



A LENTEN JOURNEY
2023



Northminster Baptist Church

Cover Art:

In loving memory of Cavett Taff

A Lenten Journey, 2023

Baptists of all stripes have one factor in common...our pilgrimage with God begins with a personal faith experience, one which sets us apart as a forgiven people, free of the encumbrance of resident sin, and braced with a gospel of hope and right living. James Weldon Johnson gifted us with his picturesque description of God's special creation of human beings, which we treasure in his *God's Trombones*:

And God stepped out on space,
and He looked around and said,
"I'm lonely...I'll make me a man."
Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled down;
And there the great God Almighty
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand;
This great God,
Like a mother bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till he shaped it in his own image;
Then into it he blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.

Given that status as God's special creation, we've used our gifts in questionable ways. Created as God's companions, we've denied God's goodness and behaved as unrighteous children.

Historically, Lent is that phase of the church year devoted to our attempts to turn things back in the direction of a focus on God. Lent is when we try to make it right. It is an incomplete, even an

erroneous attempt. The great gulf created by our hard-headedness is still there, even as we reach out to the eternal for a new way.

After forty days of struggle, Lent gives way to the incredible redemption story, when God convinces us of His great love, sent to us in the life and Passion of Jesus Christ. For those of us who believe, we know that it happened out of God's personal love for each of us, and it is accepted by each of us personally and lived in faith because it is a personal faith. The Lenten process now stretches before us. Let us walk the path of hurt and hope, trying to identify once again with God's great pain, and realizing even more the reality of God's great love for the people He created so long ago.

Ash Wednesday, February 22

Psalm 24:3-5; Psalm 103:13-22; Ecclesiastes 3:20; John 4:16

A Prayer for Ash Wednesday

We forget sometimes that ashes come from fire,
That this soft black powder was once a firm green frond,
Bright and vibrant before it became dry and brittle,
Stiff and fibrous before a flame transformed it into dust.
Every living thing submits to change.
Let's not fear it.
From seed to plant, palm to ash,
This bit of the earth smudged on our foreheads today
Was carried lovingly in the hands of the Creator.
What fires will we step into this Lent?
What new forms will our souls take
When we encounter the holy blaze of the Living God?
We are—it is true—ash to ash and dust to dust,
But whether in youth or in old age, in life or in death,
Let us be assured,
We are held, and we are God's.
Amen.

Cameron Bellm, "Spirit & Verse"

Thursday, February 23

Psalm 51; Jonah 3:1-10; Romans 1:1-7

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

Psalm 51

Repentance is a daunting task. During these 40 days of Lent, we prepare our hearts for the coming of the harsh realities of Holy Week in anticipation of the assured celebration of Easter. Like the stripping of the sanctuary, we open our hearts to the cleansing of Lent.

However, the Psalmist reminds us that acknowledging our wrongdoings, taking responsibility for our choices, and making amends is not the end of our Christian understanding of repentance. We are given the gift of a fresh start—a white baptismal garment, an empty tomb, a chrysalis, a new creation. Through the story of the resurrection, we find redemption, and we are recreated by a God that promises to be our sustainer. God is with us, and God will be with us even as we stumble. As we repeat the cycle, perhaps our heart remains cleaner a little longer, remaining in touch with the spirit a little longer—always transforming, bit by bit, into the created image of God, as intended.

Friday, February 24

Psalm 51; Johan 4:1-11; Romans 1:8-17

The people of Nineveh did not get what they deserved. Jonah's frustration is a human response. During the long period of repentance during Lent, our eyes are on the prize—redemption—when everything will be made right. Our human response seeks punishment and correction. God's response is one of forgiveness and fresh starts. "Making right" becomes a process of building relationships as God intended. Jonah struggled with his human response, and God reminded him that true redemption is not focusing on what is removed but on the glory of what can be created. Especially during Lent, let us be thankful that we do not "get what we deserve." We are children of God by creation and remain children of God by the grace of God. The people of Nineveh remembered their Creator. Like Jonah, we are resting in the shade of the grace of our Creator.

Saturday, February 25

Psalm 51; Isaiah 58:1-12; Matthew 18:1-7

Lent is a time to take the time
to let the power of our faith story take hold of us,
a time to let the events
get up and walk around in us,
a time to intensify
our living unto Christ,
a time to hover over
the thoughts of our hearts,
a time to place our feet in the streets of Jerusalem
or to walk along the sea and listen to his word,
a time to touch his robe
and feel the healing surge through us,
a time to ponder and a time to wonder . . .

Lent is a time to allow a fresh new taste of God!

Ann Weems, Kneeling in Jerusalem

First Sunday in Lent, February 26

*Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7, Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19;
Matthew 4:1-11*

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

Monday, February 27

Psalm 32; 1 Kings 19:1-8; Hebrews 2:10-18

Those of us who walk along this road
do so reluctantly.
Lent is not our favorite time of year.

