



Big Book of Lenten Devotionals

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

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's 2019 "Big Book of Lenten Devotionals" gives you a valuable resource for personal and corporate Spiritual formation during the Lenten season. From Day 1 through Day 47 (Easter), 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 since 2015 have contributed to this resource to help enrich your Lenten worship for many years to come.



Day 1

Jonah 3:1-4:11

^{3:1} The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, ² “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” ³ 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. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. ⁶ When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.” ¹⁰ 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. ^{4:1} But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. ² 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. ³ And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴ And the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. ⁸ 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.” ⁹ But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.” ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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, Student Association President

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.

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.”

Helen Blier, staff

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

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

Don’t we?

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

Prayer

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

Hebrews 12:1-14

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. ⁴In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children — “My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; ⁶ for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.” ⁷Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? ⁸If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. ⁹Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. ¹¹Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. ¹²Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. ¹⁴Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Cathy Brall, staff

One particularly virulent Lenten temptation is to assume that we are solely responsible for the content and results of any program of spiritual discipline we undertake during this season. If we successfully refrain from indulging in chocolate, alcohol, or whatever we promised God we would avoid, or, in contrast, successfully engage in Bible reading, prayer, or other deeds we promised we would do, then by golly, we think we’ve had ourselves a pretty good Lent. The danger of a “successful” Lent lies in the growth of our ego rather than growth in humility from a faithful Lent. This passage reminds us that Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. We don’t initiate or continue this journey alone. A great cloud of witnesses surrounds us—saints who have trod a similar path, sometimes stumbling, sometimes falling flat on their faces—whose prayers and testimonies encourage us to persevere. Trials and difficulties will confront us over the next 40 days—all permitted and some perhaps designed by Christ—to help us develop the peaceful fruit of righteousness and resemble our Savior in his holiness. Let us not lose heart, but rather proceed faithfully, being strengthened and healed as we walk toward Easter.

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you have called into this holy season to journey with the cloud of faithful witnesses from generations past and present. Help us to follow with patience and persistence the path that Christ will set before us, trusting in His righteousness and not our own, that we may obtain the growth and transformation that you alone most desire and design in each of our lives, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Day 2

Deuteronomy 7:6-11

⁶ For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. ⁷ It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, ¹⁰ and who repays in their own person those who reject him. He does not delay but repays in their own person those who reject him. ¹¹ Therefore, observe diligently the commandment—the statutes, and the ordinances—that I am commanding you today.

Gary Glasser, Student Association Vice President

It is really miraculous to be considered a treasured possession by the Lord our God, is it not? Just let that thought rest with you for a few moments. We are his people, his prized possessions! And not because of anything we do to deserve it but just by believing in him and loving him. And not because we are many, not because we are the best, not because we are the biggest. In fact, we are the least of all peoples!

I witnessed the Lord's work with his treasured possessions when I was in India on a mission trip. In this area, almost all the women work on giant tea plantations picking tea leaves in the hot, relentless sun. They constantly have to bend over to pick the tiny tea leaves and put them in a burlap sack they each drag behind them. At the end of every day their bags are weighed, and if they haven't met their quota they don't get paid. (But their tea leaves are kept by the owners.)

One night I attended a Bible study led by two women in a hut that wasn't tall enough for anyone over 5'10" to stand up straight in. That night two more women attended for the first time; they'd slipped out of the surrounding forest into the hut with several candles serving as a beacon. I watched as the new attendees listened rapturously with smiles on their faces to the words of Scripture. They sat there until it was time for them to go, as it had gotten dark and there was a rogue elephant at large in the forest. I felt like I was watching the work of Jesus' earliest disciples as they spread the word. I watched as four tea-leaf gatherers received the word of God and knew they were among God's prized possessions.

Isn't that something? In a world of people consumed with trying to be the best, the richest, the strongest, the most popular, God reminds us that he does not love anyone for being the greatest but because he has chosen us, and we are simply to follow him and stay true to his commandments. He will love us, no matter how numerous or powerful we are or how poor and burdened we may be.

Prayer

Dear God, grant me the clarity each day to go out into the world and notice those you put in my way to provide them evidence of your love for your treasured possessions. Let me share the gratitude I feel for the life you have given me and extend myself to others.

John 1:29-34

²⁹ 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!" ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because

he was before me.’³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.”³² And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.³³ 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.’³⁴ 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.

Titus 1:1-16

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

Lori Liller Arnold, staff

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.

Day 3

John 1:35-42

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ 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?" ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² 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.

Psalms 22

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
- ² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.
- ³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- ⁴ In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
- ⁵ To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.
- ⁶ But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
- ⁷ All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

⁸ *"Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver —
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"*
⁹ *Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.*
¹⁰ *On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.*
¹¹ *Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.*
¹² *Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;*
¹³ *they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.*
¹⁴ *I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;*
¹⁵ *my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.*
¹⁶ *For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;*
¹⁷ *I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;*
¹⁸ *they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.*
¹⁹ *But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!*
²⁰ *Deliver my soul from the sword,
life from the power of the dog!*
²¹ *Save me from the mouth of the lion!
from the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.*
²² *I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:*
²³ *You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!*
²⁴ *For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.*
²⁵ *From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.*
²⁶ *The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
May your hearts live forever!*
²⁷ *All the ends of the earth shall remember*

*and turn to the LORD;
 and all the families of the nations
 shall worship before him.*
²⁸ *For dominion belongs to the LORD,
 and he rules over the nations.*
²⁹ *To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
 before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
 and I shall live for him.*
³⁰ *Posterity will serve him;
 future generations will be told about the Lord,*
³¹ *and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
 saying that he has done it.*

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.

Psalm 130

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

and with him is great power to redeem.
⁸ *It is he who will redeem Israel*
from all its iniquities.

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 4

John 1:43-51

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

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.

Titus 3:1-15

¹ Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone. ³ 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. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ 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. ⁶ This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ⁸ 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. ⁹ But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰ After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions, ¹¹ since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned. ¹² 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. ¹³ Make every effort to send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way, and see that they lack nothing. ¹⁴ And let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs, so that they may not be unproductive. ¹⁵ 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-programed 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.

