and sluggish. God doesn't forget who we are inside when we stumble, disbelieve, and snarl at life. Like a loving parent, God will not reject the worst angels of our nature. In fact, according to Paul, God is longing for us to cast off everything that prevents us from living into our true identities as God's beloved children.

In this season of Lent, we are invited to consider our lives deeply, to be honest about the things we have done and left undone that cause us to stumble away from the merciful heart of God. Like the little girl in the story, we can safely think about, pray about, and confess all those dark places inside ourselves because, at the end of the story, we will never be rejected by the One whose love is inclusive, wide, and deep. We do not stumble so we can fall. Every day, through the grace of God, our stumbling leads us right back into the loving arms of Jesus.

### **Prayer**

Holy parent of all people, we do not need to ask whether you love us, because it is your love that gives us life and breath. Forgive us when we stumble, teach us when we are sluggish, open our eyes and ears to experience the power of your Holy Spirit. Let us be so confident of your love for us that our lives become a testimony of your love for all creation. Thanks be to God. Amen.

### **John 10:19-42**

<sup>19</sup> Again the Jews were divided because of these words. <sup>20</sup> Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?" <sup>21</sup> Others were saying, "These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" <sup>22</sup> At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup> and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. <sup>24</sup> So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." <sup>25</sup> Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> The Father and I are one." <sup>31</sup> The Jews took up stones again to stone him. <sup>32</sup> Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" <sup>33</sup> The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'?" <sup>35</sup> If those to whom the

*word of God came were called 'gods' — and the scripture cannot be annulled — <sup>36</sup> can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'? <sup>37</sup> If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. <sup>38</sup> But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." <sup>39</sup> Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. <sup>40</sup> He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. <sup>41</sup> Many came to him, and they were saying, "John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." <sup>42</sup> And many believed in him there.*

### **Nathan Leslie '10**

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

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

#### ***Prayer***

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

### **Kelsy Brown '10**

Have you ever thought about the number of voices that call for our attention? Work, school, projects, children, parents, parishioners, social media, news cycles, and friends continue to share their opinions, needs, time, and requirements of us. Some voices are positive—they congratulate us on a job well done, comfort us during seasons of challenge, and lead us through the darkest valleys. Others are difficult, demanding, and overpowering in our day-to-day lives. It isn't unusual for different voices to call for our attention at the same time but in different directions.

Isn't it amazing that, in the midst of all the voices that call on us, Jesus continues to call us by name? Whenever we take time to listen, we can always hear Jesus' voice rising above the noise of the many voices calling for our attention. Can you hear Jesus' voice? What is He saying to you?

#### ***Prayer***

Jesus, in the midst of all the buzz of voices calling for our attention, help us to hear your voice above all the rest. Quiet our minds, take away the distractions, and guide us toward the voice that knows us better than any other—Your voice, which calls each one of us Beloved and invites us to follow. Amen.

## Darryl Lockie '17

"Look man, I don't need your whole life story." Do you ever feel like saying that to a particularly garrulous friend, coworker, or family member? Maybe/hopefully you're not as grumpy as I am and have never felt this way, but I know I sure have. One might want to say the same to Jesus in today's Gospel passage. At the temple Jesus is asked a simple, albeit loaded question: "Are you the Messiah?" His response is almost 100 words long. The old axiom might apply: sometimes a simple "yes" or "no" will suffice. After all, it was Jesus who once said, "Let your 'yes' be 'yes'" (Matt 5:37), though granted in a slightly different context there.

Jesus' gratuitous response encapsulates well what this season is about though. Lent is a time when we seek to more finely tune our ears to the Good Shepherd's voice. It's where we consider more deeply, how closely, we ourselves are following after that voice. Lent is a season when we might also rest in this present gospel truth: no matter what we are wrestling with, demons that are personal or societal, the One who made us in his image has us firmly within his grasp. There is no darkness nor evil that can indelibly mar that image or snatch us from God's hand. That's a good word for a world as broken as ours. Hence, perhaps we might add a bit of correction to that axiom above. Sometimes a "yes" or "no" will simply *not* suffice.

### **Prayer**

Dear God, thank you for Christ the teacher. He who so often answers our prayers and questions, not in the way we expect but in the way we need. Give us then our daily bread; that which *you* determine is necessary for the journey ahead. In these days, tune our ears to the voice of the Good Shepherd. Amen.

## Day 38

### **Jeremiah 29:1-14**

<sup>1</sup> *These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.* <sup>2</sup> *This was after King Jeconiah, and the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.* <sup>3</sup> *The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiyah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said:* <sup>4</sup> *Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:* <sup>5</sup> *Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce.* <sup>6</sup> *Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.* <sup>7</sup> *But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.* <sup>8</sup> *For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream,* <sup>9</sup> *for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the LORD.* <sup>10</sup> *For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.* <sup>11</sup> *For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.* <sup>12</sup> *Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you.* <sup>13</sup> *When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart,* <sup>14</sup> *I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

### **Marty Neal '18**

Jeremiah's letter is written to a people who are lost, bewildered, and far from their home and their God. They are searching for guidance and answers. False prophets are telling them that their stay in Babylon will be short. The true word from God is that the people should settle in for the long haul. They are to make Babylon their new home. They are to seek God and pray for peace. But what kind of peace?

It seems the people of Israel have prayed for their own peace, as they do in Psalm 122. Now God, through Jeremiah, calls for the people to change their world view. Their *shalom*, their peace, rests not within themselves but through the world around them. They will find God not in seeking only their peace, but in seeking the peace of Babylon. They will find their peace in the welfare of the non-Israelite, the outsider—their oppressor. And so they will find God.

In a similar sense, Jesus attains his great *shalom* by offering forgiveness to all—even to those seeking his crucifixion. He invites everyone into the kingdom of God. During this Lenten season, pray for the capacity to love and forgive all others—both within and outside the Church. Pray for their *shalom*, and so seek God. May we approach Easter with hearts full of love and forgiveness not only for those we love, but also for those who oppress us.

#### ***Prayer***

Loving Father, we live in a world with many defined boundaries. We view people on opposite sides of those boundaries as our enemies, our oppressors. Purge our feelings of hate, enmity, and bitterness, and replace them with humility, patience, understanding, strength, and courage. In our difficult work, help us to live with your eyes and your heart in the sure knowledge of our future hope in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

### **Kendra Buckwalter Smith '12/'13**

So often in life, we find ourselves in places we'd rather not be, whether due to our own choices or circumstances beyond our control.

In today's text, Jeremiah speaks to the Hebrew people who had been carried into exile in Babylon. It was not where they thought they should be, nor where they wanted to be. In the preceding chapter, a false prophet named Hananiah told the people exactly what they wanted to hear—that this exile would not last long. Into the false hope generated by Hananiah's words, the word of the Lord came through Jeremiah speaking a greater, if more challenging hope. While false prophets encourage mere optimism, Jeremiah encourages true hope that comes only through trust in the God who holds the future of all creation in an active, loving, redeeming embrace. It's a hope that allows us to be realistic about the immediate present—to admit the hardship, the injustice, the disappointment—and to discover the ways God is working in the midst of it all.

We don't know what the future will look like. But the word of the Lord assures us that it is filled with hope. And that's all we need to know. With that knowledge, we can get at the work of responding to God's call in the present—the call to seek the welfare of the families and communities that surround us; of society that is crumbling under injustice and violence; of creation that is groaning in travail. In seeking the welfare, even of the places we'd rather not be, it turns out that our hearts are seeking the Lord who promises to be found. For at the center of God's heart is not merely the future we imagine for ourselves, but the promise of welfare and hope for all creation.

### **Prayer**

God of promise, we are regularly reminded that the world has wandered far from where you have called it to be. Even still, you promise that the future is filled with hope. Help us to trust in this hope and to respond to your call to settle into grateful living and actively seek the welfare of all, knowing that you are at work even in the places we'd rather not be, lovingly leading all creation to your promise fulfilled. Through Christ Jesus, the hope of the world. Amen.

### **Romans 11:13-24**

*<sup>13</sup> Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry <sup>14</sup> in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them. <sup>15</sup> For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead! <sup>16</sup> If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy. <sup>17</sup> But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, <sup>18</sup> do not vaunt yourselves over the branches. If you do vaunt yourselves, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. <sup>19</sup> You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." <sup>20</sup> That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. <sup>21</sup> For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you. <sup>22</sup> Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. <sup>23</sup> And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. <sup>24</sup> For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.*

### **John Charnock '09**

In this passage about the olive tree, Paul does three things: asks a question, provides an answer, and tells the truth. First, the question. Who do you think you are? We might fancy ourselves the heart of things, but the fact is we're barely a *part* of things. I've never seen a wild olive shoot, yet I realize I *am* one. Undisciplined, wandering, haphazard. I know who I am. Who do you think you are? That's a question Paul asks us all.

He also provides an answer, spelled G-R-A-C-E. By grace, a wild olive shoot is treated as a natural branch. By grace, a lost soul is welcomed home. By grace, the question finds an answer. "Who do you think you are?" sounds the question. "Saved by grace," comes the resounding reply.

So there are the question and the answer. Now it's time for the truth. None of this is easy. All that pruning and grafting is painful—so of course it hurts. Especially in the middle of Lent, it hurts. After all, we follow one who took Holy Week walks in the olive groves. We bear the cross of one who died on the tree.

Who do you think you are? Saved by grace. None of this is easy. Thanks be to God.

### **Prayer**

O Lord, I don't always journey along a neatly groomed pilgrim path. Sometimes I wander in the wilderness. Sometimes I even outrun the hope that is in me. So help me find hope in you. In your name I pray. Amen.

## **Lisa J. Lyon '92**

Horticulturists cultivate plants to maximize health and growth by adding nutrients to soil, developing irrigation systems, and pruning diseased branches. In Romans 11:17-24, Paul describes God the Horticulturist grafting branches from a wild olive tree (Gentiles) onto a cultured tree (Israel). Many Jewish Christians objected to Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. Even those who understood that salvation in Christ is for all insisted that Gentiles be fully Jewish (circumcised) to be fully Christian. This division between "us" and "them" frustrated Paul, who prayed for the reconciliation of the world. Israel's branches were broken off because of unbelief; Gentiles were grafted on because of faith, but Paul urges them not to become proud, for "those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in . . . again" (v 23). But will those who are re-grafted welcome the "wild" branches or demand God remove them?

Today as people huddle in like-minded groups fearful of contamination by "them", let's look to God the Horticulturist: Grafting branches from a wild tree onto a cultivated tree's rootstock increases hardiness and resistance to insects and disease, resulting in larger fruit and bigger yields. Yet, surprisingly, each part of the grafted tree keeps its original character. God's intention is not the contamination of Israel by Gentiles, but cross-pollination. God's design is for a strong, healthy, fruit-producing hybrid. All varieties of people sharing the same roots, branching out to share our gifts in ministry to a hurting world.

### **Prayer**

Dear Jesus, you assure us that "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me . . . that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:1-2). Help us to be pliant in the hands of the Horticulturist who prunes us of our faults and imperfections that we may be strong, healthy and fruit-producing. Amen.

