



Lenten Devotional 2020

We hope you'll follow along daily, be deepened in your faith through this year's ministry of our Distinguished Alums, with additional contributions by Board members, and prepare your heart to celebrate at Easter the new life that Jesus Christ made possible for all.

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**PITTSBURGH
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY**

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Darrell W. Yeaney '56, Specialized Ministry (2005)

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 12:1-14

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

DEVOTIONAL

The writer of the Book of Hebrews is unknown, but his intention is clear. Writing to Jewish Christians in the first century CE, he was keenly aware of the struggles faced by people of faith who lived in the pagan and polytheistic empire of Rome. That is why his writing is as explicit and clear as it is helpful to us today.

Our world may be scientifically and technologically far advanced over the writer's known world—the pagan world of the Roman Empire—but it is no less brimming with false gods. We have grown up in a secular culture where our idols are fame, power, wealth, and pleasure—all modern symbols of success.

Yet as Christians we know, and are reminded especially during this period of Lent, of the lures that lead folks—including ourselves—into what the Scriptures call "sin," a life forgetful of God's presence and call to unselfish, compassionate living. The writer of Hebrews reminds us followers of Jesus that the remedy to keep us from these modern, powerful, social distractions of success is the same as that in the first century: "keep your eyes on Jesus."

PRAYER

Dear Lord of the universe, of time, and of our lives, give us the wisdom and courage to heed the insights of the writer of the Book of Hebrews as we face the attractions of today's false gods. Give us the wisdom to be aware of the misleading lures of our popular culture. And give us the courage to turn away and set the eyes of our hearts on Jesus. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Stephen D. Crocco '78, Academia (2005)

SCRIPTURE

Habakkuk 3:1-18

1 A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk according to Shigionoth.
2 O LORD, I have heard of your renown,
and I stand in awe, O LORD, of your work.
In our own time revive it;
in our own time make it known;
in wrath may you remember mercy.
3 God came from Teman,
the Holy One from Mount Paran.
His glory covered the heavens,
and the earth was full of his praise.
4 The brightness was like the sun;
rays came forth from his hand,
where his power lay hidden.
5 Before him went pestilence,
and plague followed close behind.
6 He stopped and shook the earth;
he looked and made the nations tremble.
The eternal mountains were shattered;
along his ancient pathways
the everlasting hills sank low.
7 I saw the tents of Cushan under affliction;
the tent-curtains of the land of Midian trembled.
8 Was your wrath against the rivers, O LORD?
Or your anger against the rivers,
or your rage against the sea,
when you drove your horses,
your chariots to victory?
9 You brandished your naked bow,
sated were the arrows at your command.
You split the earth with rivers.

10 The mountains saw you, and writhed;
a torrent of water swept by;
the deep gave forth its voice.
The sun raised high its hands;
11 the moon stood still in its exalted place,
at the light of your arrows speeding by,
at the gleam of your flashing spear.
12 In fury you trod the earth,
in anger you trampled nations.
13 You came forth to save your people,
to save your anointed.
You crushed the head of the wicked house,
laying it bare from foundation to roof.
14 You pierced with their own arrows the head of his
warriors,
who came like a whirlwind to scatter us,
gloating as if ready to devour the poor who were in hiding.
15 You trampled the sea with your horses,
churning the mighty waters.
16 I hear, and I tremble within;
my lips quiver at the sound.
Rottenness enters into my bones,
and my steps tremble beneath me.
I wait quietly for the day of calamity
to come upon the people who attack us.
17 Though the fig tree does not blossom,
and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails
and the fields yield no food;
though the flock is cut off from the fold
and there is no herd in the stalls,
18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will exult in the God of my salvation.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2020

The Rev. Sue Sterling Montgomery '77, Pastoral Ministry (1998)

SCRIPTURE

John 17:9-19

9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

DEVOTIONAL

John's Gospel passage could be called a conundrum of words going 'round and around. They sound a lot like the 1930s song "The Music Goes Round and Round," recorded by Tommy Dorsey:

I blow through here,
The music goes 'round and around—
Whoa-ho-ho-ho-ho—
And it comes out here.
I push the first valve down,
The Music goes down and around—
Whoa-ho-ho-ho-ho—
And it comes out here.
I push the other valve down,

The music goes 'round and around—
Whoa-ho-ho-ho-ho—
And it comes out here.

Jesus' prayer seems a lot like air going 'round and around in a trumpet and coming out as sounds—sounds that are confusing: no longer in the world/in the world, hated by the world/do not belong to the world, not out of the world/no longer in the world, into the world—what?

To understand Jesus' prayer we have to go back in time and understand how two opposite views of life guided ancient thinking. Greek philosophy saw the world as divided into two realms: the earthly and the spiritual. This view led to a major understanding of Christianity that still haunts us today—the belief that Christianity is about life not in this world but in the next world. Jesus brings these dual and conflicting images into his prayer. He knows the people listening to him are struggling to understand, just as we are, these dualities as well as the more troubling concepts of heaven and hell. This way of thinking has a long history that isn't going to go away.

But Jesus gives us another way to view our complicated and spinning world. He was nurtured in the Judaic understandings of life and creation: the world—heaven and earth—is one *holy* place created by God. God is *in* the world, and holiness in life is lived *in* the world. Nowhere do we see this view more clearly than in the words of the Lord's Prayer for God's kingdom to come "on earth as it is in heaven."

As the music goes 'round and around in our lives, where is it coming out—in love, or in Law? In grace and forgiveness, or in fear and judgment? Is the song we are singing *in* the world and affirming of life? Or is it a song of separation? May the music of our hearts go 'round and around—and come out with Jesus' glorious and jubilant words of grace, faith, and promise.

PRAYER

Most gracious and loving God, on the night of Jesus' birth his cry burst into song, which changed history. As he grew, his teachings became life-changing songs of love. When he was tried, crucified, and died, the world thought his song was silenced. His resurrection brought forth a glorious song of unending love. Help us never to forget that, if Christ's song is to continue, we must do the singing. May we sing a jubilant song of faith, hope, love, and justice "on earth as it is in heaven." In Christ we pray, amen.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2020

The Rev. Lisa Dormire '86, Specialized Ministry (2006)

SCRIPTURE

Ezekiel 39:21-29

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

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Donald P. Owens '69, Academia (2002)

SCRIPTURE

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

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

the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—23 therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. 24 He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

DEVOTIONAL

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

Human beings continually make poor choices and pursue inadequate remedies for their mistakes. Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and realized they were naked. To remedy their vulnerability, they made clothes of fig leaves. But humans are allergic to fig leaves, not to mention the leaves are not large enough to cover what needs to be covered and wilt shortly after being taken from the tree. Adam and Eve were afraid. They suffered deep and profound fear.

