

# **DAILY DEVOTIONAL**

**EASTERTIDE**

**APRIL 13 - MAY 31, 2020**

**NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

## PREFACE

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In March 2020, during the season of Lent, Nassau Church was closed because of the Covid-19 crisis. As our congregation transitioned to worshipping online, we continued to share our usual Lenten Devotional online; but we realized that both the readers and the writers wanted to keep sharing daily meditations after Easter.

This Eastertide Devotional contains a scripture reference and a meditation for each day from Easter through Pentecost (April 13 -May 31), written by a host of Nassau Church members and friends. The scriptures are from various translations and paraphrases of the Bible, and were selected by Dave Davis, Andrew Scales, and Len Scales. Each author was assigned one scripture on which to write a personal reflection.

The Eastertide Devotionals were shared online. This document was created after Pentecost in order to collect and record this special event. Instead of printing hard copies to pass out at church, we offer this document to you to read and keep, electronically or by printing.

We hope you will continue to use it as you worship by yourself and in your family group. Please know that others are sharing this experience with you.

Grace and Peace,

The Lenten (now Eastertide) Devotional Team  
Nassau Presbyterian Church  
June 2020

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 13, 2020*

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## **Psalm 145:1–7**

***One generation will praise your  
works to the next one,  
proclaiming your mighty acts (Psalm 145:4 CEB).***

When I was about three years old my grandmother, Lucy West Douglas, began my lessons in faith, the Gospel, and the power of God's love. She would sit me on her lap and sing her favorite hymns directly to me in a reedy and emotional soprano: our "church time." I would stare deeply into her pale gray eyes, which were often filled with tears. As I would learn as an older child, those eyes held secrets about her ancestry—and mine. Her father, a Baptist minister, was the son of a white slave owner and his black slave. Her mother, a regal church woman, was descended from a Cherokee mother who gave her newborn daughter to a black family to save her from the Trail of Tears.

My grandmother, born in 1888, grew up more privileged than most black families in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at the time, but her family lost everything when her father died relatively young. Grandmother Lucy also later buried two husbands and a son. So it is no surprise that her favorite hymn was Thomas A. Dorsey's "Precious Lord, Take My Hand." This hymn was also the favorite of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In this hymn, God's "mighty acts" are ones of comfort.

The psalmist assures us that despite the storms and dark nights of human history, our ancestors and the elders among us will forever use song and the oral tradition to nurture our faith. They will eloquently demonstrate God's love through worship and the power of the Holy Spirit. We are promised this tradition from generation to generation.

*Dearest Lord, thank you for the blessings and sacrifices of wise elders and ancestors, who have taught us through word, deed, and song the majesty of Your love. Please sustain us as we seek to celebrate and demonstrate the lessons of Your Gospel for all ages. Amen.*

### **Rozlyn Anderson Flood**

Roz has been singing in Presbyterian church choirs since elementary school; she sings second alto in Nassau's Adult Choir. She is currently working with a young cousin to publish their uncle's posthumous memoir, which traces the Anderson family history in the United States back to 1755.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 14, 2020*

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## **Mark 16:1–8**

***“...he is ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you” (Mark 16:7 NRSV).***

If the witness from the Gospel of Mark was the only Easter story we had to go on;

If when the evangelist wrote his testimony, he thought that the only account we would hear would be him saying that the women said that a white-robed young man said that Jesus said he had "gone ahead";

If we did not have the Emmaus road story (traveled by those slow to believe);

If we did not have the story of Jesus' appearance in spite of the locked doors (to confront the Doubter);

If we did not have the story of the appearance on the Galilee mountain (where some doubted);

Would Mark's report be enough?

Would there be billions of believers over scores of centuries?

Yes, if Jesus did indeed go ahead to where we will see him.

*Lord, I believe;  
help my unbelief. Amen.*

### **Tom Coogan**

Tom and his wife Beth have been Nassau Church members for 15 years. Tom has served as deacon, ruling elder, small group leader, and softball coach.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 15, 2020*

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## Psalm 99

*Extol the Lord our God,  
and worship at his holy mountain;  
for the Lord our God is holy (Psalm 99:9 NRSV).*

I confess. I struggled when I first read Psalm 99. I wanted a verse that spoke to where I was. Psalm 23 would be a good fit. Something more immediate, more . . . earthly. Something that comes down to where I am when I listen to the evening news, my heart breaking. Not something that tells me to look up, that calls on me to make an effort, to pull my eyes away from the moment, the need, the pain, and to see beyond that. Certainly not a call to praise a distant God far above us on His mountain. I really, really wanted to write this from a “me” perspective.

But, upon reflection, perhaps this was exactly the scripture I needed to hear. This pandemic, like all the other ills we live through—it is just another consequence of living in a broken world. God gave us dominion over the earth, but we have not been good stewards. We have destroyed the environment, changed the climate, caused a frightening mass extinction. We have created the stresses that lead to pandemics breaking out. Suffering, whether it is immediate or distant, will always be present in our mortal lives. But remember God, who stands above this brokenness, who sent His only begotten son to die for us so that we could have eternal life. The mistakes we have made on earth cannot change Him, cannot sway the confidence we have in eternal salvation. This is also central to who we are as Christians. So yes, make the effort! Remember the Risen Christ, and what He means to us! Remember God’s love, remember eternity, and lift your eyes up and away from this broken world! Praise the Lord!

*Lord God, thank you for this reminder of who You are, of Your unchanging glory, and of Your unchanging love for us. Thank You for reminding us of Your lordship over our broken world. Amen.*

### **Karen Brown**

Karen Brown and her husband, James Takasugi, raised their two adult sons, Alan and Andrew, at Nassau and have been active participants in the life of the church. Karen has served as a deacon and a member of both the Mission and Outreach and Adult Education Committees and represented Nassau on trips to Malawi with Villages in Partnership. She is particularly grateful for the on-line fellowship available at Nassau in these unprecedented times.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 16, 2020*

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## Isaiah 55:10–13

*As the rain and the snow  
come down from heaven,  
and do not return to it  
without watering the earth  
and making it bud and flourish,  
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,  
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:  
It will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10–11  
NIV).*

In the church year, the Easter season is high tide for metaphors of kingship, triumph, and eternal reign. Can I confess that I secretly bristle on the inside with every royal reference? It all seems so old-fashioned and dusty, a reminder of political systems that have no appeal to me.

This passage, though, is as vivid as can be. It uses metaphors from nature rather than politics, speaking of buds, flowers, mountains, hills, trees, juniper, and myrtle. Through the connection between rain, seed, bread, and eating, it speaks of authority and purpose, of efficacy and intention, of endurance and joy, of immediacy and accomplishment and hope.

We know that after Easter, Jesus' followers spent some time locked behind closed doors, waiting on news, buffeted by rumors, afraid, cut off from work, leaderless, not knowing who might be safe to let into the room, relying on the kindness of others, and not knowing whether "normal life" might ever return. We're told they prayed constantly and studied scripture. I wonder if they turned to this passage for encouragement.

*God, please help us figure out how to celebrate and demonstrate your love, even when we are confined inside; Holy Spirit, help us understand our connection to people of all ages and to the breadth of humanity, even when we are isolated. Today, this very day, help us to engage with the world, to yearn to do what is just and fair, to encourage what is kind and helpful, and to walk humbly before you and alongside our neighbors. Amen.*

### **Bill Creager**

Bill and his wife Angela have been Nassau Church members since 1995, and he is currently a member of Session and of the Nassau/Witherspoon Joint Mission Committee. He is a lifelong introvert but is reconsidering that commitment after these first several weeks of the "stay at home" era.

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*April 17, 2020*

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## **Matthew 28:1–10**

***After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb” (Matthew 28:1 CEB).***

The title the Common English Bible gives this passage, “Resurrection,” is a bit of a spoiler. Of course, as Christians, we know how it all turns out—there’s the joyful reunion, then the ascension into heaven, then we can all sit down to Easter brunch. To be honest, it can be hard to feel the tension and suffering when reading the stories of the disciples. Didn’t they know it’ll all turn out fine?

Of course, they didn’t. When the Marys visit the tomb, they must’ve still been reeling from the death of their Lord. Resurrection wasn’t guaranteed; viewed through their eyes, it’s one of the darkest moments of the Bible. But we know otherwise. Through their faith, the darkest depths of their sorrow were transformed to rejoicing.

While it’s easy to focus on the spectacle of divinity that is Easter, in these trying time let’s not forget the human dimension of the holiday. Suddenly, in the midst of grief and pain and doubt that promised to stretch on forever, God poured forth God’s goodness on the disciples. And, guess what—they never saw it coming.

