



A LENTEN JOURNEY
2021

A Lenten Journey, 2021

**“We need a little Christmas, right this very minute,
Candles in the windows, carols at the spinet...”**

Or so the song goes, but the reality is that we have had our Christmas for this season, and now, cold reality has crept back into our living: Covid-19 is raging throughout our land; a rebellious mob recently sacked our nation’s capitol; our people are divided and angry; the national economy reflects the state of the country in jobless rates, closed businesses, and lines of Americans waiting for food and vaccine against the pandemic. In the middle of this muddle of despair, we are called to begin our Lenten journey.

In desperation, some of us would feel justified in wondering, “Where is God?” “God promised to be with us, yet God remains silent!”

And Thomas Merton, the American Trappist monk, answers:

“God, who is everywhere, never leaves us. If we do not know God well, we do not realize that God may be more present to us when God is absent than when God is present.”

Merton calls us to renewed faith in the God of a journey that can provide forty days of renouncing the attitudes and thoughts that we do not need, and renewal of the lifestyles and faith that we do need to live as Jesus taught us to live and be. The journey begins with Ash Wednesday, when we examine who we really are and where God can take us. Let us set our course and begin, looking to God who, silent or not, will walk with us to the end.

Ash Wednesday, February 17

Psalm 95; Jonah 3:1-4, 11; Hebrews 12:1-14; Luke 18:9-14

I grew up in Natchez, the site of rich native American cultures as well as 19th century columned plantation manors. While the remains of these cultures no longer have life, in the ashes of their structures we can find information as to how they lived. When I was growing up, I enjoyed hiking around these ceremonial mounds and historic homes. An old fence, a collapsed roof, and a solitary column would appear to be all that was left of some these old families and old ways. The greatest enemy of these palatial buildings was fire. The combination of dry wood and futile access to water pressure could turn a mansion into a pile of ashes in a few short hours. These ashes had many stories to tell, and many stories we may never know.

In occasional Biblical descriptions of grief and repentance, sackcloth and ashes appear as symbols of our limited human existence. No matter what we believe about the afterlife, the truth we will have to live by is that one day we will die. Perhaps we will have left the imprint of our living on lives that came after us. If we lived like Jesus, our greatest accomplishment may be that, in living, we loved others. If we can get that one right, it will be the greatest truth left among our ashes, that in all that we did, we loved others.

There is more to this story, of course. But for now, we examine the ashes left from our own living.

Thursday, February 18

Psalm 37:1-18; Deuteronomy 7:6-11; Titus 1:1-16; John 1:29-34

They profess to know God, but deny him by their deeds.

Titus 1:16

Back from the City

After three days and nights of rich food and late talk in overheated rooms, of walks between mounds of garbage and human forms bedded down for the night under rags, I come back to my dooryard, to my own wooden step.

At the Cloisters I indulged in piety while gazing at a painted lindenwood Pieta—

Mary holding her pierced and desiccated son across her knees; but when a man stepped close under the tasseled awning of the hotel, asking for “a quarter for someone down on his luck,” I quickly turned my back.

Now I hear tiny bits of bark and moss break off under the bird’s beak and claw, and fall onto already-fallen leaves.

“Do you love me?” said Christ to his disciple.

“Then feed my sheep.”

Jane Kenyon

Friday, February 19

Psalm 35; Deuteronomy 7:12-16, 23-32; Titus 2:1-15; John 1:35-42

For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world.

Titus 2: 11-13

Going into Lent can be like going into the wilderness and leaving behind what is familiar, according to Barbara Brown Taylor. You can learn “what it is like to live by the grace of God alone and not by what you can supply for yourself. You give up the illusion that you are in control of your life and find out who you are, what you really miss, what the pacifiers are—the habits, substances, or surroundings you use to comfort yourself to block out the pain and fear that are normal parts of being human.”

“Nothing is too small to give up. Even a chocolate bar will do. For forty days, simply pay attention to how often your mind travels in that direction. Are you hungry? Well, what is wrong with being hungry?” She says that “still, small voice might tell you the chocolate bar isn’t your pacifier but your power tool. Or it might tell you, ‘Why waste your time on this dumb exercise?’ If you do not know whom that voice belongs to, read Luke’s story again. Then tell the devil to get lost and decide what you will do for Lent.”

“Better yet, decide whose you will be,” says Taylor. “Worship the Lord your God and serve no one else. Expect great things, from God and from yourself. Why should any of us settle for less?”

Barbara Brown Taylor, “Lenten Discipline”

Saturday, February 20

Psalm 30; Deuteronomy 7:17-26; Titus 3:1-15; John 1:43-51

O Lord my God, I cried to thee for help and thou hast healed me.