### **John 11:1-27**

<sup>1</sup> Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup> Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup> after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. <sup>7</sup> Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." <sup>8</sup> The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" <sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." <sup>11</sup> After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." <sup>12</sup> The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." <sup>13</sup> Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup> For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." <sup>16</sup> Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." <sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though

*they die, will live,<sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"<sup>27</sup> She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."*

### **Derek Davenport '05/'17**

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

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

Awful things happen. We get the news we dread. We lose those closest to us. Jesus let Lazarus die.

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

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

#### ***Prayer***

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

### **Karyn Bigelow '16**

Throughout the Gospels we see multiple occasions on which there is a problem that seems to have great urgency according to those who believe in Jesus. They need healing for themselves or someone else. They are frightened by the troubled waters. But Jesus does not share that same sense of urgency—in any of the stories. And in this story he is no different. In desperation because of Lazarus' illness, Mary and Martha send for Jesus. When he finally arrives, they focus on his neglecting to come "in time." They focus on actions, timing, and outcomes, but not in that moment on who Jesus is. Jesus moves the conversation from what he "neglected" to do to who he is—the Christ, the Son of God.

Every year in the church, we feel chaos and urgency in planning Palm Sunday, Ash Wednesday, plays, Good Friday, egg hunts, and Easter programs. This passage serves as a reminder that in this Lenten season, as we look to the resurrection and the many things that "need" to be done, we should not lose our focus on Jesus the Christ, the Resurrected One.

#### ***Prayer***

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, help us in this season as we do the work of the Kingdom. May we always remember the One whom we serve, the One whom this season is all about. Empower our work to point to Christ, the One who was resurrected to free us from all our sins.

## **Day 39**

### ***Psalm 43***

<sup>1</sup> *Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause  
against an ungodly people;*

*from those who are deceitful and unjust  
deliver me!*

- <sup>2</sup> *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?*
- <sup>3</sup> *O send out your light and your truth;  
let them lead me;  
let them bring me to your holy hill  
and to your dwelling.*
- <sup>4</sup> *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.*
- <sup>5</sup> *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.*

### **Catherine Craley '07/'15**

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

#### **Prayer**

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

### **Psalm 149**

- <sup>1</sup> *Praise the Lord!  
Sing to the Lord a new song,  
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Let Israel be glad in its Maker;  
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Let them praise his name with dancing,  
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.*
- <sup>4</sup> *For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;  
he adorns the humble with victory.*
- <sup>5</sup> *Let the faithful exult in glory;  
let them sing for joy on their couches.*
- <sup>6</sup> *Let the high praises of God be in their throats  
and two-edged swords in their hands,*
- <sup>7</sup> *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!*

### **Joanne Spence '18/'24**

The poems in the Psalter reflect the gamut of human emotions in their expressions of crying out to God for forgiveness and mercy, lamenting pain and our own sinfulness, praising God's majestic nature and all his creation, and much more. Psalm 149, the compendium's penultimate song, invites us to praise the Lord in a "new song." Verse 3 tells us to "praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre"—in other words, to praise God with our whole body. Thus Psalm 149 acknowledges our humanity.

For many of us, Lent is a time when we think of our bodies often—particularly if we are practicing daily fasting from food. At such times, we become more aware of our body's limits and needs. Being human is part of how God created us. He made us in his image, yet human, and he declared us good. How often do we exist disconnected from and disappointed with our bodies? A friend and mentor of mine notes, "We don't just *have* bodies, we *are* bodies." The body is the primary and only vessel in which to live one's life. We are not "brains-on-a-stick." Could acknowledging our finite and limited existence be the point at which we find true freedom to "sing a new song"—sing it in just the same way the psalmist charges us to praise and thus please the Lord?

#### **Prayer**

Lord, we are yours, and you are ours. Help us to sing a new song. Let us worship you with the entirety of our bodies, thus bearing witness to the Incarnated One. We pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Don McKim '74**

"Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song" (v. 1) commands the Psalm. Praise God for a victory God gave the people. We don't know what it was. But God "adorns the humble with victory" (v. 4). So sing!

The words "new song" appear in other psalms (33:3; 96:1). They may designate a new composition praising God's goodness. But Karl Barth suggested that, in the Old Testament, "new song" refers to "the coming and crucial time of the Messiah" (*Church Dogmatics* III/3, 472). If he's correct, this text is one for Lent.

The "humble" obtained "victory" (in Hebrew, also "salvation"). Jesus the Messiah "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). Then God exalted him (2:9). Jesus brought victory and salvation. In Lent, we praise the humble Jesus who saves us from the cross—and who triumphs! God's people "exult in glory" (v. 5). Sing a new song!

#### **Prayer**

O God of goodness and blessing, we praise you that you are always with us. As you protected and helped your ancient people, so through your presence do you do for us now as we know your salvation in Jesus Christ. Thank you for the humble Christ, who triumphs over all! Amen.

### **Rebecca McGreevy Hickok '93**

It is Saturday, March 13, 2021. But . . . it's not really Saturday, March 13. As I write these words, it's late June in 2020, and my deadline for submitting this devotional is in a few days. It's a sweltering summer day in the mid-Hudson Valley, an area hit particularly hard by "the virus." Here in New York, we are on a slow march to whatever normal will be for us.

I can't imagine what next week will bring, much less what our world will look like in nine months, when it really will be March 13th. But I can tell you one thing: there's a good chance that we will not be singing the praises of God in the congregation of the faithful. Singing is the one thing they've told us not to do. All those diagrams and graphs and 8 x 10 colored glossy photographs with circles and arrows and a paragraph on the back have shown us that. NO SINGING! No new songs. No old songs. No songs with dance. No songs with timbrel. No songs with harp. NO . . . SINGING.

Yet it's the one thing we should be doing now—whether it's June or March. New songs, old songs, protest songs, praise songs, lament songs . . . songs that fill our hearts with love; songs that fill our eyes with vision; songs that fill our ears with awareness. Maybe we can't gather together as we used to in pre-Covid-19 days, but that doesn't mean we can't still sing. In fact, do this: close the computer or Ipad or phone or whatever device you are using to read this devotional, stand up, and hoot out your favorite hymn. If we can dance like no one is watching, then we can certainly sing like no one is listening. Except God. Who is listening—and beaming at all God's beloved children standing by themselves in their homes and workplaces and backyards and at traffic lights and by a loved one's hospital bed and in classrooms or church offices, singing. Singing for our lives. Praise God!

#### **Prayer**

Loving God, Conductor of the Choir Invisible, we lift our voices to you not just to praise you but also to ask your guidance as we seek to be in harmony with each other. Amen.

#### **John 11:28–44**

<sup>28</sup>When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." <sup>29</sup>And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup>Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup>The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. <sup>32</sup>When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." <sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup>He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup>Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup>So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup>But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" <sup>38</sup>Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup>Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days." <sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup>When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup>The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

### **Kang Na, Former Board member**

Walking through the dark days of Lent can be difficult even for the most pious among us because we forget, for much of the time on most days, that we are in Lent. Furthermore, Easter, the light at the end of the tunnel, can rob Lent of its human reality by injecting a subtle dose of Docetism, the doctrine that Christ was only divine, not really human, and therefore did not really suffer.

Oddly, wonderfully, it is John's very divine portrait of Jesus that shows us his true humanity: Jesus was very upset about Lazarus' death; he wept . . . while assuring Martha of resurrection hope (vv. 23–27).

On this eve of Passion Sunday and Passion Week, which brings us to the crucifixion-death of Jesus, we remember that much of life is like Lent. On this side of the empty tomb, there is suffering—which is what “passion” means—and lots of it. Even if shy of Job's devastation, our lives are punctuated by pain and prayers of desperation. And as Ecclesiastes reminds us, echoing Genesis 3:19, we will all die.

The amazing mystery of Jesus' humanity reminds us of our very own humanity that is all too tempted to leap to Easter joy. But we cannot afford to be docetic, especially during Lent, especially during Holy Week, especially on Good Friday. By meditating on Jesus' sorrow at Lazarus' death, we can properly contemplate the divine mystery of Jesus' own suffering and death. And only through meditating on his passion can we glimpse the profound mystery of Easter joy . . . of which we shall not yet speak.

#### **Prayer**

O God of mystery, root us in your immeasurable love as we continue our walk through Lent that we may truly embrace Jesus' humanity and thereby also ours. Keep us faithful and hopeful in the love and humanity of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

### **Romans 11:25-36**

<sup>25</sup>*So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.* <sup>26</sup>*And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,*

*“Out of Zion will come the Deliverer;  
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.”*

<sup>27</sup> *“And this is my covenant with them,  
when I take away their sins.”*

<sup>28</sup>*As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; <sup>29</sup>for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. <sup>30</sup>Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, <sup>31</sup>so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. <sup>32</sup>For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.*

<sup>33</sup>*O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

<sup>34</sup> *“For who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counselor?”*

<sup>35</sup> *“Or who has given a gift to him,  
to receive a gift in return?”*

<sup>36</sup>*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.*

**Trevor Jamison '01**

“O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (v 33).

Though Paul wrote that, it’s never stopped us from trying to comprehend God’s judgments and ways. That’s because we find them puzzling, and at times, distressing.

Paul was puzzled (and perhaps distressed) that “a hardening has come upon part of Israel” (v 25). Most of his fellow Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah/Christ. Why would God work in this way? What does that say about God?

In our time, we are puzzled (and sometimes distressed) by God’s ways with the world. Why put people in power who misuse it? Why permit suffering to be handed out to the innocent, whilst allowing the guilty to go free and prosper? Why arrange for people of faith to be persecuted?

Paul suggests God permits some things to happen in order to bring a greater good into being: “God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all” (v 32). Here, the apostle provides only a partial answer, but then, God’s ways are inscrutable.

If we can’t understand God fully, then we are going to have to trust. We have greater grounds for trust if God not only permits political injustice, violence, suffering, and persecution in this world, but also is prepared to be among those at its receiving end. And at this point in Lent, Jesus is approaching Jerusalem, and his encounter with these very things.

***Prayer***

O God, we cannot fully understand you, so help us to trust in you. Encourage us to confront, endure, and overcome the evils of this world, even as we remember your Son, the Christ, travelling to Jerusalem, ready to confront them. Amen.

**Naomi Johnson '23**

Romans 11:33 is a breathtaking moment of declaration and praise in Paul’s letter, and it draws my heart into awe-filled worship. The phrase “the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” reminds me of the vastness of God’s sovereignty and grace. It’s a humbling acknowledgment that God’s plans and purposes are beyond human comprehension, yet they overflow with mercy.

Reflecting on this passage, I am struck by the mystery of God’s ways, particularly in how Paul frames the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles in God’s salvation plan. Paul’s argument that God’s mercy extends to all, despite human disobedience, speaks to the boundless generosity of God. This challenges me to trust in God’s wisdom, even when I don’t understand the circumstances of my life or the world around me.

A personal story comes to mind when I reflect on this verse. There was a time in my life when I struggled to see God’s hand in the midst of pain and uncertainty. I questioned how anything good could emerge from such confusion. But over time, I began to see the intricate ways God was at work—restoring relationships, deepening my faith, and drawing me closer to Him. Like Paul, I could only respond with awe, marveling at the richness of God’s mercy.