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

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

PRAYER

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

MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2020

*The Rev. Paul D. Wierman '61, Pastoral Ministry (2013)
Written before he died July 15, 2019*

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 6

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

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

and thus that hymns based on ideas found in the Bible were unacceptable. Contemporary worshipers, on the other hand, love Watts's familiar hymns.

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2020

Steven A. Falci '03, Specialized Ministry (2016)

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 1:20-31

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. 26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are,

29 so that no one might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

PRAYER

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

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2020

The Rev. Dr. James E. Davison '69, Academia (2009)

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 2:1-13

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

but on the power of God. 6 Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. 7 But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"—10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13 And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

Glorious God, I thank you that in Jesus Christ you have revealed your hidden wisdom and displayed your power through what our world calls weakness and foolishness. Grant that I, too, may display wisdom in serving and giving of myself, instead of striving after success or seeking for things such as worldly approval or acclaim. In Christ, the Lord of glory, I pray. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Tami Hooker '02, Specialized Ministry (2017)

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 39:1-23

1 Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. 2 The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. 5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. 6 So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate. Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. 7 And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. 9 He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" 10 And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not consent to lie beside her or to be with her. 11 One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house, 12 she

caught hold of his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. 13 When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, 14 she called out to the members of her household and said to them, "See, my husband has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us! He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; 15 and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside." 16 Then she kept his garment by her until his master came home, 17 and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; 18 but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside." 19 When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, "This is the way your servant treated me," he became enraged. 20 And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. 21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. 22 The chief jailer committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. 23 The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

But Joseph and my friend, both wrongly convicted prisoners, show us a different way. It doesn't require that we stop working for justice. But it does involve refusing to grant the actions of others or even our circumstances the power to change who we are and what we do. That power rightfully

belongs only to God, who claims us as God's own, who is with us in our times of struggle and disappointment, and who finds a way to show us such great favor in our most challenging circumstances that it is apparent even to those outside the faith.

PRAYER

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

FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 2020

The Rev. Carey Jo Johnston '03, Mission (2019)

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 40:1-23

1 Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt. 2 Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, 3 and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. 4 The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he waited on them; and they continued for some time in custody. 5 One night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own meaning. 6 When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. 7 So he asked Pharaoh's officers, who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today?" 8 They said to him, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpret them to God? Please tell them to me." 9 So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream there was a vine before me, 10 and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms came out and the clusters ripened into grapes. 11 Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." 12 Then Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days; 13 within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. 14 But remember me when it

is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place. 15 For in fact I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon." 16 When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, "I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, 17 and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head." 18 And Joseph answered, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; 19 within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a pole; and the birds will eat the flesh from you." 20 On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants, and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. 21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand; 22 but the chief baker he hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. 23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

SATURDAY, MARCH 7, 2020

Dr. Sandra A. Collins '87, Academia (2018)

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 41:1-13

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

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

In the midst of serving this mercurial pharaoh, the cupbearer realizes he has failed the captive Joseph.

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2020

The Rev. Dr. William R. Myers '67, Academia (2010)

SCRIPTURE

Romans 6:3-14

3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For whoever has died is freed from sin.

8 But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

MONDAY, MARCH 9, 2020

The Rev. Michael Stanton '06, Mission (2017)

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 41:46-57

46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. 47 During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. 48 He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. 49 So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure. 50 Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphra, priest of On, bore to him. 51 Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” 52 The second he named Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.” 53 The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; 54 and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. 55 When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do.” 56 And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. 57 Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

DEVOTIONAL

As I began writing this meditation, I was struggling with depression, overwhelmed by vocational challenges, and dogged by a sense of dread that I was failing. It was in that mental state that I found the depiction of Joseph’s prosperity and success irritating—until Manasseh and Ephraim were birthed into the story. The names of Joseph’s sons serve as reminders of the hardships and misfortunes Joseph had

endured for the better part of his 30 years of life: being forsaken by his brothers and sold into slavery, falsely accused of a crime and imprisoned—unmerited hardships resulting from the jealousy and spite of others and instigated, ironically enough, by Joseph’s God-given gifts and obedience.

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2020

Dr. Daniel O. Aleshire, Board Member.

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 42:1-17

1 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you keep looking at one another? 2 I

have heard,” he said, “that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.”

3 So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he feared that harm might come to him. 5 Thus the sons of Israel were among the other people who came to buy grain, for the famine had reached the land of Canaan. 6 Now Joseph was governor over the land; it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. 7 When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them. “Where do you come from?” he said. They said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.” 8 Although Joseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. 9 Joseph also remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them. He said to them, “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!” 10 They said to him, “No, my lord; your servants have come to buy food. 11 We are all sons of one man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies.” 12 But he said to them, “No, you have come to see the nakedness of the land!” 13 They said, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is no more.” 14 But Joseph said to them, “It is just as I have said to you; you are spies! 15 Here is how you shall be tested: as Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here! 16 Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies.” 17 And he put them all together in prison for three days.

DEVOTIONAL

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

In today’s text, it is not clear why Joseph treats his brothers the way that he does. One reading would put anger at the center of his behavior: he treats them harshly; accuses them of being spies even though he knows they are not; requires one of them to return to Canaan to get the youngest brother, and puts the rest in jail for a few days. Another reading is that Joseph is the loyal governor of the pharaoh—and at a time when many were coming to Egypt in search of food because of widespread famine, it is Joseph’s job to care

for the careful distribution of Egypt's food reserves—even if the petitioners are his brothers and he is pompous and overbearing about how he does the job. While the story continues with tender moments, with food for Abraham and his family, and even with reconciliation among the brothers, this text is full of reminders of tragically broken brotherly bonds.