We'd rather be more active—
planning and scurrying around.
All this is too contemplative to suit us.
Besides we don't know what to do
with piousness and prayer.

Perhaps we're afraid to have time to think,
for thoughts come unbidden.
Perhaps we're afraid to face our future
knowing our past.
Give us the courage, O God,
to hear your word
and to read our living into it.
Give us the trust to know we're forgiven,
and give us the faith
to take up our lives and walk.

Ann Weems, Kneeling in Jerusalem

Tuesday, February 28

Psalm 32; Genesis 4:1-16; Hebrews 4:14-5:10

Holy God, breathe your Spirit of life into us. We are creatures of earth, and we are your children, created in your image. We are frightened sometimes in this world full of risk and confusion. Sometimes things happen too fast, and we find it hard to make good decisions. We need your help.

God, as you created life at the beginning of time, create and shape us anew. We want to be clay once more, shaped by your hand, touching earth, contemplating heaven, loving, working, and playing on this good earth. We want to be a part of the circle of love you began in Jesus, reaching to embrace the whole world—a circle where sick people are healed, dying souls are comforted, the oppressed masses achieve new dignity, and all live in peace. Through your Spirit, let it be!

Ruth C. Duck, *Touch Holiness*

Wednesday, March 1

Psalm 32; Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28; Matthew 18:10-14

“Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.
Black and brown, peach and tan, all the children in the lands,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.”

(modified by Hart and Madeleine Wylie)

We grew up singing this little verse, and it contains a universal truth: children are innocent, precious, giving, and loving by their very nature. They are born with a spark of the divine glowing from their eyes. Who they become, though, is not so easy to predict. Some grow up to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Some become criminals or racists or cruel people.

How do we explain this? Remember the words to Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “You’ve Got to be Taught” from *South Pacific*:

You've got to be taught to hate and fear,
You've got to be taught from year to year,
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a different shade,
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught before it's too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate,
You've got to be carefully taught.

This is true, isn't it? Watch a kindergarten class or a Sunday School class which has children of various ethnicities in it. Do they only associate with children who look like them and reject the others? No, they don't seem to even see differences like that. They accept and love one another as people. It is only children who grow up in homes in which the parents teach them that people of different races are inferior that they begin over time to reflect that view. You must be taught. In Matthew, Jesus warns us not to harm or corrupt little ones. What a sin it is to teach children to hate or fear others!

Dear God,

Teach us to love one another and to remember that each of us is a child of God and precious because of it. Amen.

Thursday, March 2

Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:3-7

“I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.”

Psalm 121

Psalm 121 certainly gives us reassurance and hope that God is present in our lives and watching over us to protect us from harm always. Yet, we know from our experience that we are not protected from harm always. Bad things happen to good people. Some who are faithful servants still get cancer and die. Accidents do not appear to be distributed differently among the faithful and faithless. This is actually one of our first awakenings as we age, and it leads many to question God’s existence: If there is a God, why did my mother die at a young age of cancer? How did that child contract a disease that was fatal if God is watching over us?

Have you ever questioned the words of this Psalm? I know I have. I believe it, but then life happens and bad things happen to me. Yet, my family and I do see God’s presence in the midst of heartache and pain, sickness and even death. As Chuck Poole would often say, “God gives us the grace to go through what we cannot go around.”

God never promised us a rose garden, a trouble-free life, wealth and position, or an ideal existence. That is not who God is. God is a Holy Spirit within us helping us heal and get through life’s troubles and joys. God is the ground of our very being, placing goodness and love in our hearts which allows us to face life with confidence.

Friday, March 3

Psalm 121; Micah 7:18-20; Romans 3:21-31

“But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Romans 3:21-24

Christianity might have remained a small Jewish movement had it not been for Paul who expanded the faith to include Jews and Gentiles alike. To Paul, there was no difference between them—all were people who had fallen short of the glory of God and needed God’s grace and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul succeeded in spreading this gospel beyond the Jewish world into the Roman world where it eventually grew into an accepted religion, later the state religion of the Empire. We owe Paul a great debt of gratitude for the very existence of the church today. That is truly an amazing story in history. But what was so special about Christianity? Why did Christianity thrive and many of the other religious movements fade away? There was something about Jesus, his story, and the passion of his disciples and followers that was different. They were willing to stand up and follow him in the face of lions in the Colosseum or hanging from the executioner’s ax.

“We have all fallen short of the glory of God.” We all stand in need of the grace of God. We would not be empathetic, caring, and giving people without God in our lives: grounding us, loving us, and showing us how to love one another.

God,

Grant us your grace, love, and forgiveness as we have all fallen short of your glory. We know you are a God who forgives the worst within us. May we receive that redemption that comes to us through your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Saturday, March 4

Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:4-8; Luke 7:1-10

Today's readings from Psalm and Isaiah focus on God as the source of our salvation: Our help comes from the Lord. God's salvation will last forever. God's deliverance will never end. The scribes in Israel were probably familiar with these scriptures about Yahweh and God's love for Israel.