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.

Ron Cole-Turner, faculty

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.

Day 5

Jeremiah 9:23-24

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

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.

Mark 2:18-22

¹⁸ Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁹ Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. ²¹ "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. ²² And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

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.

Psalm 84

- ¹ *How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!*
- ² *My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.*
- ³ *Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.*
- ⁴ *Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise. Selah*
- ⁵ *Happy are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.*
- ⁶ *As they go through the valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.*
- ⁷ *They go from strength to strength;
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.*
- ⁸ *O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah*
- ⁹ *Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed.*
- ¹⁰ *For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.*
- ¹¹ *For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
he bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does the LORD withhold
from those who walk uprightly.*
- ¹² *O LORD of hosts,
happy is everyone who trusts in you.*

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.

Day 6

John 2:1-12

¹ On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. ⁹ 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 ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. ¹² 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.

Psalm 119:73-80

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

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.

Day 7

John 2:13-22

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

Hebrews 3:1-11

¹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ² was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also "was faithful in all God's house." ³ Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. ⁶ Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope. ⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness,

⁹ *where your ancestors put me to the test,
though they had seen my works ¹⁰ for forty years.
Therefore I was angry with that generation,
and I said, 'They always go astray in their hearts,
and they have not known my ways.'*

¹¹ *As in my anger I swore,
'They will not enter my rest.'"*

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.

Psalm 34

- ¹ *I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*
- ² *My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.*
- ³ *O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.*
- ⁴ *I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.*
- ⁵ *Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.*
- ⁶ *This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.*
- ⁷ *The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.*

- ⁸ *O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.*
- ⁹ *O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.*
- ¹⁰ *The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*
- ¹¹ *Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*
- ¹² *Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?*
- ¹³ *Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.*
- ¹⁴ *Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.*
- ¹⁵ *The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their cry.*
- ¹⁶ *The face of the LORD is against evildoers,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.*
- ¹⁷ *When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,
and rescues them from all their troubles.*
- ¹⁸ *The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.*
- ¹⁹ *Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD rescues them from them all.*
- ²⁰ *He keeps all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.*
- ²¹ *Evil brings death to the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.*
- ²² *The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.*

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.

Day 8

Deuteronomy 9:13-21

¹³Furthermore the LORD said to me, "I have seen that this people is indeed a stubborn people. ¹⁴Let 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." ¹⁵So I turned and went down from the mountain, while the mountain was ablaze; the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. ¹⁶Then 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. ¹⁷So I took hold of the two tablets and flung them from my two hands, smashing them before your eyes. ¹⁸Then 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. ¹⁹For 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. ²⁰The 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. ²¹Then 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.

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.

Psalm 27

- ¹ *The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*
- ² *When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh —
my adversaries and foes —
they shall stumble and fall.*
- ³ *Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.*
- ⁴ *One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.*
- ⁵ *For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.*
- ⁶ *Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.*
- ⁷ *Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!*
- ⁸ *“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”
Your face, LORD, do I seek.*
- ⁹ *Do not hide your face from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!*
- ¹⁰ *If my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will take me up.*
- ¹¹ *Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.*
- ¹² *Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.*
- ¹³ *I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.*
- ¹⁴ *Wait for the LORD;*

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

Liddy Barlow, executive minister of Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania

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.

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. ²⁴ You have been rebellious against the LORD as long as he has known you. ²⁵ Throughout the forty days and forty nights that I lay prostrate before the LORD when the LORD intended to destroy you, ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; pay no attention to the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin, ²⁸ 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.’ ²⁹ For they are the people of your very own possession, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.” ^{10:1} 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. ² 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.” ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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.

Psalm 126

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

Revelation 21:22

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

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.

Day 10

Deuteronomy 10:12-22

¹² 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, ¹³ and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. ¹⁴ Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the LORD your God, the earth with all that is in it, ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer. ¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. ¹⁹ You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. ²² 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.

Psalms 105

- ¹ O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.
- ² Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wonderful works.
- ³ Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

⁴ *Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually.*

⁵ *Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered,*

⁶ *O offspring of his servant Abraham,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.*

⁷ *He is the LORD our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.*

⁸ *He is mindful of his covenant forever,
of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,*

⁹ *the covenant that he made with Abraham,
his sworn promise to Isaac,*

¹⁰ *which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,*

¹¹ *saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan
as your portion for an inheritance."*

¹² *When they were few in number,
of little account, and strangers in it,*

¹³ *wandering from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another people,*

¹⁴ *he allowed no one to oppress them;
he rebuked kings on their account,*

¹⁵ *saying, "Do not touch my anointed ones;
do my prophets no harm."*

¹⁶ *When he summoned famine against the land,
and broke every staff of bread,*

¹⁷ *he had sent a man ahead of them,
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.*

¹⁸ *His feet were hurt with fetters,
his neck was put in a collar of iron;*

¹⁹ *until what he had said came to pass,
the word of the LORD kept testing him.*

²⁰ *The king sent and released him;
the ruler of the peoples set him free.*

²¹ *He made him lord of his house,
and ruler of all his possessions,*

²² *to instruct his officials at his pleasure,
and to teach his elders wisdom.*

²³ *Then Israel came to Egypt;
Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham.*

²⁴ *And the LORD made his people very fruitful,
and made them stronger than their foes,*

²⁵ *whose hearts he then turned to hate his people,
to deal craftily with his servants.*

²⁶ *He sent his servant Moses,
and Aaron whom he had chosen.*

²⁷ *They performed his signs among them,
and miracles in the land of Ham.*

²⁸ *He sent darkness, and made the land dark;
they rebelled against his words.*
²⁹ *He turned their waters into blood,
and caused their fish to die.*
³⁰ *Their land swarmed with frogs,
even in the chambers of their kings.*
³¹ *He spoke, and there came swarms of flies,
and gnats throughout their country.*
³² *He gave them hail for rain,
and lightning that flashed through their land.*
³³ *He struck their vines and fig trees,
and shattered the trees of their country.*
³⁴ *He spoke, and the locusts came,
and young locusts without number;*
³⁵ *they devoured all the vegetation in their land,
and ate up the fruit of their ground.*
³⁶ *He struck down all the firstborn in their land,
the first issue of all their strength.*
³⁷ *Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold,
and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.*
³⁸ *Egypt was glad when they departed,
for dread of them had fallen upon it.*
³⁹ *He spread a cloud for a covering,
and fire to give light by night.*
⁴⁰ *They asked, and he brought quails,
and gave them food from heaven in abundance.*
⁴¹ *He opened the rock, and water gushed out;
it flowed through the desert like a river.*
⁴² *For he remembered his holy promise,
and Abraham, his servant.*
⁴³ *So he brought his people out with joy,
his chosen ones with singing.*
⁴⁴ *He gave them the lands of the nations,
and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples,*
⁴⁵ *that they might keep his statutes
and observe his laws.*
Praise the LORD!