*Lord, help us to know that in these trying times, you bring the dawn when we least expect it. Amen.*

### **Sam Bezilla**

Sam is a first-year student at Yale University studying Economics. He’s been a lifelong member of Nassau Church through which he’s discovered his love of the arts, community service, and the great outdoors.

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*April 18, 2020*

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## **John 20:1–18**

***The angels said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus (John 20:13–14 NRSV).***

We live in times of great fear and sorrow. Certainly, we can identify with Mary Magdalene, a personal friend of Jesus, facing the loss of her friend, her teacher, and her Lord. Who has not felt the weight of such grief? Possibly some of us have felt at times as if we are distant from Jesus, or that God is not there for us at a time when we need to feel God's presence the most. And just possibly, like Mary Magdalene, we sometimes fail to appreciate Jesus when he is right there with us. The miracle of Jesus' passion and resurrection is that God provided the ultimate evidence that God would be with us no matter what. In my life I have seen many people (often young people) struggle with their faith, just how much they believe of what has been passed along to them. I have known people who decided to give up on their relationship with God due to pain or hurt or loss. The miracle for us is that God never gives up on us. He is risen indeed!

*Lord Jesus be with us when our hope wavers, when our faith is overcome by our sorrows and fears. Help us to understand that even when we want to give up, you are there, with and for us. Amen.*

### **John Parker**

John is a long-time member of Nassau Church, who is grateful for the church's sustaining witness to the Gospel, especially in these troubled times. He is a writer by trade, a current deacon, and a teacher of third and fourth graders in Nassau's church school, from whom he learns a lot.

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*April 19, 2020*

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## **John 20: 19-23**

***Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:19b–20n NRSV).***

The doors to the room where the disciples gathered had been locked to guard against intruders, when out of nowhere Jesus appeared and greeted them, “Peace be with you.” This greeting must have been familiar to the disciples, yet only after Jesus showed them his wounds did they rejoice. Perhaps the disciples were so overcome with sorrow, uncertainty and fear that they could not see that Jesus was with them.

How perfectly this story of Jesus appearing to the disciples speaks to us these days! When I over-consume news reports and give over to my fear about the future, I need to remember that Jesus never abandons us, and through Him “nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow” (Romans 8:38 New Living Translation). Although we are separated from each other to protect our physical health, we are reassured that Jesus is always with us and beside us, offering us spiritual and emotional comfort and peace.

*Loving God, as you sent Jesus to comfort and reassure His disciples, fill us with your Spirit and help us to comfort and reassure others in times of uncertainty and distress. Help us to stop worrying about the future and remember that nothing separates us from your love. Amen.*

### **Anne Kuhn**

Anne and her husband Jeff have been members of Nassau Church since moving to New Jersey in 2008. Their son Paul lives in Cincinnati and daughter Sara, in Atlanta. The daughter of a Presbyterian minister and a life-long church musician, Anne’s formative years and Christian faith were shaped through countless experiences of worship, youth group, choir and church-related activities. Her faith journey continues into the present, where she is blessed to be part of the fellowship of believers at Nassau Church.

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*April 20, 2020*

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## **John 20:24–29**

***Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me?  
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe”  
(John 20:29, NRSV)***

When the other disciples told Thomas of Jesus' earlier appearance to them, Thomas replied, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." When Jesus appeared again, this time with Thomas present, He invited Thomas to do just that.

Every time I read this passage, I wonder if I would have shared Thomas' doubt had I been in his shoes, and also have missed out on the blessing of this beatitude. Notably, while the blessing might carry a gentle admonition, there is no condemnation. Jesus accepts Thomas where he is, doubt and all, and puts that doubt to rest.

It is heartening to know that at every point in our walk of faith, there are no interviews or auditions to pass. There are no pass/fail tests and no trick questions designed to derail us. Through Jesus Christ, God always forgives our sins and always accepts us as we are.

*Dear Lord, thank you for always being there for us as we strive to be faithful to you. Please help us today to see the world more as you see it, to love others more as you love us, and to understand what is really important and what is not. Amen.*

### **Jeff Kuhn**

Jeff and his wife Anne have been members of Nassau Presbyterian Church for 12 years. Jeff has served as a ruling elder at Knox Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati and is currently a deacon at Nassau.

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*April 21, 2020*

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## **John 20:30–31**

***Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30–31 NRSV).***

When I was younger, I sometimes wished for a dramatic conversion, an “I believe” moment that would make a good story and settle doubt forever. Shocker, it hasn’t worked that way, but John’s Gospel overflows with many kinds of invitations to meet Jesus and be changed. These two verses near the conclusion of John’s Gospel function as a kind of musical notation, *da capo al fine* and a rest sign, instructions to start again from “In the beginning” to the end, and then to pause. Let it all sink in before more stories of life with post-resurrection Jesus. These two verses, which I read as a “Dear All, Love, John” note, fill me with questions. What happens when you think of these verses as a note addressed to *you*? What’s your favorite story in John? Is it one of the healing stories? The feeding of five thousand? The Samaritan woman meeting Jesus at the well? How does the story help you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God? What’s the significance of that? How does the story show you what it means to “have life in his name”? The questions lead me to start over from the beginning, rest with the stories, let them accomplish their purpose.

*Thank you, Jesus, for inviting all to “come and see” you and the overflowing signs of your power and love. Thank you for John and the many stories about you. Guide us as we “come to believe” or, as some notes put it, “continue to believe” and have life in your name. Amen.*

**Jane Maggard**

Jane lives in Hopewell and works at Princeton University.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 22, 2020*

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## Habakkuk 2:1–3

***There is still a vision for the appointed time.... If it delays, wait for it; for it is surely coming (Habakkuk 2:3 CEB).***

The prophet Habakkuk centuries ago raised his voice in complaint to God that justice and wholeness seemed far off. And like Habakkuk, I too complain to God. I join the psalmist as I pray “How long, O Lord,” sometimes in anguish, sometimes in anger and frustration. And then God answers Habakkuk and me with this command and promise: *“If it delays, wait for it; for it is surely coming.”*

*I wait*, all too impatiently,  
for the time when social distancing will relax and I can visit a dear friend already on hospice,  
for a time when Covid-19 won’t disproportionately affect those in the “less developed” world, for a time when some future virus won’t disproportionately affect people of color in our own country,  
for a time when captives will be released, the oppressed will go free, the hungry will be fed, the planet will be saved...

The list of what I wait for seems endless. As I wait, I hear, sometimes loud and clear, sometimes only faintly, God’s promise that *“it is surely coming.”* Salvation is coming now, in this life, not just in the life to come, as Eric Barreto has taught us from Luke’s gospel.

And as I wait, I recall that “waiting” in the biblical tradition is active waiting—not sitting around, but actively participating in bringing about God’s future, that *“vision for the appointed time.”* And so I take comfort in the promise, but at the same time I ask myself, what specifically does God require of me this day toward bringing an increase of God’s justice and mercy in this world.

*Help me, dear God, to trust your promise, and give me courage to do what you call me to do. I pray in the name of Jesus, my example and my Savior. Amen.*

### **Kathie Sakenfeld**

Kathie has participated in the life of Nassau Church since 1970. Ordained in the PC(USA), she retired from teaching Old Testament at Princeton Seminary and now enjoys the open spaces and wide range of community activities at Stonebridge. Reading, listening to classical music, and growing vegetables in a postage stamp garden keep her busy as well.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 23, 2020*

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## Psalm 110

***Your people will offer themselves willingly  
on the day you lead your forces on the holy mountains.  
From the womb of the morning, like dew,  
your youth will come to you (Psalm 110:3 NRSV).***

This verse reminds me of Holy Week. Specifically, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Partially because Christ died on the cross for us. To save our sins. And now this Psalm is implying that we must do our part as children of God. Now of course nothing we do could ever have the effect or impact on Christians worldwide that God dying for our sins had. However, as children of God, we should feel obligated to love and adore him. And how much it meant to us for him to die for our imperfections and sins. And I think that specifically when I read the phrase, “offer themselves willingly.” The people (Us People of God) give themselves so freely and willingly because they know God did the same when he died on the cross for our sins. Us being willing to serve God with no questions asked is a true testament to us as Christians and how much we love our God undoubtedly.