This passage encourages me to surrender my limited understanding and rest in the infinite wisdom of God. It invites me to trust that, even when the path seems unclear, God’s plans are rooted in love and designed for His glory. Truly, “to Him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom 11:36).

### **Prayer**

Lord, thank You for the depth of your wisdom and mercy. Help me to trust in your plans, even when I cannot see the full picture. Teach me to rest in your infinite knowledge and surrender my uncertainties to you. May my life reflect your glory forever. Amen.

## **Day 40**

### **Zechariah 9:9-12**

- <sup>9</sup> *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.*
- <sup>10</sup> *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.*
- <sup>11</sup> *As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,  
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;  
today I declare that I will restore to you double.*

### **Joy Pedrow, SYI '11**

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Prayer***

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

### **Jim Graham '66**

It's Palm Sunday. Though it's also Passion Sunday, preventing us from jumping from triumphal entry to resurrection, and missing Jesus' pain and death on the cross. Jesus' ride into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week still speaks powerfully as a visual of who he was and is to us, and how we might reflectively follow him.

It was a demonstration, a march on Jerusalem, an expression of how things should be. This was brought home to me in 1968 when Palm Sunday fell three days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., known for his peaceful protests. Jesus was trying to tell/show us something, even though its meaning was lost on the crowd that followed him into the city that day, when he chose to fulfill the vision of the prophet Zechariah, proclaiming that lordship, leadership, authority come with a large dose of humility.

I love to illustrate that by reading verse 9:9 aloud, with deliberate crescendo: "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he," then pausing and saying softly, "*humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey!*"

Whether it's politics, business, church, family, or any context in which we're called to lead others, we're called to do so with humility—not lording it over them, but by demonstrably serving them. Let us pause and reflect, on this Palm Sunday, how we may better follow Jesus who fulfilled, and fulfills through us, Zechariah's vision of humble service. God's image!

### ***Prayer***

Lord of all, you sent Jesus to save us from self-righteousness and to set before us a humble servant way of life. When we are bossy leaders, make us kind and understanding; when we are proud, bring us down some, that we may demonstrate before others what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ and your servant people. Amen.

### **Paul James Pfeuffer '12/ '18**

One of the questions I asked my congregation during advent was "What symbols do you most associate with peace?" There's the V Sign, adopted by 1960s anti-war activists, made by holding the index and middle fingers aloft. In Christian circles, there's the fish associated with Jesus. There are also the dove, the olive branch, and the symbol designed by the 1958 British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—so ubiquitous that it became known as the peace sign.

Peace is the inescapable subplot echoing thematically across Jesus' story, as well as the entire metanarrative of scripture—often in the places least expected. For Zechariah, that peace stems from the image of the Divine Warrior, who demilitarizes the nations under his dominion. While many Christians tend to shy away from the image of God-as-warrior, certainly, this is one that even the most uncomfortable of us can get behind, no? The Warrior is making war...on war. The Warrior comes riding not on a warhorse, but on a donkey, a symbol of peace. No more chariots. No more warhorses. No more battle bows. From sea to sea, to the ends of the earth. War never again. Never again war.

Peace can be found in the strangest, the most mysterious of places, and scripture invites us to see peace where there is conflict in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. He brings peace in the days and weeks leading up to his death, always the subversive character turning the image of what we expect on its head.

I invite you during this time to look for moments of peace in the war of the everyday, recognizing the presence of Jesus, reminding us to look for him riding in to calm the storm.

**Prayer**

Prince of Peace,

Abide with us, remain with us. Even while we live in a war-torn world, we look forward to the day on which conflict shall cease and all that remains is your deep wellspring of peace.

Amen.

**Matthew 21:12-17**

*<sup>12</sup> Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves. <sup>13</sup> He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers." <sup>14</sup> The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. <sup>15</sup> But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry <sup>16</sup> and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself'?" <sup>17</sup> He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.*

**Roderick Grahame '15**

We all love a parade, don't we? Enticed by the color, the music, floats, and balloons, joining in is so alluring. And that day in Jerusalem, as Jesus approached the city riding on a donkey, lots of people joined in the procession. It was a joyous, unruly, untidy ragbag parade of humanity—the lost, the lonely, the sick, the marginalized, the children, and the foolish all found a welcome. Here was their King, a donkey-riding King, a King of peace and love coming down the Mount of Olives and approaching the eastern gate.

Yet what we may not realize is that, at roughly the same time, approaching the western gate from the road to the coast was another parade. This one had marching, weapons, well-disciplined soldiers, and it was led by a figure in uniform riding a stallion. This was a parade of power, not joy, led by one Pontius Pilate, coming into the city to keep order during the Passover celebrations.

Two parades—two approaches to life that were to clash in the days ahead. And the confrontation starts in the Temple as Jesus, in mounting rage, drives out the moneychangers. Even now it shocks us. We are not accustomed to seeing Jesus in anger. His fury arises from various reasons: the misuse of the Court of the Gentiles as a trading floor rather than a place of prayer and communion with God. This area was meant as the sanctuary for non-Jews. His anger rises also because the rich and powerful are ripping off the poor by charging exorbitant commission rates for exchanging common currency into Temple coin. It was a lucrative arrangement between the Temple authorities and the greedy, grasping money folk. No ethical investment here. And Jesus is outraged.

Two models of how we might live: one of money, power, and control; another of love, joy, and acceptance of all. Which parade will you choose to follow as you journey through Holy Week?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, our delightful donkey-riding King, in whose parade come the waifs and strays—may it be your way that we follow, your procession of love we join, that we might be led ever forward to your Kingdom of justice and inclusion for all your followers. Amen.

### **Psalm 42**

- <sup>1</sup> *As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
so my soul longs for you, O God.*
- <sup>2</sup> *My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.  
When shall I come and behold  
the face of God?*
- <sup>3</sup> *My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
while people say to me continually,  
“Where is your God?”*
- <sup>4</sup> *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.*
- <sup>5</sup> *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 <sup>6</sup>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.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Deep calls to deep  
at the thunder of your cataracts;  
all your waves and your billows  
have gone over me.*
- <sup>8</sup> *By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,  
and at night his song is with me,  
a prayer to the God of my life.*
- <sup>9</sup> *I say to God, my rock,  
“Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I walk about mournfully  
because the enemy oppresses me?”*
- <sup>10</sup> *As with a deadly wound in my body,  
my adversaries taunt me,  
while they say to me continually,  
“Where is your God?”*
- <sup>11</sup> *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.*

**Ciera (Cici) James '21**

As we walk through this season of Lent we are reminded of our need for God. In our penitence we are reminded not only of God's faithfulness but also of our dependence on God. Yet sometimes we feel alone—sometimes as we face our struggles God seems absent. They ask, "Where is your God?" We cry out in despair from yearning to feel the presence of the Lord again, from knowing our need for our rock. We ask ourselves, "Where is *my* God?" In our longing, we know God is constant. In our anguish, we know the day will come when we will again rejoice in the Lord. "Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God." Our souls long for healing, peace, and comfort from the Lord—our rock in our distress. Because we know, in truth, that a time is coming when we will again praise the Lord, we can have hope in God even in the midst of our despair.

***Prayer***

Lord, you are our rock. You are our foundation in times of darkness, and we know we can trust in you. Yet sometimes we cannot feel your presence. Give us strength to praise you and hope in you when we do not have the strength on our own. Meet us in our despair, gracious God, and hear us when we cry out. You are the one our souls long for. We praise and pray to you now in your Holy name. Amen.

**Jennifer Stroud '18**

Anyone who has spent time in the desert learns, very quickly, how precious water is to every living thing. Without water one's mouth dries up, one's skin withers, one's internal organs begin to shut down. Without water one's physical body fades away and dies. So it is with our spirit's need for God.

Without our Lord, our lives are naught but a restless yearning, a thirst that is never abated. But when we discover Jesus our souls drink deeply, and we are refreshed and renewed in the life-giving water offered to us by our loving Creator, the Source of All Being. The Psalmist understands this truth and begins his song by declaring his great need for the Holy Other. But just as our faith can wax and wane through the joys and tribulations of this life's journey, so, too, is the Psalmist's faith challenged. He feels anxiety and depression come upon him, and he wonders why. Why has he forgotten how much the Lord has done for him? Why do we?

By the end of the Psalm, the writer has remembered that only the Lord can keep us sane and safe in this world. Only God can quench every thirst and fulfill every need. By God's grace we also will recall to our minds and our hearts this astounding truth as we experience the ups and downs of our own journeys. This day, thirstily partake of the peace, the joy, and the love given to you by our great God. Meditate on the unending blessings given to you by the Lover of your soul. Remember, drink deeply, and be renewed!

***Prayer***

Lord I am dry—as brittle as branches in a parched and arid land. I am thirsty for the things this world cannot give me. Fill me, Lord, to overflowing. I need the joy of knowing that You love me more than I will ever understand. I need the comfort of remembering that I am never alone—that Your presence is always with me. I need the power of Your Holy Spirit to strengthen me and teach me so that I do not lose my way. Remind me of the blessings You have showered upon me

when the world tries to darken my day. Help me to shine the brightness of Your love and light!  
In Jesus Holy Name I pray. Amen!

### **Rick Willhite '86**

Reading Psalm 42, I'm reminded of a chilly October morning twenty-four years ago. I was on retreat near the end of a year that seemed marked by a series of relational and professional failures. I'd made mistakes. There had been too, in that year, an uncanny number of deaths, one after another, among people I knew. So much seemed to be ending. Trying to imagine the future was peering into midnight fog. I was hollowed out, empty. Awakening from a broken sleep, I left my bed at sunrise and went for a solitary walk. I walked up a country road and through a gate into a fallow field filled with end-of-season goldenrod. I laid down and closed my eyes, exhausted at 8:15 a.m.

A single goldenrod stem arched over the withered grasses where I lay. When I opened my eyes, I noticed a drowsy bumblebee slowly beginning to stir in the warming light of the rising sun. Minutes passed as I watched the bee while near and far around me, crickets began to sing. The lives of these, their whole world, would end quite soon with the coming freeze and snows of winter. The bumblebee began to probe for nectar as the crickets sang, out of a knowing deeper than thought, beyond vision or words or imagination. I remembered in those moments, perhaps for the first time, that my heart too, knew something; had always known, in the space between beats, what the crickets knew.

It sustains me still. *Selah*.

### **Prayer**

Dear God, whose grace unfolds in every moment, open our hearts to your loving presence, ever before us in this moment too. May it be so. Amen.