Nancy Lowmaster '11

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

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

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

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

Prayer

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

Day 11

Deuteronomy 11:18-28

¹⁸You 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. ¹⁹Teach 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. ²⁰Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, ²¹so 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. ²²If 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, ³then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and mightier than yourselves. ²⁴Every 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. ²⁵No 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. ²⁶See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: ²⁷the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today; ²⁸and 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.

John 4:1-26

¹Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John”—²although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—³he left Judea and started back to Galilee. ⁴But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The 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.) ¹⁰Jesus 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.” ¹¹The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with

his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ 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. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ 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.

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.*

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.

Day 12

Jeremiah 1:1-10

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

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

Mark 3:31-4:9

^{3:31} Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” ³³ And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is

my brother and sister and mother.”^{4:1} 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.² He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them:³ “Listen! A sower went out to sow.⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up.⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil.⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away.⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.⁸ Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.”⁹ And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

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.

1 Corinthians 3:11-23

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

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.

Psalms 42

¹ As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.

² My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and behold
the face of God?

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

⁴ These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:

*how I went with the throng,
 and led them in procession to the house of God,
 with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
 a multitude keeping festival.*

⁵ *Why are you cast down, O my soul,
 and why are you disquieted within me?
 Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
 my help ⁶and my God.
 My soul is cast down within me;
 therefore I remember you
 from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
 from Mount Mizar.*

⁷ *Deep calls to deep
 at the thunder of your cataracts;
 all your waves and your billows
 have gone over me.*

⁸ *By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,
 and at night his song is with me,
 a prayer to the God of my life.*

⁹ *I say to God, my rock,
 "Why have you forgotten me?
 Why must I walk about mournfully
 because the enemy oppresses me?"*

¹⁰ *As with a deadly wound in my body,
 my adversaries taunt me,
 while they say to me continually,
 "Where is your God?"*

¹¹ *Why are you cast down, O my soul,
 and why are you disquieted within me?
 Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
 my help and my God.*

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!

Day 13

John 4:27-42

²⁷ 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?" ²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." ³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² 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.

Psalms 6

- ¹ O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger,
or discipline me in your wrath.
- ² Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.
- ³ My soul also is struck with terror,
while you, O LORD — how long?
- ⁴ Turn, O LORD, save my life;
deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.
- ⁵ For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who can give you praise?

- ⁶ *I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.*
- ⁷ *My eyes waste away because of grief;
they grow weak because of all my foes.*
- ⁸ *Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.*
- ⁹ *The LORD has heard my supplication;
the LORD accepts my prayer.*
- ¹⁰ *All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror;
they shall turn back, and in a moment be put to shame.*

Katie Yates, staff

When reading Psalms 6 and 121, what stands out most to me is the emphasis on God's benevolent power in our lives. We are not in control, but neither are we subject to a capricious or evil divinity. Whether things are good or bad, the Lord "will watch over your life." God hears our cries and sees our private pains—even more than that, as we look ahead to the cross and the resurrection. We see that this all-powerful God desires the ultimate good for us—a personal relationship with Him. When I read these passages, I am reminded again that God saves us because of His unfailing love. It is not up to us! God saves me, and you, because He wants to and because He loves us, not because of anything we do or say. What a comforting, liberating thought.

Prayer

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

Psalm 121

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

Day 14

Jeremiah 2:1-13, 29-32

¹ The word of the LORD came to me, saying: ² 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.*

³ *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.

⁴ Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. ⁵ 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?*

⁶ *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?"*

⁷ *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.*

⁸ *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.*

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

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

¹¹ *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.*

¹² *Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
be shocked, be utterly desolate,*

says the LORD,

¹³ *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.*

²⁹ *Why do you complain against me?*

You have all rebelled against me,

says the LORD.

³⁰ *In vain I have struck down your children;*

they accepted no correction.

*Your own sword devoured your prophets
like a ravening lion.*

³¹ *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"?*

³² *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!

Psalm 25

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

David Morse, adjunct faculty

During the time we call Lent, we are given an opportunity to reflect in a unique way on the question, "Who am I before God?" As we lift our souls to God, we are challenged to reflect on that question anew. The psalmist gives us some guidance to answer that question. As we reflect on his words, we discover several aspects of who we are. We are forgiven. Our sins, though real, have been forgiven. We are instructed. The Lord instructs us in the way of wisdom and thereby guides our path. We are given consolation in times of distress. These gifts, among others, are the gifts of God's presence. This awareness empowers us to be able to live lives of confidence, lives of service, and lives of victory.

Prayer

God of grace, God of forgiveness, God of wisdom, give us power to lift our souls to you, to embrace the cross, and to follow you as faithful disciples confident of your victory in Christ and our victory in Him. Amen.

Day 15

John 5:1-18

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

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

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.

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. ²⁹ They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² 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. ^{2:1} 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. ² You say, "We know that God's judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth." ³ 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? ⁴ 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? ⁵ 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. ⁶ For he will repay according to each one's deeds: ⁷ to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ 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.

Day 16

Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28

⁹On that day, says the LORD, courage shall fail the king and the officials; the priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded. ¹⁰Then 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!”

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ Disaster overtakes disaster,
the whole land is laid waste.

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

²¹ How long must I see the standard,
and hear the sound of the trumpet?