*Father, whom we love without question, you dying on the cross for our sins is the ultimate sacrifice for all Christians everywhere. We will continue loving and praising you because we know it's what you would've done for us. Thank you for loving and forgiving us, even when we act in sinful ways. In your name. Amen.*

### **Julia Hill**

Julia, a high school sophomore, is part of the Children and Families Ministries Committee. Every summer she enjoys volunteering in vacation Bible school and participating in the chancel drama. She is part of the youth group and enjoys coming to choir and fellowship every Sunday night. When she is not at school or talking to her friends at church, she can be found singing in her room, usually to Broadway shows.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 24, 2020*

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## Luke 24:13–27

***They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive (Luke 24:22b–23 NRSV).***

I put on my sturdy shoes and go outside into a beautiful spring afternoon where my crabapple tree displays white blossoms like cotton balls. I step across the street and into the woods.

Nearby forests divide suburban developments. My neighborhood. Lately on my walks, I see more of my neighbors. A young boy on his bike stops about 20 feet away and waves at me as if he watches a parade and I am a passing float. I wave back like I am sitting on a parade float.

“What is the stick for?” he asks.

“It’s a hiking stick,” I say.

“Oh,” he says.

On second thought, I add, “In case I trip.”

“Oh,” he says.

Behind me, as I go on my way, a woman speaks.

He turns and calls out, “I *am* waiting.”

Me, too, I think, as I move on. I am waiting to be told I can rejoin my girlfriend, my church family, my daughters, brother and sister, niece and nephews and grandnieces and co-workers and friends and on and on.

In that waiting, I know I am not alone. We are all waiting for this pandemic to pass over us and praying it will not harm us or those we know and love.

Zoomtime, FaceTime and YouTube notwithstanding, it does get lonely at my house. Yet, I know I am not alone. We are not alone. We have not been alone since that walk to Emmaus. Not since those mourners found a vision of angels proclaiming good news at an empty tomb.

Deeper into the woods, the trail skirts the Millstone River through a forest of pine, sweet gum and holly trees. I create a six-foot berth as I pass another family and an eager boy says in his outdoor voice, “We have to stay close, so we don’t get taken!” His parents laugh. Amen to that, I think.

Back into suburbia, I look across the street and greet another family on their way to the wilds I have just left. “We’re going to walk over grasslands,” says a little girl who is so excited she hops up and down in her pink waders as she holds her dad’s hand. That’s how

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happy I should be, I am reminded. Christ has risen. He has risen indeed. We never hike alone.

*Lord, please don't let our eyes be kept from recognizing your loving presence in our lives, during our work and on our journey. Thank you for leaving the tomb and joining us on our walk to Emmaus. We praise you for reminding us again and again that you are with us forever and ever and ever. Amen.*

### **Marshall McKnight**

Marshall McKnight is currently working at home for the State of New Jersey. He lives in Princeton Junction in a little farm house next to the Northeast Corridor rail line. A member of Nassau Church since 2011, he currently serves as a deacon and on the Adult Education and Membership Committees.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 25, 2020*

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## **Luke 24:28–35**

***And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight (Luke 24:30–31 NABRE).***

Growing up, Easter meant food and family: dying hard-boiled eggs with my cousins, hunting for brightly colored plastic eggs in my grandparents' yard, eating the ears off of chocolate rabbits and leaving the rest for someone else. The main meal was never central the way it was at Thanksgiving or Christmas, but at Grandma's house you were sure to have a plate of bird- and bunny-shaped cookies in front of you as you chatted with aunts, uncles, and second-cousins-once-removed. Those holidays were characterized by eating and laughter, and it didn't even matter who was at your table. In fact, looking back through decades of gatherings, there are certain people in my family whom I honestly might not recognize right away if I saw them on the street; if they were outside of the familiar context, away from where I expected them to be... would I know them?

Of course, I'd like to think that I would immediately recognize my family anytime, anywhere. Just like I want to believe I would recognize God in any encounter, whether big or small. But so often I'm moving from place to place, talking about who knows what, thinking about anything other than God and my place in Creation. And it takes the familiar ritual, the repeated encounter, the expected context for me to open my eyes and say, "Aha! So *there* God is," as if I found Him in an Easter basket, hidden in a kitchen cabinet. But then I leave that familiar place, I go back into the world, and God vanishes from my sight.

How many times have I encountered God, except that my eyes were closed?

*Lord, open our eyes and our hearts, that we might recognize you in every encounter. Amen.*

### **Tim Flood**

Tim is a member of the Adult Education Committee. He and his wife, Kate Torrey, began attending Nassau two years ago, became members last year, and they keep getting volunteered for things. They can usually be found up in the left-side balcony.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 26, 2020*

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## **Matthew 5:7**

***God blesses those people who are merciful (Matthew 5:7a NLT).***

In the crazy, uncertain world that we live in today I find that my best hope for expressing forgiveness, or mercy, is to express kindness. I have so much to explore in my faith, but what I know to be true, particularly in this passage, is that God hopes for deeper connection, stronger kindness, and more honest forgiveness in every interaction. Sometimes I think we make it more complicated than it needs to be. Showing mercy is an arduous task that we over-analyze and too often execute to benefit ourselves. But perhaps when we approach others we could reflect on how we feel when we bend our knees and fold our hands to pray. We are looking for mercy, right? What if, in our everyday interactions, we acted with the kindness, the mercy that we yearn for when we pray? If everyone approached the world with that vulnerability, I imagine the world would be full of more merciful people.

*God, forgive us for not understanding how to approach the world with the mercy you show us. We try and, most often, we fail to show the world the love that you taught us. Dear God help us to approach others with love rather than trepidation and with kindness rather than hostility. Amen.*

### **Tessa Kettelkamp**

Tessa has been a member of Nassau Presbyterian Church since she was baptized in 1995 and was an active member of the youth community. She has since moved out of the Princeton area but loves having the Nassau community to return to.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 27, 2020*

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## Isaiah 65:17–25

***Look! I'm creating a new heaven and a new earth:  
past events won't be remembered;  
they won't come to mind (Isaiah 65:17 CEB).***

“Look!” Listen to me! Look around you! Just as we discovered in our Lenten focus on the shape of salvation, a salvation that is around us today, God is announcing a hope that is not only for tomorrow but for today, right now. And how is that happening? In his commentary on Isaiah, Paul Hanson reminds us that this new heaven and new earth and the hope it brings cannot be separated from the justice and mercy that God desires for all creation. He writes that these words give our call “a clear focus by refusing to sacrifice justice to the logic of expediency.” Perhaps we see that hope today in the medical staff who seek to save each person in their care, not a statistical average. Or we see it in the reliability of the check-out person at the grocery store who comes to work each day knowing that it could put her in the path of the Corona virus. This new heaven and earth is shown through the smallest acts of kindness, bravery, and love. Through them we offer the world a vision and the gift of hope, the hope that we proclaimed on Easter, the hope that Isaiah brought to the Israelites, the hope that surrounds us today. Thanks be to God

*God of all creation, we praise your holy name as we look to the hope that you have promised us even as we show that hope to others. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

### **Carol Wehrheim**

Carol Wehrheim is Clerk of Session and leader of the In-Choir Bible Study Group. She is living through these days of physical distancing with jigsaw puzzles, mysteries, knitting, and some small writing projects.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 28, 2020*

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## **1 John 1:1–4**

***The life was revealed, and we have seen, and we testify and announce to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us. What we have seen and heard, we also announce it to you so that you can have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1: 2–3 CEB).***

The apostolic witness of the life of Jesus Christ, what was seen and heard, defines the fellowship we, the community can have with God. The Christian life, my Christian life, is one of continuing discovery and understanding about the life of Jesus Christ. It is a lifelong journey, sometimes a highway—with insights, understanding and faith coming fast and easily, the sightline clear and unobstructed. Yet, sometimes the journey takes on the feel of a trek up a mountain—not knowing what is around the next turn of the trail and stumbling on hidden rocks and stumps. The last weeks have felt like an endless and difficult trek up a mountain, but through each and every day, the evidence of Jesus Christ lived through community on this earth shines forth. As I have faced the uphill trek, stumbling and crying out, “why, O God?” I have also seen the life of Jesus exemplified every day. Those who are dedicated to the health and welfare of the greater good – those on the front lines and each of us who is staying home, these examples are clear evidence of God’s presence. Every day there are the small, personal and significant acts exemplifying the life of Jesus. In those moments, I am caught breathless with the beauty of community with God and with life here on earth. While the trek is uphill, I know that those who have gone before provide us guidance to be in fellowship with one another and with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

I invite you to listen to this recording, one that the Adult Choir was rehearsing earlier this year in preparation for worship. While we currently worship apart, we are together in community with God, Jesus Christ and each other always, and we will be together in person again. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHJDosSjVw4>

*Dear God, in these difficult times, allow my heart to continue to be open and my eyes to continue to see what the apostles saw and heard in Jesus Christ. With gratefulness for our fellowship and community with God, amen.*