In the Gospel of Luke, we have an account of a gentile, a Roman centurion whose faith, according to Jesus, "surpasses even that which he has encountered in Israel." Perhaps this man had seen some of Jesus' signs, heard about how he fed the multitude with loaves and fish, or listened to his teachings. Jesus was willing to heal the man's servant, but because of the centurion's faith, his servant was healed at the very time he and Jesus spoke. That kind of faith, where one can speak to the mountains and the mountains move, is something that we as believers may have trouble understanding or accepting in our own walks with Jesus. The example of someone with this kind of faith, who had probably not been truly educated in Judaism or the scriptures, gives us hope that no matter who we are, we, too, can receive God's miracle.

The fulfillment of the goodness of God as Savior and Deliverer happens not only with the knowledge of the scriptures, but with the personal walk we have with the Lord. God is able to reach out and touch us at our point of need as our Provider. My prayer is for you to know how to ask God what you need, and then by faith receive from God. Like the centurion, God's mercies spoken to us at the point of our belief, can minister to us just when we need it.

Second Sunday in Lent, March 5

Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; Matthew 17:1-9

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

Monday, March 6

Psalm 128; Numbers 21:4-9; Hebrews 3:1-6

These passages of scripture I find comforting, particularly Psalm 128. This setting is of a family with prosperity and peace. What a blessing God gives. But as we walk with God on our journey, we may encounter what Moses and the Israelites did in Numbers—they grumbled against the Lord and Moses and were bitten by snakes. They repented and the Lord used Moses to bring healing to them. Their lack of obedience and ingratitude for the food God provided in the wilderness seems to be the reason why the people were bitten by the snakes. When they repented, their hearts once again became clean towards God as their sick bodies were healed.

This passage reminds us that not everything adverse we encounter in life is automatically evil; sometimes, the challenges we face are overcome by faith, bringing us closer to God. Jesus is the Savior who wants to come to us at our point of need. By grace, we are adopted as God's children. The closer we get to God, the more we understand the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which, through surrender and obedience, overcome the mountains set before us.

Tuesday, March 7

Psalm 128; Isaiah 65:17-25; Romans 4:6-13

Listen

with the night falling we are saying thank you
we are stopping on the bridges to bow from the railings
we are running out of the glass rooms
with our mouths full of food to look at the sky
and say thank you
we are standing by the water thanking it
standing by the windows looking out
in our directions

back from a series of hospitals back from a mugging
after funerals we are saying thank you
after the news of the dead
whether or not we knew them we are saying thank you

over telephones we are saying thank you
in doorways and in the backs of cars and in elevators
remembering wars and the police at the door
and the beatings on stairs we are saying thank you
in the banks we are saying thank you
in the faces of the officials and the rich
and of all who will never change
we go on saying thank you thank you

with the animals dying around us
taking our feelings we are saying thank you
with the forests falling faster than the minutes
of our lives we are saying thank you
with the words going out like cells of a brain
with the cities growing over us
we are saying thank you faster and faster
with nobody listening we are saying thank you
thank you we are saying and waving
dark though it is

W.S. Merwin, "Thanks" from *New and Selected Poems*

Wednesday, March 8

Psalm 128; Ezekiel 36:22-32; John 7:53-8:11

We have been taught to practice careful speech and to focus on loving the person in front of us. It is said that knowledge is knowing what to say, and wisdom is knowing when to say it. Dietrich Bonhoeffer knew the things to say at the most relevant times. He shared tremendous wisdom on spiritual devotion that continues to move us today. It was a timeless wisdom, one that is a beautiful guide in our own Christian journey.

In a technological and social media-driven world, we are constantly tempted to separate ourselves from our true Christian purpose of loving God with all that is in us and loving others as we want to be loved. A special friend once told me that I let my cell phone interrupt my life and my connection with others. It was a real slap in the face, but sadly it was true. I have decided to be more intentional in making a focused time for spiritual growth, a time to be still and release all agendas, allowing God to set the course of the silence. It is in the silence we are able to listen better for nudges of the Holy Spirit.

The thoughtful poet, Mary Oliver, says it beautifully in her poem “The Gift.”

Be still, my soul, and steadfast.

Earth and heaven both are still watching
though time is draining from the clock
and your walk, that once was confident and quick,
has become slow.

So, be slow if you must, but let
the heart still play its true part.
Love still as once you loved, deeply
and without patience. God and the world
know you are grateful.
That the gift has been given.

Thursday, March 9

Psalm 95; Exodus 16:1-8; Colossians 1:15-23

O Lord, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ;
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the
sins of the world, have mercy on us. Thou that sittest at the right
hand of God the Father, have mercy on us.