²² “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.”

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

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

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

²⁶ 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.

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

²⁸ 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.

John 5:19-29

¹⁹ Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. ²⁰ The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. ²¹ Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. ²² The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life. ²⁵ Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; ²⁷ and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

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!

Psalm 27

- ¹ *The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*
- ² *When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh —
my adversaries and foes —
they shall stumble and fall.*
- ³ *Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.*
- ⁴ *One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.*
- ⁵ *For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.*
- ⁶ *Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.*
- ⁷ *Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!*
- ⁸ *“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”
Your face, LORD, do I seek.*
- ⁹ *Do not hide your face from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!*
- ¹⁰ *If my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will take me up.*
- ¹¹ *Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.*
- ¹² *Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.*
- ¹³ *I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.*
- ¹⁴ *Wait for the LORD;*

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

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.

Day 17

Jeremiah 5:1-9

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

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

^{2:25} *Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have the written code and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. ²⁹ 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. ^{3:1} Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ² Much, in every way. For in the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³ What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴ 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."*

⁵ *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.) ⁶ By no means! For then how could God judge the world? ⁷ But if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? ⁸ 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! ⁹ 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, ¹⁰ as it is written:*

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

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

Psalm 148

- ¹ *Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!*
- ² *Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!*
- ³ *Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!*
- ⁴ *Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!*
- ⁵ *Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for he commanded and they were created.*
- ⁶ *He established them forever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.*
- ⁷ *Praise the Lord from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,*

⁸ *fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!*
⁹ *Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!*
¹⁰ *Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!*
¹¹ *Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!*
¹² *Young men and women alike,
old and young together!*
¹³ *Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.*
¹⁴ *He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.
Praise the Lord!*

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.

Day 18

John 7:1-13

¹ 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. ² Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. ³ So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; ⁴ for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵ (For not even his brothers believed in him.) ⁶ Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil. ⁸ Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come." ⁹ After saying this, he remained in Galilee. ¹⁰ But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. ¹¹ The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, "Where is he?" ¹² 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." ¹³ 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.

Psalms 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.*

Johnnie Monroe, Metro-Urban Institute Advisory Council member

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.

Psalm 149

¹ *Praise the Lord!
Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.*
² *Let Israel be glad in its Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.*
³ *Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.*
⁴ *For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with victory.*
⁵ *Let the faithful exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their couches.*
⁶ *Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,*

⁷ *to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,*
⁸ *to bind their kings with fetters
and their nobles with chains of iron,*
⁹ *to execute on them the judgment decreed.*
This is glory for all his faithful ones.
Praise the Lord!

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.

Day 19

Mark 5:1-20

¹ They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. ² And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. ³ He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain; ⁴ for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. ⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; ⁷ and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." ⁸ For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" ⁹ Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." ¹⁰ He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹ Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; ¹² and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." ¹³ So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake. ¹⁴ The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. ¹⁶ Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. ¹⁷ Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. ¹⁸ As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. ¹⁹ But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." ²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Sue Thorn, lead organizer of Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network, Pittsburgh

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.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

¹² "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³ "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your

bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶Do 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." ¹⁷But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. ¹⁹Or 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? ²⁰For 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.

Psalm 150

¹ Praise the LORD!

Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise him in his mighty firmament!^[a]

² Praise him for his mighty deeds;

praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

³ Praise him with trumpet sound;

praise him with lute and harp!

⁴ Praise him with tambourine and dance;

praise him with strings and pipe!

⁵ Praise him with clanging cymbals;

praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

⁶ Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD!

Paul (PJ) 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 150th 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!

Day 20

John 7:14-36

¹⁴ About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. ¹⁵ The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?" ¹⁶ Then Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. ¹⁷ Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. ¹⁸ Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him. ¹⁹ "Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?" ²⁰ The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?" ²¹ Jesus answered them, "I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. ²² Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. ²³ If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath? ²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." ²⁵ Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill?" ²⁶ And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? ²⁷ Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." ²⁸ Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. ²⁹ I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me." ³⁰ Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. ³¹ Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, "When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?" ³² The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him. ³³ Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. ³⁴ You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." ³⁵ The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? ³⁶ What does he mean by saying, 'You will search for me and you will not find me' and, 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

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

¹ *O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger,
or discipline me in your wrath.*

² *Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.*

³ *My soul also is struck with terror,
while you, O LORD — how long?*

⁴ *Turn, O LORD, save my life;
deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.*

⁵ *For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who can give you praise?*

⁶ *I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.*

⁷ *My eyes waste away because of grief;
they grow weak because of all my foes.*

⁸ *Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.*

⁹ *The LORD has heard my supplication;
the LORD accepts my prayer.*

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

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

²¹Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. ²²For 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. ²³But 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." ²⁴Yet 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. ²⁵From 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; ²⁶yet they did not listen to me, or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their ancestors did. ²⁷So 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. ²⁸You 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.

²⁹ 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.

³⁰For 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. ³¹And 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. ³²Therefore, 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. ³³The 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. ³⁴And 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

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

¹³For 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. ¹⁴If it is the adherents of the law who are to be

the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.¹⁵ For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us,¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) — the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.¹⁸ Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.”¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,²¹ being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.²² Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.”²³ Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone,²⁴ but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,²⁵ who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

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, chief urban affairs officer at the Mayor’s office, Pittsburgh

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 hope, we too are to be that *ichthys*, to swim with unwavering faith and strength in God against all odds, purposefully helping those in need along the way. The *ichthys* didn’t swim with self-piety and judgment, but seemed to mingle love and acceptance with courage and

principle. Abraham fully checked his ego at the door; then God blessed him. I bet that *ichthys* was swimming toward blessings too, but likewise had to first dump the weight of ego at his/her “door.”

Prayer

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

Psalm 91

- ¹ *You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,*
- ² *will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust.”*
- ³ *For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;*
- ⁴ *he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.*
- ⁵ *You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,*
- ⁶ *or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.*
- ⁷ *A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.*
- ⁸ *You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.*
- ⁹ *Because you have made the LORD your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling place,*
- ¹⁰ *no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.*
- ¹¹ *For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.*
- ¹² *On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.*
- ¹³ *You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.*
- ¹⁴ *Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.*
- ¹⁵ *When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.*
- ¹⁶ *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.