### **Kim Kleasen**

Kim can be found in the choir loft, playing flute, and serving in ways that hopefully support others and the church as a body. Kim is currently on Session, supporting our Mission and Stewardship. One of her long-time favorite ways to connect is through the Church Mouse program and, most recently, through being a pen pal for the Mass Incarceration Task Force. Kim is on the Board of Villages in Partnership and joined a Friendship trip to Malawi in 2018 with Karen Brown.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 29, 2020*

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## Psalm 19

*The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.  
They have no speech, they use no words;  
no sound is heard from them.  
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.  
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.  
It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,  
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.  
It rises at one end of the heavens  
and makes its circuit to the other;  
nothing is deprived of its warmth.*

*The law of the LORD is perfect,  
refreshing the soul.  
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.  
The precepts of the LORD are right,  
giving joy to the heart.  
The commands of the LORD are radiant,  
giving light to the eyes.  
The fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring forever.  
The decrees of the LORD are firm,  
and all of them are righteous.*

*They are more precious than gold,  
than much pure gold;  
they are sweeter than honey,  
than honey from the honeycomb.  
By them your servant is warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.  
But who can discern their own errors?  
Forgive my hidden faults.  
Keep your servant also from willful sins;  
may they not rule over me.*

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*Then I will be blameless,  
innocent of great transgression.*

*May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart  
be pleasing in your sight,  
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

To me, reading any psalm is like listening to an oldies station, you may not exactly remember all the words, but you have heard everything at least once or twice. And Psalm 19 is sort of like a greatest hits compilation. Take verse 10: “They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold” (NIV). Or the final verse: “May these words of my mouth, or this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.” I guess I have heard that verse a few hundred times.

I was struck by the shift in emphasis at verse 11. Up till then, it is all a celebration of how great is creation, and the order of life within that creation. But then, referring to the precepts of the Lord: “By them your servant is warned, in keeping them is great reward.” The implication is clear, ignore these precepts at one’s own peril. What follows is a plea for help to keep the servant free from sin. As I interpret this, none of us can really hope to measure up, except with divine intervention.

For some reason, as I traveled with this train of thought, I found I was taking pity on Dave Davis. To talk about being able to measure up, the pantheon of Princeton preachers goes back to the first president of Princeton, Jonathan Edwards. Imagine following in the footsteps of the author of one of the most famous sermons of all time “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” (Admittedly this sermon was delivered before Edwards arrived in Princeton, but my point remains.) Nonetheless Dave gets up there Sunday after Sunday and delivers. So must we go forward and do our best.

*O Lord, help us to appreciate the splendor of your creation and the redeeming nature of Jesus Christ, as we hope that our own efforts are acceptable to you. Amen.*

### **Bill Katen-Narvell**

Bill is a 25-year member of Nassau Church, whose wedding to BJ in 1979 was officiated by Wallace Alston. He was raised an Episcopalian (with some Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic influences), and his subsequent theological education is mostly vicarious through BJ’s seminary education and spiritual direction practice. When not writing meditations, he keeps busy as a vice president for State Street Bank.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*April 30, 2020*

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## 1 John 1:5–10

***God is light and in him there is no darkness at all... if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another (1 John:5, 7 NRSV).***

Easter morning becomes so much more intense when you learn, the day before, that your 96-year-old mom has tested positive for the corona virus. For me, it became a time of fear, concern and planning... but also of thanksgiving and support.

Fear for her possibly imminent death... concern for her care and comfort... and planning for final “good-bye” calls, especially by the grandchildren.

But thanksgiving as well for a full life well spent and for a spunky lady who still recognizes her family members and has said more than once, “I am ready to pop off!” ... and the sustaining support offered by my church family, most immediately by the staff and the closest of friends.

As I write this devotional on April 13<sup>th</sup>, my mom is doing surprisingly well, initially showing mild symptoms over a week ago, being tested, and having a virus-positive test result come back on Saturday. Today she is well cared for in the isolation unit at her retirement community in Delaware... and, providentially, has no fever or cough. She is having phone conversations with family and friends while her marching orders to us are “no hospitalization, no intubation, and no resuscitation.”

What will happen tomorrow, or even in the next hour, is the great unknown... but, whatever happens, my mom will be fine for she is confident that God is with her, in this life and in the one to come.

As I read the assigned text, I am struck (but not surprised) by the resounding reassurance that this passage provides, especially in verses 5 and 7 above. That light shines on my mom, my family, and on all of you at Nassau in this life that we share together.

*Dear Lord, thank you for the strength and reassurance that you provide during this time of isolation and transition. Thank you for our beloved church family that sustains us as we live our lives and as we anticipate the life to come, both for our loved ones and ourselves. And may the people of Nassau Presbyterian Church, together say “Amen!”*

### **Tom Charles**

Tom Charles and his wife Lynn are long-time Nassau members who are enjoying the delightful company of their daughter Marisa (returned temporarily from Burma), and the always entertaining Skype conversations with daughter Natalie and her husband Paolo.

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*Tom's mom, Eleanor Charles, died on April 22nd, peacefully, with a nurse reading to her the names of family members written in the corners of a poster board on which Tom's sister, Susan, had written the words, "WE LOVE YOU!" For Tom, sharing this devotional has provided him with an opportunity to gather with his church family... at a time when his nuclear family cannot come together at a traditional memorial service.*

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 1, 2020*

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## John 11:25–26

***“Do you believe this?” (John 11:26b NRSV).***

These verses in John 11, spoken by Jesus to Lazarus’s sister Martha, are the puzzling, ecstatic words we know we will take with us to our deathbeds and we will speak at the graves of our loved ones. These lines are Easter’s core of the Gospel’s power; the words that dance at the periphery of our attention but will at times of grace draw near enough for us to breathe them in. These words, although we’ve known them by heart from childhood, are nevertheless bursting with the potential for disruptive joy and new astonishment.

And then Jesus asks Martha: “Do you believe this?”

Many of us in these days may feel a bit like Martha. She is anxious about the stench of her brother’s grave and distracted by mutterings of the curious crowd forming around the sealed entrance of the tomb, in hopes of seeing a spectacle or hearing a tale to retell. Perhaps, Martha thinks, inviting Jesus was not such a good idea.

But then Jesus approaches the cave and speaks: “Take away the stone!”

Out of the darkness of death and isolation, Lazarus stumbles into the dazzling light, trailing the soiled wrappings of the grave. What shall we do when we realize this is Lazarus? Do we then believe Jesus is indeed the Chosen One to whom the arm of the Lord has been revealed?

In our own lives we can sense that what happens next here in our time will either remake this world or crush us utterly. Will there be justice? Will there be a vaccine? Will we return to the darkness we’re sewn into or will we stumble by grace into the light of salvation and redemption?

Do you sometimes feel interred (as I do) by fear, particularly in these days of intensely not-knowing, as we hope to outwait an incomprehensible menace? From Jesus we know that there is one way out, and it is the redemption of the Easter moment: Christ is risen!

With this truth, the fresh air rushes into our caves and we can breathe deeply again; the light stabs our eyes. We find courage and patience to accept this billowing veil that is shrouding our vision of the months and years to come. Let us rise up then and join with all the people of the world to rebuild our lives according to the light and law of His grace.

Can we believe this? He is risen indeed!

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*Wise Father and loving God, guide us back out into the light again. Quicken our shrunken hearts so we may rise and remake this tired and abused world anew, according to your merciful and righteous will. Roll away the stone of doubt and darkness; bring us out into the light of hope and the Easter joy of Jesus' resurrection. Renew our exhausted hearts and assist us to rise when you summon us. Amen.*

### **Deborah Tegarden**

Debbie is a long-time Princeton resident and an editor at Princeton University Press. She was a member of Nassau Church from 1981 to 1987, and she gratefully rejoined this fellowship in 2017. She is one of the lucky few who can work from her home in recent weeks; and while interesting work and a regular salary are blessings, her anxiety about the future increases in these days.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 2, 2020*

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## **Psalm 73:23–28**

*My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart  
and my portion forever (Psalm 73:26 NRSV).*

Of the assigned passage, verse 26 singled itself out to me. Maybe because over ten years ago my heart decided to fail. I clearly remember being on the table as the cardiology team did their imaging and maneuvering and wondering how it was going to end. I was not afraid, I was curious; it helped that the environment was not strange to me, I had been in such procedure rooms many times, just never on the table. I am still here and I feel strong, however, the older we get, the more aware we are of the fragility of our existence. Our flesh is weak and our strength is borrowed. I am comforted by the strength that does not fade. I take refuge in the incorruptible flesh that is promised.