Book of Common Prayer, adapted

Where there is love, there is God. The Word of God says, let
everything that has breath praise God. When we praise the Lord,
we are magnifying God and putting every other thing below God.

In our crazy rush to live life, we need to pause, take a deep
breath, and rest our spirits into a quiet and calm place. Take time
to praise God for God's love, faithfulness, and mercies. Poet,
Mary Oliver said, "Breathe it all in. Love it all out."

Good morning Lord,

We praise you for your grace and your mighty power. The majesty
of your creation is awe inspiring. Your provisions are humbling.
Open our eyes to see the hurting around us and soften our hearts
to love and hurt with them. Let us learn from your example how
to reach out in loving compassion to help those in need.

We bring to you our broken hearts and broken dreams, and
you reach out to us with the greatest love of all. Your gentle love
heals our hurts. Your sacrificial love forgives us. May we open our
hearts to receive your grace. In the name of the Father, the Son,
and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Friday, March 10

Psalm 95: Exodus 16:9-21; Ephesians 2:11-22

We all have struggles and disappointments. During this Lenten season, remember the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

“The deep meaning of the Cross of Christ is that there is no suffering on Earth that is not borne by God.”

In a confused and divided world, what we really need to focus on is the gift of being transformed and reconciled to God, thankful that we have the gift of grace through Jesus Christ. God wants us to understand that we can start over again. Today can be a fresh start. We can be transformed and made into a holy temple for our Lord, a community of faith, together with the Saints, to be a place where God dwells in each of us by the Spirit. That tender place opens a wonderful opportunity to become humble and to have a quieten spirit.

As we grow in our faith, we become transformed and with that transformation, we are hungry to find God in the ordinary. He cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is a friend of silence. See how nature, trees, flowers, grass, all grow in silence; see the stars, the moon, and the sun, how they move in silence.

We need silence to be able to be inspired to touch souls. If we remain silent, centered, and aware, everything that appears is seen as it truly is: an emanation of love; therefore, the answer will be to radiate love back.

“Prayer is sitting in silence until it silences us, choosing gratitude until we are grateful, and praising God until we ourselves are an act of praise.”

Richard Rohr

Saturday, March 11

Psalm 95; Exodus 16:27-35; John 4:1-6

Exalted Manna

I love to lift you in the Eucharist,
For you descended to the depth for me,
You stooped beneath the whole weight of the world,
And held it as the nails drove through each wrist,
You Held us all through your long agony,
Held all the taunts and curses that we hurled
Held all our hurts deep in your heart for healing
And when we lifted you onto your cross
You lifted all of us up to the Father
And made your outspread arms a sign, revealing
God's all-sustaining love, that bears our loss,
Becomes our daily bread, calls us to gather
Each love, as manna in the wilderness.
So lift me as I lift you. Lift and bless.

Malcolm Guite

Third Sunday in Lent, March 12

Exodus 7:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

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

Monday, March 13

Psalm 81; Genesis 24:1-27; 2 John 1:1-13

Walk in Christ's Commandments

“I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.”

2 John 1:4-6

Tuesday, March 14

Psalm 81; Genesis 29:1-14; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

“In distress you called, and I delivered you. I answered you in the secret place of thunder. Hear, O my people, while I admonish you. O Israel, if you would but listen to me!”

Psalm 81:7-8

Lent offers a chance to again listen and ponder what it means to be faithful. Barbara Brown Taylor offers insight into what it means to serve God:

“What if the real test of our success as God’s servants is not what we do but how we do it? What if the real measure of our extraordinariness as Christians is not our thoughtfulness or our friendliness or our busyness but our SPARK? What if the real sign of our witness to the light is not how much we accomplish but our own LIGHTNESS, our own reflection of the bright God who has chosen us and lit us up and sent us into the world like candles in a dark room?”

Wednesday, March 15

Psalm 81; Jeremiah 2:4-13; John 7:14-31, 37-39

“I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt...But my people did not listen.”

Psalm 81:7-8

How do we listen so that we follow God’s ways?

Margaret Guenther says, “God has spoken to us in scripture and continues to speak—in the liturgy and in our prayers.” She says that listening requires paying attention so that our awareness might be sharpened. “We can hear God speak, predictably in sacred settings, but also in wildly unlikely places and circumstance: the subway, the shower, and the messy garage. After all, the Holy Spirit is blowing over us all the time, sometimes as gentle as a baby’s breath and sometimes roaring like a Kansas tornado. God speaks to us in the seemingly chance words of friend or stranger. God’s voice can be heard, too, in the words that appear to leap from the pages of a book. We hear God’s voice in our dreams, if we let ourselves be open to them. We hear it when the ordinary gains the sudden clarity of insight. God’s voice is powerful in the arts and pervasive in the book of nature. As St. Ephrem wrote in fourth-century Syria, ‘Everything in creation points to the creator.’ It’s all a matter of paying attention.”

from My Soul in Silence Waits

Thursday, March 16

Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:10-21; Ephesians 4:25-32

“What pleases the Lord: burnt offerings and sacrifices or obedience to his voice? It is better to obey than to sacrifice. It is better to listen to God than to offer the fat of sheep.”