Day 22

John 8:12-20

¹² 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." ¹³ Then the Pharisees said to him, "You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid." ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ You judge by human standards; I judge no one. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. ¹⁸ I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf." ¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ 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.

Romans 5:1-11

¹ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person — though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. ⁹

Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. ¹¹ But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Lisa Slayton, CEO of Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation

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.

Psalms 51

- ¹ *Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.*
- ² *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.*
- ³ *For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.*
- ⁴ *Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.*
- ⁵ *Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.*
- ⁶ *You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.*
- ⁷ *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*
- ⁸ *Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.*

⁹ *Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.*

¹⁰ *Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.*

¹¹ *Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.*

¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

¹³ *Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.*

¹⁴ *Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.*

¹⁵ *O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.*

¹⁶ *For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.*

¹⁷ *The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

¹⁸ *Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

Helen Blier, staff

David's remorse provides us with a heavy read three weeks into Lent. After being confronted by Nathan, David pleads for God's mercy. His sin? It was more than just adultery and murder. Rather, those acts, horrible in themselves, were the means by which he violated right relationship—with Bathsheba, with Uriah, with himself, and, ultimately, with God. Psalm 51 is his response to Nathan's shattering revelation—"You are the man!" (2 Sam 12:7).

Self-disclosure is no stranger to us these days. #Nofilter, social media, calling-out culture, TSA scrutiny, medical tests—all plumb the depths of human bodies and behavior and dredge stuff up into the light of day for scrutiny, consumption, and judgment. But David's remorse is different. It's not self-disclosure—it's self-examination within the context of a relationship with a God who judges . . . and whose primary attribute is mercy. As Pope Francis has said, "The mercy of our God is infinite and indescribable." Indeed, the plumb line for God's judgment of us is the degree to which we—created in God's image and likeness—show mercy ourselves.

As we engage in our own self-examination this Lenten season, let's remember that we do so in the embrace of a God of mercy who calls us to extend the same to others (and ourselves, too).

Prayer

God of mercy, we are not so different from David. We too go astray and find ourselves forgetting that you call us to be people of that same mercy—showing welcome to the stranger, compassion to the oppressed, forgiveness to others as imperfect as we are. Awaken in us the kind of self-

awareness that brings us deeper into the experience of your infinite and indescribable love so that we can incarnate that love to those who need it most.

Day 23

Jeremiah 10:11-24

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ They are worthless, a work of delusion;
at the time of their punishment they shall perish.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Gather up your bundle from the ground,
O you who live under siege!

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Woe is me because of my hurt!
My wound is severe.
But I said, "Truly this is my punishment,
and I must bear it."

²⁰ 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.

²¹ For the shepherds are stupid,
and do not inquire of the LORD;
therefore they have not prospered,
and all their flock is scattered.

²² 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.

²³ *I know, O LORD, that the way of human beings is not in their control,
that mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps.*

²⁴ *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!

John 8:21-32

²¹ *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."* ²² *Then the Jews said, "Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?"* ²³ *He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world."* ²⁴ *I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he."* ²⁵ *They said to him, "Who are you?"* *Jesus said to them, "Why do I speak to you at all?"* ²⁶ *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."* ²⁷ *They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father.* ²⁸ *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."* ²⁹ *And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him."* ³⁰ *As he was saying these things, many believed in him.* ³¹ *Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³² 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.

Psalm 27

¹ *The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?*

*The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*

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

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

⁴ *One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.*

⁵ *For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.*

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

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.

Day 24

John 8:33-47

³³ 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'?" ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father." ³⁹ They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, ⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ You are indeed doing what your father does." They said to him, "We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself." ⁴² 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. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. ⁴⁴ 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. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God."

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 22

¹ *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?*

² *O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.*

³ *Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

⁴ *In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.*

⁵ *To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹² *Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;*

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

¹⁴ *I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;*

it is melted within my breast;

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

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

¹⁷ *I can count all my bones.*

They stare and gloat over me;

¹⁸ *they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.*

¹⁹ But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword,
life from the power of the dog!
²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion!
From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
²² I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
²⁴ For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.
²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
²⁶ The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
May your hearts live forever!
²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
²⁸ For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.
²⁹ To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.
³⁰ Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
³¹ and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

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.

Psalm 130

¹ *Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.*

² *Lord, hear my voice!*

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

³ *If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?*

⁴ *But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.*

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

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

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

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

Jim Durlleser '78/'80

In Christian tradition, Psalm 130 is one of the seven penitential psalms and is known by its first words in the Latin version: De Profundis, "Out of the Depths." It is a personal prayer for help, a prayer for redemption, that is prayed from the depths, from the lowest points of life.

In a few weeks, we will observe Good Friday. We will remember the agony of the cross of Calvary and the darkest points of life. But then, for the rest of Friday and all day Saturday, we will wait. We will join the Hebrew poet who wrote Psalm 130 in declaring, "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope."

We wait and we hope in the LORD because we know that out of the darkest depths of Good Friday there will emerge a new dawn on Easter morning, a new dawn of life and renewal.

Prayer

Lord, we wait for you. During this Lenten season, out of the deepest and darkest depths of life, we hope in you. On Good Friday, as we remember Jesus' suffering and death, we put our hope in you. For we look forward to the life and renewal that you give us on Easter. Amen.

Day 25

Romans 6:12-23

¹²Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³No 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. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. ¹⁵What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶Do 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? ¹⁷But 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, ¹⁸and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I 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. ²⁰When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²²But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. ²³For 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

- ¹ *In you, O LORD, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.*
- ² *Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily.
Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me.*
- ³ *You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name’s sake lead me and guide me,*
- ⁴ *take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.*
- ⁵ *Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.*
- ⁶ *You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols,
but I trust in the LORD.*
- ⁷ *I will exult and rejoice in your steadfast love,
because you have seen my affliction;
you have taken heed of my adversities,*
- ⁸ *and have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy;
you have set my feet in a broad place.*
- ⁹ *Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also.*
- ¹⁰ *For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away.*
- ¹¹ *I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;*

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

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.