## **Day 41**

### **Jeremiah 11:18-20; 12:1-17**

<sup>18</sup> It was the LORD who made it known to me, and I knew; then you showed me their evil deeds. <sup>19</sup> But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. And I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes, saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered!" <sup>20</sup> But you, O LORD of hosts, who judge righteously, who try the heart and the mind, let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. <sup>12:1</sup> You will be in the right, O LORD, when I lay charges against you; but let me put my case to you. Why does the way of the guilty prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? <sup>2</sup> You plant them, and they take root; they grow and bring forth fruit; you are near in their mouths yet far from their hearts. <sup>3</sup> But you, O LORD, know me; You see me and test me—my heart is with you. Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and set them apart for the day of slaughter. <sup>4</sup> How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither? For the wickedness of those who live in it the animals and the birds are swept away, and because people said, "He is blind to our ways." <sup>5</sup> If you have raced with foot-runners and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you fall down, how will you fare in the thickets of the Jordan? <sup>6</sup> For even your kinsfolk and your own family, even they have dealt treacherously with you; they are in full cry after you; do not believe them, though they speak friendly words to you. <sup>7</sup> I have forsaken my house, I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my heart into the hands of her enemies. <sup>8</sup> My heritage has become to me like a lion in the forest; she has lifted up her voice against me—therefore I hate her. <sup>9</sup> Is the hyena greedy for my heritage at my

command? Are the birds of prey all around her? Go, assemble all the wild animals; bring them to devour her. <sup>10</sup> Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard, they have trampled down my portion, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. <sup>11</sup> They have made it a desolation; desolate, it mourns to me. The whole land is made desolate, but no one lays it to heart. <sup>12</sup> Upon all the bare heights in the desert spoilers have come; for the sword of the LORD devours from one end of the land to the other; no one shall be safe. <sup>13</sup> They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns, they have tired themselves out but profit nothing. They shall be ashamed of their harvests because of the fierce anger of the LORD. <sup>14</sup> Thus says the LORD concerning all my evil neighbors who touch the heritage that I have given my people Israel to inherit: I am about to pluck them up from their land, and I will pluck up the house of Judah from among them. <sup>15</sup> And after I have plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them, and I will bring them again to their heritage and to their land, every one of them. <sup>16</sup> And then, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, "As the LORD lives," as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people. <sup>17</sup> But if any nation will not listen, then I will completely uproot it and destroy it, says the LORD.

### **Susan Washburn '12**

"God, do something!" Many of us have experienced the frustration of watching the bad guys win or the wicked thrive. Like Jeremiah we have gone to friends or co-workers in exasperation and asked, "How can she get away with it?" When things feel out of control, we call upon God to right the wrongs we experience in the world. Like Jeremiah, we call upon God, saying, "Let me see your retribution upon them!"

During this Holy Week, Jeremiah reminds us that our world does not always look like a fair place. As The Message puts it in Jeremiah 12:1ff., bad people have it good and con artists make it big. Certainly, as the story of Jesus unfolds this week, it would seem that the worldly and powerful forces against him will win.

We don't know the disciples' prayers as they watched their leader be arrested, beaten, and crucified, but I'd imagine their cries sounded like Jeremiah's: God, do something! Make this right! We, too, want to know we have a God we can call on in our despair, a God to fight the unfairness of a cancer diagnosis, restore a lost job, overhaul the systems that deny justice, or miraculously heal a loved one.

Though we may be drenching our pillow with tears, we are promised joy in the morning. Jeremiah's message doesn't end with despair and defeat, but with the promise of God's compassion and restoration. The events of Holy Week don't end when the stone is rolled in front of the tomb—but with the stone's being rolled away in the light of a new dawn.

### **Prayer**

Lord, we come to you remembering that despair and dysfunction do not have the final word. Give us hearts to trust that you are working for the reconciliation of the world even when we cannot see it. May your power and compassion reign. Amen.

### **Philippians 3:1-14**

<sup>1</sup> Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard. <sup>2</sup> Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! <sup>3</sup> For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh—<sup>4</sup> even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth

day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

### **Jim King '18**

In his letter to the church at Philippi, the Apostle Paul reminds the early Christians there to not lose sight of their ultimate goal as members of Christ's Holy Church. Through his own personal example, Paul implores them to stay strong in their conviction as a community and to never lose sight of their ultimate reward. "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (v. 14).

Lent is a wonderful time for us Christians to reflect on that goal by paying particular attention to our spiritual lives and by making adjustments to it where needed. It is a time to build or re-establish the spiritual habits we should be exercising all the time as a Christian community. Most importantly, it is a time to participate in the activities that enable us to stay focused on seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. For according to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, seeking the Kingdom of God is what we are called to do above all else (Matt. 6:33).

This year, may Lent be for all of us a time of spiritual contemplation, renewal, refreshment, and strength as we "press on" and build up within ourselves the virtues that will guide our lives as together we seek God's Heavenly Kingdom and His righteousness.

### **Prayer**

*Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian*

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of laziness, despair, greed, and gossip. But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to thy servant. Yes, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother, for You are blessed unto the ages of ages. Amen.

### **John 12:9-19**

<sup>9</sup> When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, <sup>11</sup> since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus. <sup>12</sup> The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

*"Hosanna!*

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

<sup>14</sup> Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

<sup>15</sup> *“Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.  
Look, your king is coming,  
sitting on a donkey’s colt!”*

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

### **Mouris Yousef '07/'18**

Among the many great things we encounter in John 12:9-19, one of the most important ones deserves our attention: the reaction of the crowd that had come to celebrate the Passover on hearing that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. What we see here is simply a bunch of followers who got amazingly excited about their leader. Of course, we know the crowd had different expectations of the Messiah, the Savior of Israel, from what Jesus’ true mission was. But the point remains: the people enthusiastically celebrated Jesus’ coming into Jerusalem, David’s City, in a very special way. They received Jesus as a conquering king. They spoke of his greatness and his miraculous power.

I keep thinking about our commitment to Jesus and our excitement about his message—are we excited about Jesus, too? If we’re not, what is wrong with us as believers in the United States? Have we become so comfortable? Have we lost sight of the greatness of Jesus? Have we forgotten our own mission field?

In this season of Lent, may we acknowledge our need to remember our first love. May we get excited once more about our mission—and about Jesus himself!

#### **Prayer**

Have mercy on us, O God, according to your steadfast love. Be with us as we renew our commitment to Jesus. Help us to get excited about his visitations as the crowd did when he came to Jerusalem. Amen!

### **Day 42**

#### **Jeremiah 15:10-21**

<sup>10</sup> *Woe is me, my mother, that you ever bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land! I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me. <sup>11</sup> The LORD said: Surely I have intervened in your life for good, surely I have imposed enemies on you in a time of trouble and in a time of distress. <sup>12</sup> Can iron and bronze break iron from the north? <sup>13</sup> Your wealth and your treasures I will give as plunder, without price, for all your sins, throughout all your territory. <sup>14</sup> I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn for ever.*

<sup>15</sup> *O LORD, you know;  
remember me and visit me,  
and bring down retribution for me on my persecutors.  
In your forbearance do not take me away;  
know that on your account I suffer insult.*

- <sup>16</sup> *Your words were found, and I ate them,  
and your words became to me a joy  
and the delight of my heart;  
for I am called by your name,  
O LORD, God of hosts.*
- <sup>17</sup> *I did not sit in the company of merry-makers,  
nor did I rejoice;  
under the weight of your hand I sat alone,  
for you had filled me with indignation.*
- <sup>18</sup> *Why is my pain unceasing,  
my wound incurable,  
refusing to be healed?  
Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook,  
like waters that fail.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Therefore, thus says the LORD:  
If you turn back, I will take you back,  
and you shall stand before me.  
If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless,  
you shall serve as my mouth.  
It is they who will turn to you,  
not you who will turn to them.*
- <sup>20</sup> *And I will make you to this people  
a fortified wall of bronze;  
they will fight against you,  
but they shall not prevail over you,  
for I am with you  
to save you and deliver you,  
says the LORD.*
- <sup>21</sup> *I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked,  
and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.*

### **Joshua Fisher '14/'18**

In this passage of Scripture we look into the window of Jeremiah's heart and see the suffering that is defining his life. Like a sharp stomach cramp, the suffering of Jeremiah demands our attention, as he begins his lament by saying, "Woe is me, my mother, that you ever bore me," and as, crippled with rejection, he cries, "all of them curse me." Yet God reminds Jeremiah that rejection, curses, and suffering will not have the last word. God has "intervened for the good" (v. 11).

In this season of Lent, we are preparing ourselves to remember God's intervention for our good. Throughout the history of the church, many Christians have prepared themselves through the ancient practices of fasting and repentance, among others. But to many of us, those particular practices can be intrusive. Perhaps what is most intrusive about fasting and repentance is their invitation to be attentive to and honest about the pain of our own hearts.

It takes great courage to open our places of pain before the Lord, and in Lent we are invited to do just that. Like Jeremiah experienced with God, we are invited to sit down at the table with the True Suffering Servant, Jesus, who offers us the bread and cup of healing—for the deepest wounds can never be healed with bandages, as Jeremiah knew well (v. 18). They can, however, rest safely entrusted in the

scar-bearing hands of the One who knows our suffering, the One who says, "I am with you, to save you and deliver you."

**Prayer**

Loving Lord, you know the many wellsprings of each of our hearts. The springs of joy and hope. The springs of grace and mercy. The springs of life. You also know the deep wells of pain that we would much rather ignore than address. In this season of Lent, please be gentle with us; at the same time, do not let our fear hold us in bondage any longer. Please give us the courage, trust, and grace to open the wounds you desire to heal and to be patient when healing comes slowly. May you make your Church a bronze wall that will not be moved. To the Glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forevermore, amen.

**Philippians 3:15-21**

*15 Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. 16 Only let us hold fast to what we have attained. 17 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18 For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humiliation so 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.*

**Drew Myers '15**

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

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

**Prayer**

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

**Ben Phipps '15**

We live in a culture in which most of us like to do things our own way. From ordering at our favorite restaurant to selecting an outfit for the day, many of us live by the motto "Have it your way!" We long to be our own person, to be known as unique, to be a free individual. That yearning to be unique may make it frustrating to hear what the Apostle writes to the Christians in Philippi: "join in imitating me."

Hold on. Why should we have to do things the way you do, Paul? Why can't I do things my own way and live my life the way I want to live it?

Well perhaps Paul knows a truth about human nature that our culture seems to have forgotten (or perhaps ignores), namely, that as human beings we are creatures made from dust and created in God's image. Lent is a time of year when we remember that we are creatures while also seeking to be more like our Creator. Or to put it another way, Lent is a time when we seek to imitate Jesus. We participate in his sufferings so that we may participate in his glory.

So why imitate Paul? Simply because Paul imitates Jesus. We all need someone to look toward while imitating Jesus. For the Philippians it was Paul. Who is it for you? Whom are you imitating? Does your life represent someone who is imitating Jesus? If not, how can you adjust your life so that you reflect the glory of Christ?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, show me the areas in my life where I can better imitate you. I confess that I too often follow the selfish desires of my heart from longing to be my own person rather than following you. Strengthen me and equip me to love and serve you in every aspect of my life. Amen.

### **John 12:20-16**

*<sup>20</sup>Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup>They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup>Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup>Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor."*

### **Jim Walker '03**

*" . . . unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed . . . ."*

I've come to understand resurrection as more than just a theological concept or doctrine. Resurrection, for me, has become a daily reality, like breathing or eating or sleeping. We have these basic human needs: oxygen and water and food and sleep. Love and belonging and meaning and knowing. These are the things that we need to survive. Without them—we're dead. We don't exist. But I've learned to include another real gift in this list of basic human necessities: resurrection. It is a sometimes overlooked or misunderstood deep need we all long for. We all live within the rhythm of birthing and dying, dying and birthing. Our minds, bodies, and souls yearn for resurrection, like we crave water, food, and air.

