

Lenten Devotional

NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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Scripture quotations are from the following translations

as noted after the citation:

Common English Bible (CEB)

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

New International Version (NIV)

King James Version (KJV)

The Vanderbilt Divinity Library offers an excellent online daily lectionary.
lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu

Preface

*It is well known that Christ consistently
used the expression “follower.”
He never asks for admirers, worshipers, or adherents.
No, he calls disciples.
It is not adherents of a teaching,
but followers of a life, Christ is looking for.
~Søren Kierkegaard*

The Season of Lent is a journey I look forward to each year. It's an opportunity to become a stronger disciple; an opening to increase devotion to the One who journeyed to the cross on our behalf. It's an adventure in faith; a pilgrimage with our Lord to Calvary.

Lent comprises the 40 days before Easter (excluding Sundays, because Sundays are always celebrated as the Resurrection of our Lord). Included here are daily devotions to be reflected upon in the days ahead for study, prayer, confession, and the renewal of our life with God.

We encourage you to find a daily spot to read the scripture and to meditate upon it deeply. Reflect upon its meaning and ask yourself the question, “How am I being called as Christ's disciple? How shall I live in light of the ministry of Jesus my Lord?”

These devotions are written by multi-generational members and friends of our church and can be used as a resource for personal, group, or family devotion. Read the scripture. Light a candle. Take your time. Breathe. Be led by the Spirit beside our Way, Truth, and Light.

With Lenten grace and peace,

Lauren J McFeaters
Associate Pastor
Nassau Presbyterian Church
Lent 2019

Ash Wednesday

Psalm 51:1-17

Create a clean heart for me, God;
put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me!
Return the joy of your salvation to me
and sustain me with a willing spirit. – vs. 10, 12 (CEB)

Jonathan Shenk

Iwould like to offer a slight tweak to this psalm from our ancient Israelite spiritual companion. Rather than “create a clean heart for me,” why not “restore the child-like heart with which I was born?” Rather than “return the joy of your salvation,” why not “rekindle the joy of your salvation which burns deep within me”?

Because I suspect the greatest challenge in life, for many of us, is remembering and reclaiming the joy and exuberance of our early years, from the time before our hearts became timid and hardened from the various knocks and bruises of life. And so we are not looking for God to create anything wholly new here, but to stoke the joy in our hearts and rekindle the fire that is already there.

As we begin this journey of reflection and reconnection, my hope is that we might reclaim the gift of our sacred humanity and boldly embrace the joy of life.

God of joy and magnificence, enliven our hearts so they might reflect your glory. Invigorate our lives with the joy of your presence. Amen.

Thursday

Exodus 5:10–23

Then the slave drivers and the foremen went out and said to the people, “This is what Pharaoh says: ‘I will not give you any more straw. Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all.’ ” – vs. 10 (NIV)

Steve Longley

In Exodus 5:10–23 Pharaoh makes an unreasonable demand of the Israelites who serve him. Pharaoh commands the Israelites to deliver their daily quota of bricks despite Pharaoh’s decision to no longer provide the straw needed to make the bricks.

Sometimes we too make unreasonable requests of others. I know I do. Like Pharaoh, I sometimes expect others to respond to my requests before considering the implications of my stated needs. From a place of selfishness, I avoid asking the hard questions: Is my request just? Am I approaching others with empathy? Have I taken the time to stand in the other person’s shoes? Will my request promote mutuality and growth? Am I honoring God’s image in others?

God desires that all persons grow in their love of God and of community. However, when our hearts grow hard and selfish, proud and arrogant, as did Pharaoh’s heart, we close ourselves from God’s warm, loving embrace. But when our hearts are open, compassionate, and empathetic, God works through us for the glory of God and the benefit of all humanity.

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son. Look with compassion on the whole human family. Take away the arrogance and hatred that infect our hearts. Break down the walls that separate us, and unite us in the bonds of love. Through our struggle and confusion, work to accomplish your purposes on earth; that in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Friday

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

You will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust” – vs. 2 (NRSV)

Anthony (Tony) Glocker

Life from post WWII until recently was reasonably stable. I went to school and college, had a job for seven years and then another for 37 years. We lived in our house for 50 plus years. But now we live in a time of uncertainty. The unwritten rules that governed our political life are no longer in force. The rules that governed international relations and global trade are threatened. Where can I turn to find a safe harbor that will not be eroded, a place to be trusted to be there when I need it? For me the place is Nassau Church. That is where I find a community of people among whom I find my God, a refuge I can trust.

Constant and patient God, ask your angels to guard your people and never leave us alone. Amen.

Saturday

John 12:27–36

As long as you have the light, believe in the light so that you might become people whose lives are determined by the light – v. 36 (CEB)

Holly Hardaway

I am reminded in the reading of this passage of the African American traditional tune, “Jesus, the Light of the World” by George D. Elderkin, 1800. Singing it as a youth many years ago brought life and light to my young faith journey, but today it reinforces the depth of my gratitude for a faith that relies on the promise of this simple truth.

*Walk in the light, beautiful light.
Come where the dewdrops of mercy shine bright.
Shine all around us by day and by night.
Jesus, the light of the world.*

Light. A noun. A verb. Yes, a verb! Illuminate. Speaking the truth in love. Spreading hope. Advocating for justice for all. Standing up and doing the right thing. Is this what Jesus stood for? Stands for? Wants us to do today?

Jesus, light of the world, help us to remember what you have taught us and what you have shown us by bringing your light to our darkness. Thank you for illuminating our path every day. Help us listen and watch, and do what you desire and lead us to do; in Jesus' name. Amen.

First Sunday

Deuteronomy 26:1–11

Then celebrate all the good things the LORD your God has done for you and your family—each one of you along with the Levites and the immigrants who are among you. — v. 11 (CEB)

Larry Alphs

Today is the first Sunday in Lent, a “little Easter” oasis, as we pause in our Lenten journey to reflect on where we have been and where we are going. Today’s readings remind us of Jesus’ temptation, of God’s salvation and of God’s boundless love for us because we know the Lord’s name.

The words of verse 11 cut as well as heal. In our deeply troubling times, the foundations of who we are as a people seem to be shaking, perhaps crumbling. The Deuteronomic call for us to celebrate with the immigrants among us rings hollow as we seek to build walls to keep them out. The call to love kindness, do justice and walk humbly with our God grows fainter from our leaders and throughout our society. Does the Lord still hear us? Do we “know the Lord’s name”?

But, as we assemble together today, meditating on God’s faithfulness, we are reminded that we are an Easter people. We celebrate the good things that the Lord has done for us and for our families. We affirm that we are followers of Jesus, who stood firm in temptation. We can shout together, “The Lord is...”

Lord, rescue us. Protect us, because we know your name. We cry out to you. Answer us. Be with us in troubling times. Save us and glorify us. Fill us with old age. Show us your salvation. Amen.

Monday

1 John 2:1–6

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. – vs. 1-3 (NIV)

Joshua Stucky

Sin is the cause of all problems in the world. We all sin, and Jesus saves us from that sin. However, we need to know God, and be in a relationship with God, to know and to have the truth. We can't just say we know God though; we need to do as God says and live like God to truly know God.

I think it is important to read this verse as one of the “dear children” that John writes to, because we are all guilty of sin and all need to be in a relationship with God to be free from that sin. We are all children of God who have a need and a desire for God to be in our lives, and if you have God's love, you will never need anything else.

Dear Lord, help us to be free from sin and to truly know you; in your name we pray. Amen.

Tuesday

Zechariah 2:1–5, 10, 13

“Jerusalem shall be inhabited like villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and animals in it. For I will be a wall of fire all around it, says the Lord, and I will be the glory within it.”