Psalm 30:2-3

Winter walks up and down the town swinging his censer, but no smoke or sweetness comes from it, only the sour, metallic frankness of salt and snow. The water slaps crisply upon the cold-firmed sand. There are no stars, nor a moon. The water tosses its black laces and flaunts, streaked with the finest rain.

In the winter I am writing about, there was much darkness. Darkness of nature, darkness of event, darkness of the spirit. The sprawling darkness of *not knowing*. We speak of the light of reason. I would speak here of the darkness of the world, and the light of _____. But I don't know what to call it. Maybe hope. Maybe faith, but not a shaped faith—only, say, a gesture, or a continuum of gestures. But probably it is closer to hope, that is more active, and far messier than faith must be. Faith, as I imagine it, is tensile, and cool, and has no need of words. Hope, I know, is a fighter and a screamer.

Mary Oliver, "Winter Hours," *Upstream*

First Sunday in Lent, February 21

Psalm 63; I Corinthians 1:17-31; Mark 2:18-22

Sundays remain days of thanksgiving and praise
and are not included in the season of Lent.

Monday, February 22

Psalm 41; Deuteronomy 8:11-18; Hebrews 2:11-18; John 2:1-12

As I read Psalm 41, I think for me there are some very key concepts that anticipate the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It begins with a statement that the Lord delivers in the day of their trouble those who “consider the poor,” or “weak.” Jesus later will say that the weak and poor are blessed and will inherit the Kingdom of God. Jesus often expressed the idea that we have a duty to feed the hungry and heal the sick and care for those who cannot care for themselves.

David goes on to lament that his enemies are persecuting him because of his sin and he had reasons for a guilty conscience. He had committed great sins. But despite that he goes on to say with confidence that God has been gracious to him and lifted him so that he remains in God’s presence and grace, and he ends the song with praise of God “from everlasting to everlasting.”

In this psalm, we can all find meaning to apply to our own lives. God is present with us, supporting us, despite our wrongdoings, as we seek to do his will toward others in need.

Tuesday, February 23

Psalm 45; Deuteronomy 9:4-12; Hebrews 3:1-11; John 2:13-22

All four Gospels relay the story of Jesus cleansing the temple of money changers. The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) place this event at the end of Jesus' ministry, but John puts it at the beginning of his ministry. Scholars believe the event took place toward the end of his life. John did not really deal with Jesus' life as much as with his ideas and theology. He was discussing themes at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He is introducing a "Passover" theme and an emphasis on Jesus' death and resurrection early in his gospel.

Jesus drove away those who were selling animals to be sacrificed in the Temple, as the Torah demanded, and when he did so, he told them to get out of his "father's house." They were quite puzzled, I am sure, since the funds derived supported the Temple, and they were following the law. On that basis, they questioned his authority. That is when Jesus told them to tear down the temple and he would raise it up in three days, an obvious allusion to his upcoming death and resurrection.

We see many examples today of the exploitation of the Church to enrich pastors who preach a "prosperity gospel." To many of us, this is also an abomination. God's church should not be a means to enrichment, but a path to grace, mercy, and outreach to the poor and needy in our midst.

Wednesday, February 24

*Psalm 119:49-72; Deuteronomy 9:13-21;
Hebrews 3:12-19; John 2:23-3:15*

Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.

Hebrews 3:12-14

It appears that the early Christians in Jerusalem were struggling with unbelief and turning away from the living God. I am reminded of *Mark 9:24*: “Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!’” That is repeated in a song I recently heard by Allison Krauss, “I do believe, Lord help my unbelief.”

Doubt is a fact for most Christians at one time or another. Paul tells us to encourage one another daily, constantly so that our faith may not waver. It is our faith in God and Jesus Christ that sets us apart as Christians. We need help from one another and from God to remain faithful to our commitment and our belief in Him.

Lord, help our unbelief!!!!

Thursday, February 25

Psalm 50; Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5; Hebrews 4:1-10; John 3:16-21

The scriptures are full of second chance stories. The Deuteronomy verses include Moses' petition for the people of Israel to have a second chance, and God goes through the effort of writing on stone - again! We would not need the story of Jesus and the verses in John if the people of God had fully comprehended the message of God's love from the beginning. Instead, God sent the message - again - through Jesus.

Our lives are full of choices. In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes:

“People often think of Christian morality as a kind of bargain in which God says, ‘If you keep a lot of rules I’ll reward you, and if you don’t, I’ll do the other thing.’ I do not think that is the best way of looking at it. I would much rather say that every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself.”

Thanks be to God that we are not solely defined by a single choice. Thanks be to God for the season of Lent when we are invited to rethink our choices.