The conflict, of course, is that death is not very appealing. We make every effort to avoid it. But the Spirit will not allow us to live in a made-up, artificial, death-free utopia. God knows what our real needs are and breathes into each of us the saving gift of death and life. God shakes the seeds from the tight grip of our fists. With gritted teeth and watery eyes, we sometimes reluctantly acquiesce—a great set-up for the punch line that is to come: Death is not the end. Death is the exhale that makes way for the inhale. The seed falls to the ground and becomes life, even more rich and abundant. Thus Jesus in John 12, who has just entered the city and is headed to his own death, charges us to see reality through the eyes of God, from the perspective of eternity, and surrender its natural rhythm.

My guess is that many of us are holding tight to some seeds today. Consider this word an invitation to let the seeds go, let them die, and join in the rhythm of eternity. Be nourished by the basic human necessity of resurrection.

In the name of The Resurrection, amen.

### **Prayer**

Come, Resurrection, and take my seeds. Awaken me to your work around me even at this very moment. As deep calls to deep, may my spirit be immersed in the love that is and causes me to become—the love that takes my death and turns me into life. Amen.

## **Day 43**

### **Jeremiah 17:5-10, 14-18**

<sup>5</sup> Thus says the LORD: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD. <sup>6</sup> They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. <sup>7</sup> Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. <sup>8</sup> They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. <sup>9</sup> The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it? <sup>10</sup> I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings. . . . <sup>14</sup> Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for you are my praise. <sup>15</sup> See how they say to me, “Where is the word of the LORD? Let it come!” <sup>16</sup> But I have not run away from being a shepherd in your service, nor have I desired the fatal day. You know what came from my lips; it was before your face. <sup>17</sup> Do not become a terror to me; you are my refuge on the day of disaster; <sup>18</sup> Let my persecutors be shamed, but do not let me be shamed; let them be dismayed, but do not let me be dismayed; bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction!

### **Alice Phillips '94**

I love plants and flowers; however, I have a problem! In the busyness of life, I can walk right past them and forget something . . . they need to be watered.

What is true for my flowers and plants is true for my spiritual life as well. This passage from Jeremiah gives us a wonderful image of a tree planted by a stream whose root system reaches deep to be nourished by the water (vv. 7-8). These verses tell us that, when we trust in the Lord, this is the image for us. When we trust in the Lord, we are nourished and strengthened, and we can bear fruit. When the tough times come in life, we can stand strong.

We do not need to be like my dried up flowers and plants when I forget to water them. Jesus tells us, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them” (John 7:37-38).

Are you spiritually parched right now? Why not come to the One who can nourish your wilted spirit. Soak in God’s Word, spend time in prayer and meditation, and take time to praise the Lord!

### **Prayer**

Gracious and Loving God, we thank you for the way in which you nourish our spiritual lives. You invite us to come and drink. Oh Lord, we have to admit that there are times in our busyness that we don't spend ample time with you; and we know the result: a wilted spirit. We are grateful, Lord, that as we come to Jesus and drink, you lift us up and strengthen us! Help us to drink abundantly so that, when the difficult times in life come, we can stand strong and continue to bear fruit.

### **John 12:27-36**

*<sup>27</sup> "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say — 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup> The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." <sup>30</sup> Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. <sup>34</sup> The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" <sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. <sup>36</sup> While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.*

### **Marty Neal '18**

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

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

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

### **Prayer**

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

### **Alyssa Bell '11**

Light and darkness. Illumination and shadows. Clarity and confusion. Our world sends us mixed messages about what is light and what is darkness. Our sin clouds our judgment and we believe that a shadow disguised as a lamp can somehow show us the way, any way . . . to peace. Jesus Christ took on all darkness so that we could know light and be surrounded by it always. The Light of the World surrendered to hurt and bitterness, evil and destruction. On His way to the cross, Jesus told his disciples to remain with Him so that they would know the way. In the beginning of John's Gospel we are

reminded that darkness cannot overcome the light. No matter what happens—even death on the cross, even descent into hell—the Light will always crowd out the shadows of sin and evil.

In this Lenten season, we are intensely aware of the encroaching darkness in our world. How easily we start to feel defeated. As we wait for our Savior and as we long for wholeness and peace, let us seek the Light of the World and let us be lights to those around us by proclaiming His hope, peace, love, and joy for all to hear.

**Prayer**

Lord, please shine your light upon us today, and with your light strengthen us to be people of light, to shed fear of the darkness, and to stand with confidence upon your promises. We need your comfort and your assurance. Guide us in the way we ought to go, and light our path. Amen.

**Robert Ellson '18**

There is one question that is truly the “bottom-line” question of Easter. It is the question Jesus asked at Bethany when, after proclaiming that He was the resurrection and the life and that those who believed and put their trust in him would have eternal life, he said, “Do you believe this?”

The resurrection is what separates our Lord from the thousands of gurus and prophets who’ve come both before and after him. Easter’s bottom-line question drives responsible hearers either to accept or reject the Christian faith. In an earlier passage (John 11:25-26), the Lord stands at the tomb of his friend Lazarus and makes the astonishing claim, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” Then he looks into their faces and asks the bottom-line question of Easter: “Do you believe this?” It is a question that many of us may not have really stopped to consider. Or perhaps we have actively avoided the question.

“Do *you* believe this?” Have you transferred your trust from yourself and your own good intentions over to Jesus Christ alone? Has this saving faith, this resurrected life, this “Christ in me” experience made a difference in your life? Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” When he used that phrase, “I Am,” it captured the attention of those around him. When our Lord made this statement at the tomb of Lazarus, all those around him recognized it as an affirmation of his deity. Do you believe this?

Do you believe that Jesus is Lord, that you will one day die, and that if you put your trust and faith in him alone you will inherit eternal life? That’s it. It’s personal. Do you believe—really believe—that Jesus Christ is the risen Savior? The Lord makes it very plain: Eternal salvation is through faith in him alone and not through human effort or good works, or through any other self-proclaimed prophet or messiah. Nowhere in Scripture does Jesus say, “I am one way, but there will be others.” He says, I am *the way*, *the truth*, and *the life*. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

When asked the question by Jesus, “Do you believe this?” will you be able to answer as Martha did, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is come into the world”? Will you join her this Easter by saying “Yes, Lord . . . I believe!”?

**Prayer**

Yes Lord, we believe. We believe you are the Son of God, the risen Lord. We believe your hand will touch the dry bones of our faith, your Word will breathe new life where there was death, your Spirit will raise us up from where we lie, your love will bring us home. And we believe that

by your cross and by your grace we stand forgiven, free. Yes Lord, we believe.

**Philippians 4:1-13**

<sup>1</sup>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.

<sup>2</sup>I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>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.

<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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.

<sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

**Susan Moudry '10**

During a recent Holy Week, I realized I was kind of holding my breath as the time proceeded. I was waiting for the next shoe to drop. You see, our extended family had a string of unwelcome events spread over a few years that all tied to Holy Week: death, loss, injury, illness. So, familiar anxiety set in as the time approached.

While the specifics will vary, those of you serving churches can likely relate. We often collectively hold our breath, worrying about the plethora of services and sermons, if the weather will cooperate, what illness and death may intervene, and countless other things. We wait, wondering what might go wrong next.

Yet, it's into that space the Scripture speaks to us today. We are reminded to give thanks and focus on the good, staying present to all that God is doing in the world. We are told not to worry, but rather to communicate with God. By giving our anxious hearts away, we are gifted peace and presence of mind to get through whatever may come. This is God at work in us.

In the midst of a world full of fears, we can be grateful and rejoice, because no matter our very legitimate concerns, God hears and God is with us. You and I are not alone. Thanks be to God for that peace.

**Prayer**

God who knows all the wanderings of our worried hearts, come fill us today with a sense of your

presence and peace. Guard us from the worry that creeps in again and again. Help us to rejoice. Amen.

### **Rebecca Hickok '93**

Well. My head's all over the place with this. It's Wednesday of Holy Week. Holy Week. You know, "Tis Midnight and On Olive's Brow." Not "Ode to Joy." Who in the name of the sweet baby Jesus picked these readings? Look up "clueless" in the dictionary and I think you'll find a picture of the culprit.

But. Hmmm. Wednesday of Holy Week. Day before the Big Day. Passover. If I were a first century Jewish woman, what would I be doing that day? Same thing I do now as a Christian woman before a big holy day, I expect. Shopping, cooking, cleaning, anticipating the arrival of family, and singing. Joyfully. My family will be here, all in one place all around one table, all remembering and celebrating the grand story of Exodus, holding the empire at bay for one day. And I know what I wouldn't be doing. Listening to the news. I'd be way too busy to hear the argle-bargle about the troublesome itinerant preacher who was giving the Romans and Herod a run for their money. Good on him if he was, but I have potatoes to peel and beds to get ready.

So let's not do that thing we do. Putting 21<sup>st</sup> century expectations on our first century ancestors and getting our knickers all in a knot because they're singing for full-throated joy in the midst of our Holy Week.

Because, honestly, I'll take any glimmer of joy I can get any time I can. This day, April 16, marks seven months to the day that my husband of 30 years died. So, when I read this passage some clueless genius picked for today, it makes me want to – if not sing – maybe hum softly – at the possibilities for the healing balm of joy.

So, whether you are a first century woman just trying to bring joy into her family circle in a place where life was hard and the Romans were harder or a 21<sup>st</sup> century woman searching through the darkness for that one spark that gives you the wherewithal to carry on: we cling to the words of Paul, who was no stranger to hard times either:

*Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.*

#### **Prayer**

Sweet, loving God, sometimes joy and sorrow course through us at the same time, and we're not at all sure what to do. Help us to embrace both. Amen.

### **Day 44**

#### **Jeremiah 20:7–18**

<sup>7</sup> O LORD, you have enticed me,  
and I was enticed;  
you have overpowered me,  
and you have prevailed.