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

PRAYER

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

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Helsel (Hetz) Marsh '68/'87, Pastoral Ministry (2000)

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 5:9-6:11

9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons—10 not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? 13 God will judge those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you." 6:1 When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters? 4 If you have ordinary cases, then, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? 5 I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, 6 but a believer goes to court against a believer—and before unbelievers at

that? 7 In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? 8 But you yourselves wrong and defraud—and believers at that. 9 Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, 10 thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

DEVOTIONAL

The "verse" that immediately comes to mind as I read today's passage from 1 Corinthians 5 is "in the world, but not of the world." But there is no such verse! Nevertheless, several New Testament verses make the point: John 15:19, "If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you"; John 17:16, "They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world"; John 2:15-16, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world"; Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God"; and James 1:27, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this; to care for orphans and widows in distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

"In the world" is our locus, our location. We cannot influence the world as "light" and "salt" if we are not in it. But we are not to draw from the world as our source of inspiration or behavior. This was no easy task for the Corinthian Christians, surrounded as they were by hedonism. It is no easy task for us either. We are called to be "holy," to be different from the world. None of us reaches this goal. Thus the need both for forgiveness and for God's transforming presence and power. We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, but we are sanctified by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

David McFarland, formerly of the Sewickley Presbyterian Church, defined sanctification as "the process of growing to be more and more like Jesus Christ for the sake of others." The goal of our journey of faith is the integration of Christ into everything we do. If we do so, the world will see the love of God through us.

PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, when, as you taught us, we pray "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven," we are reminded that the church is sent into the world so that the world will know eternal life, which is to

"know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Continue, we pray, your Spirit's transformation of us from within. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 2020

The Rev. Dr. W. Fred Graham '55, Academia (2006)

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. 13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." 17 But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

DEVOTIONAL

As our brother Paul addresses divisive issues in the young church at Corinth, he is forced to assert over and over again the young Christians' freedom ("by grace [which is a gift] are you saved") while living in wholesome community in a pagan world. This situation means that all manner of issues come up: food and drink, hairstyles, prostitution, lawsuits, and the list goes on. So to believers trying to find their way in such a society, Paul returns again and again to the slogan-like admonition, "all things are lawful, but not all are beneficial."

The human body is good, not evil, as some ascetics would assert. After all, our Lord rose in body from the grave. Our Lord owns my body and your body. His Spirit is within. So during Lent, perhaps we should examine how we use the body God has gifted to each one of us. Do we work too much? Eat too much? Loaf around too much? Join me in asking yourself, What balance can I find today as I work and live in loving community with other followers of the Risen One?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, take my whole self this day, and inspire me to admire what you are about within my heart and by my hands. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2020

The Rev. Michael C. Gehrling '08, Creative Ministry (2018)

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 7:1-9

1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman." 2 But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 This I say by way of concession, not of command. 7 I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind. 8 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. 9 But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.

DEVOTIONAL

"I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind." These words from today's Scripture passage from 1 Corinthians have been words to which I've returned regularly over the past 15 years. I'm single. And the reminder that my single life is as much a gift from God as the lives of my married friends is an assurance. It's also a challenge.

The Greek word translated "gift" in this verse is *charisma*. It's the same word Paul uses to describe spiritual gifts just a few chapters later in this epistle. What if we thought of our singleness or marriage less as gifts for ourselves to enjoy and more as spiritual gifts given by God through us to the Church?

As a single person, I've experienced the gift of married people in my community. They bring into my life a sense of stability and a rootedness in place. Sacramentally, their love and relationship point me to the love between Christ and the Church.

As a single person, I've also seen how my singleness makes me available to my community. That's not to say, as many think, that singleness means having more hours and energy to give. As a single person, I still need time for personal spiritual practices, for rest and recreation, and for the work of maintaining a home (work which I do without the help of a partner). But I do bring to my community a certain flexibility and availability. I can bring single-minded attentiveness to each person I encounter and to God. Sacramentally, I can point my community to the virgins with oil in their lamps waiting for the Bridegroom to come, or to the angels who with single-minded devotion never stop crying, "Holy."

How is your singleness, or your marriage, a gift to your community?

PRAYER

God, you generously entrust each of us with the gift of singleness or the gift of marriage. Help us to steward these gifts faithfully, that whatever our station in life, it may be a blessing to the Church and to the world. We pray in the name of Christ, the Bridegroom who lived in single-minded devotion to you. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 2020

The Rev. Diane Fonderlin '89, Mission (2018)

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 7:10-24

10 To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband 11 (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. 12 To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. 13 And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 15 But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you. 16 Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife. 17 However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches. 18 Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision

is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything. 20 Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called. 21 Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever. 22 For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters. 24 In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God.

DEVOTIONAL

During our time in the overseas mission field, my husband, Tim, and I lived in some of the world's most impoverished nations. Over the years, we encountered countless challenges as we sought ways to work alongside people who needed decent shelter, good health care, enough food to eat, and educational opportunities.

To say that I never thought about just packing up and leaving would not be honest. Sometimes I would get so frustrated with bureaucratic red tape and corrupt government officials that I would mentally throw my hands in the air and say, "Lord, I'm ready to get out of here!"

But then I would spend a morning with Carl, the young man who served as my interpreter for seminary classes, and all those thoughts would melt away. Very bright and with a grasp of English that was so good, Carl would easily translate difficult theological concepts into explanations that Creole- and French-speaking students could understand. Knowing of Carl's desire to teach theology, I often thought how great it would be for him to study at a seminary in the U.S. or France. There he could flourish, get hired at a good theological school, and help equip future pastors.

But Carl has other ideas. Yes, he would like to take graduate courses at a good seminary, but his ultimate goal would always be to return to his homeland to teach theology. Because of all the limitations that people in his home country face, Carl wants to be a part of giving students the best schooling possible. This young man is truly content to "bloom where he was planted."

That principle is what Paul teaches the church at Corinth here in verses 10-24 of chapter 7. Many of those baby Christians were still holding on to their old way of life, and Paul's first letter to them is one of good, practical counsel. He wants people to understand that they can be good Christians no matter their circumstances—and that they can bring about change by being obedient to the gospel.

These are words that still hold true for us—today!