– vs. 4b-5 (NRSV)

Debbie Tegarden

In 1972 I drove through East Germany to West Berlin. At each border, I had to show papers of identity, buy special car insurance, and attach special license plates. Why do the grim walls of history’s scars seduce us with comforts of documentation and barriers?

Perhaps your life, like mine, is defined by webs of measurements and calibrations we need to move through our days, to keep our balance from one week to another. But we also yearn to be enfolded in a living Spirit beyond measure, and to rejoice in the sacred space ablaze with the living presence of God. How can we reach the dwelling of the Lord without our compasses?

The Lord is a wall of fire surrounding his city. In Matthew, Jesus brings this prophecy closer to our hearts, “You are the light of the world. A city built upon a hill will not be hidden.”

*The atoms of Democritus and Newton’s Particles of light
Are sands upon the Red sea shore,
Where Israel’s tents do shine so bright (William Blake).*

Dear God, free us from the bonds of divisions, partitions, and separations that we may live to realize the joining of all people with the Lord in his temple of light and joy. Let us become a city of blazing light, without walls. Bricks and mortar, plumb lines and yardsticks cannot define or contain this city. Amen.

Wednesday

Luke 21:34–22:6

The chief priests and the legal experts were looking for a way to kill Jesus, because they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, who was one of the Twelve. He went out and discussed with the chief priests and officers of the temple guard how he could hand over Jesus to them. They were delighted and agreed payment for him. He agreed and began looking for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them. – vs. 2-6 (CEB)

Keith Mertz

Why, Judas?
 Why can't Jesus see things the way *I* do? *I've* studied the law, politics, history, and economics. *I'm* pretty sure the world works the way his enemies work.

Why can't Jesus see what he's giving up, and what *I* am giving up for him? *I've* followed Jesus for three years, what's in this for me?

I just want Jesus to pay attention to how *I* define success. Take up my cross, follow you? Really? *I've* tried to negotiate a win-win situation that makes everyone happy. I mean, why can't Jesus take over the temple and put *me* in charge of all the money?

I know that Jesus is powerful and that no matter what *I* do, *I* can't defeat his plans. *I* know he always has options. After all—legions of angels at his command—how awesome is that?

Now maybe Jesus will appreciate how important *I* am.

Fairest Lord Jesus, in this Lenten Season, help us to prepare for Easter. Help us to see ourselves in your passion. Forgive the motives that diminish our response to your call. Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison. Save us to your purpose for our lives. Save us to show your boundless love to all who need it. Bring our lives out of the darkness and into the light. Save us to be your light in the world. Amen.

Thursday

Psalm 27

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. — v. 13 (NRSV)

Patrick Foley

This verse strikes me as entirely appropriate for the world in which we live. As we move through our days that are filled with conflict and vitriol on so many levels, it can be easy to lose sight of our continual need to seek, find and enjoy the goodness of the Lord. If it's in a quiet moment of peace, a cup of coffee with a dear friend or a text from a loved one, the goodness of the Lord is with us, if we are tuned in to experience it.

I find this entire psalm very comforting. It encourages us to “be strong” and to “wait for the Lord.” Life can be so hectic and stressful that it can be easy to become frustrated in our search for the Lord and the peace that only he can provide. Sometimes, we need to be reminded to slow down and be patient as we “wait for the Lord.” If we do, wonderful things are possible and our faith will be rewarded.

Help us, Lord, as we seek the peace only you can provide. Help us to be patient and to see your goodness in the land of living. Amen.

Friday

Philippians 3:17–20

Brothers and sisters, become imitators of me and watch those who live this way—you can use us as models. As I have told you many times and now say with deep sadness, many people live as enemies of the cross. Their lives end with destruction. Their god is their stomach, and they take pride in their disgrace because their thoughts focus on earthly things. Our citizenship is in heaven. We look forward to a savior that comes from there—the Lord Jesus Christ.— vs. 17-20 (CEB)

Harry Carter

As a high school student with more freedom and more decisions to make every day, I sometimes feel lost. However, reading these verses reminded me that God is always with us and teaches us basic moral rules to refer to in order to live a good Christian life. As representatives of God, the Nassau Presbyterian Church community sets examples on how to live a good Christian life every Sunday. I always leave church feeling more connected to God and more motivated to do more good every day. This church is not a magical building, it is a community that teaches members to follow God. Every decision I have to make is always my decision but I am always grateful God and Nassau Church guide me from evil to good, to help me make the best decision.

God, help us connect to you by learning from each other every Sunday we meet; in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday

Psalm 118:26–29

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.

From the house of the LORD we bless you.

The LORD is God,

and he has made his light shine on us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession

up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will praise you;

you are my God, and I will exalt you. — vs. 26-29 (NIV)

Val Matthews

This cheerful poem shows the peoples' exuberant and happily noisy participation in their collective appreciation for God's blessings. Their presentation is such a positive and energetic statement. At the same time, they are aware of—and are willing to express—their loyalty, as they commit to exalt God.

We also may with confidence allow ourselves to celebrate our blessings, enthusiastically and cheerfully. At the same time, we recognize and celebrate our personal and our collective responsibilities, as well as our appreciation for God's grace and blessings.

Lord, please guide all of us with the courage to recognize and to celebrate our many blessings; and the courage and reality check to recognize and, yes, to celebrate with vitality our responsibilities, personally and as a society. Amen.

Second Sunday

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Then he brought Abram outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars if you think you can count them." He continued, "This is how many children you will have." – v. 5 (CEB)

Tom Coogan

Heaven

beckons

shimmering

*Look up at the sky and count the stars if you think
you can count them*

pondering

prototype

Abram's

righteous

response

inspires

faith

firmly

grounded.

*Lord, mighty God,
grant that our modern star-counters
can discover your abundant love.
Amen.*

Monday

Psalm 105:1–42

Pursue the LORD and his strength;
seek his face always!

Remember the wondrous works he has done,
all his marvelous works, and the justice he declared. – vs. 4–5 (CEB)

Claire Mulry

As I sat to consider Psalm 105, I must admit I was a bit world weary. It is much easier to focus on what is wrong and list a litany of injustices surrounding us than to remember wondrous works. Yet these wondrous works surround us daily and we fail to notice. We lose faith. How easily we forget the Lord's strength is with and within us. May we strive each day to seek the Lord's face, remember his wondrous works and justice declared.

God, our strength, open our eyes to see your wondrous works; fill our hearts with the strength to work for your justice. Amen.

Tuesday

Psalm 105:1–42

The LORD—he is our God.

His justice is everywhere throughout the whole world.

God remembers his covenant forever,
the word he commanded to a thousand generations,
which he made with Abraham,
the solemn pledge he swore to Isaac.— vs. 7-9 (CEB)

John Thurber

The first verses of Psalm 105 are overflowing with thanksgiving for the power and strength of God. We are reminded to sing praises to the Lord constantly in appreciation of God's marvelous works throughout the world.

As we awaken each morning, God's miracles may not be the first thing we experience. The truth is that the world around us may appear to us deeply broken. Too often we may be consumed with despair at what we see and experience each day. How can we reconcile this very human landscape with the promise of God's protection and justice throughout the world?

It is the promise of God's covenant that is the source of our hope. Our God chose us for this covenantal relationship, despite our many human fallibilities and failures. This is a promise like no other, and we can hardly refrain from singing.

Gracious and loving God, we give thanks for your covenant, and for the transforming power of your promise, as revealed to us through the incarnation, cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Help us to sing praises to you and to tell of your wondrous works each day of our lives. Amen.