*I have become a laughingstock all day long;  
everyone mocks me.*

<sup>8</sup> For whenever I speak, I must cry out,  
I must shout, "Violence and destruction!"  
For the word of the LORD has become for me

*a reproach and derision all day long.*

<sup>9</sup> *If I say, "I will not mention him,  
or speak any more in his name,"  
then within me there is something like a burning fire  
shut up in my bones;  
I am weary with holding it in,  
and I cannot.*

<sup>10</sup> *For I hear many whispering:  
"Terror is all around!  
Denounce him! Let us denounce him!"  
All my close friends  
are watching for me to stumble.  
"Perhaps he can be enticed,  
and we can prevail against him,  
and take our revenge on him."*

<sup>11</sup> *But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior;  
therefore my persecutors will stumble,  
and they will not prevail.  
They will be greatly shamed,  
for they will not succeed.  
Their eternal dishonor  
will never be forgotten.*

<sup>12</sup> *O LORD of hosts, you test the righteous,  
you see the heart and the mind;  
let me see your retribution upon them,  
for to you I have committed my cause.*

<sup>13</sup> *Sing to the LORD;  
praise the LORD!  
For he has delivered the life of the needy  
from the hands of evildoers.*

<sup>14</sup> *Cursed be the day  
on which I was born!  
The day when my mother bore me,  
let it not be blessed!*

<sup>15</sup> *Cursed be the man  
who brought the news to my father, saying,  
"A child is born to you, a son,"  
making him very glad.*

<sup>16</sup> *Let that man be like the cities  
that the LORD overthrew without pity;  
let him hear a cry in the morning  
and an alarm at noon,*

<sup>17</sup> *because he did not kill me in the womb;  
so my mother would have been my grave,  
and her womb forever great.*

<sup>18</sup> *Why did I come forth from the womb  
to see toil and sorrow,  
and spend my days in shame?*

## **Joel Peterson '18**

God's call upon the lives of the prophets didn't come with the promise of peace and prosperity or the guarantee that anyone would want to listen to their words. And Jeremiah wasn't afraid to be honest with God about the inhospitable working conditions he endured. The word of God had taken over his body so that the prophetic warning of violence and destruction was always on his lips. Jeremiah wanted to stop preaching, but the words were like a fire that could not be contained. As others heard Jeremiah's prophecy of doom and gloom, the words burned up his reputation and destroyed his body.

No matter our specific vocation, we know from experience that the call of God compels us to diverge from the path of least resistance. As the love of God fills our bodies, we can no longer be silent to the forces of death and unrighteousness in our world. We become disillusioned with the way things are, and a passion to make things right ignites within us. Sometimes we encounter outside resistance, but prophetic voices often encounter more painful resistance from within the Christian community.

There is no more appropriate time than Lent to confess our struggles to God honestly. When we hold these feelings in, we risk burnout. But when we, like Jeremiah, are blunt with God, the weight of the message's efficacy is lifted from our shoulders. We're reminded that we are vessels of God's word. The word itself and the work of transformation are God's.

### **Prayer**

Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord. You have placed causes and concerns deep in our hearts, yet the world has told us to be silent. As your prophetic word burns inside us, give us also your words of grace. Renew us, strengthen us, and equip us to be your servants, now and to the end of the age. Teach us once again to sing your praises, all the while knowing that you will succeed in bringing justice and righteousness to our world. Amen.

## **John 17:1-26**

<sup>1</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup>I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. <sup>6</sup>"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. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be

sanctified in truth. <sup>20</sup>"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>"Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup>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."

### **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 this Maundy Thursday, we find ourselves with the disciples resting at the feet of Jesus as he offers this prayer.

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.

### **Leland Platt '02**

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 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" (vv. 20-21). Jesus' prayer in John 17 expresses Jesus' care, love, and compassion not only for his current disciples but also for all who *will* believe in him.

Other than Jesus, few creatures can express compassion as well as dogs can. And dogs have played an important role in my ministry. Because dogs express compassion so well, I have used several of them as therapy dogs in homes, nursing homes, and hospitals to visit members of my congregation. Case in point: Russ and Shirley had been married for more than 40 years and were incredibly close. Shirley was hospitalized with an unknown medical condition. Russ was terribly worried. The next morning he showed up at my front door in tears. "I don't know what I will do without her," he sobbed. I invited him in. He sat sobbing away in a desk chair as I fixed him some coffee. Purves, my Golden Retriever, immediately came to Russ, placed his paws on the chair, stood on his hind legs, then placed a paw on each of Russ's shoulders and, with deep compassion, looked Russ in the eye. Russ stopped crying as he looked into Purves's eyes, laughed, and said, "I needed that." No pastoral words of mine were needed.

While watching a five-year-old boy play with a large yellow Labrador Retriever, Luther Seminary professor Andrew Root observed: “This boy was experiencing the [message] we long for most as humans . . . *You are loved. You are mine. You are beautifully and wonderfully made*” (*The Grace of Dogs* [2017], p. 76). I know that’s what Russ experienced as Purves looked into his eyes.

### **Prayer**

God of all grace, love, and compassion, we thank you for your enduring presence among us as you remind us so often, and in unexpected ways, that we are loved and cared for. You make it easy to say with the psalmist, “Light, space, zest—that’s God! So, with God on my side I’m fearless, afraid of no one and nothing” (Ps. 27:1, *The Message*). Amen.

### **Brandon Anthony Shaw ’19**

Two things come to mind when I read this prayer of Jesus, especially as I zero in on verse 3: namely, that “eternal life,” which is to “know” Jesus, is *now*, and that we are called to “know” Jesus, not in some distant or abstract sense, but personally.

First, eternal life is defined as knowing Jesus, and we can do that now. We don't have to wait to expire from this sin-cursed world to know Jesus. Sure, post-mortem eternal life is the best, because there will be no more destructive cancers to torment us. There will cease to be places of terror, like Auschwitz or the Gulag. Tears will be wiped away forever by the Lord, and the former trials of life will be in the rearview mirror. However, eternal life is to “know” Christ, and that is something we can very much do now as we wait for God's kingdom to come in fullness.

Second, eternal life is to “know” Christ. To “know” Christ is not simply intellectual acknowledgment or assent of him; it is actual, relational knowledge and experience of him. The demons, after all, *know about* Jesus but do not “know” Jesus. To “know” Jesus is to trust in him as the one who lived the perfect life we could never live, to embrace him as the one who died in our place (and thus saved us from everlasting ruin), and to rely on him and his resurrection as what gives us hope that we, too, might be raised from death to everlasting life one day. To know Jesus is to be in relationship with this risen Savior-Lord. We are called to “know” Jesus in a deep and intimate way. We must not be content to merely know about him but experience him as friend.

### **Prayer**

Father, may we comprehend that eternal life in Jesus is now. Furthermore, may we not be merely content to know about Jesus but actually experience him daily. May we share his gospel so that others might know him, too, and thus glorify you. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

## **Day 45**

### **Psalm 22**

<sup>1</sup> *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

*Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?*

<sup>2</sup> *O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;  
and by night, but find no rest.*

<sup>3</sup> *Yet you are holy,  
enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

<sup>4</sup> *In you our ancestors trusted;*

they trusted, and you delivered them.  
5 To you they cried, and were saved;  
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.  
6 But I am a worm, and not human;  
scorned by others, and despised by the people.  
7 All who see me mock at me;  
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;  
8 "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver —  
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"  
9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb;  
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.  
10 On you I was cast from my birth,  
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.  
11 Do not be far from me,  
for trouble is near  
and there is no one to help.  
12 Many bulls encircle me,  
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;  
13 they open wide their mouths at me,  
like a ravening and roaring lion.  
14 I am poured out like water,  
and all my bones are out of joint;  
my heart is like wax;  
it is melted within my breast;  
15 my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,  
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;  
you lay me in the dust of death.  
16 For dogs are all around me;  
a company of evildoers encircles me.  
My hands and feet have shriveled;  
17 I can count all my bones.  
They stare and gloat over me;  
18 they divide my clothes among themselves,  
and for my clothing they cast lots.  
19 But you, O LORD, do not be far away!  
O my help, come quickly to my aid!  
20 Deliver my soul from the sword,  
my life from the power of the dog!  
21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!  
From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.  
22 I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:  
23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!  
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;  
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!  
24 For he did not despise or abhor  
the affliction of the afflicted;

*he did not hide his face from me,  
but heard when I cried to him.*

<sup>25</sup> *From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.*

<sup>26</sup> *The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.  
May your hearts live forever!*

<sup>27</sup> *All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the LORD;  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before him.*

<sup>28</sup> *For dominion belongs to the LORD,  
and he rules over the nations.*

<sup>29</sup> *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.*

<sup>30</sup> *Posterity will serve him;  
future generations will be told about the Lord,*

<sup>31</sup> *and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
saying that he has done it.*

### **Jennifer (Hipple) Christmas '11**

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

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

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

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

#### ***Prayer***

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

### **1 Peter 1:10-20**

<sup>10</sup>Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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! <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. <sup>15</sup>Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; <sup>16</sup>for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, <sup>19</sup>but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. <sup>20</sup>He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.

### **Steve Franklin '09**

I was once told that Lent was a solemn season of repentance. However, I find the season of Lent to be filled with beauty and hope. While it may, indeed, be a season of repentance and fasting, it points us to and prepares us for the resurrection. It affords us the opportunity to look to Christ knowing that we have already received his grace and that we will continue to do so.

Hope is an expectation or desire that something will happen. Peter writes, “Set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.” Have we set our hope on something other than the grace that Jesus brings us? Lent is a time to look forward to what God will do in the resurrection, a time for us to experience grace. In the knowledge that Jesus claims victory over death, let us set all our hope on God’s grace.

#### **Prayer**

God of the resurrection, may we always set our eyes on the hope you give us in Christ. As we repent in this season of Lent, may we also experience the grace that comes to us through our Savior. May we know what it means to live as people of the resurrection and offer grace to others. Amen.

### **John 13:36-38**

<sup>36</sup>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.” <sup>37</sup>Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” <sup>38</sup>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.”

### **John Welch '02**

In reflecting on our Christian journey, is it possible to ask whether or not our zeal has created a falsehood that to the eyes of the uninformed and unsaved could easily be interpreted as hypocritical? Is it possible that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts are out of sync and not in proper alignment? As with the Pharisees, whom Jesus chided with the words, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34 et al.), can it be that we suffer from a spiritual form of heart arrhythmia? The words of a famous hymn state, “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no

turning back.” With fervor and excitement we sing these words without knowing to what extent our faith will be tested.

In John 13:37, Peter unknowingly tells Jesus a modest falsehood, “a fib,” because his heart is suffering from a form of spiritual “AFib” (atrial fibrillation), which happens when the heart is in an unhealthy rhythm. A spiritually unhealthy rhythm of the heart can lead to spoken intentions that are shallow and short on follow-through. Peter was affected by this condition and Jesus diagnosed it. Peter’s heart was moving too quickly and was therefore out of step. While Peter, in his zeal and affection, wasn’t aware that his faith had not yet been tested and his heart was still unhealthy, Jesus knew what was coming. He warned Peter that his heart would undergo a shock when he’d soon deny the Lord three times.

So also we, in our haste to want to say and do the right things in the company of others, may find ourselves out of step because our fleshly desires put our hearts out of rhythm.

### **Prayer**

Most Holy God, You, who established truth, diagnosed the sinful condition of the world in eternity past and even now—You are able to diagnose the sinful condition of our hearts. Search us and know our hearts, try us and know our anxieties, and when we are apt to fall short of the holiness you require, lead us in the way everlasting. In the name of Jesus, Your Son and our Savior, amen.

### **Rebecca Konegen '22**

It’s an exchange full of intention, as well as present and future time shifts: “I am”, “you will”, “what about now?” and then “I will”, “will you?”, and “you won’t.” Now, then later in the future, back to now, and then in the near future. What will happen versus what won’t? There’s a lot of skipping around, time-wise. And then there’s identity: who Jesus is, which defines what he will do and is capable of doing, and who Peter is, which defines in turn what he is capable of doing and therefore will (or won’t) do. Not to mention all of those pronouns.