*Lord, we thank you for your strength and guidance. As we continue to shelter, hiding from an unseen pestilence, we ask that you comfort us and give us the wisdom to know how to act. We praise your holy name. Amen.*

### **Frank Llort**

Frank is a retired developer of cardiovascular devices. He has been a member of Nassau Church since 1996 and has been ordained as a deacon and ruling elder in the PC(USA). Frank was awarded a PhD in chemistry at Princeton in 1979. He boasts of seven happy grandchildren and no unhappy ones. He trains Brazilian Jiu-jitsu in Philadelphia and teaches it at several Friends' academies.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 3, 2020*

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## **1 Corinthians 1:17–21**

***For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18 KJV).***

Whenever I look at a cross, whether it is gracing and protecting the altar or atop a sacred edifice, I am immediately comforted. The cross is a tangible symbol of God but, also, something that serves as an intangible embrace from God.

I might offer an example from my travels when I was particularly captivated by the cross in Rome. A few years ago, as part of a business trip to observe in-depth interviews with physicians for a qualitative market research project, I was asked to travel with our client to Rome, Italy. My client and I arrived at the airport, retrieved our bags, and caught a taxi that sped us to the outskirts of the city and dropped us and our luggage at a lovely building which housed the focus group facility.

After a few hours, our hosts suggested we each take a break to find our respective lodgings and all meet back in the facility for dinner and the next round of research. I was told that my hotel, the Domus Sessoriana, was only a ten-minute walk from the facility. “It was very easy,” our host said.

I searched for that hotel for about 45 minutes. Up and down, around the block with my two pieces of luggage I walked...even passing and greeting one of the physicians in our focus group—twice! I proceeded down a street for what was probably the third or fourth time...I stood at the corner and stared across the street at a church. I spied the cross atop the church, and I was led immediately forward up the path. The church, Santa Croce di Gerusalemme, was illuminated (since night had set in), and I had not walked more than halfway up the pathway when, out of a small outbuilding came (what I think was) a priest dressed all in white and, thus, glowing from the backlight. I asked, in my best Italian, where the Domus Sessoriana was, and could he please give me directions. Instead of responding, he turned slightly to his right, and pointed with his left hand toward the church.

The experience reminded me a bit of Christ and His appearance as a gardener to Mary Magdalene after the Resurrection. I turned to walk further toward the church and what was looking more and more like a hotel entrance to its right, but, within seconds of having received those directions, I turned back to thank this priest again, but he was gone. It was like he only came out just for me, to guide me in. I was guided by a church and cross, and, then, by someone to whom I will be forever grateful...for alleviating my stress, comforting me in my direction, and, simply, for pointing me to my little hotel.

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

My trip back to the airport that next morning was at 5 a.m. To the side of my taxi window, out the left window, I saw a church steeple with its cross in the distance. It was the only thing illuminated for a mile radius, it seemed, other than some house lights and some relics along the way. But this steeple and cross were there, as a guide, and as an ever-present help ‘in ages past.’

I think of towns all over the world – and, specifically, small towns I have seen across the UK and Europe where there is a church, its steeple and cross that look upon its residents and visitors. For that was, it seems, the purpose for those builders of times past...to build the most beautiful, the tallest, most imposing, most powerful, and most comforting structure in the town...with a purpose to guide, protect and cherish anyone who sees those architectural wonders.

Isaac Watt's Hymn, "At the Cross," from 1707:  
(Chorus)

At the cross, at the cross,  
Where I first saw the light,  
And the burden of my heart rolled away -  
It was there by faith I received my sight,  
And now I am happy all the day.

*Dear God, please help us to see the Cross in all of its Splendor, in all of its Glory, and in all of its Might. Please help us, as we view the Cross, whenever and wherever we are, to think of God, God's Grace upon us, and to be reminded that we are forever saved by our love of and faith in God. Please use us as your clay to respect God's love in marveling at a leaping baby lamb or being awed by a spray of sunrays that appear out of the blue as we round a corner on a walk through a lovely spring tulip garden, We will think of God in those moments and remember that God's love is 24/7. Hallelujah and Amen!*

### **Cynthia Lynn Miller**

Cynthia has attended the Presbyterian Church ever since young—from her years growing up in and as a member of the Village Presbyterian Church in Northbrook, Illinois, to her membership within Nassau. Cynthia is enlightened by the Cross and all it represents every day. She works in international market research and loves history, travel, reading and writing.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 4, 2020*

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## Isaiah 25:6-9 (NIV)

*On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare  
a feast of rich food for all peoples,  
a banquet of aged wine—  
the best of meats and the finest of wines.  
On this mountain the Lord will destroy  
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,  
the sheet that covers all nations;  
the Lord will swallow up death forever.  
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears  
from all faces;  
The Lord will remove his people's disgrace  
from all the earth  
The Lord has spoken.  
In that day they will say,  
"Surely this is our God.  
We trusted in the Lord, and the Lord saved us.  
This is the Lord, we trusted in him.  
Let us rejoice and be glad in the Lord's salvation."*

An Eastertide meditation on our present time. Spend a moment with these words. Picture them. Feel them. Then move on. Listen closely for Words from the Lord.

### **WORDS FROM COVID-19**

**Virus! Unclean! Hazard! Plague!  
Wash hands! Social distance! Confine! Cancel! Shame!  
gloves...gowns...masks...ventilators...shrouds  
hoarding... scarcity...hunger  
jobless...inequity...economic collapse  
uncertainty... anxiety...fear.....sleepless  
overwhelming emotions...depression...paranoia...quarreling  
alone...weeping...words unspoken...death**

*(...silence...)*

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

## WORDS FROM THE LORD

*...out of the silence...*



A BREATH OF GOD - Genesis 1 and John 1:1 as viewed from the Hubble telescope

**Arise! Shine!**

**Listen! Touch! Taste! Smell! Rejoice!**

**Serving Sharing Forgiving Thanksgiving**

**Shepherding Foot -Washing Wiping-Tears-Away**

**Banqueting Feasting Singing Dancing**

**Communion-of-the-Saints Compassion Mercy Justice**

**Shalom**

**Love**

**Christ Is Risen!**

Hallelujah Chorus from Easter Service at Nassau Presbyterian Church

<https://youtu.be/3nzLk70GJeo>

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*Lord, our Rock, our Redeemer, we hear your words for you have spoken.*

*Help us to understand.*

*In this time of need we look to you for salvation.*

*Hear our prayer.*

*Kyrie eleison*

*Have mercy upon us.*

*Kyrie eleison*

*Amen. Amen. Amen.*

### **Larry Alphs**

Larry has occupied a balcony seat at Nassau since 2007. A farmer, pharmacologist, physician and scientist, Larry waits patiently for this crisis to pass, spending much time in his garden appreciating the beauty of creation and awaiting the birth of a fourth grandchild.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 5, 2020*

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## **Romans 8:18–25**

***“For in hope we were saved. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance (Romans 8:24–25 NABRE).”***

I find this verse particularly applicable because as Covid-19 continues to affect the entire globe, many people are starting to feel despondent. People are losing their ability to see the end of this pandemic, instead feeling like this will be the new “normal.” God calls us to be hopeful in that which is unseen, for that will save us.

There is a story in Greek mythology of a woman named Pandora, whose curiosity caused her to open her box, releasing many evils in the world. She was able to close it just in time to keep “hope.” Although the sentiment is nice, I believe that the Bible verse captures the spirit of hope better. Hope is not something that we passively carry in our “box,” but is instead, as this verse proclaims, an ideology of endurance. Merriam-Webster defines endurance as, “the ability to withstand hardship or adversity, especially the ability to sustain a prolonged stressful effort or activity.” This evokes action! In order for us to hope for the future, we must act! Whether that be following CDC guidelines, treating the sick, or researching solutions, in order for us to hope for the future, God calls us to be God’s presence on earth. By doing our part to slow the spread of this virus, we are all actively hoping in God’s promise.

*Dear Lord, thank you for giving us your Word to meditate on as we face adversity. Let us metaphorically stand together in the hope of your promise and see your presence around us. Amen.*

### **Robert Duffy**

Robert has appreciated being embraced by Nassau Church and tries to continue “cyber-participating” in any way he can. As a first-year resident in internal medicine at Cooper Hospital, he has been inspired by his co-workers, who have dedicated themselves to patient care during these tumultuous times. He has also been heartened by so many following guidelines towards isolation, looking forward to a greater sense of community to come when this crisis resolves.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 6, 2020*

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## **Romans 8:26–28**

***God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans (Romans 8:26, 27 The Message).***

In the current life-changing pandemic, I often sigh, watching the news. One can almost hear the world groaning. God surely hears these prayers.