Wednesday

Luke 13:22–31

Someone said to him, “Lord, will only a few be saved?” Jesus said to them, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow gate. Many, I tell you, will try to enter and won’t be able to. – vs. 23–24 (CEB)

Sheri Haan

Three young women sat near me at the coffee shop discussing their dream—getting into Princeton University. Questions tumbled out. Could they distinguish themselves? Who would write great references? Were their grades high enough? Cross cultural experiences? Volunteer hours? The excitement came to a halt when one mentioned the numbing statistic: roughly six percent get in! Eyes rolled until one declared, “Hey! We can do this!”

Meanwhile I was trying to concentrate on this devotional, thinking about a kingdom where the way is also narrow. Yet, two completely different processes. One requiring stellar accomplishments; the other, none. Hanging around the church doesn’t cut it. No resumes, references or transcripts needed. God already knows that stuff! The application process? Simply kneel before God, confess sin, profess absolute belief in and ask for the blood of Christ to save.

And the great news? The acceptance rate is one-hundred percent. Guaranteed!

Humble our hearts, Lord. We set aside all earthly accomplishments to kneel before you, empty of self, allowing the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us completely. Amen.

Thursday

Psalm 63:1–8

God! My God! It's you—

I search for you! My whole being thirsts for you!

My body desires you in a dry and tired land, no water anywhere.

Yes, I've seen you in the sanctuary; I've seen your power and glory.

My lips praise you because your faithful love is better than life itself!

So I will bless you as long as I'm alive;

I will lift up my hands in your name.

I'm fully satisfied—as with a rich dinner.

My mouth speaks praise with joy on my lips—

whenever I ponder you on my bed,

whenever I meditate on you in the middle of the night—

because you've been a help to me

and I shout for joy in the protection of your wings.

My whole being clings to you; your strong hand upholds me. — (CEB)

Kim Kleasen

The psalmist displays great trust in and love for God. The psalmist has seen and experienced God in very personal ways in her life and is drawn, therefore, to praise God with joy. In our daily lives we experience God, perhaps in large and momentous ways but, likely more often than not, in subtle and small ways. Our ability to be present and consciously attuned to our daily experiences will open the path to experiencing God more fully. In that experience, we will find ways to live out God's purpose for us in ways that we may not imagine otherwise. Through that experience we will find great joy and be compelled to praise God, each of us in our own way—through words, meditation, song, faithful works, poetry or with any of the multitude of talents God has provided. Let us praise God!

Dear God, open more fully my heart and eyes today so that I can see your guiding hand in my life in a way that I have not seen before. Thank you for your everlasting presence with me. Amen.

Friday

Psalm 63:1–8

You, God, are my God,
 earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you,
 my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where
 there is no water.

I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your
 glory.

Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.
 I will praise you as long as I live,
 and in your name I will lift up my hands.

I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;
 with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

On my bed I remember you;
 I think of you through the watches of the night.

Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.
 I cling to you; your right hand upholds me. – (NIV)

John F. Kelsey, III

March 22, 2019 – International World Water Day

Our bodies require water to survive. But even where there is no water, the power and glory of God will sustain my soul. When I am feeling sorry for myself, regardless of the reason, God alone can fill me with his love when I seek it. God is the center, the being of my life. Those who say they are believers may tread this dry and thirsty land, but they must demonstrate their love with deeds and actions and words that glorify God!

Help us to recognize true serenity when we walk with God. Let our worldly desires come only after seeking first the kingdom of God— all else may be added unto us. God is the water of our souls. Amen.

Saturday

Luke 6:43–45

The good person out of good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil: for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. – v. 45 (NRSV)

Timothy Brown

By now in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus had taught about the loving character of God and what it is to “believe.” Here, he moves beyond knowledge and belief, to teach about faith. It is not enough to listen, to hear, to understand and to believe. To be a person of faith, one’s behavior must reflect one’s beliefs. As breath is necessary for speech, so too is conduct necessary for faith. The words we choose are a fundamental part of what we “do” as human beings. Words make manifest who we are and the character of the treasure of our hearts—be it good or be it evil.

Our mouths can speak words that can nurture bigotry or acceptance; sow hatred or love; harm or heal; humiliate or honor; instill fear or courage; bind together families and friends or tear them apart. Words can cause war or peace. A stray word can wound a child for a lifetime and a thoughtful one can awaken a saint. And when faithfully shared between the stranger, the “other” or even the enemy, words can lift humankind to the heights of God’s kingdom.

Words...choose them faithfully.

Help us nurture good treasure in our hearts and help us know that the true value of our treasure arises only from its being shared with others through our words and actions. Amen.

Third Sunday

John 13:34–35

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

— vs.34-35 (KJV)

Janet Anderson

By this shall all men know that you are Mine:
that you shall gather in the arms of love
the lonely, lost, defenseless; this the sign
that holy fire has touched you from above.

By this shall you be known: the outstretched hand,
the voice of welcome and the open door
to greet the weary strangers where they stand
(for you were strangers on a foreign shore).

As I have loved you, let your love be given;
as I command, so may you keep My Word:
so love shall reign on earth as now in heaven,
and by all nations will My voice be heard.

By outward acts the inward soul enshrine:
by this shall all men know that you are Mine.

Dear God, as your love has embraced us, may we also embrace in love all your children as our brothers and sisters. Amen.

Monday

Psalm 39

But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you. – v. 7 (NIV)

Benjamin Yeh

When life brings us to the end of our rope, when despair pushes us to the edge of the cliff, what do we do? When we feel abandoned, alone and lost, we may ask God, what is still left to us?

In the novel *Ordinary Grace*, the pastor, who lost his daughter to a senseless murder, seems to offer us the answer. He said that God still leaves us three profound blessings: *faith, hope and love*. God gives us freely these gifts, and he's given us *complete control* over them. Even in the darkest night it's still within our power to hold to faith. We can still embrace hope. And we can still stand steadfast in our love for others and for God.

Unless we agree to throw away these gifts, no one, and nothing, can take these gifts from God away.

O Lord, open our eyes to see the abundance of your love. Help us to exercise daily our faith, hope and love—your precious gifts to us. Amen.

Tuesday

Psalm 39

Hear my prayer, LORD!

Listen closely to my cry for help!

Please don't ignore my tears!

I'm just a foreigner—

an immigrant staying with you,

just like all my ancestors were. — v. 12 (CEB)

Jay Dunn

I considered myself to be a patriotic American, but I was conscripted to participate in a war effort that I regarded as unwise and probably immoral. What's a Christian to do? I didn't have an answer, but God did.

I served on an airbase in Vietnam that was near an orphanage. Periodically the youngsters were brought to the base and I was able to play a part in giving them a small taste of the kind of childhood I had taken for granted. I even tried to spread cheer among adults, but that was not as easy. They knew that if I survived the war I would go home in a few months. They already were home and had no escape from the horrors of the war. On two occasions I thought I wouldn't survive, but God brought me through those very scary incidents. Maybe I made a difference in a few peoples' lives while I was there.

Father, we rejoice that when we don't have an answer we can trust that you do. Please let us not lose sight of this universal truth. Amen.

Wednesday

Luke 13:18–21

Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.” – vs. 18-19 (NIV)

Janine Edwards

Words felt in the soul. Can you see it? That tree: an act of hope that led to growth. It brought song and shelter.

Maybe it's a lovely spring day and a child, moved by the fresh warmth and the smell of damp soil, finds a small spot to call her own. She eagerly presses the seed into the soil and waits expectantly.