Friday, February 26

Psalm 40; Deuteronomy 10:12-22; Hebrews 4:11-16; John 3:22-36

Psalm 40 could be an introduction to Lent: “I wait patiently for the Lord.” The number of the Psalm resonates – 40. There is no evidence that David assigned the number 40 to this Psalm. The original Hebrew numbering of the Psalms actually experienced a bit of a shuffle during the translation into Greek. Although the number 40 for this Psalm is not attributed true Biblical significance, we know stories told throughout the Bible of 40 years and 40 days when the number is significant. (A quick internet search suggests that the number 40 is used 146 times in the Bible).

When used in the Bible, 40 is not necessarily a literal number of days or years. Instead, the number is used to indicate a generation or a complete period of time or a period of testing or a period of growth. Now we find ourselves in Lent – a period of 40 days, and Lent comes at a difficult time in 2021. We have been waiting “patiently” for almost a full year. (Did you know that the Latin root for “quarantine” is “*quadraginta*,” which means “forty”?) We are not starting a period of waiting, we are persevering through a prolonged period of waiting.

Although the stories of the Bible include some periods of time which were actually much shorter or much longer than the number 40 indicates, all of the stories point toward an end to that period of time. The number is not infinite. Although the waiting may have felt infinite in the midst of the 40, the waiting ended. We, too, are comforted by the words of David, “God inclined to me and heard my cry.” We do not wait in vain.

Saturday, February 27

Psalm 55; Deuteronomy 11:18-28; Hebrews 5:1-10; John 4:1-26

We praise you, our creating God,
for fresh water,
 sparkling mirror of your glory;
for humble water,
 out of which life first sprang,
 and upon which the first path to new life was charted;
for the parting waters of Exodus,
 clearing freedom's highway out of the house of slavery;
for the waters of repentance,
 flowing straight into the hearts of your people
 at the word of John the Baptist;
for the Living Water, your Son,
 pouring himself out like a flood,
 quenching our thirst with his love.

*Easter Blessings and Promises:
Songs and Prayers of the Easter Vigil
The Monks of Weston Priory*

Second Sunday in Lent, February 28

Psalm 24; Jeremiah 1:1-10; I Corinthians 3:11-23; Mark 3:31-4:9

Sundays remain days of thanksgiving and praise
and are not included in the season of Lent.

Monday, March 1

Psalm 56; Jeremiah 1:11-19; Romans 1:1-15; John 4:27-42

**Fear happens When,
not if**

*“In God most holy, just, and true,
I have reposed my trust;
Nor will I fear what flesh can do,
The offspring of the dust.”*

Isaac Watts

Tuesday, March 2

Psalm 61; Jeremiah 2:1-13; Romans 1:16-25; John 4:43-54

Cracked Cisterns

I recall days of years long since passed:
Singing songs, sharing sodas, and spending time.
Loving life with a pace both furious and fast,
As memories were created beautiful and sublime.

I remember laughter and gladness.
I remember sorrow and sadness.
I can see our steps stretched side by side.

Now we drink from different wells.
Water gushes from a cracked wall.
I watch as dried lives become shells
As the people once so close grow small.

I feel cold rain on far off shoulders.
I feel warm wind on riverside boulders.
I can see where we once were near.

Dry, parched lips seek something new.
In truth, they may need something old.
I stand with an extra cup—no idea what to do,
As hope's light grows dim—flickering and cold.

Robert Dean

Wednesday, March 3

Psalm 72; Jeremiah 3:6-18; Romans 1:28-2;11; John 5:1-18

Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does its successive journeys run,
his kingdom spread from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more.

To him shall endless prayer be made,
and praises throng to crown his head.
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
with every morning sacrifice.

Let every creature rise and bring
the highest honors to our King,
angels descend with songs again,
and earth repeat the loud amen.

Isaac Watts

Thursday, March 4

Psalm 70; Jeremiah 4: 9-10, 19-28; Romans 2:12-24; John 5:19-29

In living the cross-formed life of loving God with all that is in us and loving others as we love ourselves, I was blessed to be on the receiving end of loving others. I was loved in a special way during a time of great anxiety. Three special friends each had recently received very scary medical diagnoses within weeks of each other. I desperately wanted to be there for them, to encourage and love them in the journey they faced. As fate would have it, I had just reconnected with a friend after twenty plus years. I reached out to her by email expressing my anxiety and fears. The next morning, she replied with such profound words that I knew immediately that her words were sent to me, through her, but definitely from God. I lovingly share her response:

“Heartbroken for you as you look for a silver lining...It’s there, waiting to shine brightly in those places that feel dark, confusing, lonely and sad—grief is never tidy and compartmentalized—we can’t keep it in a box. As you know, it’s a process. Allow room for sadness, anger, tears, moodiness...for those who grieve much have invested much—a true litmus test of love.