Putting faith into action, we can show loving kindness to everyone we meet...across the street, by phone, or by email. We know that nothing, **nothing**, not even skillions of viruses, can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

In God's time, not in a political or financial rush, the world will rebalance.

*So, pray with me, breathing in healing, breathing out peace. Amen.*

### **Lynne Pfarrer Seidel**

Lynne joined Nassau Church in 1976. She misses face-to-face time with her Nassau family. She thanks God for technology, which keeps us connected.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 7, 2020*

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## **Romans 8:31–39**

***For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38–39 NRSV).***

After Jesus' death, Paul was in the Greek city of Corinth when he wrote a very powerful letter to the Romans. He reminded us of Psalms and Isaiah by saying "we are as sheep for the slaughter." Two months ago, our world turned upside down and I felt like a sheep ready for slaughter. It's still hard for me to believe that our entire world shut down over night. But today there are people working through very stressful times to make sure that we have food and medical supplies. There are teachers educating our children and doctors risking their lives. This is the strangest time I have ever lived through. But with faith, nothing that appears to be good and nothing that appears to be evil can triumph over us. Through faith, Paul teaches us that through the mastery of having nothing to lose we will be victorious and we will be safe.

*Dear Lord, thank you for this day where I have everything that I need. Help those who are sacrificing their freedom by living in danger and help those who are under extreme stress and help those who are suffering. Amen.*

### **Jody Erdman**

Jody has been the Director of the Anne Reid Art Gallery at Princeton Day School for the past fifteen years. She was christened at birth at Nassau Presbyterian Church by her Great Grandfather Dr. Charles R. Erdman when he was pastor. Her son Spencer began nursery school at Nassau when he was 2 years old. They have been worshiping at Nassau on and off all of their lives.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 8, 2020*

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## Philippians 3:10–14

***...forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on... (Philippians 3:13b–14a NRSV).***

I've lifted my foot. I'm leaning into the step I'm about to take. I'm at that moment where I can still lean back and stay where I have been, or I can lean forward—maybe even leap!—and go somewhere new. Until. I hear. The ice. Crack. I have a split second to decide before I split right through this ice into the cold water below. Step back? Leap forward? Stand still and drown in shockingly cold water?

I didn't even know that I was on ice. Just knowing how frigid the water is below the ice takes my breath away. That's what this time feels like. I'm stuck in a step that is halfway up, halfway down. I feel like I'm holding my breath.

The distance between people is more than the physical space right now. Midst the dizzying swirl of chaotic COVID chaos that closed companies, schools, and life as we once knew it, formerly mundane tasks now test our patience with how much more time they take. This tiny piece of protein has anchored itself in every nation on earth. It has sowed fear. It has cut the most powerful to their knees in obedience. It has crippled commerce. It has made for a lot of bad days and promises many more to come.

When Paul was writing this letter to Phillip, he was probably not having a great day either. He was in prison. He had had (and may have continued to suffer from) a catastrophic loss of his sight where he had to learn how to do everything differently and trust people who surely regarded him with complete suspicion. For him, time also expanded. He was isolated in a confined living space. He was “socially distant” from those with whom he served and inspired. His dependence on others was as close to 100% as you can get. What can we learn from his period of isolation? Press on anyway.

Paul had just finished sharing the details of his career in this letter to the Philippians. No one could deny his impressive pedigree. And yet, just like a runner focused on running a marathon, Paul tells us to turn away from the past and turn towards the goal. He said that what has happened doesn't matter. His language is sharp: all of his “gains” he regarded as “loss.” His message was to the point: press on. Not stop. Not stand still. Not look back: press on.

The promise before us isn't anything “normal.” In fact, if we come out on the other side of this pandemic “back” to normal, that would be the biggest tragedy of all. As the shock of it all shakes out, we can learn much from Paul's marathon-like approach to faith in this marathon called COVID-19. Just keep going. One step. The next step. The third step. Small steps towards a big finish. And that's the point: finish. Continue to live each day in

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

all the light God offers, both acknowledging the source of the light and our responsibility to walk according to it, no matter how difficult things get or how long things take to accomplish. It's not who crosses the line first, but that everyone who set out on the journey presses on and steps across the finish line into communion with Christ.

*Dear Lord, let us feel you alongside as we press on through what is challengingly new. Help us take each step in trust that Your path will emerge in front of us. Amen.*

### **Natalie Shelpuk**

When the world is open, Natalie Shelpuk works with individuals and organizations as a coach and trainer to design and deliver learning experiences that enhance performance, improve communication, drive growth, and enable greater work satisfaction. She began her career as a musician and journalist.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 9, 2020*

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## Philippians 4:4–9

***The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:5b, 6a, 9 NRSV).***

What an invitation, what a promise, what a comfort!

I learned that my dear Uncle Cleveland, 85, and much beloved by many and me, isn't doing well in hospital now eight days. Not the Covid-19, but an infection, and white cells, no appetite, nothing more doctors can do—the collection of words did not sound good. I listened to the growing sadness in my cousin Clevie's voice, calling from Chicago, and I knew what he was not willing to say. So, we both grew silent.

Then almost in unison, "We just have to turn Cleveland Davis / my dad / our uncle / mom's brother, over to the Lord in prayer." "If God is coming to get my brother today, the Lord will be with him," my mom said some minutes later when I called her in Bucks County. Then she was silent, and I heard her taking a breath. Seconds later, recovered, she was grateful for the call, and that Clevie was such a good and loving son, and that I was her daughter. That's how we Davises from Ocilla, Georgia, and Chicago, Illinois, Evelyn's from Brooklyn, New York and Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and Leslies now in Princeton, New Jersey were raised.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Rest assured; He knows better than any of us what must be done on any given day. Turn it over to the Lord in prayer. Turn it over to the Lord in prayer and do not worry about anything, because the Lord is near.

*Precious Lord Jesus, please hear my prayer, that the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will indeed fill our hearts and minds today. During this time of extreme challenge, with so many impacted with so much loss, may we on bended knee remember who is the Lord and King and Comforter-in-chief of all who suffer and all who come to believe. Let us have compassion one for the other. Be kind and gentle in all discourse. May the peace of the Lord God be with us all today and always. Amen.*

### **Denyse Leslie**

Denyse has been a Witherspoon Church member since 2007. She has served as clerk and is currently a member of Session, secretary of Witherspoon Presbyterian Women, and a founding member of the Witherspoon/Nassau Joint Mission Committee. This collaboration is expanding the reach of Presbyterian ministry and building, and deepening relationships Denyse has enjoyed with Nassau sisters and brothers in Christ. Joint service enlarges the heart of a beloved community.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 10, 2020*

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## 1 Corinthians 1:26–31

***God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:28–30a NRSV).***

We live in a culture and exist in a community where success, achievement, and impressive titles are often equated with wisdom, power, and status. These are sources of comfort and pride. It is often in the church that our practices reflect what we believe and value. Church budgets reflect congregational values and priorities. Years ago, I was a member of a church which referred to its members as “giving units”. The salary of the director of music was triple that of the pastor! There was constant unrest and dissension in the church budgeting process and the church as a consequence.

Similarly, Paul encountered dissension and disunity among the leaders in the church in Corinth. In our text, Paul does not attempt to settle their disputes, instead, he makes the claim that worldly power and worldly wisdom are superficial. He asserts that God calls those to serve who are not necessarily wise, mighty, or noble. He humbles and shames the privileged because their “human standards” of wisdom and power deny the “foolishness of the gospel.”

How do we make Paul’s message to the church in Corinth relevant in the chaos of a world-wide pandemic, a global economic crisis, and a paralyzing fear of the unknown?

Rev. Brian Blount, president of Union Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, offered these thoughts on the impact of COVID–19 in an April 22nd interview with the PC(USA) News Service:

“In the New Testament there is despair, hopelessness, but those are the islands. The real ocean is the hopefulness that is coming.”

When asked about his hopefulness, Blount responded, “I’ve read to the end of The Book (the Bible). There is great promise of hope at the end of The Book. In my best moments, I feel it. It has been bred in me. While there is difficulty in the middle of The Book, there is hope in the end. There is a promise in that. God can and does break through the present, just as God did with Jesus.”