Maybe it's a dreary Saturday, crisp with lingering winter air, yet a woman, tending her “To Do” list, finds herself at #7: Plant spring garden. She dutifully clears the area of weeds and plants her seed realizing this act is just the start of many hours of tending.

Maybe it's the season of Lent, marching us towards death, and we, as the kingdom of God, wonder what act of hope we are called to, what seed to plant, what growth should we anticipate.

Can we envision that tree, giving shelter, bringing joy?
“... and the birds perched in its branches.”

Jesus, God who lived on earth, let our faith prompt us to scatter seeds of hope. Help us believe and know that you can bring about change and grow our community into a place of shelter and song. Amen.

Thursday

2 Corinthians 4:16–5:5

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond measure. – vs. 16-17 (NRSV)

Marshall McKnight

I took the wrong ferry run to Isle au Haut, Maine, which meant I had to back pack four miles to my campsite. That would've been okay, except I was planning for a walk of 400 feet and brought way too much gear. I left some stuff with the boat pilot and arranged to meet him later in the day when he would stop at the camp's dock. That would have been fine, except for some reason, I did not trust him with my food pack, so I had to carry that in my arms which soon felt like an affliction that I could not overcome.

My vacation, a rare solitary one on a spectacular day in a beautiful place in August, quickly became a heavy, stressful ordeal of my own making. I spent the first quarter mile or so silently cursing my stupidity and the next stretch wondering if I was going to make it at all, much less in time to meet the pilot.

Then I remembered “Siyahamba” the song we sing in worship and began to sing it as I scrambled through pristine green forest on a trail of rock and gnarled roots.

We are marching in the light of God.

While my burden did not lighten, I remembered that I was not alone and I felt God and my Nassau Church friends hiking and singing with me.

When I took my pack off and laid my burdens down at the campsite, I said, “I did it, baby!” I quickly corrected myself because I remembered that God and you, my friends, helped me do it.

I said, “Thank you, Lord.”

Lord, please help us remember that our afflictions are momentary and you are always with us as we together march in your light toward the full weight of your eternal glory. Amen.

Friday

Psalm 32

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.
I will counsel you with my eye upon you. — v. 8 (NRSV)

Linda Ott

The average adult makes 35,000 choices each day. Some seem inconsequential: What to wear? What to eat? What to buy? Some are obviously very important: Where to attend school? Getting married? Changing jobs? Retiring? Relocating?

According to C. S. Lewis each choice is important. “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 than 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 into a heavenly creature or 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.... Each of us at each moment is progressing into one state or the other.”

Thanks be to God’s eye upon me in all the ways I should go!

Dear God, help me understand that in this interconnected world all my choices can matter enormously—especially to the marginalized affected by my consumer habits. Thank you for your promise to teach, counsel and instruct me in all my decisions. Amen.

Saturday

Luke 15:1–10

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. — v. 7 (CEB)

Eliana Hansen

Jesus is talking to a crowd. This particular crowd is full of tax collectors and sinners. Just like this crowd, we are listening in the hope of finding hope. While the crowd is listening Jesus tells a parable. This parable is about a shepherd and his sheep. This shepherd has 100 sheep, and one happens to go astray. So instead of the shepherd letting the sheep go to its very obvious doom, this shepherd goes after the sheep. Once the shepherd finds the sheep, he is delighting in telling all his neighbors about this joy.

I as a human tend to go astray a lot, just like the sheep. I look straight at the forest of sin, and more or less think, let me just take a quick walk. However, before I can take that quick walk straight to sin, Jesus calls me back. Sometimes I ignore that call, but no matter how hard I try to hide from Jesus he will search until he finds me, and rejoices.

Dear Jesus, please save us from the forest of sin, and help us find our way back to you. Amen.

Fourth Sunday

Luke 15:1–3, 11b–32

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

— vs. 31–32 (NIV)

Mani Pulimood

The story of the prodigal son speaks of the compassionate love of a father for both his wayward sons. A father who never stops loving them even though they were outwardly or inwardly wayward.

The rebellious younger son demands his inheritance, leaves home, and squanders his money. He sinks to the depths of despair, before he comes to his senses and asks for forgiveness.

The older son stays home, but gets bitter and resents his father’s decision to welcome his brother home. He demands that the father be unforgiving and heartless to his poor homeless brother.

Who or where are we in our spiritual journey? The prodigal son coming to the Father for forgiveness, or the resentful older brother who does not want to forgive, or the compassionate father reaching out in love to both his wayward sons.

Are we not blessed that we have an older brother in Christ who showed us how to behave and what to believe through his parables? Then as the only begotten son of God, Christ was willing to die for our sins so that we may find our way to our loving Father who gladly forgives us when we confess our sins.

Lord, we are your hands and feet in this world today. Grant us grace to forgive one another and in so doing find joy in loving one another as you created us to be. Amen.

Monday

Psalm 53

They are corrupt, and their ways are vile;
 there is no one who does good.
 Everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt;
 there is no one who does good, not even one." — vs. 1b, 3 (NIV)

Anne-Renee Rice-Soumeillant

David could have written this psalm about our current world, and yet, his observation was of the people so very long ago. Weren't we supposed to have evolved? How has our Lord put up with this lot of undeserving people and continued to love us?

Where and how does grace bore into this whirlwind of "evildoers"? Is grace working for us/them?

Can we assume that evil is part of human nature and will continue into eternity as long as they/we shun the Lord as a whole? In assuming this, do we allow it, look the other way and are, in essence, in accord with it?

God is surely sad that behaviors have not changed and that evil acts abound. I believe that evil and corruption are constant forces that we must each work against daily.

Lord, we pray that evil forces in humanity be quenched by your love and salvation. May we teach others who do not believe in you and may we honor you. We pray that our imperfect selves will be your faithful army to help alter the course of evil in our world. Amen.

Tuesday

Leviticus 25:1–19

You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely. The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely. – vs. 18-19 (NRSV)

Karen Brown

Nature is where I encounter God. When I need calm to pray, I imagine sitting by a flowing river, gazing at lofty peaks, with no human distraction anywhere. This passage helped me to understand why this seems so right to me. There is an interrelationship between us, God’s creation, and God himself. How apt that rules laid down to reconcile the ancient Israelites to God also allowed them to live in harmony with his creation!

As Christians, we have been reconciled to God through the blood of Christ. We are no longer beholden to the Law. Yet still, we live in a broken world. That brokenness is manifested not only in our cruelty to each other, but also in the deterioration of our world from the ravages of climate change. As part of discipleship, we strive to be better citizens of God’s world. Should we not also strive to be better stewards over his creation?

Dear Lord, I thank and praise you for the richness, beauty and bounty of our world. Please help us to stand as witnesses against all the manifestations of sin in your amazing creation. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Wednesday

Psalm 53

They have all fallen away, they are all alike perverse;
there is no one who does good, no, not one. - v. 3 (NRSV)

Elizabeth Gift

I have a confession to make. Until very recently, I hated confession or anything that reminded me that I am a sinner. I hated acknowledging that I was anything less than perfect. But recently, God has been teaching me through my own experiences, and the examples of others, about the beauty, grace, and healing that can be found in acknowledging our sins and confessing them to God. When I go before God in prayer to acknowledge the ways I have fallen short, when I stand before the Lord asking for help and for forgiveness, when I admit that I am far from perfect and that I want God's help to make things right, I find grace, peace, and healing that goes to the core of my very being. It goes beyond this, though, for I also find that my relationship with the Lord grows deeper, richer, and more intimate because I have shared the most secret places of my heart with God.