God is there to lift your head and heal your heart through this heaviness. His ways are higher, His love is greater, His compassion softer, and His care deeper than we can imagine on this side.

Remember: our understanding is limited, so trust in the only hope—Jesus—the one and only source of healing and comfort. Our friend, our shepherd who leads us by and through the still waters... ‘I lift my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from, my help comes from The Lord.’ Standing with you and your precious friends with expectant healing as He sees and He wills... my heartfelt love, support, and prayers.”

Amanda M. Reeves

Friday, March 5

Psalm 69; Jeremiah 5:1-9; Romans 2:25-3:18; John 5:30-47

We all have gone through dark times, and it's usually in that darkness we cry out,

“Save me, oh God, I'm drowning.

Hear me, oh God, my soul is longing.

God, deliver me and heal my sadness.”

In that sadness, our friend Mary Oliver's quote seems so appropriate:

“That time I thought I could not go any closer to grief without dying, I went closer, and I did not die.”

We have been taught that faith is what gets us through those dark places that we wish we could have just gone around. So, just now, in your quiet time, say, “Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world; Have mercy, have mercy on us. Lamb of God You take away the sins of the world. Grant us peace, Grant us peace.”

If you have forgiven yourself for being imperfect and falling, you can now do it for just about anybody else. If you have not done it for yourself, I'm afraid you will likely pass on your sadness, absurdity, judgment, and futility to others.

Fr. Richard Rohr

We must all carry the cross of our own reality until God transforms us through it.

Fr. Richard Rohr

Love is the source and goal;

Faith is the slow process of getting there;

Hope is the willingness to move forward without resolution.

Fr. Richard Rohr

Saturday, March 6

Psalm 75; Jeremiah 5:20-31; Romans 3:19-31; John 7:1-13

Sometimes silence in prayer and worship can be the loudest to the ears of God.

Mother Teresa

God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer.

Mother Teresa

Unto Thee, O God, Unto Thee, O God,
I lift up my soul, O God unto Thee.

Oh my God in Thee have I trusted,
Let not my enemies triumph over me,
Unto Thee, O God, Unto Thee, O God,
I lift up my soul O God unto Thee.

Show me Thou ways. Teach me Thy paths,
Thou art the God of my salvation.
Oh my God, in Thee have I trusted,
Thou art the God of my salvation.

Francis Aulbach

Dear Lord, see me through these hard times, I am filled with fears. I reach out my hand to You now. Please walk beside me, guide me, and help me hold on strong, through trials and storms. Help me hold on to my faith, even in the darkest hour. Stay with me Lord, show me Your way, in Your love, Holy Spirit I abide, Amen.

During the season of Lent, I encourage you to come by the church and sit alone in the Sacred and Holy place. Enjoy the stillness of just you and the Spirit. Listen in your mind—remember the songs, the music, the majesty of the organ. Remember the words, remember the connections, and thank God for the joy we will share when we return together as a Family of Faith.

Third Sunday in Lent, March 7

Psalm 93; Jeremiah 6:9-15; I Corinthians 6:12-20; Mark 5:1-20

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and are not included in the season of Lent.

Monday, March 8

Psalm 80; Jeremiah 7:1-15; Romans 4:1-12; John 7:14-36.

About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?" Then Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him."

John 7:14-18

You must make your choice: either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

C. S. Lewis

Gracious God, lead us to always be the student, seeking the glory of your truth. Amen.

Tuesday, March 9

Psalm 78:1-39; Jeremiah 7:21-34; Romans 4:13-25; John 7:37-52

That famous promise God gave Abraham—that he and his children would possess the earth—was not given because of something Abraham did or would do. It was based on God’s decision to put everything together for him, which Abraham then entered when he believed. If those who get what God gives them only get it by doing everything they are told to do and filling out all the right forms properly signed, that eliminates personal trust completely and turns the promise into an ironclad *contract*! That’s not a holy promise; that’s a business deal. A contract drawn up by a hard-nosed lawyer and with plenty of fine print only makes sure that you will never be able to collect. But if there is no contract in the first place, simply a *promise*—and God’s promise at that—you can’t break it.

This is why the fulfillment of God’s promise depends entirely on trusting God and his way, and then simply embracing him and what he does. God’s promise arrives as pure gift. That’s the only way everyone can be sure to get in on it, those who keep the religious traditions *and* those who have never heard of them. For Abraham is father of us all. He is not our racial father—that’s reading the story backward. He is our *faith* father.