PRAYER

Lord of all creation, desire of our hearts, we thank you that we are able to come to you in the knowledge that our words reach loving ears. We are humbled by such caring. In this season of Lent, help us, we pray, to understand more fully your purposes for our lives. Strengthen us and guide us in the power of your great and Holy Spirit so that we may fulfill those purposes. For in doing so, our hope is that we may represent you in this world with all the graciousness, kindness, generosity, forgiveness, and love that Jesus Christ himself revealed when he walked this earth. O Lord, we truly want to be participants in your Kingdom-building! In the name of Christ, amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 2020

Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, Board Member

GENESIS 44:1-17

Psalm 150

1 Then he commanded the steward of his house, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the top of his sack. 2 Put my cup, the silver cup, in the top of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him. 3 As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. 4 When they had gone only a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward, "Go, follow after the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my silver cup? 5 Is it not from this that my lord drinks? Does he not indeed use it for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.'" 6 When he overtook them, he repeated these words to them. 7 They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing! 8 Look, the money that we found at the top of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; why then would we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? 9 Should it be found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover the rest of us will become my lord's slaves." 10 He said, "Even so; in accordance with your words, let it be: he with whom it is found shall become my slave, but the rest of you shall go free." 11 Then each one quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. 12 He searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. 13 At this they tore their clothes. Then each one loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city. 14 Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house while he was still there; and they fell to the ground before him. 15 Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that one such as I can practice divination?" 16 And Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak?

How can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; here we are then, my lord's slaves, both we and also the one in whose possession the cup has been found." 17 But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the one in whose possession the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father."

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

SCRIPTURE

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.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2020

The Rev. Dr. William N. Jackson '61, Pastoral Ministry (2017)

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 7:26-29a, 32-38

26 I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. 29 I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; . . . 32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; 33 but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. 35 I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord. 36 If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée, if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. 37 But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control, and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well. 38 So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.

DEVOTIONAL

A cursory reading of these verses from 1 Corinthians 7 might lead one to think that they merely discuss the contrasts (the pros and cons) between being married and being celibate—which is better or worse? The text is actually, however, a statement about the obvious differences regarding the number of demands, duties, and pressures—or lack of them—attendant to each marital status.

Paul states that it would be easier (and perhaps better) for a single person to fulfill his/her calling without the hindrances and distractions that can come with marriage. But he also says very clearly that marriage is not a sin. In fact later, in Ephesians, he says that marriage is a significant symbol, sign, and example of the perfect relationship between Christ and his bride, the Church.

The crucial point in his letter to the Corinthians is that Paul was certain the return of Christ was imminent; it constituted the “impending crisis” of verse 26. Another translation reads, “the time is short.” So for Paul there was

an urgency, an imperative, for the followers of Jesus to be ready imminently—to be prepared by putting all their priorities in place. Whether married or celibate, then, and whatever extra personal responsibilities attended them, the Corinthian Christians’ top priority should be readiness and empowerment by the Spirit as Christ’s faithful, well-prepared, obedient servants.

The message for us here in this Lenten season is to take another opportunity for disciplined worship, study, and prayer to re-enforce our “top priority” to fulfill our role of being dedicated disciples, stewards, and witnesses for the Lord, even as we hear again the haunting echo of Jesus saying to us, “You must be ready [AT ANY TIME], for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you least expect.”

PRAYER

Oh Lord, may our relationship with you through our daily discipline and devotion of study and prayer make us ready at any time for all opportunities to fulfill our “top priority” to be your faithful, loyal, and obedient servants—ones who share your love and grace with all the family, friends, neighbors, and strangers we will encounter today. In the name of Jesus our Savior, amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Linda Jo H. McKim '77, Academia (1994)

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 45:16-28

16 When the report was heard in Pharaoh’s house, “Joseph’s brothers have come,” Pharaoh and his servants were pleased. 17 Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: load your animals and go back to the land of Canaan. 18 Take your father and your households and come to me, so that I may give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you may enjoy the fat of the land.’ 19 You are further charged to say, ‘Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. 20 Give no thought to your possessions, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’” 21 The sons of Israel did so. Joseph gave them wagons according to the instruction of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey. 22 To each one of them he gave a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. 23 To his father he sent the following: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. 24 Then he sent his brothers on their way, and as they were leaving he said to them, “Do not quarrel along the way.” 25 So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. 26 And they told

him, "Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt." He was stunned; he could not believe them. 27 But when they told him all the words of Joseph that he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 28 Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die."

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Edward Newberry '71, Pastoral Ministry (2012)

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 9:1-15

1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 This is my defense to those who would examine me. 4 Do we not have the right to our food and drink? 5 Do we not have the right to be accompanied

by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? 7 Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk? 8 Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? 10 Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever plows should plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop. 11 If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? 12 If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? 14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. 15 But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this so that they may be applied in my case. Indeed, I would rather die than that—no one will deprive me of my ground for boasting!

DEVOTIONAL

Today's passage of 15 verses contains 17 questions asked by Paul to the Corinthians. Each question is different and somewhat rhetorical, but all relate to his work as an apostle. Reflecting other assertions of authority, such as "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God," and Paul's comment in verse 3, "this is my defense," the passage could be seen as another effort by Paul to declare that he is a real apostle. The powerful authority claimed here is rooted in the notion of freedom, framed by the opening question: "Am I not free?" It sounds like Paul's commission by the risen Christ has established his freedom to do as he pleases when enacting his apostolic ministry.

Today's passage is part of a larger section of the letter—a section dealing with Christian freedom, especially in the matter of eating meat offered to idols. Assuring Christians of sound knowledge that "food will not bring us close to God," Paul is using himself and his exercise of freedom as an example, as strong Christians relate to weaker believers who are worried and wrestling with this dilemma.

In the modern West of 2020, we individual Christians are not defending our "apostleship" or worrying about idol-tainted food. So what does this passage say to our reflections and spiritual disciplines during Lent? An interpretation contrary to the traditional understanding of Paul's purpose here might help: says one commentary, Paul is not defending his right to be an apostle, but explaining why he has not *exercised*

his rights as an apostle, namely, he doesn't want to be a stumbling block, a hindrance to the gospel of Jesus Christ. For Christians who revere the gospel, that sounds like a worthy goal for Lent—or any time—as we live out our faith.

As individuals who are joined with others in the body of Christ, we might look to Paul's convictions as an apostle of Christ for guidance regarding our witness in Christian life together. In explaining the marks of the Church, the PC(USA) *Book of Order* speaks of the apostolicity of the Church as God's gift in Jesus Christ. Our calling and mission as those sent by Christ is to proclaim the gospel of God's love, grace,

truth, freedom, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, and salvation in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, for the whole world.