We’re kept so busy keeping track of the conversation that we can miss an essential point: Jesus says that Peter will follow after him *before* he tells Peter that Peter is about to deny him. Peter hasn’t even yet faced the temptation to deny his association with Jesus.

Jesus offers assurance of salvation—the confidence of having been saved—even before the next sin occurs. The confidence is there *before* the cross—it’s already a sure thing. Peter will go to that place Jesus is preparing.

The God whom we serve—whom we, like Peter, aspire to serve—offers love and grace, even knowing that we will stumble, badly. Our God sees our sins coming—not just the ones in our past, over which we no longer have control—and still acts to save. Still loves, still promises, still assures.

### **Prayer**

God who sees, God who suffers at our own hands, you know us thoroughly. Our aspirations and our blunders, the moments when we live into your gifts and your promises, and the moments when we fail you utterly. And still, you act on our behalf. We are, as Peter is, humbled. Let us always know your grace. Amen.

### **John 19:38-42**

<sup>38</sup> After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. <sup>39</sup> Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. <sup>40</sup> They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. <sup>41</sup> Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. <sup>42</sup> And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

### **Cindy Parker '10**

My husband was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma when he was 29 years old. We had two beautiful daughters who were 5 and 3 and we'd just found out we were expecting our third child when the surgeon delivered the news. I'm sure the shock was evident on both our faces. Who expects to receive a diagnosis of cancer in their twenties? I'm embarrassed to admit that the first thought that came into my mind was a selfish one, "How would I take care of three kids if he died?" I threw myself into caring for my daughters, afraid to get too close to my husband, afraid of what the chemo might do to our unborn child, afraid of being a single parent, afraid of losing him. Fear makes us do crazy things, doesn't it?

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were afraid too. They were afraid of losing their positions of power, they were afraid of what people would say, they were afraid of what happens to people who follow Jesus. Fear makes us do crazy things, doesn't it?

But they show up in spite of their fear. They show up and they care for Jesus' body and prepare him for burial with an abundance of spices, 75 pounds worth—enough to bury 75 bodies!! And we are the witnesses of the extravagant love that always seems to accompany Jesus. Abundance that fear cannot overcome. Abundance that even death cannot diminish! Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea's actions remind us that as beloved children of God, we are loved abundantly, in spite of our fear—even because of our fear.

My husband survived eight months of chemo, took a break from his treatment to be by my side when our third daughter was born, and finished with two more months of radiation treatments. He is still cancer-free.

When I look back at that challenging, demanding, exhausting period of our lives, I realize we not only survived, we thrived—because of the abundance of God's love that we experienced through the love of our family, our friends, our children. Even in the midst of our fears.

#### **Prayer**

Abundant God, thank you for *all* the ways we experience your extravagant love. Help us to remember, in spite of our fears, or because of them, you love us with an everlasting love. And all God's beloved children said, AMEN!

### **Erin Morey '22**

Last year, during Holy Week, my pet rabbit Lilly developed an infection that led to severe neurological symptoms. She was unable to eat or drink, so I developed a routine of syringe-feeding her and giving her subcutaneous fluids several times a day. I was heartbroken to watch her life slip away while

simultaneously doing my best at work to prepare for the beautiful liturgies of Holy Week and Easter. I also felt guilty that this care might distract me from having a meaningful Lenten practice.

One afternoon, as I was feeding Lilly on my lunch break, she gently licked my fingers, and I felt more connected to her than I ever had. I realized then that the rhythm of caring for my dying pet had become a meaningful spiritual practice, and I treasured this time with her. When she finally died, I realized how much I missed this time, caring for her, and truly being with her.

As a clergy person, I spend a great deal of time caring for people who are dying and who have died, as well as the people who love them. I have also lost people I love to death. I still don't know whether death is a normal part of life or a terrible violation of God's will for this world. What I do know is that, eventually, all life dies, and grief is hard. I have watched people care for their dying loved ones and witnessed love that is profound and sacred.

It is tempting, I think, to run from death, and to avoid being present with sickness, suffering, and death—including our own! How astonishing that our God became vulnerable, and not only died, but allowed others to care for Him when he did.

#### **Prayer**

God of love, help us never to lose sight of the promise of Easter and resurrection. And when we inevitably find ourselves at the cross and tomb, let us respond not with avoidance, but with care and compassion. Amen.

### **Day 46**

#### **Psalm 43**

- <sup>1</sup> *Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause  
against an ungodly people;  
from those who are deceitful and unjust  
deliver me!*
- <sup>2</sup> *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?*
- <sup>3</sup> *O send out your light and your truth;  
let them lead me;  
let them bring me to your holy hill  
and to your dwelling.*
- <sup>4</sup> *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.*
- <sup>5</sup> *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.

#### **Psalm 143**

- <sup>1</sup> *Hear my prayer, O LORD;  
give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness;  
answer me in your righteousness.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Do not enter into judgment with your servant,  
for no one living is righteous before you.*
- <sup>3</sup> *For the enemy has pursued me,  
crushing my life to the ground,  
making me sit in darkness like those long dead.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Therefore my spirit faints within me;  
my heart within me is appalled.*
- <sup>5</sup> *I remember the days of old,  
I think about all your deeds,  
I meditate on the works of your hands.*
- <sup>6</sup> *I stretch out my hands to you;  
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah*
- <sup>7</sup> *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.*
- <sup>8</sup> *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.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Save me, O LORD, from my enemies;  
I have fled to you for refuge.*
- <sup>10</sup> *Teach me to do your will,  
for you are my God.*

*Let your good spirit lead me  
on a level path.*

- <sup>11</sup> *For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life.  
In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.*
- <sup>12</sup> *In your steadfast love cut off my enemies,  
and destroy all my adversaries,  
for I am your servant.*

**Charles L. Fischer III, staff**

"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." (Psalm 143:8, NRSV)

There is something about the midnight hour that holds one in suspense. There is no certainty about what is before you. The late evening when you can't see yet know that something is in front of you. The late evening when you wrestle with the decisions that are to be made and wait with great anticipation as to what the new day might reveal. In the midnight hour, there are the ruminations that one may go through as they think about the day that has passed and the day before them. It may be the tossing and turning of what had not been accomplished which gives you angst. Or it may be the enthusiasm around the excitement of a new day that is to come.

The words of the psalmist are a plea to the Lord. What might be the sound of love that one yearns to hear? Is it a familiar sound of affirmation? Will it be the chirping of birds after morning has broken? The sound of steadfast love may be the most assuring sound. The confirmation that all is well and that there is nothing else to be worried about.

I can hear these same pleas coming from those who witnessed the horrific events of a lynching the day before. Their teacher has been executed and those who had followed him are now hopeless. They have lost the one who had been the manifestation of all assurances. And now they find themselves in the dark, a midnight hour like no other, desiring nothing more than to hear the steadfast love of the Lord in the morning.

***Prayer***

Collect for Holy Saturday, *The Book of Common Prayer*

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

***Job 19:21-27a***

- <sup>21</sup> *Have pity on me, have pity on me,  
O you my friends,  
for the hand of God has touched me!*
- <sup>22</sup> *Why do you, like God, pursue me,  
never satisfied with my flesh?*
- <sup>23</sup> *"O that my words were written down!  
O that they were inscribed in a book!*
- <sup>24</sup> *O that with an iron pen and with lead*

*they were engraved on a rock for ever!*  
<sup>25</sup> *For I know that my Redeemer lives,*  
*and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;*  
<sup>26</sup> *and after my skin has been thus destroyed,*  
*then in my flesh I shall see God,*  
<sup>27</sup> *whom I shall see on my side,*  
*and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”*

### **Taylor Barner '16**

Anyone who has ever skinned a knee or elbow from a fall or playing sports will tell you it is not a pleasant experience. The raw, burning feeling on your skin comes alive with the slightest movement. And even though you know it isn't a serious injury, the pain reminds you just how frail we human beings are. But as with most injuries, the body begins to heal quickly, and within days the injury is merely a memory.

Today's passage from Job reminds us that our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, is alive and will stand upon the earth once more at the last. But Job also says that when his flesh is totally destroyed, when all is stripped away, perhaps even when his life on earth is over, then he shall see God in the flesh, as his frail, completely exposed self.

C. S. Lewis takes this concept a step further in *The Chronicles of Narnia: Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. SPOILER ALERT. In the novel, the Pevensies' cousin Eustace is transformed into a dragon because of his brutish nature, and he can only return to being a boy by stripping the dragon skin off his body. But no matter how much he scrapes and tears, he cannot "undragon" himself. Only with the help of Aslan can his dragon-self be permanently stripped away.

Similarly, only when we are stripped of our skin, stripped of our sinfulness, our burdens, and ourselves can we truly see God. When there is nothing left but our flesh, when our walls are taken down, when we become vulnerable—that is when we can truly see and welcome God. And the beautiful truth is that our God is with us.

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we know that you are alive, and we rejoice in your resurrection. Strip away our fears, our worries, and ourselves, O God, so that we may see you. Grant us perseverance and patience as we await the return of your Son. Help us to be vulnerable, to love others as we love ourselves, and to trust in You alone. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

### **Greg Steible '14**

Silence. Ear-shattering silence. Guttural and fierce silence. Silence blasting forth from the deep.

Yesterday we witnessed Christ on the cross cry out one last time. And today, what do we have? The void encroaching wordlessly on our hearts. Tomorrow will come, but we aren't there yet. Today we sit in the deafening silence.

When Job is confronted with this silence, he stands firm. In the heartbreaking reality in which he finds himself, when all is lost and Job is being blamed by his friends, and when Job even begins to believe God is being unjust and malicious, he proclaims a greater truth. He boldly proclaims, "I know that my

Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.” He knows the truth of God’s grace and believes, deep in his innermost being, that there is hope.

As we sit in the silence of this Holy Saturday, we know the truth. We know what the morning brings. We know the oppressive silence will come to an end. But in the middle of it, it’s easy to forget. And so we raise our voice in unison with Job and declare that we know *our* Redeemer lives and that at the last our Christ will stand upon the earth.

### **Prayer**

O God, we are eager for tomorrow, and yet you call us here. Be with us in the darkness, as we know our Redeemer lives. Give us hope even on those darkest days, until that morning rises. Through Christ, our Redeemer, we pray. 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.*

### **Alyssa Bell ’11**

In a world that celebrates productivity as evidence of our worthiness, rest can feel impossible. What will happen if I stop? How will people know that I am doing my part? I am grateful for the rhythms of the

church year that invite us to slow down, and Holy Saturday offers us a particularly unique and sacred pause.

In Hebrews chapter 4, the author gives the listener a little collection of theological themes. Sabbath rest, the profound holiness of scripture, and the grace offered us by Jesus our high priest fill this pericope with enough content to populate a lengthy sermon series or Bible study class. What do rest, scripture, and grace have to say to us this Holy Saturday as we wait for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus?

With the rich tradition of scripture reminding us that rest matters deeply to our faith—as much to us as it did to our Hebrew ancestors in the faith—we encounter at the end of this passage a stunning picture of grace. On Good Friday, Jesus our high priest has destroyed the dividing curtain, allowing us entrance and welcome. We are forgiven.