*Lord Jesus, thank you for meeting us even in the depths of our sin,
and for offering to us forgiveness, hope, and new life in you. Amen.*

Thursday

Isaiah 43:1-7

But now thus says the LORD,
 he who created you, O Jacob,
 he who formed you, O Israel:
 Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
 I have called you by name, you are mine. – v. 1 (NRSV)

Holley Barreto

It was a summer night at a Young Life camp in 1995 or 1996. Maybe at Lake Champion? My memory is hazy on the details.

I remember the speaker at that evening's gathering telling us we were all God's beloved. He encouraged us to yell it to our neighbors, as if God was personally delivering this message loudly and clearly to each of us. "YOU ARE MY BELOVED!"

It felt silly and a bit uncomfortable. I giggled uneasily, both from the noise of hundreds of teenagers yelling and from the contradiction of speaking such an intimate message so loudly.

Not much else about this evening has stuck with me.

Except that over 20 years later, the message is still there loud and clear. It now echoes in my heart rather than in a crowded room:

I have called you by name, you are mine. You are my beloved.

O Lord, thank you for loving me boldly, graciously, constantly. Root in me the truth that you have called me by name and that I am yours. Allow this truth to bloom in me so that my words and deeds are a witness of your love to those around me. Amen.

Friday

Psalm 126

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. – v. 5 (NRSV)

Darrell and Judy Guder

Psalm 126 captures central themes of the observance of Lent. The throngs on their way to worship express both mourning, and rejoicing. They look back upon hard times, and they weep. As they do, they recall that God has always responded to their lament. Again and again, “the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion.” They have reason to laugh, to share their joy, to confess that “the Lord has done great things for us.”

In our Lent of 2019, there is much going on in our personal lives and our national journey that is cause to mourn, even weep. What is remarkable in Psalm 126 is the linking of sowing, weeping, and shouts of joy. The psalm is a prayer, and it expresses the confidence of a people for whom suffering was never the last word. This psalm reminds us that we are called and sent to sow now, regardless of how bleak our present situation may be.

Lord, enable us to live in confident hope so that we may sing this new song: “The Lord has done great things for us: we are glad!” Amen.

Saturday

John 11:45–57

Then the chief priests and Pharisees called together the council and said, “What are we going to do? This man is doing many miraculous signs! If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. Then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our people.” One of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, told them, “You don’t know anything! You don’t see that it is better for you that one man die for the people rather than the whole nation be destroyed.” He didn’t say this on his own. As high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would soon die for the nation—and not only for the nation. Jesus would also die so that God’s children scattered everywhere would be gathered together as one. From that day on they plotted to kill him. — vs. 47–53 (CEB)

Lisa Burke

In a 1964 NFL game between the Minnesota Vikings and the San Francisco 49ers, Bill Kilmer, the 49er’s quarterback, fumbled while being sacked in the backfield. Jim Marshall, Viking defensive end, scooped the ball and raced down the field...the wrong way. He ran into the wrong end zone for a safety against his team. Not realizing what he had done, Marshall threw the ball towards the stands in elation after “scoring” the safety.

In our scripture passage, Caiaphas’ efforts to control Jesus’ influence among the Jews actually set another play in motion—God’s plan for our salvation—and scored a safety against his own team.

Dear Lord, thank you for your plan for our lives. Guide our hearts and minds, and give us peace. Amen.

Fifth Sunday

Psalm 126

Yes, the Lord has done great things for us, and we are overjoyed.
 Lord, change our circumstances for the better,
 like dry streams in the desert waste!
 Let those who plant with tears reap the harvest with joyful shouts.
 Let those who go out, crying and carrying their seed,
 come home with joyful shouts, carrying bales of grain!

— vs. 3–6 (CEB)

Rebekah Sterlacci

In one of my favorite songs, “Spirit Cold” by Tall Heights, the question is asked “How do I wake my spirit cold?” The song goes on:

*How do I learn my dreams to mold?
 To lay them bare in the morning cold?
 If they're still out there, then the chasm grows.
 For all you know, for all you've known.*

I struggle daily with the sadness, anger, ignorance, cruelty, apathy, weary, pain, and grief of our world. It can become suffocating. Music is a way for me to connect with God’s love and interpret the world in a different way to find hope, joy, perseverance, resilience, happiness, and kindness. We must remember that God is with us. The love of God helps us to find ways to navigate our daily challenges. When Tall Heights later sings, “Steady are the feet in the morning glow,” I think of the words of the psalmist: “Let those who plant with tears reap the harvest with joyful shouts!”

Heavenly Father, help us to find sure footing in the morning glow and to remember all that the Lord has done for us. Help us to be joyful in our homes, places of work, and our communities as we remember your love. Help us to be glad in your promise of salvation and to share this gladness with others. Amen.

Monday

Psalm 20

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. – v. 7 (NIV)

Eliot Daley

At my first glance of Psalm 20, I got a false positive. As a young kid, I rode horses in the hills high above Oakland and Berkeley every weekend while yearning for a high-horsepower chariot with four wheels. That yearning was amply fulfilled in my adult years with a succession of pretty spiffy sports cars. But that was just my superficial reaction to this passage.

What reached me more deeply is not the obvious emphasis on “trust” but, rather, the use of “we.” It reminds me that faith is a team sport. Who among us can sustain a robust 24/7 confidence that God is at our side without experiencing God’s love through others? My father demonstrated to me on our very first camping trip that it’s not possible to build a fire with one log. A fire is sustained by several logs continually igniting each other. So let it be for us.

O God, whom we dare to call “our” God, trip us up when we sidle away from each other and, therefore, from you, that we might tumble back into each other’s arms and rekindle our shared faith. Amen.

Tuesday

Psalm 20

Now I know that the LORD saveth his anointed;
he will hear him from his holy heaven
with the strength of his right hand. — v. 6 (KJV)

Bart Jackson

God loves me, of course.

We shrug this idea into memory, then dismiss as a given—a fact like the sky being blue and Nassau having no parking. But after pondering, I realized God’s constant love is the utmost miracle. No rationale explains why the Creator and Sustainer of all that is must lavish his love on us. It completely baffles Satan: where’s the benefit, what’s God’s return on this investment? We bask in this divine love, and the wise among us realize how hourly, desperately we depend on it. Some of us adoringly return it in our own blunderful ways. Yet our loving Lord certainly does not require returned adoration any more than a burned ox.

Nonetheless, here we stand, beloved by God. Almost as astonishing: God listens to our pleas—and cares! And as a final dollop, God seeds love amongst ourselves. Miraculous.

Dear Lord, may we further strive to know you, talk with you, and appreciate the overwhelming flow of miracles you send our way. Amen.

Wednesday

Luke 18:31-34

But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

— v. 34 (NRSV)

Christianne Lane

So many times the true nature of things is hidden from us in plain sight, and often we only understand later with the advantage of hind sight. Perhaps a friend says something strange that turns out to be nearly letting the cat out of the bag about a surprise in your honor. Or a seemingly offhand comment from a colleague only later reveals how sad and lonely he was. Then there are the times a simple ache reveals an irreversible disease, or an annoying symptom can in hindsight be identified as an early indication of a miraculous life growing in a woman's body. It reassures me that even the disciples, who were with Jesus day after day, could not comprehend what to us in the pages of Luke's Gospel is a clear message of Jesus' coming death and glory. It was "hidden" from them, revealed only after the events Jesus speaks of here.

Dear God,

Open our eyes to see your glory in the world around us.

Open our ears to truly hear your word in scripture and in the mouths of the young and old.

Open our hearts to share in the joy and needs of others.

Loosen our tongues to sing your praise.