Romans 4:13-15, The Message

Faith is the art of holding on to things in spite of your changing moods and circumstances.

C. S. Lewis

God of Abraham, thank you for your promise of eternal life and the fulfillment of that promise in your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Wednesday, March 10

Psalm 119:97-120; Jeremiah 8:18-9:6; Romans 5:1-11; John 8:12-20

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why, then, has not the health of my poor people not been restored?

Jeremiah 8:22

There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin-sick soul

Sometimes I feel discouraged
And deep I feel the pain
In prayers the holy spirit
Revives my soul again

There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin-sick soul

If you can't pray like Peter
If you can't be like Paul
Go home and tell your neighbor
He died to save us all

There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the wounded soul

Nana Mouskouri

You do not need to understand healing to be healed or know anything about blessing to be blessed.

Frederick Buechner

Father God, our world needs so much healing. Guide us to lift up and not tear down, join together and not tear apart. Amen.

Thursday, March 11

Psalm 42; Jeremiah 10:11-24; Romans 5:12-21; John 8:21-32

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. This memorable opening line from *A Tale of Two Cities* could easily describe the year 2021. The Covid virus swept our nation leaving death and destruction in its wake. Civil unrest, violence, and unemployment have touched all of us in one way or another.

All of this brings to mind a small idea of what Jesus must have felt on the cross. “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

But we are not forsaken, which brings me to the good news. Many positive things came out of our forced quarantine. Our environment is healthier because there has been less fuel consumption. For me, personally, it meant more quality time with Jim. We cooked, worked puzzles together, walked a lot and found joy in the little things! We are not as wasteful as we were before the quarantine and are mindful of the joy in just being.

We are not forsaken! We are redeemed! God is with us always in good times and in bad. He will see us through.

Friday, March 12

Psalm 88; Jeremiah 11:1-8, 14-20; Romans 6:1-11; John 8:33-47

Not one of us goes through life without meeting up with adversity. Personal struggles challenge us, as well as troubles within our home, community, nation and world. That's life...and that's why God, throughout scriptures, constantly assures us of His presence. And not just his presence, but also His peace.

Despite adversity, we can possess peace of mind by leaning on God's strength and power. By hanging onto the promise of His presence, we realize we have nothing to fear...nothing to bear that we can't handle. Our God-found courage provides us with the confidence we need to get through hardship...and in doing so help others find their way.

At times when you feel least like singing, let God put His melody into your heart. With His presence, He will bring you His peace.

Tune in to the Heart of God

Saturday, March 13

Psalm 87; Jeremiah 13:1-11; Romans 6:12-23; John 8:47-59

A Prayer For Lent

Loving God,

I commit this season of Lent to you
And ask you to show me what I need to turn away from,
And what I need to turn towards.
Shine your loving light in those dark parts of my heart,
And bring new life, new hope and new possibilities.
Help me to walk more closely with Jesus,
To know that I am deeply loved,
And to share his love with others. Amen.

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 14

Psalm 66; Jeremiah 14:1-9; 17-22; Galatians 4:21-5:1; Mark 8:11-21

Sundays remain days of thanksgiving and praise
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Monday, March 15

Psalm 89:1-18; Jeremiah 16:10-21; Romans 7:1-12; John 6:1-15

When Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, he summarized in these gestures his own life. Jesus is chosen from all eternity, blessed at his baptism in the Jordan River, broken on the cross, and given as bread to the world. Being chosen, blessed, broken, and given is the sacred journey of the Son of God, Jesus the Christ.

When we take bread, bless it, break it, and give it, with the words, "This is the Body of Christ," we express our commitment to make our lives conform to the life of Christ. We too want to live as people chosen, blessed, and broken, and thus become food for the world.

Henry J. M. Nouwen, *Becoming Food for the World*

There is no spiritual treasure to be found apart from the bodily experience of life on earth, engaging in the most ordinary physical activities with the most exquisite attention I can give them. My life depends on ignoring all touted distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul. What is saving my life now is becoming more fully human, trusting that there is no way to God apart from real life in the real world.

Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World*

This is another day, O Lord.
I know not what it will bring forth,
But make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be.
If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely.
If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly.
If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently.
And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly.
Make these words more than words,
And give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

Kathleen Norris, *Acedia and Me*

Tuesday, March 16

Psalm 97; Jeremiah 17:19-27; Romans 7:13-25; John 6:16-27

Let today be the day you give up who you've been for who you can become.

Pope Francis, 2014

Patience asks us to live the moment to the fullest, to be completely present to the moment, to taste the here and now, to be where we are. When we are impatient, we try to get away from where we are. We behave as if the real thing will happen tomorrow, later and somewhere else. Let's be patient and trust that the treasure we look for is hidden in the ground on which we stand.