*Transforming God, renew us in your wisdom and power as we journey again toward the wonder of Pentecost. May we discover again new courage, new freedom, and new life in you. Amen.*

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

### **Barbara Flythe**

Barbara is a widow and retired public school educator and diversity trainer. She has three adult children and two adored granddaughters. Barbara has been a member of Witherspoon Street Presbyterian since November 1985. She was ordained a ruling elder in the PC(USA) in May 1983. Barbara currently serves as a member of both the WSPC Christian Education Committee and the Nassau/Witherspoon Joint Mission Committee.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 11, 2020*

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## Zechariah 8:1–8

***The Lord of heavenly forces proclaims: Old men and old women will again dwell in the plazas of Jerusalem. Each of them will have a staff in their hand because of their great age. The city will be full of boys and girls playing in its plazas (Zechariah 8:4–5 CEB).***

When I hear about children playing in plazas, I picture my twin sons the spring they were five, having the time of their lives in the fountain on the Platz der Alten Synagoge. It was a beautiful day, and people of all ages and colors were out enjoying the sunshine. The plaza was brimming with happiness. It is hard to imagine this was once a sight of hatred and violence. Lee and Ned played steps away from the old synagogue that was destroyed during the Kristallnacht in 1938.



On the “Night of Broken Glass” Nazis attacked Jewish persons, businesses, and houses of worship. Police and fire departments did nothing to stop them. Did any Jewish families find comfort in Zechariah’s promises following Kristallnacht? Could they imagine the horrors to come in the near future or foresee the scene of bliss I witnessed almost eighty years later? It is a challenge to look beyond the difficulties of the present, but we must try to remember to go to God for hope and peace.

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*Dear God, give us strength to live through today and believe in the promise of tomorrow.  
Amen.*

**Anne Thomsen Lord**

Anne is a deacon, ruling elder, and mother of four. She and her family lived in Freiburg, Germany, from August 2017–August 2018 while her husband Errol was on sabbatical.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 12, 2020*

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## **Acts 11:19–26**

***When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts (Acts 11:23 NIV).***

The grace of God—a powerful phrase that can look like so many different things in my stream of consciousness:

- ❖ A gorgeous spring day full of blooms under a cloudless sky;
- ❖ Streets that are strangely empty but homes that are filled with warmth and hope;
- ❖ A photo of a loving couple standing before the backdrop of a majestic red rock scene in Sedona, Arizona—a striking memory, forever beautiful in place and thought;
- ❖ A young fourth-year nursing student who ardently prepares for her NCLEX testing, her chosen field now an equal mix of selflessness and danger;
- ❖ Strangers who pass each other at odd distances while peering over masks, yet offering a warm greeting;
- ❖ A house void of its husband and father, but filled with memories, love, and laughter again;
- ❖ A forced social disconnect opening pathways for new and renewed social connection;
- ❖ Neighbors near and far bonding together to help those affected by widespread and unspeakable economic loss and need;
- ❖ A strong church community, a family of God, providing love, spiritual guidance and a new sense of normalcy in a pandemic that is anything but;
- ❖ A unified world effort for a cure, for healing of hearts left to grieve those for whom it is too late;
- ❖ Creation, all of it, both spectacular and flawed.

*Gracious Lord, we ask that you help us to see that your hand is in every aspect of this world, of our lives. Please make us more mindful than ever that you walk beside us always. No matter what. Amen.*

### **Lois Foley**

Lois has been a member of Nassau Church since March of 2018. She enjoys her participation in the Church Mouse program and began teaching 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Sunday School with a wonderful team earlier this year. She loves distance walking with her daughter, Meghan, and is beyond excited that the parks are open again. Grown children, Rachel (husband Adam) and Bryan, have been social distancing but staying closely connected, and are thankfully well.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 13, 2020*

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## Psalm 131

*O LORD, my heart is not lifted up,  
my eyes are not raised too high;  
I do not occupy myself with things  
too great and too marvelous for me.  
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a weaned child with its mother;  
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me. (Psalm 131:1–  
2 NRSV).*

Who in our church family picked Psalm 131 for me? How could you possibly have known that I needed to be “calmed,” needed to put what is going on right now into perspective.

A breast-feeding child has no fears as we know them. A child at this age, neither watches the evening news, nor is too afraid to go out and buy the newspaper because of COVID-19. Throughout my career in education, I’ve never had so many counselees consumed by fear (terrified to the point where they can’t take care of themselves, let alone do their homework or get online for class). Worry about our families, friends, teachers, neighbors, and our own lives can consume us and can engulf lives around the world.

When I think of a child in that totally helpless, innocent stage where all of life’s needs are addressed by the parent, my firstborn child, Courtney, comes to mind, and I learned about her resilience quickly. When she moved onto bottle-feeding, I was delegated to awaken at 1:00 a.m. to feed her. What a glorious time of peaceful quiet, my daughter and I rhythmically bonding in the living room’s rocking chair. One morning I woke up terrified, my tee shirt soaked with formula with her bottle pressed to my shoulder. My daughter lay fast asleep at my feet with our golden retriever curled up around her. Courtney had evidently rolled off my lap and our dog had taken over babysitting. Fast forward 36 years later to a few days ago, and that same Courtney announced to Maria and me that she and her husband are blessing us with our first grandchild this coming Halloween. Who knew I, “this world-class worrier,” needed Psalm 131?

I came across my kindergarten picture awhile back, and I was surprised to see two children wearing leg braces—I had forgotten that polio was still a disease to be reckoned with back then. Sadly, polio still is in many parts of the world today. Every baby born in this world has found security at a mother’s breast. Psalm 131 is calling us to put our wants aside and to work with the global community against COVID-19, calm our fears, check our materialistic wants, and trust in our loving God and Jesus Christ. Through our faith, love and determination, our souls will be calmed, and God’s love will guide us as we save His most precious gift, children.

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*Dear Heavenly Father, help up us to place our faith in your LOVE. Calm our fears, and encourage us to share our gifts with others. Settle our shaking hearts so we may more clearly focus on the needs of others. Please, Dear Lord, give us (the people of your Earth) resilience, knowledge and compassion as we meet our challenges together. In your name we pray, Amen.*

### **Penn Bowditch**

For the past 48 years, Penn has worked with teenagers and college students in a variety of capacities (U.S. History teacher, varsity coach in four different sports, and numerous administrative capacities including independent school head). Presently, hi is a school counselor at a large public school in North Jersey. He and Maria moved to the Hopewell area two years ago. They have three wonderful adult children and spent 28 years at Blair Academy most recently.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 14, 2020*

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## **James 1:17–18**

***He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created (James 1:18 NIV).***

“Firstfruits” are the first crops harvested each spring, given in biblical days as an offering to God in thankful acknowledgement that all gifts come from our heavenly father. As Christian believers, reborn through the New Covenant, we are spiritual “firstfruits,” charged to dedicate ourselves to doing God’s will here on earth.

This is a tall order, but he does not expect us to do it all on our own. Remember the Pentecost after Jesus’ death and resurrection, when his faithful gathered to celebrate the Jewish spring harvest festival. The Holy Spirit rushed in like a high wind, inspiring and empowering those first believers to go forth and share the Good News.

In the same way, we modern-day believers are called to dedicate ourselves to God’s work in the world. We may feel overwhelmed by current circumstances, but in these same circumstances are also an amazing array of opportunities to do good. And in doing good, in helping others cope with the challenges they face, we also reclaim our sense of agency and control in our own lives.

When I retired, last year, I wanted to find ways to serve the community. I was initially immobilized, wasting way too much time trying to discern which path God wanted me to take. Finally, one of Dave Davis’ sermons led me to I Corinthians 12. The part that hit home was verses 4–6:

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.”

The message: it doesn’t really matter which way I try to help—I should just get started. Turns out that there are lots of ways to serve, even while sheltering at home—and I feel much better for it.

*Dear Lord, in these dark days of illness, isolation and fear, help us to find the strength to reach out to others in compassion and caring. Thank you for your steadfast love, the leadership and sacrifice of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit that inspires and strengthens us in your ways. Amen.*

### **Elizabeth H. Beasley**

Liz joined Nassau Church in 2007 when she moved to Princeton from Davis, California. She has served as a ruling elder and on the membership and adult education committees and was ordained as a deacon in November 2019. She is also a volunteer with Villages in

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

Partnership, a church mission partner working to end extreme poverty in Malawi. Liz married Kimball Beasley in the sanctuary in 2010 and retired from Rutgers University in 2019.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 15, 2020*

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## Acts 9:36–43

*Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them....He took [Dorcas] by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive (Acts 9:39, 41 NIV).*

Peter was

**willing and able** to make the journey; and was then **willing and able** to resurrect this woman and was then **willing and able** to present her to her credible witness friends.