Amen

Thursday

Hebrews 2:1–9

How will we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? – v. 3 (CEB)

Bill Creager

Inearly drowned when I was ten, having fallen from a boat into the rapids of an icy Utah river. A wonderful, brave man named Bosco was standing far downstream. He tied a heavy rope around his waist and waded into the river to try to catch me as I floated by. It was a near thing: I was so cold, had given up, and was hallucinating. I remember his voice jolting me to alertness: “Hey—I can’t do this alone. Swim to me!”

I’ve never been too bothered by the whole “faith or works” conundrum, because of that punch-in-the-gut memory of Bosco coming for me, yelling at me to wake up, swim, help in my own rescue, grab his saving hand.

The writer in Hebrews challenges us to “pay more attention to what we’ve heard, or else we drift away” and speaks of a salvation “announced through the Lord.” Surely the thought is of Jesus unrolling the Isaiah scroll, reading: “God has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, to announce, ‘This is God’s year to act!’” How to swim towards that salvation today?

Brave God, sometimes we are cold to the bone, but we know you are in the river with us. Amen.

Friday

Hebrews 2:10–18

Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested. — v. 18 (NRSV)

Lynne Seidel

It isn't clear by whom or for whom this book was written. But we know the Christians were being persecuted by Roman authorities, and waiting, wondering when, if ever, Jesus would return. Maybe they felt ready to throw in the towel. So they needed reminding of God's promises. They needed encouragement.

Jesus is fully human and fully God. Fully human, he knows all human experience from the inside. Our pain and suffering, physical and emotional, is his also. He stands by us and strengthens us to not give up.

When you sing, “nobody knows the trouble I've seen,” *tell him*. He gets it.

Lord Jesus, who was one with us in your humanness, thank you for your deep understanding of our problems, for walking beside us. Remind us to pray without ceasing. We trust you. Amen.

Saturday

Luke 22:1-13

And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. – v. 4 (KJV)

Cynthia Lynn Miller

Betrayal. What prompts it? Why did Thomas à Becket betray Henry II? What of Mary, Queen of Scots, and Queen Elizabeth I? Brutus and Julius Caesar? John Adams and Thomas Jefferson? Gertrude and Hamlet? Duncan and Macbeth? Then, we have Judas and Jesus. A swirl of theories exist as to what motivated Judas: money, jealousy, hatred. Or did he feel unworthy? Unloved? Undeserving of that which he preached? It is a challenge to reach back into history and be certain. But one thing we know for certain is that God loves everyone. No one is undeserving. Unloved. Unworthy. Regardless of circumstance God and Jesus embrace everyone. Unconditionally. They will never betray. This is the truth, the light and the way. Whatever motivates and challenges us, we must remember, God is there for us. Every minute of every day. And we must endeavor never, ever to betray that trust. In all ways.

Oh God, please help us to remember that we are loved. That we are deserving of that love, every minute of every day. And that we should keep these lines close to our hearts at all times based on the classic children's hymn: "Jesus {and God} loves me! This I know, For the Bible tells me so." And we must never let that faith and feeling go. Amen.

Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50:4–9a

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. – v. 4a (NRSV)

David Mulford

Today we wave palms as we observe Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Friday we mourn as we contemplate his death on a cross. Next Sunday we sing hallelujahs as we celebrate his victory over death.

But what then? A time to settle back into our old ways, or a time to “do something” in response to the good news that has been so dramatically expressed?

Our marching orders come from the prophet Isaiah: “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.”

Ah, the power of a word: a word of thanks, a word of encouragement, a word of consolation, a word of love, a word that says “You can do it—just try—and remember God is with you every step of the way.”

Lord, guide us to use our words generously as we help sustain our fellow travelers on their journey; in Jesus' name. Amen.

Monday

Isaiah 42:1–9

A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
I, the Lord, will take hold of your hand. — vs. 3, 6 (NIV)

Agnes Olah

I grew up in Hungary, in a Reformed Church Sunday School. Every Sunday we walked home with a small piece of paper with a Bible verse that we had to memorize during the week. Surprisingly, I still remember some. Isaiah 42:3, 6 is one of them. What a beautiful life-time promise!

As I get older, I realize our life is full of problems, pain, illness, stress, disaster and loss. Not all of them are big, but every time we solve one, another is coming. But I believe God has a purpose behind every problem. He wants to strengthen our faith, while he is holding our hand. Every problem is a personality building opportunity. It is our choice to become better or bitter. However, we have to remember, God can bring good out of the worst evil.

Gracious God, thank you for your promises. Please help us to always live by them. Amen.

Tuesday

Psalm 71:1–14

As for me, I will always have hope;

I will praise you more and more. – v. 14 (NIV)

Lois Foley

There's a certain ease to praising God when things seem to be going the right way, which mostly means "our" way. How often are we sending praises above when we encounter life's road blocks, though?

This past year has been a difficult season of grief for me, having lost both of my parents just four months apart. What occurs to me is that we are all in a certain season of grief—mourning the loss of human kindness and compassion in our society. It's hard to let go of sadness, frustration and despair when we are routinely faced with gun violence, bigotry and hate.

The wonder of being a Christian is God's infinite ability to use our grief and loss to show us true purpose and never-ending hope. Allowing God to work through us to help others is where the healing process begins and the praises keep coming.

We praise you, Lord, for your loving kindness. Heal our hearts and keep them open with longing for a better tomorrow through eternal hope. Amen.

Wednesday

Psalm 70

Hasten, O God, to save me;
come quickly, Lord, to help me.

You are my help and my deliverer;
Lord, do not delay. — vs. 1, 5b (NIV)

Mark Herr

The Psalms are compelling evidence that in thousands of years men and women don't change. Psalm 70's plea for deliverance from enemies is as timeless today as when it was written: Who among us doesn't have enemies?

It might be the mean girls' clique at middle school: "Hasten, O God, to save me; come quickly, Lord, to help me." Or maybe it's the office bully: "Hasten, O God, to save me; come quickly, Lord, to help me." Or just the cancer microbe splitting and splitting until the doctor declares, "Stage Four": Dear Lord, "Hasten, O God, to save me; come quickly, Lord, to help me!"

The psalmist knows that as unchanging as men and women are, so too, is God's promise, a foreshadow of the cross and the empty Eastertide tomb.

"I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; Lord, do not delay!" Amen.

Maundy Thursday

John 13:1–17, 31b–35

“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” – v. 8 (NIV)

Monisha Pulimood

Jesus frequently taught through parables that were generally incomprehensible to his disciples until he explained them. In this passage, his behavior itself is puzzling, especially to Peter. Not only does Jesus stoop down to wash the feet of his disciples, but he even rebukes Peter for not accepting that service.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus showed us that we should help those in need, feed the hungry, and shelter the homeless. At the same time, Jesus assures us that when we need help, all we have to do is ask.

But what happens when we are unwillingly on the receiving end, when we take it as a point of pride to be self-sufficient? Have there been times when we have been taken aback, perhaps even been offended, that someone tried to help us?

In rebuking Peter, Jesus shows us that not only should we help others, but we should also be humble enough to be served.

O Lord, help us to give up our self-sufficiency, to be humble, and graciously accept help from you and from others who cross our paths. Help us to remember that there is nothing too trivial for you. Amen.