Henry J. M. Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*

We have chosen to fast
Not with ashes but with action
Not with sackcloth but in sharing
Not in thoughts but in deeds
We will give up our abundance
To share our food with the hungry
We will give up our comfort
To provide homes for the destitute
We will give up our fashions
To see the naked clothed
We will share where others hoard
We will free where others oppress
We will heal where others harm
Then, God's light will break out on us
God's healing will quickly appear
God will guide us always
God's righteousness will go before us
We will find our joy in the Lord
We will be like a well-watered garden
We will be called repairers of broken walls
Together we will feast at God's banquet table

Christine Sive, 2010

Wednesday, March 17

Psalm 101; Jeremiah 18:1-11; Romans 8:1-11; John 6:27-40

I am bending my knee
In the eye of the Father who created me,
In the eye of the Son who purchased me,
In the eye of the Spirit who cleansed me,
In friendship and affection.
Through Thine own Anointed One, O God,
Bestow upon us fullness in our need,
Love towards God, The affection of God,
The smile of God,
The wisdom of God,
The grace of God,
The fear of God,
And the will of God
To do on the world of the Three,
As angels and saints
Do in heaven;
Each shade and light,
Each day and night,
Each time in kindness,
Give Thou us Thy Spirit.

Alexander Carmichael (1832-1912)

We come to Lent, again, good and gracious God,
come to acknowledge the distance between
who you created us to be and who we are.
We come to acknowledge our limits, our mortality.
We come to acknowledge that sometimes life is wilderness.
Come to us, be with us; speak a word of truth to us. Amen.

Thursday, March 18

Psalm 69; Jeremiah 22:13-23; Romans 8:12-27; John 6:41-51

At summer church camp the twelve-year-old girl sat on a stump in a clearing at the edge of the woods, with her Bible in her lap. She asked God to forgive her of her sins and asked Jesus to come into her heart. And so, began, a lifelong quest to live life, serve God, and to make a difference, all while trying to understand her role in God's grand scheme of things. Her Bible was her guide.

Oh God, you know my failings. The wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.

Psalm 69 :5

God pleaded with the people to repent: Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow; act with justice and righteousness.

Jeremiah 22:3

Life in the Spirit:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

Romans 8:14

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8:26-27

The Bread from Heaven: Our Reward:

Whoever believes that God sent His son, who took our sins unto Himself and died on the cross to save us, will have the eternal bread of life. Jesus is that bread.

John 6:47 (paraphrased)

Finally....Be Prepared.

Keep your Bible near..."Within the pages of the Holy Bible lie the answers to all the problems we face."

Ronald Reagan

Friday, March 19

Psalm 107:1-32; Jeremiah 23:1-8; Romans 8:28-39; John 6:52-59

Out My Window
(A Poem of Restoration)

Out my window I can see,
The promising world of an empty tree.
Empty, you say, what beauty can be
In One, Single, Empty Tree?
The Mighty Oak is resting and still
Awaiting Spring's warmth for its branches to fill.
Then sprouting forth buds that hold leaves and more
A plethora of acorns acorns galore.
Leaves that shade, acorns that fall
And bring forth new oaks fulfilling its call.
A resting place for birds of flight,
A home for squirrels to spend the night.
Or maybe stop to build their nests.
A promise of new life, life at its best.
Yes, out my window I can see,
An awakening world in that empty tree.

Jo Ann S. Welch

Let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love.

Psalm 107:8

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

Jeremiah 23:5

Future Glory: We know all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28

Saturday, March 20

Psalm 102; Jeremiah 23:9-15; Romans 9:1-18; John 6:60-71

There are three means by which God assures us that we do have eternal life: 1. The promises of his word, 2. The witness of the Spirit in our hearts, 3. The transforming work of the Spirit in our lives.

Jerry Bridges

We cannot keep to ourselves the words of eternal life given to us in our encounter with Jesus Christ: they are meant for every man and woman...It is our responsibility to pass on what, by God's grace, we ourselves have received.

Pope Benedict XVIII

Death is not the end of the road-it is merely a gateway to eternal life beyond the grave.

Billy Graham

Imagine all the people living life in peace. You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you will join us, and the world will be as one.

John Lennon

Psalm 102 provides a prayer for help from one afflicted. In answer, the Psalm recognized that the name of the Lord endures forever. God is the same today, yesterday and tomorrow.

Jeremiah 23 describes false prophets. Jeremiah lamented the sins of the people-the evil-doers. Jesus promises punishment for the sinful.

Jesus said, "No one comes to me unless it is granted by the Father."