I Samuel 15:22

Today’s readings continue the profound questions, “How do we please God? How do we follow God’s ways?” The verse above from Samuel reminds us that such action is not a quick, easy, mindless action like making a burnt offering. A life committed to God’s ways takes mindfulness and intention, listening and obeying.

The life of faith is not just a to-do list, but today’s verses from Ephesians give us a starting point: Put away lies and speak the truth. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger. Don’t steal but do honest work. Let no evil come out of your mouth, but only what is good and fitting for the occasion so that it imparts grace to those who hear. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all ill intent. Be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving as Christ forgave you.

Many verses from the Bible offer guidance including these. “What does the Lord require of you? But to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Matthew tells us that when Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, he replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40). And when Jesus was asked how many times we must forgive, he replied, “Not seven times, but seventy-seven times” (Matthew 18:22). Are we listening?

Friday, March 17

Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:22-31; Ephesians 5:1-9

There is A Savior

Are there burdens in your heart,
Is your past a memory that binds you,
Is there some pain that you've carried for too long?

Then strengthen your heart with this good news
There is a Savior and He's forgiven you.

There is a Savior, what joys express
His eyes are mercy, His word is rest
For each tomorrow, for yesterday
There is a Savior, who lights our way.

Greg Nelson, Bob Farrell, and Sandi Patti

Saturday, March 18

Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:32-34; John 1:1-9

Take a Break

Quieting your soul can awaken your senses to see and hear things you don't normally notice. There are sights and sounds that become a backdrop in the busyness of our lives. We lose sight of the little miracles all around us.

A leisurely walk is one of the best ways to appreciate the gifts we speed past day after day. The slow pace gives us a chance to notice some of these miracles. The joyful song of the birds early in the morning. The beauty of nature coming to life in the spring after a long, cold, dark winter.

Rest is a refuge we all need. We need to create breaks in the constant coming and going of our days. Even a small amount of time can make a big difference in how we feel and how we handle life.

During this season of Lent, take some time to quiet your soul and feel God's presence in the miracles all around you.

Dear Father,

Help me to slow down and take time to be thankful for the people in my life and for the good things around me. Give me the patience and wisdom to respond in love, always. Amen.

from *The Mountains are Calling*, adapted

Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 19

I Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

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

Monday, March 20

Psalm 146; Isaiah 59:9-19; Acts 9:1-20

Significant Silence

Silence has power. In music, a rest or pause sets phrases apart, often giving emphasis to special musical thoughts. In speaking, silence gives time for reflection on what has been spoken, and in this reflection the full meaning of the words opens to us. Silence turns us into listeners and enables us to think before we speak.

In the spiritual life, too, silence has power, for it is in silence of heart and mind that we meet God. While His voice is not unknown in the loud and raucous events of life, it is most commonly heard in the quietness of our own soul.

The power of silence rests in its wonderful contrast with sound; because the pause is often what gives meaning to the notes that follow.

Dear God, teach me to hear You in the silence of my heart. Amen.

from *Tune In to the Heart of God*

Tuesday, March 21

Psalm 146; Isaiah 42:14-21; Colossians 1:9-14

“Praise the Lord, O my soul! While I live I will praise the Lord; will sing praise to my God while I have my being.”

Psalm 146:1-2

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the son of his love, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

Colossians 1:13-14

“What is it to have a God? What is God? Answer: A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. As I have often said, the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you have not the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.”

Martin Luther

Wednesday, March 22

Psalm 146; Isaiah 60:17-22; Matthew 9:27-34

“The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord raises those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.”

Psalm 146:8

“But the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory. Your sun shall no longer go down, nor shall your moon withdraw itself; the Lord will be your everlasting light.”

Isaiah 60:18-20

“Then he touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith, let it be to you.’ And their eyes were opened.”

Matthew 9:29-30

“And when the demons were cast out, the mute spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying, ‘It was never seen like this in Israel.’”

Matthew 9:33

The Old Testament promises us again and again the light of the Lord. In the New Testament, the Lord descended to earth to provide a sunset for our sin and our old way of life. With God, we have a sunrise to heal us and make of us a new creation. Let us seek that power and way of living our lives through God’s Spirit, leadership, and healing. Let us choose to follow God’s star and live in God’s Light.

Thursday, March 23

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 1:1-3, 2:8-3:3; Revelation 10:1-11

“Moreover, He said to me, ‘Son of Man, eat what you find, eat this scroll, and go speak to the House of Israel.’”