Good Friday

John 18:1–19:42

Jesus answered, “I told you, ‘I Am.’ If you are looking for me, then let these people go.” – John 18.8 (CEB)

Roz Anderson Flood

“In the Garden and Beyond”

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>I In Gesthsemane
loom the gnarled olive trees
oozing viscous oil.</p> <p>Jesus bends to pray
as sunset is transfigured,
disciples in dark.</p> <p>From the blackened grove,
lanterns of the betrayer
reveal Roman swords.</p> <p>To quell the violence,
He gives over His body
to free His people.</p> <p>When He says, “I Am,” He is
Light, and then we know.</p> | <p>II Denying Jesus:
cacophony of crowing
dooms song and silence.</p> <p>III His lips sip hyssop,
the last bitter human taste,
His soul’s elixir.</p> |
|---|---|

Dearest Lord Jesus, please forgive us for always being in the position of trying to know you, even though you told us in the garden exactly who you are and showed us by dying on the cross. Shamefully, like Peter, we sometimes deny you, and like Thomas, we sometimes doubt you. However, we always love you because we know just how powerful your love is for us; In the name of all the grace and goodness you bring to our world. Amen.

Holy Saturday

Psalm 31:1–4, 15–16

I take refuge in you, LORD.

Please never let me be put to shame.

Rescue me by your righteousness!

Listen closely to me!

Deliver me quickly;

be a rock that protects me;

be a strong fortress that saves me!

You are definitely my rock and my fortress.

Guide me and lead me

for the sake of your good name!

Get me out of this net that's been set for me

because you are my protective fortress. — vs. 1–4 (CEB)

Julia Hill

Reading this passage, I got to thinking of how relevant it is to my life. I started high school in September of last year and I knew how incredibly important it is that I have someone right alongside me when I started this next phase of my education. Someone who celebrates with me every time I get a good grade on a quiz or test or when I finish working on a project and adds to my self-confidence. Someone who sticks around during my hardest and lowest points, knowing that this is not the end but the beginning of a wonderful self-discovery process. That's what a true friend and neighbor and teacher and mentor and family member looks like. And that's the kind of refuge and fortress I imagine when I read Psalm 31, verses 1 through 4.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for being a refuge and fortress in our lives. We know we are strong, but we are even stronger with you backing and supporting us. Your everyday presence in our lives is something we can always count on. Thanks for sticking by our side through our everyday tasks. Amen.

Easter Sunday

John 20:1-18

Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabbouni” (which means teacher) – v. 16 (NRSV)

Noel Werner

On the journey to Jerusalem, so many questions were asked of Jesus: What will the kingdom be like? Who will be punished and who will be saved? Do you not care for us? Is yours a power we can trust? Haven’t you heard what has been going on in our world?

Today we continue to ask questions in our own walk through life. Like Mary, we encounter death in the midst of a beautiful garden and violence in the breathless silence of dawn. “If you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him.” The answer to these questions could not be more profound. Jesus says her name; Jesus says each of our names. In answer to anxiety, insecurity, fear, and bewilderment, Jesus says your name in a voice that you somehow have known your whole life, a voice you thought had been silenced. Jesus speaks as one who has known you your whole life, in a way that causes you to respond the language closest to your heart, “Teacher, Savior, Friend.”

In the Easter Day of the Christian Year, in the weekly Easter of Sunday morning, in the daily Easter of each sunrise, the first word is always God’s:

I know you.

I call you by name.

You are mine

I am forever,

and so are you.

Dear Jesus, while I am searching in the darkness, when I cry out for an answer, let me hear my name spoken from your heart. Let me turn to the dawn of your presence and be risen from death to life, this day and every day.

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Harry Carter has been a member of Nassau Church since 2007. He enjoys singing with the church, juggling, running, and hanging out with his family.

COOGAN, TOM

TACoogan@gmail.com

Tom Coogan and his family have been Nassau Church members for 10+ years. Tom has served as deacon, ruling elder, small group leader, and softball coach.

CREAGER, BILL

william.creager@gmail.com

Bill Creager lives in Princeton, loves opera, is trying to learn Spanish, and is passionate about long-distance touring by bicycle. He is a member of the Adult Education and Mission and Outreach Committees. He still needs to learn to be a better swimmer.

DALEY, ELIOT

eliot@eliotdaley.com

Eliot Daley was formerly an associate pastor of Nassau Presbyterian Church, the

producer of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood", and a healthcare executive and consultant. He now writes punditry on his website "Out of My Mind" (www.eliotdaley.com).

DUNN, JAY

jaydunn8@aol.com

Jay Dunn is a retired sports writer. During the baseball season he continues to publish a weekly column in The Trentonian.

EDWARDS, JANINE

nonsunblob@gmail.com

Janine Edwards finds joy in Princeton by looking for beauty and planning adventures with her husband Mark and children, Adeline and Elias. She founded and currently leads Princeton Writing Academy.

FOLEY, LOIS

mrslofo@hotmail.com

Lois Foley and her family became members of Nassau Church in March 2018. Lois is a family law paralegal in New Brunswick and a volunteer ESL instructor and tutor at the South Brunswick Library. She enjoys assisting with Nassau's children in Worship Explorers and Club 345.

FOLEY, PATRICK

pwflawyer@aol.com

Patrick Foley and his family became members of Nassau in March 2018. Patrick is an attorney in New Brunswick.

GIFT, ELIZABETH

eagift@alum.mit.edu

Elizabeth Gift and her husband Kevin have four wonderful children, ages 24, 22, 13, and 11. She currently serves Nassau Church as a ruling elder and Princeton Presbyterians as secretary of the board of the Westminster Foundation. She is a stay-at-home parent and enjoys running as a prayer practice.

GLOCKLER, ANTHONY

glocklers@comcast.net

Anthony (Tony) Glockler was born in Lebanon to Presbyterian missionary parents. He and Bev joined Nassau Church in 1967 and both of their daughters were baptized here. All the lady Glocklers have been hand bell ringers. Bev and Tony have been ruling elders and deacons and currently process the Sunday morning offering every Monday morning.

GUDER, JUDY & DARRELL

guderjd@aol.com,

darrell.guder@ptsem.edu

Judy and Darrell Guder are both retired, she as a church musician and accompanist, he as professor at Princeton Seminary. Together they translate German theology into English.

HAAN, SHERI

sdhaan10@yahoo.com

Sheri Haan attends the Friday Morning Women's Bible Study and assists in children's ministry. She is the executive director emerita of Christian Schools International, Grand Rapids, MI.

HANSEN, ELIANA

office@nassauchurch.org

Eliana Hansen is a student at West Windsor Plainsboro South High School. She goes to Nassau Presbyterian Church, and loves to paint in her free time.

HARDAWAY, HOLLY

hhardaway@comcast.net

Holly Hardaway, an occupational therapist, has been involved in Nassau Presbyterian Church since 1988. She and her wife Claire are grateful for their Nassau Church family.

HERR, MARK

Mark.Herr@Point72.com

Mark Herr, a preacher's son, grandson, and great grandson, has been a member of Nassau Presbyterian Church since 1986. He lives with his wife, Rachel, and together they are the proud parents of Sarah, Brooks, Cheeky, and Gardiner Herr.

HILL, JULIA

kristina.h.hill@gmail.com

Julia Hill is a freshman at Princeton High School. At Nassau, she's involved in the choir, a card making group and participates in the chancel drama productions. In her free time, she enjoys singing along to the Broadway musical "Hamilton" and some hymns.

JACKSON, BARTON

Bjackson2@comcast.net

Bart Jackson, to his own delight, sings in the Nassau Church Choir, pontificates ceaselessly at the Men's Breakfast, and has heartily rejoiced in the companionship of Nassau Church's warm folks these last 15 years. By trade, he writes books, publishes other people's books, and hosts The Art of the CEO radio show. He is best known as Lorraine Jackson's husband.