John 6:44

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 21

Psalm 118; Jeremiah 23:16-32; I Corinthians 9:19-27; Mark 8:31-9:1

Sundays remain days of thanksgiving and praise
and are not included in the season of Lent.

Monday, March 22

Psalm 31; Jeremiah 24:1-10; Romans 9:19-33; John 9:1-17

So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

John 9:17

In the midst of gathering darkness light becomes more evident.

Bonnie Bostrom

The delicate touch of fingertips...gentleness...a cold deep blue pool for the washing...coming out of the darkness to see the faces of humankind...the trees and the red flowers...

James Dickey

To whom or whether shall my darkness flee
but to the Light,
And who's that Light but Thee?

Francis Quarrels

Tuesday, March 23

Psalm 121, Jeremiah 25:8-17; Romans 10:1-13; John 9:18-41

I Will Lift Up My Eyes.....

...to feel the warmth of the sun.

I Will Lift Up My Eyes....

...to watch the jay spread wide wings and glide effortlessly
through the very air I breathe.

I Will Lift Up My Eyes....

...to see trees reaching skyward.

I Will Lift Up My Eyes....

...unto the hills and will praise the Mystery
my Helper,
my Keeper,
my Protector,
my Strength

From this time on and forevermore.

Wednesday, March 24

*Psalm 119:145-176; Jeremiah 25:30-38;
Romans 10:14-21; John 10:1-18*

How are they to call on One in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in One of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim Him? And how are they to proclaim Him unless they are sent? As it is written, "how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Romans 10: 14-15

As a child I was taught that one was called to the ministry or to missions with these words. Years later I read the wisdom of Martin Luther and found clarity that this too is MY calling; a calling to simply share the Love of God with those in my given life.

"Sometimes I think of life as a big wagon wheel with many spokes. In the middle is the hub. Often in ministry, it looks like we are running around the rim trying to reach everybody. But God says, 'Start in the hub; live in the hub.' Then you will be connected with all the spokes and you won't have to run so fast."

Thursday, March 25

Psalm 131; Jeremiah 26:1-16; Romans 11:1-12; John 10:19-42

Come Unto Me

When the journey gets too hard,
when we feel depleted,
when our compassion
 turns to complaining,
when our efforts toward
 justice and mercy
 seem to get us nowhere,
it's time to remember
the humility part—

that it is God who has made us
 and not we ourselves;
that the saving of the world
 or even part of it
 is not on our shoulders.
It is then we can come unto him,
 and he will give us rest.
With rest we'll remember
 what it is we are all about.

Ann Weems, Kneeling in Jerusalem

Friday, March 26

Psalm 22; Jeremiah 29:4-13; Romans 11:13-24; John 11:1-27

The Way to Jerusalem is Cluttered

The way to Jerusalem
is cluttered
with bits and pieces of our lives
that fly up and cry out,
wounding us as we try
to keep upon this path
that leads to Life.

Why didn't somebody tell us
that it would be so hard?
In the midst of the clutter,
the children laugh
and run after stars.
Those of us who are wise
will follow,
for the children will be the first
to kneel in Jerusalem.

Ann Weems, Kneeling in Jerusalem

Saturday, March 27

Psalm 137; Jeremiah 31:27-34; Romans 11:25-36; John 11: 28-44

The curve of time turns in on itself, bends back and threatens
Apocalypse whispers and end time. Sonnets play in bars and senate
chambers. Deathwatches on TV news announce more violence,
more battles, and more destruction.

The little one stood waiting, While the one Who Is
Greater Than All spoke:
Come sit with me and rock a while
And I will sing you lullabies that Sarah sang to Isaac.
I will tell you stories, wondrous tales of adventure,
danger, miracles and love
For those songs must be sung, these stories told.
Not kept on shelves like jars of pickles in a dark cellar
No spice can preserve us. But these stories can save.
In the telling is new life.
In the singing is good news.

Loretta F. Ross, *Christmas Lullaby*

Teach me desire
That draws life from dry bones
Like orange flames
Leaping from kindling sticks.
Oh Way is Narrow Love,
Oh take up your cross Love
Teach me resurrection passion
I've had enough of death.

Could I be held enthralled
By wonder unable to move
Across a room for need to kneel
At every step in praise,

Loretta F. Ross

And we are put on earth a little space, that we may learn the beams
of love.

William Blake

Palm Sunday, March 28

Psalm 24; Zachariah 9:9-12; I Timothy 6:12-16; Matthew 21:12-17

Sundays remain days of thanksgiving and praise
and are not included in the season of Lent.