Ezekiel 3:1

“And he said to me, ‘Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.’”

Revelation 10:9b

In today’s passages from Ezekiel and Revelation, we find parallels from two prophets: one in the Old Testament, one in the New Testament. According to scholars, Ezekiel prophesied from about 593 to 571 BCE as an exile in Babylon; the apostle John wrote the Revelation when he was exiled on the Isle of Patmos, possibly during the AD 80s.

Ezekiel was called as a young prophet around age thirty and was just starting his ministry when he had his first vision. John, an apostle of Jesus, was in his senior years when the visions of the book of Revelation were presented to him.

In Ezekiel’s vision, a hand holding a scroll of a book appeared to him. In John’s vision, an angel (presumed to be Christ) appeared to him with a little book. Both men were instructed to eat their scrolls, which would taste as sweet as honey, and then go prophesy; Ezekiel to the house of Israel and John to many people, nations, tongues, and kings.

Both were to proclaim the message of God’s glory. Those who would believe God’s word and live by its truth would be given the promise of salvation. But for those who rejected God’s truth, a bitter end was promised. This message to study and live by the God’s truth is as relevant today as it was centuries ago.

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I do hope.”

Psalm 130:5

Friday, March 24

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 33:10-16; Revelation 11:15-19

You may remember that John Newton, the English sea captain and slave trader who wrote “Amazing Grace,” turned away from a life that caused great suffering for others to a life lived under God’s grace. In addition to his hymns, Newton left us with this testimonial:

I am not what I might be, I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I wish to be, I am not what I hope to be; but I thank God I am not what I once was, and I can say with the great apostle, “By the grace of God, I am what I am.”

Newton’s words, which unite verses 11:15-16 in Handel’s immortal setting of the “Hallelujah Chorus,” are a living witness to what God foresaw in John’s Revelation:

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.”

Verse 17 then adds the triumphal moment:

“We give you thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, because you have taken your great power and begun your reign.”

These verses, as well as Handel’s magnificent musical setting, set forth what God has intended all along, that his great kingdom will be realized on earth and in our lives. Perhaps it is time for God’s kingdom to come on earth. Perhaps it is time for us to allow God to bring to pass a full realization of His kingdom in our own living, as we deal with the needs of God’s world.

Saturday, March 25

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 36:8-15; Luke 24:44-53

Each year the church gives us six weeks to take a long, loving look at our lives to see if our values and priorities are in line with God's desire for us. Since most of us find that we've wandered from God's path, Lent become that second chance or "do-over" to "return to God with our whole heart."

Our choir sings "In This Still Room," a musical setting of John Greenleaf Whittier's poem, by the same name, as an introit to worship:

And so I find it well to come
For deeper rest to this still room,
For here the habits of the soul
Feels less the outer word's control
For strength and mutual purpose pleads
More earnestly our common needs;
And from the silence multiplied
By these still walls on either side,
The world that time and sense have known,
Falls off and leaves us, God alone.

What can we expect to find there in that sacred space, in that emptiness of worldly things removed by self-sacrifice? Today's scriptures remind us of God's unfailing love for us and God's forgiveness for all of our sins. Blessed assurance, indeed.

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 26

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

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

Monday, March 27

Psalm 143; 1 Kings 17:17-24; Acts 20:7-12

Two of today's scriptures share the loss of a loved one, arguably one of the darkest moments in our human experience. Yet, through Jesus we are taught to put our faith over our fears—fear of loss and even death. Rob Smith's lyrics to "I will Trust You in the Darkness" capture this beautifully:

I will trust you in the darkness, I will serve you in my pain.
I will worship in the wilderness and will follow to the end.
For you are the suffering shepherd and you know your
sheep by name.
So I will trust you in the darkness once again.

I'll believe your word of comfort when the light of life
grows dim.
I will heed your voice at midnight when the tempests rage
within.
I will cling to Christ my savior who bore my sorrow's sting,
And I will trust you in the darkness once again.

"Faith is taking that first step, even when you can't see the whole staircase."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Step out in faith. Trust—even in the darkness.

Tuesday, March 28

Psalm 143; 2 Kings 4:18-37; Ephesians 2:1-10

“But God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us....made us alive together with Christ....and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 4:2-7

Nothing lasts.

Nothing good lasts. Nothing bad lasts. Nothing in this world lasts. Not a thing in this life endures for more than a few minutes. It comes and it goes. Bottom line.

People don't last. Feelings don't last. Happiness doesn't last. Sadness doesn't last. Circumstances don't last. Rainstorms approach, then dissipate. Famous corporations fail. Not a thing lasts.

There is only one thing in life that endures. Do you know what that thing is? The goodwill of heaven. The kindness of the Almighty. That's it.

This mercy from On High is so plentiful it's nonsensical. It defies knowledge. But it lasts. It never dies. And that is all I know.