We could follow Paul's example of sacrificial freedom in our witness of word and deed. We could strive not to hinder but rather to further the proclamation and living of this good news. Our faithfulness as Christ's body, the Church, will determine the outcome.

PRAYER

Holy God, your eternal love sent Jesus Christ to our world. The Lordship of Jesus sends us into our world. Both of these commissions are signs of apostolic responsibility. Help us to know the blessing of being the Church, which is charged with continuing the mission and message of the Savior. We seek to proclaim Jesus and his truth as good news. Empower consistent and sincere faithfulness in our ministries. May all we do as your Church bless our world and glorify our gracious Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2020

Josephine (Jodi) Brodhead Moore '96, Mission (2016)

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 47:1-26

1 So Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; they are now in the land of Goshen." 2 From among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. 3 Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our ancestors were." 4 They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to reside as aliens in the land; for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks because the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, we ask you, let your servants settle in the land of Goshen." 5 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. 6 The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best

part of the land; let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock." 7 Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob, and presented him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8 Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the years of your life?" 9 Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my earthly sojourn are one hundred thirty; few and hard have been the years of my life. They do not compare with the years of the life of my ancestors during their long sojourn." 10 Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. 11 Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and granted them a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had instructed. 12 And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents. 13 Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. 14 Joseph collected all the money to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. 15 When the money from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan was spent, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, "Give us food! Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone." 16 And Joseph answered, "Give me your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone." 17 So they brought their livestock to Joseph; and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. That year he supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock. 18 When that year was ended, they came to him the following year, and said to him, "We cannot hide from my lord that our money is all spent; and the herds of cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. 19 Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate." 20 So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. All the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's. 21 As for the people, he made slaves of them from one end of Egypt to the other. 22 Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh, and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land. 23 Then Joseph said to the people, "Now that I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you; sow the land. 24 And at the harvests you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones." 25 They said, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh." 26 So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth. The land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we are beloved sinners of your own creation who are striving always to be more like you. Help us to recognize and root out our need to define ourselves by "the other." Help us to recognize how this attitude permeates

society and our institutions. Bless us with a kingdom-view of your creation and a revelation of a just world in which all can participate equally. For it is through your blessing that our fractured world can attain salvation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Myles W. MacDonald '55, Pastoral Ministry (2009)

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 47:27-48:7

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

DEVOTIONAL

Years ago, when preparing for a visit to the Holy Land, I had an opportunity to discuss my proposed itinerary with Dr. Kenneth Bailey, my seminary classmate and a noted theologian who resided and taught for years in the Middle East. When I told him I wanted to visit Hebron, the burial place of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, he strongly advised me that it was not worth the trip. So I followed his advice and

didn't go there (though I admit there are times when I wish I had done so out of respect for our spiritual ancestors).

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

second that he wanted to bless Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (because of Joseph's birthright).

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

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

PRAYER

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

SUNDAY, MARCH 22, 2020

Robert Benedetto '77, Academia (2013)

SCRIPTURE

Romans 8:11-25

11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. 12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. 18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth

comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

In times such as these, O God, we wait in Lenten apprehension and hope, longing for the preservation of humanity, the restoration of your creation, and the redemption of both through the sustaining and transforming presence of your Holy Spirit in our hearts and in our world. We “groan inwardly” as we wait for our full and complete adoption as sons and daughters of your Kingdom and for the New Creation you have promised. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Carol B. Pitts '89, Specialized Ministry (2011)

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 49:1-28

1 Then Jacob called his sons, and said: “Gather around, that I may tell you what will happen to you in days to come. 2 Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob; listen to Israel your father. 3 Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the first fruits of my vigor, excelling in rank and excelling in power. 4 Unstable as water, you shall no longer excel because you went up onto your father’s bed; then you defiled it—you went up onto my couch! 5 Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. 6 May I never come into their council; may I not be joined to their company—for in their anger they killed men, and at their whim they hamstringed oxen. 7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel. 8 Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons shall bow down before you. 9 Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness - who dares rouse him up? 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his. 11 Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes; 12 his eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk. 13 Zebulun shall settle at the shore of the sea; he shall be a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon. 14 Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds; 15 he saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant; so he bowed his shoulder to the burden, and became a slave at forced labor. 16 Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. 17 Dan shall be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path which bites the horse’s heels so that its rider falls backward. 18 I wait for your salvation, O LORD. 19 Gad shall be raided by raiders, but he shall raid at their heels. 20 Asher’s food shall be rich, and he shall provide royal delicacies. 21 Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears lovely fawns. 22 Joseph is a fruitful bough,

a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. 23 The archers fiercely attacked him; they shot at him and pressed him hard. 24 Yet his bow remained taut, and his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, 25 by the God of your father, who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. 26 The blessings of your father are stronger than the blessings of the eternal mountains, the bounties of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers. 27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey, and at evening dividing the spoil.” 28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, blessing each one of them with a suitable blessing.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Robert J. Weingartner '82, Mission (2012)

SCRIPTURE

Mark 8:1-10

1 In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them,
2 "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. 3 If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance."
4 His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" 5 He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." 6 Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. 7 They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. 8 They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. 9 Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. 10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

DEVOTIONAL

The familiar story of Jesus' feeding the 4000, related in today's Gospel reading, has troubled scholars a bit. Some see such close parallels with the feeding of the 5000 that they conclude it is the same event. But in Mark 8:19 Jesus himself refers to the two feedings, and Mark 6:30-44 has already recorded the feeding of the 5000.

In today's reading from Mark 8, Jesus is in the region of the Decapolis, on the eastern shore of Galilee—an area populated by Jews and Gentiles. It appears that Jesus is there for an intensive time of teaching, and what seems to occur in this remarkable fellowship meal is that both Jew and Gentile sit together. Jesus has entered pagan territory to give a glimpse of his concern for all peoples and the global scale of the commission he will give his disciples.

Jesus observes the great need of the crowd and asks the disciples what could be done. His disciples reply, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" Do the disciples lack confidence in Jesus' ability to perform another miracle? I don't think so. Are they just being cautious, not wanting to appear to be directing Jesus in a course of action? Perhaps. Or maybe they are still trying to figure out who this Jesus is and what it means for him to be at work in the world and their lives. Mark tells us after the first feeding that they "did not understand about the loaves" (6:52).