KELSEY, JOHN

jkelsey@kelseyfamily.com

John Kelsey and his wife Pam have been active members of Nassau Presbyterian Church since 1974. He has served as a ruling elder, deacon, chair of Princeton Outreach Programs (POPI) and a member of several committees, including his current activity as an usher. Their children, Lisa and Jay, were each baptized, attended Youth Fellowship and mission trips and married at Nassau Church.

KLEASEN, KIM

kjkleasen@comcast.net

Kim Kleasen has been a member of Nassau Church for many years. You will see her in the choir loft on Sunday mornings singing second soprano and sometimes playing flute. With the Princeton Presbyterian Quintet, she provides music for worship both at Nassau and Witherspoon Street Churches. This past summer she traveled to Malawi for a week of work with Villages in Partnership, one of our mission partners. If you want a life changing experience, please consider going to Malawi this year! Currently, she is serving on Session and finds great joy at Nassau through worship and

arts, mission work and our community.

LANE, CHRISTIANNE

singcmb@gmail.com

Christianne Bessières Lane is a musician, wife, and mother of an amazing toddler. She loves to sing in choir when she can, write music, play with her daughter, and take walks with her husband and fellow musician, John. Together they await the coming of their second child expected just before the printing of this devotional.

LONGLEY, STEVE

Stephen.longley@ptsem.edu

Steve Longley is a second career student at Princeton Theological Seminary. Steve and Alison Longley live in Princeton with their two Labrador rescues, Lucy and Ethel.

MATHEWS, VAL

val2mathews@gmail.com

Val Mathews enjoyed several careers in electronic warfare, international telecom/IT, oil and natural gas, Russian-American Co., and is now a volunteer on the board of Military Prep High School. His wife Martha is in adult choir. They definitely enjoy the

success of their three children and six grandchildren.

MCKNIGHT, MARSHALL

marshallmcknight48@gmail.com

Marshall McKnight worships God through his work as a deacon at Nassau Church. He works for the State of New Jersey.

MERTZ, KEITH

keithdmertz@gmail.com

Keith Mertz joined Nassau Presbyterian Church in 2000. His wife Mary Ann attends St. Charles Borromeo Roman Catholic Community in Montgomery. Their four children were raised in an ecumenical home with an appreciation of both traditions. Keith sings bass in the adult choir and attends the Men's Friday Morning Breakfast and Adult Education at Nassau Church as frequently as possible.

MILLER, CYNTHIA

cmiller@braunresearch.com

Cynthia Miller lives in Lawrenceville, works in international market research and is a member of the Adult Education Committee. She particularly loves reading, writing, and traveling. Her interests focus primarily

on the history of Colonial America, Great Britain and the rest of Europe, in the “long” eighteenth century and Regency Era.

MULFORD, DAVID

dmulford19@comcast.net

David Mulford is a Presbyterian minister, now retired. He and his wife Nancy have been a part of Nassau Church since 2006.

MULRY, CLAIRE

cmmulry@comcast.net

Claire M. Mulry is grateful for the blessings Nassau Church brings to her life. She lives in Franklin Park, NJ with her wife Holly and dog Hap. Claire is an occupational therapist; she teaches at Kean University and is co-founder of Independent Domain, LLC an aging in place consulting practice.

OLAH, AGNES

agnes.olah@comcast.net

Agnes Olah, retired bank executive, lives in Somerset. She and her three grandchildren – Dorian, Peter and Adam – and their parents have been part of the Nassau Church community since 2012. Agnes enjoys assisting children’s activities in Nassau and leading the greeting cards and handcrafts projects that

help fund Nassau’s mission partners.

OTT, LINDA,

linda60spirit@gmail.com

Linda Ott is a Candidate for ordination in the PC(USA) under the care of Nassau Church where she has been a member for many years. After retiring from a career as a corporate attorney, she completed an MDiv and ThM and is excited to be called to ministry in this chapter of her life. Linda currently lives in Greenville, SC.

PULIMOOD, MANI

mani_pulimood@yahoo.com

Mani Pulimood has been worshipping at Nassau Church for 14 years, with his wife Monisha, and two sons Nikhil and Philip. He has authored a book, *Spiritual Dimensions – Musings on Life and Faith*. One of his favorite ministries is online evangelism through Twitter and blogs.

PULIMOOD, MONISHA

monishapulimood@gmail.com

Monisha Pulimood, her husband Mani, and their older son Nikhil, have been worshipping at Nassau since they moved to the area in 2004. Their younger son, Philip, was

born, baptized, and raised in this church. They have all been blessed through their involvement in the church in various capacities over the years.

**RICE-SOUMEILLANT,
ANNE-RENEE**

annerenee@verizon.net

Anne-Renee Rice-Soumeillant works professionally as a chef de cuisine. Other than gastronomy being a point of focus, she is mother to Andre and Pierre who are part of Nassau's youth program. She is a Southerner, a Francophile and has somehow managed to live in New Jersey for 20 years. She loves Nassau Presbyterian Church and is thankful her family is part of it.

SEIDEL, LYNNE

seidellynne8@gmail.com

Lynne Seidel has been part of Nassau Church since 1976. Thankful for family and friends, she loves studying, loves singing hymns, and loves people.

SHENK, JONATHAN

jshenk@greenleafpainters.com

Rev. Jonathan C. Shenk, a former pastor, is the owner of Greenleaf Painters, a local painting company. In addition

to his business involvement he is a certified spiritual director and a social justice advocate devoted to transforming the criminal justice system. He lives in Princeton Junction with his wife, author Cynthia Yoder. They have a college-age son, Gabriel.

STERLACCI, REBEKAH

rebekah.sterlacci@gmail.com

Rebekah Sterlacci is the supervisor of visual and performing arts for the Piscataway Township Public School District and the artistic director of the Piscataway Choral Collective, an adult community choir in Piscataway Township. In her "free time," Rebekah is chipping away at her dissertation project (*Middle School Theater Programs: Sense of Belonging and Self-Efficacy*) as part of the educational leadership doctoral program at Rowan University. Rebekah and Jason (and 4 1/2 year old Jonas) have been a part of Nassau Presbyterian Church for almost seven years. At Nassau, Rebekah serves on the Worship and Arts Committee and assists with the Christmas pageant.

STUCKY, JOSHUA

office@nassauchurch.org

Joshua Stucky, known to most people as Ua, loves music, performing in plays and musicals, and making stuff out of cardboard for his YouTube channel, "Cardboard Craft." He has two siblings, Jenna and Isaac, and his parents are Nate and Janel.

TEGARDEN, DEBBIE

datb@alumni.princeton.edu

Debbie Tegarden is a longtime Princeton resident, and has worked for many years at Princeton University Press. Raised a fourth-generation Unitarian from Marblehead, she joined Nassau Presbyterian Church in 1988. She inexplicably drifted out of this communion, and has recently and gratefully rejoined the congregation. She is hugely grateful to be back at Nassau Church, sitting in the balcony with her husband Rod.

THURBER, JOHN

jthurber@tesu.edu

John Thurber is a member of Session and serves as chair of the Cemetery Committee. He works at Thomas Edison State University in Trenton, and lives with his wife Connie in Lawrence Township.

WERNER, NOEL

NWerner@nassauchurch.org

Noel Werner is celebrating his eleventh year as the director of music at Nassau. His wife, Rev. Wendi Werner, is the pastor of The First Presbyterian Church of Dayton, where they are raising their two daughters, Sophie and Emily.

YEH, BENJAMIN

byeh65@yahoo.com

Benjamin Yeh is an executive in the telecom high-tech industry. He moved from Taiwan to Princeton in 2014 with wife (Emily) and two children (Jonathan, 20; Symphony, 10). Both Benjamin and Emily enjoy Nassau's small groups and the rich cultural life the Princeton community offers.