Day 26

Jeremiah 14:1-22

¹ *The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought:*

² *Judah mourns*

*and her gates languish;
they lie in gloom on the ground,
and the cry of Jerusalem goes up.*

³ *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,*

⁴ *because the ground is cracked.*

*Because there has been no rain on the land
the farmers are dismayed;
they cover their heads.*

⁵ *Even the doe in the field forsakes her newborn fawn
because there is no grass.*

⁶ *The wild asses stand on the bare heights,*

*they pant for air like jackals;
their eyes fail
because there is no herbage.*

⁷ *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.*

⁸ *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?*

⁹ *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!*

¹⁰ *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.*

¹¹ *The LORD said to me: Do not pray for the welfare of this people.* ¹² *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.* ¹³ *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.' ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ We acknowledge our wickedness, O LORD,

the iniquity of our ancestors,

for we have sinned against you.

²¹ Do not spurn us, for your name's sake;

do not dishonor your glorious throne;

remember and do not break your covenant with us.

²² 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.

Mark 8:11-21

¹¹ *The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him.* ¹² *And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation."* ¹³ *And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side.* ¹⁴ *Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.* ¹⁵ *And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out — beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod."* ¹⁶ *They said to one another, "It is because we have no bread."* ¹⁷ *And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"* ¹⁸ *Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember?"* ¹⁹ *When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?"* *They said to him, "Twelve."* ²⁰ *"And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?"* *And they said to him, "Seven."* ²¹ *Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"*

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

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

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

John 6:1-15

¹After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When 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?" ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" ¹⁰Jesus 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. ¹¹Then 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. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When 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." ¹⁵When 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, visiting 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.

Romans 7:1-12

¹Do 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? ²Thus 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. ³Accordingly, 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. ⁴In 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. ⁵While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. ⁶But 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. ⁷What then

should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead.⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived¹⁰ and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

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.

Psalm 145

- ¹ *I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.*
- ² *Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name forever and ever.*
- ³ *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
his greatness is unsearchable.*
- ⁴ *One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.*
- ⁵ *On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.*
- ⁶ *The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed,
and I will declare your greatness.*
- ⁷ *They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.*
- ⁸ *The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*
- ⁹ *The Lord is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.*
- ¹⁰ *All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
and all your faithful shall bless you.*
- ¹¹ *They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,*

*and tell of your power,
¹² to make known to all people your mighty deeds,
 and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
 and your dominion endures throughout all generations.
 The Lord is faithful in all his words,
 and gracious in all his deeds.
¹⁴ The Lord upholds all who are falling,
 and raises up all who are bowed down.
¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you,
 and you give them their food in due season.
¹⁶ You open your hand,
 satisfying the desire of every living thing.
¹⁷ The Lord is just in all his ways,
 and kind in all his doings.
¹⁸ The Lord is near to all who call on him,
 to all who call on him in truth.
¹⁹ He fulfills the desire of all who fear him;
 he also hears their cry, and saves them.
²⁰ The Lord watches over all who love him,
 but all the wicked he will destroy.
²¹ My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,
 and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.*

Roderick (Rick) 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

Day 28

Jeremiah 17:19–27

¹⁹Thus 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, ²⁰and 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. ²¹Thus 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. ²²And 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. ²³Yet they did not listen or incline their ear; they stiffened their necks and would not hear or receive instruction. ²⁴But 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, ²⁵then 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. ²⁶And 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. ²⁷But 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.

Psalms 34

- ¹ I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
- ² My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.
- ³ O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.
- ⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.
- ⁵ Look to him, and be radiant;

- so your faces shall never be ashamed.*
- ⁶ *This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.*
- ⁷ *The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.*
- ⁸ *O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.*
- ⁹ *O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.*
- ¹⁰ *The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*
- ¹¹ *Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*
- ¹² *Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?*
- ¹³ *Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.*
- ¹⁴ *Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.*
- ¹⁵ *The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their cry.*
- ¹⁶ *The face of the LORD is against evildoers,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.*
- ¹⁷ *When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,
and rescues them from all their troubles.*
- ¹⁸ *The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.*
- ¹⁹ *Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD rescues them from them all.*
- ²⁰ *He keeps all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.*
- ²¹ *Evil brings death to the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.*
- ²² *The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.*

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.

Psalm 146

¹ *Praise the LORD!*

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

² *I will praise the LORD as long as I live;*

I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

³ *Do not put your trust in princes,*

in mortals, in whom there is no help.

⁴ *When their breath departs, they return to the earth;*

on that very day their plans perish.

⁵ *Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,*

whose hope is in the LORD their God,

⁶ *who made heaven and earth,*

the sea, and all that is in them;

who keeps faith forever;

⁷ *who executes justice for the oppressed;*

who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;

⁸ *the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.*

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;

the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹ *The LORD watches over the strangers;*

he upholds the orphan and the widow,

but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰ *The LORD will reign forever,*

your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the LORD!

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.

Day 29

Jeremiah 18:1-11

¹The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²"Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." ³So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. ⁴The 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. ⁵Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁶"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. ⁷At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, ⁸but 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. ⁹And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, ¹⁰but 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. ¹¹Now, 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.

John 6:27-40

²⁷ "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." ²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰ So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?" ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." ³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never

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

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.

Romans 8:1-11

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

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.

Day 30

Jeremiah 22:13-23

- ¹³ 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;
- ¹⁴ 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.
- ¹⁵ 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.
- ¹⁶ He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well.
Is not this to know me?
says the LORD.
- ¹⁷ But your eyes and heart
are only on your dishonest gain,
for shedding innocent blood,
and for practicing oppression and violence.
- ¹⁸ 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!"
- ¹⁹ With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried —
dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.
- ²⁰ Go up to Lebanon, and cry out,
and lift up your voice in Bashan;
cry out from Abarim,
for all your lovers are crushed.
- ²¹ 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.
- ²² 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.
- ²³ 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

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh —¹³ for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ — if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. ¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. ²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Vera White, 1001 New Worshipping Communities associate (retired)

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.

Psalms 147:12-20

¹² *Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem!*

Praise your God, O Zion!