There is much that I don't understand about what it means for Jesus to be at work in my life. Why does God seem to act in some moments but not in others? What is the connection between our prayer and God's action? We can gain insight into those questions as we live with the stories of Jesus told in the Gospels. I see myself in those stories, with the crowds that have begun to gather around Jesus—those who come to him with broken hopes and broken hearts and broken bodies. I have discovered that I, too, am hungry for things that one can find only in Jesus.

PRAYER

Lord, as we follow Jesus and commit ourselves afresh to living for him in the world, we pray not only for ourselves and others who trust in Jesus—we ask that you will also hear our prayers in behalf of people who do not yet know him. May we share and show God's love to all whom you bring our way. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Carolyn J. Jones '77/'89, Pastoral Ministry (2005)

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 147:1-11

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

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

How will we give God pleasure today?

PRAYER

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

THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2020

Dr. Bradshaw L. Frey '77/'83, Academia (2017)

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 1:6-22

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

multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. 13 The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, 14 and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them. 15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 16 “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.” 17 But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. 18 So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” 20 So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. 22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.”

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

The people of Israel would have to wait for centuries for the one described as the Prince of Peace to resolve the constant violence of life in the world. And yet the very violence of empire and sin was visited on Christ himself. He knew the

pain of violence suffered by vulnerable children and those on the margins. Yet he didn't respond with violence but with a sacrificial love given to empower his people to enact an alternative ethic.

PRAYER

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

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2020

Bishop Leon D. Pamphile '74, Academia (2008)

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 130

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

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 2020

The Rev. Dr. William M. Paul '59, Pastoral Ministry (1996)

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.
4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant
5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;
6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.
7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.
9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part;
10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.
11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child,

I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

DEVOTIONAL

After 60 years of ministry, I am convinced: nothing matters more than genuine divine and human love. This is the claim of 1 Corinthians 13.

I wonder what the world would be like today if, from our first-century beginnings, Christians had more faithfully reflected the grace of God's unconditional love offered to all—and included friends, non-Christians, and even the foes of Christian faith. Sadly, such has not been the case.

One tragic example of the church's failure happened in the year 1099. That year the European Christian Crusaders, in one day's battle to recapture Jerusalem, slaughtered an estimated 25,000 Moslems and Jews (*Archaeology Magazine*, Nov./Dec. 2018).

When fully grasped and faithfully embraced, the scriptural claim that God "so loved the world" and Jesus' command to love our neighbors, including our enemies, are alone what will transform life on our precious planet earth. It will be the gift of all gifts for all people of every race, class, faith, and nation.

I wonder what our world would have been like if, from the beginning, Christians had taken more seriously the command to love all our neighbors, near and far, both friends and enemies. What if every follower of Jesus had become—and today became—a walking, talking, and loving instrument of God's grace in the lives of all who crossed our paths?

If our world is ever to experience lasting peace and harmony, we Christians must more fully and faithfully embrace the truth that our God "so loved the world" and calls us to do the same. If you have received God's love, you will want to share it and devote yourself, body, mind, and spirit, to reflect that love in all you say and do.

PRAYER

O God, whose love for us is transforming and forever, help us to embrace and share it with all those who cross our paths as neighbors. Help us also to contribute to peace, justice, and a love that has the power to transform the world and bring harmony and redemption to all, both near and far. In the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 29, 2020

The Rev. Joan E. Reasinger '86, Pastoral Ministry (2015)

SCRIPTURE

John 8:46-59

46 Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? 47 Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God." 48 The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" 49 Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. 50 Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge. 51 Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." 52 The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?" 54 Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, 'He is our God,' 55 though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. 56 Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad." 57 Then the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am" (v. 58). And once again they attack Jesus. This time they insist that his teachings are demonic in origin; that his power is evil rather than good; that he is from Satan rather than God; that he proclaims Yahweh, not Abraham, as Father. Jesus ends the controversy with the affirmation that he has existed long before Abraham.

Earlier the leaders had asked him the question, "Who are you?" Jesus told them: "I am the light of the world." Now they ask accusingly, "You're a Samaritan, aren't you? You have a demon, don't you?" Then they add, "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" Jesus brings the controversy to an end when he says "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." With this statement, Jesus declares his deity. He declares that God is his Father. In Jesus, the eternal God showed himself to humanity.

How often have we asked "Jesus, who are you?" and failed to listen for his answer. How often do we set traps for Jesus seeking to challenge his power? How often do we seek our

own power to save our troubled world instead of trusting in the power of Jesus? How often do the sounds of our own thoughts drown out the voice of the I AM?

The season of Lent gives us the opportunity to step back from the controversies that fill our lives, to silence the questions that cloud our minds, and to focus on Jesus and what we see God to be through and in Him.

PRAYER

Forgive us, Lord Jesus, when we question and doubt, when we challenge and accuse. Fill our hearts and minds with your love and grace, and help us know you are the "I AM," who is all we need. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 30, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Theodore W. Kalsbeek '51, Pastoral Ministry (1996)

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 121

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

DEVOTIONAL

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

The psalm begins with the author's statement that he "lifted his eyes to the hills," followed immediately by his question, "from where will my help come?" His answer is that his help

"comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth." It is generally thought that by "looking to the hills" he meant looking up to God, because the answer to his question was the strong affirmation that his help comes "from the LORD, who made heaven and earth." Without knowing exactly what he meant by "help from the hills," it is enough for us to focus on his statement that his help comes from God.

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

TUESDAY, MARCH 31, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Joseph D. Small '66, Academia (2008)

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 14:20-33a, 39-40

20 Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults. 21 In the law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people; yet even then they will not listen to me," says the Lord. 22 Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 If,

therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. 25 After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, "God is really among you." 26 What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, 33 for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. . . . 39 So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; 40 but all things should be done decently and in order.

DEVOTIONAL

John Wimber, founder of the Pentecostal, new-paradigm Vineyard Churches, was a self-described "beer guzzling, drug abusing pop musician" before his conversion. As a new Christian, he became a voracious reader of the New Testament and began attending a church. One Sunday, following a sedate worship service, Wimber asked a church leader,

"When do we get to do the stuff?" . . . "What stuff?" the leader replied . . . "You know, the stuff in the Bible—like raising people from the dead, healing the blind and paralyzed." . . . "We don't do that anymore" . . . "You don't? What do you do?" . . . "What we did this morning." . . . Exasperated, Wimber sighed, "For that I gave up drugs?"