I am no poet. I have no credentials. The only qualifications I have stem from my own suffering.

I've known pain. I've known hell. And I've also known the celestial grace of the ages. And now this is the only thing I know.

So hold onto it. Because it's yours, just like it's mine. No matter who you are. There are no magic words you have to say to receive the goodwill of heaven. No special handshake. No club to join. God belongs to you and vice versa. It is already so.

And even though it might sound clichéd, even though you might not believe what I'm about to say, even though you can't see it right now—**EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE OKAY.**

Thanks be to God.

Sean Dietrich, adapted

Wednesday, March 29

Psalm 143; Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41; Matthew 22:23-33

“Let me hear your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust.”

Psalm 143:8

Looking down into my father's
dead face
for the last time
my mother said without
tears, without smiles
without regrets
but with civility
“Goodnight, Willie Lee, I'll see you
in the morning.”
And it was then I knew that the healing
of all our wounds
is forgiveness
that permits a promise
of our return
at the end.

Alice Walker

Thursday, March 30

Psalm 31: 9-16; 1 Samuel 16:11-13; Philippians 1:1-11

XXXI In Te, Domine, speravi
(translated, I Put My Trust in You, Lord)

The night withdrew and joy came in the morning,
When I remembered that I was remembered,
That even through the bitter tears of mourning

I was sustained, the darkest powers were hindered
In their insidious work within my soul
And I was held together and re-remembered

By your unceasing love. You made me whole
When all the world was tearing me apart.
When there was fear on every side, you stole

Into the secret garden of my heart
A good thief in the night, and hid with me
In your strong tabernacle, held apart

From all that strife of tongues, cacophony
Of condemnations, so you kept me safe
In your deep silence and your mystery.

Malcom Guite, "Held Together and Remembered:
A Response to Psalm 31"

Friday, March 31

Psalm 31:9-16; Job 13:13-19; Philippians 1:21-30

“In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.”

Psalm 31

“Have we given Easter up to the lily bearers, the bunny rabbits, the patent leather shoes? Let’s face it: We live as though we don’t believe in Easter...

Easter scares us because we’re the people who can’t believe that God gives us abundant life; we think we have to earn it. But Easter says it’s already been paid! Easter says, no matter how prodigal, we can go home again! Let’s celebrate that amazing grace that in Christ’s resurrection we are still loved even at our most outrageous. The Lord has given us the music; all we need do is dance it! Come to the Easter party! Come to Easter party!”

Ann Weems, “Come To The Easter Party” (adapted)

God’s love is given to us unconditionally. Take a few moments to pray for your own needs and the needs of the world, and to thank God for His abundant life.

Saturday, April 1

Psalm 31:9-16; Lamentations 3:55-66; Mark 10:32-34

This Sunday at our church and at churches around the world, children will walk down the aisle waving fresh palm branches celebrating the entrance of Jesus, riding a donkey, as he entered Jerusalem.

On the outskirts of Jerusalem
the donkey waited.
Not especially brave, or filled with understanding,
he stood and waited.
How horses, turned out into the meadow,
leap with delight!
How doves, released from their cages,
clatter away, splashed with sunlight.

Then he let himself be led away.
Then he let the stranger mount.

Never had he seen such crowds!
And I wonder if he at all imagined what was to happen.
Still, he was what he had always been: small, dark, obedient.

I hope, finally, he felt brave.
I hope, finally, he loved the man who rode so lightly upon him,
as he lifted one dusty hoof and stepped, as he had to, forward.

Mary Oliver, "The Poet Thinks of the Donkey"

Palm Sunday, April 2

*Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11; Isaiah 50:4-9a;
Psalm 31:9-16; Phillipians 2:5-11; Matthew 27:11-54*

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

Monday of Holy Week, April 3

Psalm 51; Lamentations 1:1-12; 2 Corinthians 1:1-7; Mark 11:12-25

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”

Psalm 51:10-12

“Every time God forgives us, God is saying that God’s own rules do not matter as much as the relationship that God wants to create with us.”

Richard Rohr

“And grace is the great gift. So to be forgiven is only half the gift. The other half is that we also can forgive, restore, and liberate, and therefore we can feel the will of God enacted through us, which is the great restoration of ourselves to ourselves.”

Marilynn Robinson

“When you forgive, you in no way change the past—but you sure do change the future.”

Bernard Meltzer

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us.”

Psalm 103:12

Tuesday of Holy Week, April 4

Psalm 6; Lamentations 1:17-22; 2 Corinthians 1:8-22; Mark 11:27-33

A More Comfortable Savior

Lent makes me so uncomfortable.

I prefer to remain in my 'zone,'
lounging in my chair;
glued to my plasma screen;
relaxing after a long day;
but you lead me
into the wilderness
into those uncomfortable places
of tempting
of power,
of testing.