Monday of Holy Week, March 29

Psalm 51; Jeremiah 12:1-16; Philippians 3:1-14; John 12:9-19

The world today needs people who have been shaken by ultimate calamities and emerged from them with knowledge and awareness that those who look to the lord will still be preserved by him, even if they are hounded from the earth.

Alfred Delp

Lord Jesus, when you rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday,
You knew it was the road to the cross.
Yet you still took that road.
Give me the courage to take the road I should take today
Wherever it may lead.
May I travel trustfully and obediently through this day,
Content to leave tomorrow in your safe hands,
And tonight, rest in your peace.

Margaret Cundiff

Resurrection Passion

Teach me desire
That draws life from dry bones
Like orange flames
Leaping from kindling sticks.
Oh Way is Narrow Love,
Oh Take up your cross Love
Teach me resurrection passion
I've had enough of death.

Loretta F. Rose

Tuesday of Holy Week, March 30

Psalm 6; Jeremiah 15:10-21; Philippians 3:15-21; John 12:20-26

*Have compassion on me, Lord, for I am weak,
Heal me Lord, for I am sick at heart.
How long, O Lord, until you restore me?*

Psalm 6:2

Then Jeremiah said, "Please give me time; don't let me die young. It's for your sake that I am suffering."

Jeremiah 15:15

Jesus replied, "Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternity."

John 12:25

But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives, and we wait for his return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own.

Philippians 3:20-21

Today's scripture readings all depict the struggles of those who long for healing and rescue by God, and who wait for Him to take away their suffering of this world. God answers them, saying: "I am with you to protect you and rescue you." (*Jeremiah 15:20*)

Jesus, in his last days, knew that his end on earth was near, and that he must suffer greatly. He knew that through his suffering, death, and resurrection, God would be glorified and that He, Jesus, was providing salvation for all who believe.

Praise be to God for rescuing us from our sin and for giving us eternal life.

Wednesday of Holy Week, March 31

Psalm 55; Jeremiah 17:5-10, 14-17; Philippians 4:1-13; John 12:27-36

*But I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives.
I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions
deserve.*

Jeremiah 17:10

*Then Jesus told them, "The time for judging this world has come, when
Satan, the ruler of this world will be cast out. And when I am lifted up
from earth, I will draw everyone to myself."*

John 12: 30-32

*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your
hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:7

*Through the sorrow of Christ being lifted up on the cross, we are given
the eternal peace and joy of knowing that we will also be lifted up and
transformed into new bodies and will be given new lives, IF we choose and
IF we believe.*

*We should spend our time well and lay up treasures for our eternity. Let
us prepare to die, so that we may rejoice at our hour of death. "For this
world is not our permanent home: we are looking forward to a home yet to
come."*

Hebrews 13:14

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him
who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but
has passed from death unto life.*

John 5:24

Maundy Thursday, April 1

*Psalm 102; Jeremiah 20:7-11;
I Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32; John 17*

So, I will come
with empty hands to your supper,
empty hands and dirty feet.
I will come as your guest
and with water, bread and wine
you will make me whole
and set me free to serve you.

Ruth Burgess, *Eggs and Ashes*

Good Friday, April 2

Psalm 95; Genesis 22:1-14; I Peter 1:10-20; John 19:38-42

Jesus, our friend,
your death was contrived by the clergy,
twisting events to suit their needs.
So write your gospel on our hearts
that we yearn for justice by your laws.
And when we betray you to suit our needs,
may we hear the cock crowing,
turn towards your love
and try again to live your gospel
every day. Amen.

Chris Polhill, *Eggs and Ashes*

Holy Saturday, April 3

Psalm 88; Job 19:21-28; Hebrews 4:1-16; Romans 8:1-11

God of life and death
WE WAIT IN HOPE.

God of all the worlds that are
WE WAIT IN HOPE.

God of dazzling darkness
WE WAIT IN HOPE.

WE WAIT IN HOPE AND AWE.

Ruth Burgess, *Eggs and Ashes*

In Appreciation

We are deeply thankful for the creative expressions contributed by members of the Worship and Music Committee for this season's *Lenten Journey*:

Richard Joiner, Introduction, February 17

Jeanne Cook, February 18-20

Rush Miller, February 22-24

Holly Wiggs, February 25-27

Monica Daniels, March 1-3

Joe Rankin, March 4-6

Crisler Boone, March 8-10

Gwen Anderson, March 11-13

Shirley Foster, March 15-17

Jo Ann Welch, March 18-20

Anne Brawley, March 22-24

Amy Williams, March 25-26

Linda McGehee, March 27, March 29

Rose Mary Porter, March 30-31

Gray Jackson, April 1-3

Amy Williams, Cover Art and Layout Design

Richard Joiner, Editor