¹³ *For he strengthens the bars of your gates;
he blesses your children within you.*

¹⁴ *He grants peace within your borders;
he fills you with the finest of wheat.*

¹⁵ *He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.*

¹⁶ *He gives snow like wool;
he scatters frost like ashes.*

¹⁷ *He hurls down hail like crumbs—
who can stand before his cold?*

¹⁸ *He sends out his word, and melts them;
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.*

¹⁹ *He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.*

²⁰ *He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his ordinances.*

Praise the LORD!

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.

Day 31

John 6:52-59

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³ 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. ⁵⁴ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵ for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ 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.” ⁵⁹ 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.

Romans 8:28-39

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

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

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

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

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

"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

⁹ 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.*

¹⁰ *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.*

¹¹ *Both prophet and priest are ungodly;
even in my house I have found their wickedness,
says the LORD.*

¹² *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.*

¹³ *In the prophets of Samaria
I saw a disgusting thing:
they prophesied by Baal
and led my people Israel astray.*

¹⁴ *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.*

¹⁵ *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!

John 6:60-71

⁶⁰When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" ⁶¹But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you?" ⁶²Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴But 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. ⁶⁵And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father." ⁶⁶Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. ⁶⁷So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁰Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil." ⁷¹He 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

Mark 8:31-9:1

³¹Then 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. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But 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." ³⁴He 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. ³⁵For 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. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." ^{9:1}And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

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.

Psalms 84

- ¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
² My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

- ³ *Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.*
- ⁴ *Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise. Selah*
- ⁵ *Happy are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.*
- ⁶ *As they go through the valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.*
- ⁷ *They go from strength to strength;
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.*
- ⁸ *O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah*
- ⁹ *Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed.*
- ¹⁰ *For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.*
- ¹¹ *For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
he bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does the LORD withhold
from those who walk uprightly.*
- ¹² *O LORD of hosts,
happy is everyone who trusts in you.*

Graham McWilliams '18

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

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

Prayer

Loving God, in our faith we know that You are always with us; yet the world tries to shield us from You, and we have become downcast. We pray that Your power and strength would overcome our

human frailty, so that we may continue our journey through this pilgrimage of Lent until we can lift our heads upward to see the glory of Your risen and ascended presence. Amen.

Psalm 150

¹ *Praise the Lord!*

*Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty firmament!*

² *Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!*

³ *Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!*

⁴ *Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!*

⁵ *Praise him with clanging cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!*

⁶ *Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!*

John Magnuson '13

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

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

Prayer

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

Day 34

John 9:1-17

¹As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The 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?” ⁹Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He 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.” ¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.” ¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then 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.” ¹⁶Some 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. ¹⁷So 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.

Psalm 119:73-80

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

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.

Day 35

Jeremiah 25:8-17

⁸Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, ⁹I 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. ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ¹²Then 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. ¹³I 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. ¹⁴For 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. ¹⁵For 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. ¹⁶They shall drink and stagger and go out of their minds because of the sword that I am sending among them. ¹⁷So 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.

John 9:18-23

¹⁸ 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 ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ 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." ²² 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. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ 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?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹ 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." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹ 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.

Day 36

Jeremiah 25:30-38

³⁰ You, therefore, shall prophesy against them all these words, and say to them:

The LORD will roar from on high,
and from his holy habitation utter his voice;
he will roar mightily against his fold,
and shout, like those who tread grapes,
against all the inhabitants of the earth.

³¹ The clamor will resound to the ends of the earth,
for the LORD has an indictment against the nations;
he is entering into judgment with all flesh,
and the guilty he will put to the sword,

says the LORD.

³² Thus says the LORD of hosts:

See, disaster is spreading from nation to nation,
and a great tempest is stirring
from the farthest parts of the earth!

³³ Those slain by the LORD on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become dung on the surface of the ground.

³⁴ Wail, you shepherds, and cry out;
roll in ashes, you lords of the flock,
for the days of your slaughter have come—and your dispersions,
and you shall fall like a choice vessel.

³⁵ Flight shall fail the shepherds,
and there shall be no escape for the lords of the flock.

³⁶ Hark! the cry of the shepherds,
and the wail of the lords of the flock!

For the LORD is despoiling their pasture,

³⁷ and the peaceful folds are devastated,
because of the fierce anger of the LORD.

³⁸ Like a lion he has left his covert;
for their land has become a waste
because of the cruel sword,
and because of his fierce anger.

Romans 10:14-21

¹⁴ 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? ¹⁵ 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!” ¹⁶ But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

¹⁸ 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.”

¹⁹ 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.”

²⁰ *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.”

²¹ *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.

John 10:1-18

¹ *“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷ So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. ¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away — and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there*

will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ *For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again.* ¹⁸ *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."*

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

¹ At the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came from the LORD: ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ 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, ⁵ and to heed the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently — though you have not heeded—⁶ then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth. ⁷ The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. ⁸ 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!" ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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." ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ But as for me, here I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ 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." ¹⁷ And some of the elders of the land arose and said to all the assembled people, ¹⁸ "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.'

¹⁹ 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!" ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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. ²² Then King Jehoiakim sent Elnathan son of Achbor and men with him to Egypt, ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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.

John 10:19-42

¹⁹ Again the Jews were divided because of these words. ²⁰ Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?" ²¹ Others were saying, "These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" ²² At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; ²⁶ but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ The Father and I are one." ³¹ The Jews took up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" ³³ The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'?" ³⁵ If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods' — and the scripture cannot be annulled — ³⁶ can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'? ³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. ³⁸ But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." ³⁹ Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. ⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. ⁴¹ Many came to him, and they were saying, "John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." ⁴² And many believed in him there.

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.

Day 38

Jeremiah 29:1-14

¹ 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. ² 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. ³ The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said: ⁴ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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, ⁹ for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the LORD. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³ When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴ 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 world, 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.

John 11:1-27

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." ¹¹ After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." ¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

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

John 11:28–44

²⁸When 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.” ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The 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. ³²When 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.” ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” ³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus 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.” ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I 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.” ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴The 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, 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.