Most congregations in mainline denominations "don't do that anymore," and they have no desire to start. Pentecostal and charismatic churches are viewed as an alien zone, puzzling and mildly threatening.

For 12 years I was co-chair of the International Reformed-Pentecostal Dialogue. A personal result of the Dialogue is that I now read the New Testament differently. I am far more aware of the centrality of the Holy Spirit throughout the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles.

Today's reading is uncomfortable and challenging. Do we believe that the Holy Spirit's gifts include ecstatic utterance, healing, interpreting God's word, revealing God's purpose, and edifying the congregation? Or do we exclude some and domesticate others? Do we believe that all the Spirit's

gifts are distributed throughout God's people and that every person is gifted by the Holy Spirit of God? Or do we restrict spiritual gifts to pastors? Does our worship honor the Spirit's gifts to all God's people, or do we only recognize some of the gifts given to some of God's people?

PRAYER

Mighty God, every day you send your Holy Spirit to your people, thereby blessing us with spiritual gifts. Open our hearts to make us receptive disciples. Fill us with flaming desire to join our gifts together, thus building up the Church and serving the world for which Christ died. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 2020

The Rev. Dr. John M. Fife '67, Specialized Ministry (1986)

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 7:8-24

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

could not drink its water, and there was blood throughout the whole land of Egypt. 22 But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the LORD had said. 23 Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. 24 And all the Egyptians had to dig along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the river.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

Creator God, Great and Holy Spirit, we would be faithful to the coming of your Kingdom even as we live in an empire. Teach us anew the power of doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the God who means to free the

suffering and oppressed. In the name of Jesus, crucified on a cross of the Roman Empire and raised from death by God, amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2020

The Rev. Dr. John E. White '82/'09, Specialized Ministry (2019)

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 102

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

22 when peoples gather together,
and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.
23 He has broken my strength in midcourse;
he has shortened my days.
24 "O my God," I say, "do not take me away
at the mid-point of my life,
you whose years endure
throughout all generations."
25 Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
26 They will perish, but you endure;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You change them like clothing, and they pass away;
27 but you are the same, and your years have no end.
28 The children of your servants shall live secure;
their offspring shall be established in your presence.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Jonathan D. W. Lawrence '97, Academia (2016)

SCRIPTURES

Psalm 148

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

Exodus 9:13-35

13 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 14 For this time I will send all my plagues upon you yourself, and upon your

officials, and upon your people, so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. 15 For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. 16 But this is why I have let you live: to show you my power, and to make my name resound through all the earth. 17 You are still exalting yourself against my people, and will not let them go. 18 Tomorrow at this time I will cause the heaviest hail to fall that has ever fallen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. 19 Send, therefore, and have your livestock and everything that you have in the open field brought to a secure place; every human or animal that is in the open field and is not brought under shelter will die when the hail comes down upon them.” 20 Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD hurried their slaves and livestock off to a secure place. 21 Those who did not regard the word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock in the open field. 22 The LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that hail may fall on the whole land of Egypt, on humans and animals and all the plants of the field in the land of Egypt.” 23 Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire came down on the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; 24 there was hail with fire flashing continually in the midst of it, such heavy hail as had never fallen in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25 The hail struck down everything that was in the open field throughout all the land of Egypt, both human and animal; the hail also struck down all the plants of the field, and shattered every tree in the field. 26 Only in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail. 27 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. 28 Pray to the LORD! Enough of God’s thunder and hail! I will let you go; you need stay no longer.” 29 Moses said to him, “As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord’s. 30 But as for you and your officials, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God.” 31 (Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. 32 But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they are late in coming up.) 33 So Moses left Pharaoh, went out of the city, and stretched out his hands to the LORD; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured down on the earth. 34 But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned once more and hardened his heart, he and his officials. 35 So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

DEVOTIONAL

Psalm 148 and Exodus 9:13-35 present contrasting views of humanity’s experience with creation. In Psalm 148 all parts of creation praise God in harmony, but in Exodus thunder, hail,

and fire punish Pharaoh for the disharmony he has caused by treating the Israelites unjustly. As the story continues, we find that thunder and hail are not sufficient to change Pharaoh’s mind, and further destruction results. These “natural” disasters end the injustice and help to restore order, a theme seen earlier in the story of Noah. This use of divine violence continues throughout the Bible as faithful heroes are protected by God but the unrighteous are destroyed.

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

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

PRAYER

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

SATURDAY, APRIL 4, 2020

The Rev. Curtis D. Illingworth '70, Specialized Ministry (2014)

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 10:21-11:8

21 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt.” 22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was dense darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. 23 People could not

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

DEVOTIONAL

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

Fast-forward to the year 2020 A.D. and I see these plagues differently. I now see God leading me out of the darkness of my selfishness and the lifeless silence and thoughtlessness of a meaningless future. I cross the Red Sea into a wilderness of trials and sacrifices we call "life," and I get a glimpse of entering the new "promised land." Now I recall studying the laws of the universe in physics, biology, and math on my path to becoming an architect. Here are some thoughts on modern-day plagues through the eyes of science.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Choose the *light of Christ*, through which you will see others in God's light instead of the blind darkness of the world.

- Choose the *richness of a life in Christ* that grows and nourishes over the emptiness of death.
- Choose the *warmth of Christ's love* to sustain your relationships over the cold emptiness of separating yourselves from others.
- Choose the *Word made flesh in Christ* by proclaiming His word and deeds over the silence of those who are skeptical.

Enter the promised land of hope and dreams!

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, you have ordered the universe with physical laws that control the stars above and the world below. You have given us life and the freedom to choose our path. Help us to avoid the modern-day plagues that tempt us daily; help us discover the life-giving universal laws found in your word. Light the way with your love so that we may enter the Promised Land, a life that grows and blossoms under the hand of your life giving love and care. Amen.

SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Anita Stuart-Steva '04/'13, Creative Ministry (2017)

SCRIPTURE

Zechariah 9:9-16

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
10 He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war-horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
11 As for you also, because of the blood of my
covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
12 Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.
13 For I have bent Judah as my bow;
I have made Ephraim its arrow.
I will arouse your sons, O Zion,
against your sons, O Greece,
and wield you like a warrior's sword.
14 Then the LORD will appear over them,
and his arrow go forth like lightning;
the Lord GOD will sound the trumpet
and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.

