

Lent Devotional March 7, 2026

Scripture

Psalm 43

*1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
against an ungodly people;
from those who are deceitful and unjust,
deliver me!*

*2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge;
why have you cast me off?*

*Why must I walk about mournfully
because of the oppression of the enemy?*

*3 O send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling.*

*4 Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy,
and I will praise you with the harp,
O God, my God.*

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

Devotion

The Rev. Dr. John Charnock '09

Anton Boisen is credited with coining the phrase “living human document” as a way to understand the story of a person’s life. For the past twenty years, I have utilized this insight as a chaplain providing spiritual care to hospital patients in northcentral Pennsylvania. Recently, I’ve come to appreciate Boisen’s phrase as not only applicable to the stories of living patients, but also to the Psalms of ancient Scripture.

The story of a living human document often proceeds through four chapters with the following titles: physical, social, psychological, and spiritual. In an acute care hospital, a patient’s physical condition is front and center. Out of necessity, most caregivers confine their efforts to the healing of a physical body (physical). Chaplains also read this chapter, but as introduction to the developing story of a patient’s important relationships (social), coping skills (psychological), and sources of hope (spiritual). This has long been my preferred method for reading a living human document. And of late, this is becoming my lens for reading the Bible, and especially the Psalms.

The song of Psalm 43 may be chronologically old, but its singer is a living human document sharing inspiration for any discerning Lenten pilgrim. For example, the psalmist describes a physical condition of living under the oppression of others in a world devoid of justice (physical). Strong, supportive social relationships are replaced by deceitful and ungodly oppressors (social). As a result, the singer copes with

feelings of isolation and inner turmoil (psychological). But through it all, the psalmist reexperiences a resilient faith in God, who shines through despairing darkness in a new dawn of hope (spiritual).

And so, I travel this Lenten journey giving thanks for the living human documents who have blessed me my whole life long. Whether patients in a contemporary hospital or ancient singers of Psalms, their stories enrich our stories. For that, let us be grateful.

Prayer

O God, creator of all things and every story, be with us on our Lenten journey. Grant us the company of caring companions. Equip us to traverse injustice and rise above oppression. Especially, strengthen our steps and give us hope that carries us faithfully to our journey's end. Amen.