Grace is the means by which we can truly enter sabbath rest. We can cease our mustered-up striving and instead strive with Christ; we can lay our heads down and let go, trusting in Jesus to be in charge. This Holy Saturday, we receive the gift of grace and rest. Jesus has accomplished our salvation and is destroying death in a few short hours. Let us be still. Jesus is doing the work. Amen.

#### **Prayer**

God of creation and rest, thank you for the gift of your scriptures drawing us to yourself this Holy Saturday, and for Jesus Christ, who accomplished our salvation on the cross. Through the presence and power of your Holy Spirit, we ask for your help to rest. By your grace, we pause and let go. Amen.

#### **Romans 8:1-11**

*<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> 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, <sup>8</sup> and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> 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.*

#### **Carolyn Cranston '99**

Temptation easily lures us into setting our minds on “things of the flesh,” things that are worldly, the baser things in life that cause us to act according to our sinful nature. And creatures of a sinful nature, even living under the Law, cannot be reconciled to a right relationship with God.

But thanks be to God that, out of love, God made a way for reconciliation—a way to establish an intimate relationship between God and humanity through Jesus Christ, the divine and sinless Son of God, who defeated sin and death and who invites us to share in new life with him. Not through our own works, but through our faith in Christ Jesus and the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, whom we invite to

live in our hearts, do we become transformed through the grace—the ill-deserved favor—of God. And so we are placed on the road of living a resurrected life with Christ.

In Christ there is no condemnation because, there, God has restored us to the right relationship we cannot achieve on our own. There, the demands of God’s holy nature are achieved on our behalf through the gracious gift God has already given to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior. To God be all honor and glory!

**Prayer**

Holy and most faithful God, we thank you for your grace and for the gift of your Son, Jesus. Help us turn away from the worldly life of sin and turn instead to Christ Jesus, so that your Spirit may dwell in us to give us life and peace. Thank you that, in Christ, we do not stand condemned. Thank you for your love and forgiveness which restore us to righteousness. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Day 47**

**Isaiah 51:9-11**

- <sup>9</sup> *Awake, awake, put on strength,  
O arm of the Lord!  
Awake, as in days of old,  
the generations of long ago!  
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,  
who pierced the dragon?*
- <sup>10</sup> *Was it not you who dried up the sea,  
the waters of the great deep;  
who made the depths of the sea a way  
for the redeemed to cross over?*
- <sup>11</sup> *So the ransomed of the Lord shall return,  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

**Joseph Hedden Jr. '97**

For those of us who have learned to pray carefully crafted petitions, the rawness of the prophet’s appeal is shocking. Throwing out courtesy and convention, the prophet pleads with the Lord to awaken! To act! To rescue! To save! The unspoken implication is that, throughout the awful night of the Babylonian exile and trouble, the Lord has been asleep.

Yes, in bygone days the Lord did act in mighty ways at the Red Sea. But today? “Awake, Lord, Awake!” Surrounded by lilies, a full choir, and Easter joy, can any of us imagine begging the Lord to wake up as the pastor approaches the pulpit to lead worship? Surely we preachers will want to move on quickly to verse 11 and its future day and future hope.

But not so fast. Perhaps the prophet is struggling to identify and name a reality deep within the human soul. There are times when we live in the shadow of the cross—and not the triumphant and gleaming bronze cross of the Easter sanctuary but, rather, Calvary’s wooden cross of injustice, pain, and death.

We know moments when words cleave to the tongue and all we can ask the Lord is, “Where are you?” The prophet’s appeal to the Lord may not be pretty, but it is *real*. “Awake, awake, arm of the Lord” is the unadorned prayer of struggle clawing toward hope. It is the prayer we pray at bedsides and late at night in the half-empty Intensive Care lounge. “Awake, arm of the Lord” is the doubtful prayer of faith and the faithful prayer of doubt. Perhaps “Awake, arm of the Lord” is the appropriate prayer of sorrow and loss on a dark and misty pre-dawn journey to a tomb in Jerusalem—a journey at the end of which we discover that the Lord is, indeed, awake!

### **Prayer**

Awake, arm of the Lord! We remember your deeds of love and grace and ask you to make them real to us today. See us here in our struggles; our wrestling with doubt, our passion for justice, and our search for healing. May you provide the words and memories when they fail us. May your strong arm remind us of the hope of the empty tomb, which turns our world on its head. We pray in the name of the resurrected Christ. Amen.

### **Luke 24:13-35**

<sup>13</sup>Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>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?” <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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.” <sup>25</sup>Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. <sup>28</sup>As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup>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?” <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

### **Dave Dack '11**

In his first exhortation, Pope Francis wrote, “There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter.” Surely that is how the two disciples on the road to Emmaus felt. Stuck in grief and disappointment, they couldn’t believe the women’s Easter news that Jesus had risen, so they pressed on

toward a little town whose only noteworthy characteristic was how far away it would get them from Jerusalem.

But then they were ambushed by Jesus, and the result was joy like a consuming fire in their hearts. “Did not our hearts burn within us?” What exquisite joy awaits those who encounter the risen Savior! “Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.”

And notice where the encounter happens: on the road. The joy of Easter is not waiting for you to get to Emmaus. You won’t find it in another town, another relationship, another degree, another car, another life. This joy is looking for you, impatiently, here and now, transforming whatever road you’re on into a journey with Jesus that takes you “further up and further in” to heaven and so making every step an arrival. “So the ransomed of the Lord shall return.” Amen!

***Prayer***

Risen Jesus, restore to us the joy of your salvation. Meet us here, meet us now, and make our cup overflow with gratitude and rejoicing. Christ be in every eye that sees me, Christ be in every ear that hears me. Lord Jesus, increase in us, we pray. Amen.

**Richard Norris III, student**

Each Gospel writer presents a different account of the resurrection. But one of the narrative elements that is consistent across each account is this: no one expected Jesus to be alive that Sunday morning. The darkness of the crucifixion on Good Friday continued to hover over all of his disciples. This is arguably best exemplified in this episode on the Emmaus road. You don’t have to look far to get a sense of the defeat that Cleopas and the other disciple had to have been feeling. It’s right there in verse 21: “. . . 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.” In other words, they said, “We thought he was our Messiah, but we’ve given up any hope of that now.” But after they had spent some time communing with the Lord and intently listening to his voice, they came to realize that he had indeed risen, just as he promised.

Often, it is so easy to get so caught up in the hardships of life that we, too, lose hope and abandon our faith in God. But what the resurrection teaches us is: 1) God is always at work, even when darkness abounds all around us; and 2) no matter what, God keeps God’s promises. As the Lenten season comes to a close and we move into Eastertide, may we all remember to take time to commune with and listen to God. For it is in those moments when we are pressed on every side and we can’t see our way that we must be bold enough in the Spirit to declare, “I still expect God to work it out.”

***Prayer***

Kind and loving God, thank you for the gift of the resurrection. May it always serve as a reminder to us of your incomprehensible, incalculable, overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love for us, and your commitment to do whatever it takes to save your people. Help us to confront our doubts when evil seems to prevail. Help us to depend on your promises when trials come. Help us to always expect a miracle. In your name we pray, Amen.

**Jodie Eckenrod ’20**

One of the most memorable and well-told narratives in the gospel accounts, the walk to Emmaus, continues to spark our imaginations. Readers have questions about Cleopas and his companion (perhaps his wife?). Why did they not recognize Jesus, who prevented them from knowing who he was, and why did he vanish at the very moment they did recognize him? These two followers were not present at the

Last Supper a few days before, so why were their eyes opened when he gave them the broken bread? Why was this moment significant to them?

We can easily identify with these followers in their moment of devastation over what they thought had been lost. We can remain focused on our personal grief or on communal tragedies in the world instead of on the amazing ways God is working. Jesus interprets the scriptures in a new way for his followers, but it wasn't just head knowledge that Jesus conveyed. Their hearts burned as he retold the story, given the events of the previous three days. When was the last time our hearts burned as we reflected upon scripture?

It can be tempting for us to focus on our personal struggles or on the doom and gloom of the 24-hour news cycle. It can even be easy for us to remain merely intellectually engaged with scripture or focus on the never-ending tasks of ministry or day-to-day life. But what if during this season we allowed Jesus' interpretation of scripture to make our hearts burn? What if we truly experienced Jesus on the road to wherever we're going?

As bleak as things may look in our lives, the world, or even in the church, God is in fact working in history and will redeem all things. Jesus is King and in his mysterious ways will set things right in our broken world.

#### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, please help us to recognize your presence in our lives even in the darkest of times. Give us the eyes to see you; allow our hearts to burn within us as we experience the scriptures in light of your amazing work and your boundless love. Amen.

#### **John 20:19-23**

*<sup>19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

#### **Richard Willhite '86**

This passage from John's Gospel follows his telling of the crucifixion. Loss, agony, death, a desolation of hope—that's the immediate backstory. At this point, the disciples are what today we'd call trauma survivors. Still in shock from the casual violence of his public execution, they now fear for their own lives.

Their suffering must have been beyond description. Perhaps that's why the Gospel writer didn't try to describe it. He names only their fear. And perhaps John's very silence on the disciples' inner states may be our doorway to the story.

Perhaps you've lived through a loss that left you devastated. The hard truth is that many people do. Wordless questions arise. "How can I go on? How could all this have happened?" In the wake of the unspeakably awful, a strange guilt often arises to compound the misery. "Could I have done more? Was I somehow to blame?" Can you identify?

John bears witness to a reality of this human life. Be it trauma or a chronic, dull ache, suffering is part of our common ground. Reader take note: it's precisely into an assembly of agonized trauma survivors that the risen Christ appears.

He appears first with a greeting that's also a benediction, repeated twice for good measure: "Peace be with you." Beyond any judgment or blame, the words convey the same grace as the Father's greeting to the returned Prodigal (Luke 15:11-32). The timing is remarkable. It comes forthrightly and clearly to suffering hearts. Remarkable too, that the Risen Christ confers a directive, an assignment to people at the very nadir of hopelessness: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you," he says. Earlier in John's Gospel, Jesus told the disciples something very clear about this sending: As he was sent by the God he called Father, he now sends them "Not to *condemn* the world, but that the world might be *saved*" (John 17:2-3). Marching orders for trauma survivors. Perhaps none other than they are so well suited to recognize the suffering of the world.

The disciples are charged with the care of the same lovely and sordid, sweet and deadly world through which Jesus moved. There is no evasion. Conferred with a God-like authority to forgive or retain sins, they are sent not for condemnation but compassion. They will move forward on paths they cannot yet imagine, not on the strength of their own merits but with the gifts of Holy Spirit. In the steadfast love of God, the undeniable traumas of life are not the *end* of this story but a mysterious *beginning*.

#### ***Prayer***

To you, God of all moments, we lift up our hearts. May we hear your voice of blessing and empowerment in moments when our vision penetrates no farther than our suffering. May we find ways forward when our imaginations and hopes grow dim. May we find compassion when we are tempted by the false refuge of cynicism. Remind us again and again that, in You, life and love are eternal and that all the world's unfolding moments are held in Your hands.