15 The LORD of hosts will protect them,
and they shall devour and tread down the slingers;
they shall drink their blood like wine,
and be full like a bowl,
drenched like the corners of the altar.
16 On that day the LORD their God will save them
for they are the flock of his people;
for like the jewels of a crown
they shall shine on his land.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

This Holy Week, will we take time to reflect, or will we be caught up in the trappings of the commercialization of the holy? Will we consider our special services inconveniences in the midst of egg hunts, Easter breakfasts, and clothes shopping? Let us allow Jesus, the rabble rouser, to rouse us with his grace that we might discard the commercial and embrace the holy.

PRAYER

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

MONDAY, APRIL 6, 2020

The Rev. Keith C. Kaufold '07/12, Creative Ministry (2015)

SCRIPTURE

Lamentations 1:1-2, 6-12

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

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

PRAYER

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

TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Michael Spezio '96, Academia (2020)

SCRIPTURE

Lamentations 1:17-22

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

In loving memory of Pfarrer Wilhelm Handwerk

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

The Rev. Dr. David G. Dawson ’72, Mission (2011)

SCRIPTURE

Lamentations 2:1-9

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

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

But it is worse than that. They have brought it on themselves. Not only has Yahweh abandoned them because of their infidelity—Yahweh was so angry as to be the actual

perpetrator of their suffering. Idolatry had been exercised in a myriad of expressions. Personal piety had been flaunted in distortions of their relationship to money, sex, and power. Corporate expressions of international intrigue, arrogance, and crude nationalism had flourished.

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

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

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

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

THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Donald K. McKim '74, Academia (1994)

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 10:14-17; 11:27-32

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols.
15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I

say. 16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. . . . 11:27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. 30 For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

DEVOTIONAL

On Maundy Thursday, the church celebrates the Lord's Supper. The bread and wine offered by Jesus to all his disciples focuses on Jesus' death and the benefits of salvation given by the God of grace, who has loved us to the uttermost in Jesus Christ. In Christ's death we are united with God in Christ and with each other by bonds of faith in the church. The bread and cup are a *koinonia*, a sharing of the body and blood of Christ (10:16). We "who are many are one body" (10:17) as we share in this sacrament. We cultivate the unity which is ours in Christ so that we do not "eat and drink without discerning the body," which would thereby bring judgment (11:29-32).

The church's unity is grounded in Jesus Christ as God's gift of grace. Our discipleship as followers of Christ involves doing all we can to emphasize and enact this unity among Christian believers. The Table of our Lord is where we find who we are and whose we are—and where we know most fully that we have sisters and brothers in Christ with whom we share the bread and wine.

Ecumenical efforts in our churches are not options. They are necessities for us to live into the unity Christ brings. To turn away means we are "discerning the body" wrongly. Our commitment is to Christ in the church. We join together in the whole family of faith in praise and service to Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, you died to save us. You stretched your arms on the cross to embrace the world and gather us as your people in the church. We rejoice! May we share our lives with others who love you—and with the world you love so deeply. Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 10, 2020

The Rev. Kellie D. Wild '09, Creative Ministry (2019)

SCRIPTURE

Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33

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

DEVOTIONAL

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

I understand rejoicing in the wonderful healing power that God has and demonstrates. I also understand that for many faithful, God-loving people, life can be very hard. It can be

easy to believe in God's grace and mercy in the good times, when we have an abundance of "stuff" and lots of love from family and friends. It can seem more difficult to believe in God's grace and mercy when we struggle just to find enough to eat or a place to sleep, or people we know and love have died, been killed, or suffered brutality. I work with people who seem to go from one struggle to the next, one tragedy to the next, feel alone or abandoned and, basically, that life is hard and then you die. And I see the pain and suffering they experience.

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

PRAYER

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

SATURDAY, APRIL 11, 2020

The Rev. James F. Reese '49, Specialized Ministry (2003)

SCRIPTURE

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.

DEVOTIONAL

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

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

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

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

PRAYER

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

SUNDAY, APRIL 12, 2020

The Rev. John T. Campbell '74, Pastoral Ministry (1999)

SCRIPTURE

John 1:1-18

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15 (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

DEVOTIONAL

During my very first week in Greek class with Dr. William Orr at Pittsburgh Seminary, we were required to memorize the first verses of John 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This, for St. John, and for you and me, is set in the context of God's creation, incarnation, and re-creation.

Easter morning demonstrates God continuing to give the gift of life to his people. This festival of re-creation is God's celebration of humanity. It is God's entrusting of God's self to human beings—to you and to me—through God's incarnation. Divinity was clothed in humanity so that humanity might be clothed in divinity. Easter means that you and I are holy and intended to be holy, not as an achievement on our own, but as a gift from God. This is the gift of Christmas that culminates in Easter—the gift that empowers us to become children of God.

Have you ever thought of yourself as a sacrament? Have you ever looked at someone across the street and said, "Hey, look! There is the sacramental image of God"? What is it that prevents us, do you think, from seeing that image in ourselves and each other? In Jewish tradition, rabbis recount that each person has a procession of angels walking ahead of him or her and crying out, "Make way for the image of God." Can we even begin to imagine how very different our lives and our world might be if we lived with this as the reality and truth that guides our lives? It would mean that everywhere we go, God's angels would go before us shouting out loudly and clearly, "Here comes an image of God!"

And so, what Easter morning means for us is the fulfillment of the Incarnation, that day known to us as Christmas, as "God with us" to share our joys and bear our sorrows. In truth, 33 years of "God with us" continues today, for us, in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit!

And so, if that is the truth of Easter for us, then it may also be the Easter truth for our next-door neighbor, for those we love, for those we fear, for those who are like us and those who are different, for the stranger, and yes, even for our enemies. It means that we cannot limit Easter to a one-day event. We must begin to think of the “Easter Son-Rise” as a style of daily living and a way of being. We must begin to understand Easter as a verb rather than a noun—and to live out our daily lives with that understanding.

PRAYER

Our Lord and our God, on this day when we celebrate your resurrection, help us to come to understand that Easter is much more than a one-day celebration each year. Help all of us to know and understand ourselves as an “image of You.” And empower us to live out our daily lives as your image to our family, friends, neighbors, strangers, and yes, even, our enemies. Amen.

The Scripture quotations contained in the lectionary readings are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

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