I would like to hear words
about success,
and praise,
and feel pats on my back,
but you talk about self-denial;
you mention the cost
of following God;
you invite me (!)
to shoulder a cross.

Couldn't you have sent
a more comfortable Savior,
O God?

Thom M. Shuman, *Prayers for Today*

Wednesday of Holy Week, April 5

*Psalm 55; Lamentations 2:1-9; 2 Corinthians 1:23 – 2:11;
Mark 12:1-11*

Looking for Jesus

Jesus Christ was a man
Who traveled through the land
A hard working man and brave
He said to the rich
Give your goods to the poor
But they laid
Jesus Christ in his grave

The poor working people
They followed him around
They sung and they shouted gay
The cops and the soldiers
They nailed him in the air
And they laid
Jesus Christ in his grave

Jesus was a man
A carpenter by hand
His followers true and brave
One dirty little coward
Called Judas Iscariot
Has laid
Jesus Christ in his grave

Well the people held their breath
When they heard about his death
And everybody wondered why
It was the landlord
And the soldiers that he hired
To nail Jesus Christ in the sky

He went to the preacher
He went to the sheriff
He told them all the same
Sell all of your jewelry
And give it to the poor
But they laid
Jesus Christ in his grave

This song
Was written in New York City
Of a rich man
Preacher and slave
But if Jesus was to preach
Like he preached in Galilee
They would lay
Jesus Christ in his grave

When Jesus came to town
All the working folks around
Believed what he did say
The bankers and the preachers
They nailed him on a cross
Then they laid
Jesus Christ in his grave

Kate Campbell

Maunday Thursday, April 6

*Psalm 102; Lamentations 2:10-18;
1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32; Mark 14:12-25*

There are minutes and then there are moments. This is a moment: “while they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it: this is my body’” (Mark 14:22).

That this minute happened during Passover made it a moment that would connect this time to the moment of the Passover when the children of the slaves were “passed over” from the plague of death. It is the moment of salvation where we are called to hope for God’s liberation.

That this minute happened in the presence of his disciples connects it to the countless moments disciples have remembered and repeated this very phrase and this very action through the last 2 millennia. It is the moment of discipleship where we are called to live into love, continuing a never-ending moment until the end of time.

That is minute happened hours before Jesus would lay down his body, refusing to extend violence on anyone other than himself, connects it to the moment of his cry: all is finished. The body broken. The blood shed. Ultimate love expressed. History has hinged.

Every minute we eat the bread and drink the cup...this moment continues.

Good Friday, April 7

Psalm 95; Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33; 1 Peter 1:10-20; John 13:36-38

“Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!”

John 13:38

Those of us who've been betrayed by someone we love (which is to say everyone reading this...) can understand the anguish that Jesus experiences here. There is almost nothing worse. It's as if the floor you're about to step on suddenly vanishes, your footing disappears, and the world is forever different.

Those of us who've betrayed someone we love (which is to say everyone reading this...) can understand Peter's denial. “Me, never!”

But context is everything and when facing the life-threatening prospect of being treated as Jesus was at that moment (tried, tortured)...Peter used all the profanity he could to get out of that identification. “Hell no! Jesus who?”

But redemption comes for us all. Jesus knows Peter's heart is bigger than his lapse. None of us can be reduced to our worst moment. Post-resurrection Jesus asked Peter if he loves him. Three times he asks. Three times the affirmation.

But the ultimate affirmation is at Peter's end. History tells us that Peter would be crucified upside down, so as to not assume he should be treated as Jesus. Love, in the end, casts out all fear. Even in the worst context imaginable.

Holy Saturday, April 8

Psalm 27; Lamentations 3:37-58; Hebrews 4:1-16

We spend our lives in the liminal time between yesterday and tomorrow. We call it today, or the present, but we don't always live there. We're often obsessively focused on what happened to us yesterday and what we fear may happen tomorrow. Holy Saturday has such resonance because that is where we find ourselves so often—between a very difficult yesterday and a very unknown tomorrow.

I've always found Psalm 27 both an inspiration and a “perspiration.” I know the words are true, but they do require work. From the first verse, “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?” to the last verse, “Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord,” we find a call to do the difficult—trust in what you can't see, wait for what you hope to see.

In between these verses we find the Psalmist in an ongoing conversation with God. “Do not hide your face...Do not reject me...”

I do not claim to have a grasp of this, but I do believe it's the key to a healthy spiritual and emotional life. Ensuring our ongoing conversation with God empowers us to process the past and to hold on to hope for our future.

One can only imagine the fear of those who had given up everything to follow Jesus...who was then laid in a tomb. But as with our lives today, this moment isn't the end of the story.

In Appreciation

The Worship and Music Committee of Northminster Baptist Church offers *A Lenten Journey, 2023* as a gift for the home and individual worship of our members and friends. Deepest gratitude is extended to the writers, contributors, and creative work of these committee members:

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