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.*

Catherine Craley '07

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

- ¹ *Praise the Lord!
Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.*
- ² *Let Israel be glad in its Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.*
- ³ *Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.*
- ⁴ *For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with victory.*
- ⁵ *Let the faithful exult in glory;*

let them sing for joy on their couches.
⁶ *Let the high praises of God be in their throats*
and two-edged swords in their hands,
⁷ *to execute vengeance on the nations*
and punishment on the peoples,
⁸ *to bind their kings with fetters*
and their nobles with chains of iron,
⁹ *to execute on them the judgment decreed.*
This is glory for all his faithful ones.
Praise the Lord!

Joanne Spence '18

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.

Day 40

Zechariah 9:9-12

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

Connie Gundry Tappy, staff

Anticipating the future fulfilment of these promises, the prophet Zechariah also declared, “And I [the LORD] will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. . . . On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity” (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1).

Recognizing the present fulfilling of these promises through Christ, the apostle Matthew wrote: “Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 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.’ The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. . . . the children [were] crying out in the temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David.’ [And Jesus] left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there” (Matthew 21:12-17). The most difficult work of fulfilling God’s promises lay just ahead.

Prayer

Lord God, please help us to honor Jesus’ unfathomably difficult yet unwaveringly faithful fulfilling of your gracious and merciful promises to your people by heeding your exhortation that we “Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which [we] were called and for which [we’ve] made the good confession.” By your Spirit, help us to “keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which [you] will bring about at the right time—[you] who [are] the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,” who “alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light . . . —to [you] be honor and eternal dominion” (from 1 Timothy 6:12-16). Amen.

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.

Psalm 42

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

² *My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and behold
the face of God?*

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

⁴ *These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,
and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival.*

⁵ *Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help⁶ and my God.
My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you*

*from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.*

⁷ *Deep calls to deep
at the thunder of your cataracts;
all your waves and your billows
have gone over me.*

⁸ *By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.*

⁹ *I say to God, my rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I walk about mournfully
because the enemy oppresses me?”*

¹⁰ *As with a deadly wound in my body,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually,
“Where is your God?”*

¹¹ *Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.*

Ciera (Cici) James, Student Association Secretary

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 41

John 12:9-19

⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus. ¹² The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

"Hosanna!

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

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

¹⁵ "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

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

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

Lisa Davis, student

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

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

Prayer

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

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!

Philippians 3:1-14

¹ 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. ² Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! ³ 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—⁴ 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: ⁵ 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; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸ 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 ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

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.

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.

Day 42

Jeremiah 15:10-21

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² Can iron and bronze break iron from the north? ¹³ Your wealth and your treasures I will give as plunder, without price, for all your sins, throughout all your territory. ¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ 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.

John 12:20-16

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very 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. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever 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.

Philippians 3:15-21

¹⁵ Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold fast to what we have attained. ¹⁷ Brothers and sisters,] join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

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.

Day 43

John 12:27-36

²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say — 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. ³⁴ The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" ³⁵ Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

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.

Day 44

Jeremiah 20:7–18

- ⁷ 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.
- ⁸ 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.
- ⁹ 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.
- ¹⁰ 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."
- ¹¹ 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.
- ¹² 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.
- ¹³ Sing to the LORD;
praise the LORD!
For he has delivered the life of the needy
from the hands of evildoers.
- ¹⁴ Cursed be the day
on which I was born!
The day when my mother bore me,
let it not be blessed!
- ¹⁵ Cursed be the man
who brought the news to my father, saying,

*"A child is born to you, a son,"
making him very glad.*

¹⁶ *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,*

¹⁷ *because he did not kill me in the womb;
so my mother would have been my grave,
and her womb forever great.*

¹⁸ *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 17:1-11

¹After 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, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. ⁶"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know

that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for 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. ⁹I 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. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And 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. ¹²While 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. ¹³But 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. ¹⁴I 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. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that 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. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I 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. ²⁴Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵"Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶I 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.

Day 45

John 13:36-38

³⁶Simon 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." ³⁷Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." ³⁸Jesus 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 mediations 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.

1 Peter 1:10-20

¹⁰Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, ¹¹inquiring 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. ¹²It 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! ¹³Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. ¹⁴Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. ¹⁵Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; ¹⁶for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." ¹⁷If 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. ¹⁸You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways

inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.²⁰ He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.

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.

Psalm 22

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

¹³ *they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.*
¹⁴ *I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;*
¹⁵ *my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.*
¹⁶ *For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;*
¹⁷ *I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;*
¹⁸ *they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.*
¹⁹ *But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!*
²⁰ *Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!*
²¹ *Save me from the mouth of the lion!
From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.*
²² *I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:*
²³ *You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!*
²⁴ *For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.*
²⁵ *From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.*
²⁶ *The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
May your hearts live forever!*
²⁷ *All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.*
²⁸ *For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.*
²⁹ *To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.*
³⁰ *Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,*

³¹ *and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.*

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.

Day 46

Job 19:21-27a

- ²¹ *Have pity on me, have pity on me,
O you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me!*
- ²² *Why do you, like God, pursue me,
never satisfied with my flesh?*
- ²³ *“O that my words were written down!
O that they were inscribed in a book!*
- ²⁴ *O that with an iron pen and with lead
they were engraved on a rock for ever!*
- ²⁵ *For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;*
- ²⁶ *and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God,*
- ²⁷ *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.

Romans 8:1-11

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

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.

Psalm 43

- ¹ Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
against an ungodly people;
from those who are deceitful and unjust
deliver me!
- ² For you are the God in whom I take refuge;
why have you cast me off?
Why must I walk about mournfully
because of the oppression of the enemy?

- ³ *O send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling.*
- ⁴ *Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy;
and I will praise you with the harp,
O God, my God.*
- ⁵ *Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.*

Karen Bowden Cooper '98

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

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

Prayer

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

Day 47

Isaiah 51:9-11

- ⁹ *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?*
- ¹⁰ *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?*
- ¹¹ *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

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then 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?" ¹⁹He 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, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But 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. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and 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. ²⁴Some 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." ²⁵Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They 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?" ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵Then 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.

John 20:1-18

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes. ¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

KJ Norris '14

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

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

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

Prayer

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