These biblical successes of being both **willing** and **able** to serve as dramatic inspirations for us to accept known and unknown risks and be **willing** to commit ourselves to positive actions. We then really can try our very best, perhaps God-inspired, to also be **able** to accomplish as much as we can and probably a bit more. While few of us are real miracle-workers, we are capable of good, perhaps excellent, accomplishments, which may be perceived as remarkable by witness friends.

*Lord, we are grateful to be alive at this point in history. Yes, we are going through a difficult season; the pandemic virus may choke the spirit of some of us. Give us strength and stamina to help us to work thru. Let us sense your presence in our lives. Amen.*

### **Val Mathews**

Val enjoyed successive career steps in electronic warfare development, international technology and business, was Corp. Officer in International Co., worked, traveled and lived briefly in southern Russia, retired twice, and now serves with two non-profits. His wife Martha is in our Nassau Choir.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 16, 2020*

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## 1 Corinthians 3:5–11

***I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.... For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building (1 Corinthians 3:6–7, 9 NIV).***

How appropriate to meditate about these Bible verses during spring, when we smell the rain-soaked soil, the fragrance of the flowers and there is sweet aroma in the air everywhere. I love gardening. There are many trees and bushes around my house, but I have no vegetable garden, due to the large population of squirrels and groundhogs in my area. My spice garden is only partially done, but I plant lots of flowers every year. My neighbors often ask me how I grow such nice plants that are blooming all summer long. I mention the good soil, the frequent watering and trimming and my habit to talk to my plants. This is my part. The rest is up to our God, who makes things grow. The Bible verses written about 2000 years ago are still valid, well-founded nowadays.

Not too long ago one of my grandsons had a comment: “You are always working. Why?” I explained to him that I like to work for various reasons. First, we all need to work to meet our needs. We may need to learn how to limit our needs and the current self-isolation is a good teacher for that. We also work so we can give to the needy. This is what we call charity. Some charity work is compensated with heavenly currency. My grandson liked these explanations, so I continued. Work is a good opportunity to build relationships, make friends, learn to be a good team player and express our talent. We all have some hidden talents, that we can use when we work for God. High-quality work is typically rewarded



## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

with titles. I worked for the Federal Home Loan Bank of New York for over two decades and earned various titles. However, for me, the biggest designation is to be a “co-worker of God” as written in the Bible. Being partner of God, who created the universe, being fellow worker of Jesus, our savior, is the biggest honor I can dream of. I hope we will work in heaven.

*Dear Lord, our heavenly Father, thank you for everything you've given to us, from the nature and seasons, to sunsets and stars; from hope and trust, to grace and peace. Amen.*

### **Agnes Olah**

Agnes is a retired bank executive and part of the Nassau Church community since 2012. Especially this spring Agnes is spending lots of time in her garden and walking in the woods or by the river while talking to God and singing her favorite church songs.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 17, 2020*

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## **Matthew 9:35–38**

***When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:36–38 NIV).***

What this verse triggers in me are memories of tough times and running around “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,” not knowing which way to turn or what to do. This verse also brings back poignant memories of experiences lived during the 1975-1990 Lebanese Civil War. These experiences which turned my life upside down were about learning spiritual lessons and surrendering to the Will of God in order to stop feeling “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

This verse reassures me that there is a spiritual purpose to the pandemic. If I run around scared and despondent that my daily life has been turned upside down, I will miss the opportunity to learn from a bounty of spiritual lessons. All I have to do is surrender to the Will of God and allow Him to be my shepherd.

*God, please help me surrender to Your Will so that I open my heart. Give me the ability to learn the spiritual lessons I am meant to learn. Help me become more resilient so that I am able to endure the social isolation, the long lines at the grocery store and my inability to go out as I used to and enjoy myself. Help me develop a stronger heart so that I am able to listen to the daily news without breaking down. Give me the strength to get past the sadness that pervades my every waking moment and invades my sleep. Help me open my heart so that I stop feeling sorry for myself and start having more empathy and compassion towards all my fellow humans, especially those that are less fortunate than me, whether they are sick with the virus, have lost their livelihood or cannot see their loved ones. God, I thank you for the opportunity to strengthen myself spiritually so that I grasp what it means to surrender to Your Will and enjoy the Fruits of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## **Lina Genovesi**

Lina has been a member of Nassau Church since April 2019. She is an intellectual property attorney with a law firm in Greenwich, Connecticut. She spends her free time working on her memoir of growing up in Beirut, Lebanon.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 18, 2020*

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## **Jeremiah 9:23–24**

***Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth” (Jeremiah 9:23–34 ESV).***

A wise person, a mighty person, and a rich person walk into a bar...

I’m not sure how the joke ends, but somehow, I think we’re the punchline.

These verses from Jeremiah ask us to consider the identities that we claim for ourselves. To boast, this passage suggests, is to uplift the parts of ourselves that we would like to show off as the whole, the parts that we want to claim as our identity. As we walk through this life, each of us exists at the intersection of so many identities. Some are engraved in our features and are as vital as drawing breath, while others we wear as accessories, like the scarf that we cling to in winter and shed come summer. There are some that we aspire toward and strive to attain, and some that are thrust upon us. We engage with some like painters, brushes brandished to embellish or camouflage, and with others like craftsmen, welding to create harmony, or recasting to craft something new. There is incredible self-determination in God’s imperative. Intrinsic to the command is an essential reminder that it is up to us to claim our own identities.

Is it not laughable, then, that these are the identities that we so often choose to boast about—wise, rich, mighty? Can you imagine that we, who are God’s people, who have been invited to understand and know God, who are the beneficiaries of God’s steadfast love, justice, and righteous, would choose to call ourselves anything else?

*Lord God, you have blessed us with complex and beautiful lives, full of so much to boast about. In the midst of all that makes us who we are—the gifts and experiences and ambitions—help us to remember that we are your beloved children. May we choose to boast in that alone. Amen.*

## **Jade Hage**

Jade has been attending Nassau church for the past three years and is grateful to have enjoyed her first anniversary as a member. Hailing from Monterey, California, Jade moved to Princeton to start her career teaching high school English. On Sunday mornings you can find her in the choir loft singing with the soprano section.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 19, 2020*

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## Deuteronomy 6:1-9

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:5–9 NIV).*

### God's Love Transforms: A Meditation

Lives contracting into tight boxes.  
Screens within screens.  
Six feet boxes unseen, between.  
Squares of paper fluttering.  
Blocking doors, shuttering windows.  
Shuttering, shuddering...

God creating stillness, pause.  
Sunrise, sunset  
Love filling the spaces between.  
Guiding words given, strengthening.  
Darkness falling, light beaming.  
Hope arising... is risen indeed.

Hearts opening, expanding beyond.  
Smiles on screens.  
Six foot bridges building, between.  
Paper notes filled with faith,  
Decorating doors, windows opening...  
    love rushing in.

*Dear God. You bless each moment of our days. Pray that we may share your love with all those who cross our path. We come to you with open minds, hands, and hearts. Creating space for your love to rush in and your will to be done. Amen.*

### Shana Lindsey-Morgan

Shana and her husband Michael feel so blessed to have found their church home when they joined the Nassau community in 2013. They are so grateful that their teenagers, Dean and Avery are growing up surrounded by the amazing faith, love, and nurturing spirit

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

present at Nassau. Shana serves on Session and the Adult Education Committee. She finds renewal in the laughter of friends, the love of family, and long walks in the beautiful woods of Mountain Lakes.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 20, 2020*

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## **Philippians 1:8–11**

***And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God (Philippians 1:9–11 NRSV).***

Reading this passage, the word that immediately sprang to mind was intuition. Intuition, that voice that whispers, "Take a different route from normal," or in late February, "Buy more toilet paper even though you just got a big pack two weeks ago." Maybe it nudges you to call up a friend you haven't talked with in a while. You don't know why at the time, but later you learn there was an accident on your usual route, there will be a run on toilet paper due to a developing pandemic, and it turns out that your voice was exactly what the friend needed to get through the day. Perhaps it's the knot in your chest that you finally figure out means that you feel moved to contribute to a cause or must create something large or small to bring comfort to others.

May we open our hearts to accept knowledge and insight as we move through this time of isolation, anxiety, and need. May our love, faith, and intuition guide us to determine what will bring healthy connection, joy, righteousness, and beauty.

*Dear God, continue to speak to us. We pray that our hearts may be open to your guidance that we may use your gifts to help ourselves and others. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*

### **Christianne Bessières Lane**

Christianne is a mom, wife, and musician. She with her flutist husband, John, has been a member of Nassau since 2003, and sang in the choir for several years before the gifts of her two children. She looks forward to the day when we can sing our praise together in the sanctuary. Mungu ni Mwema! Know that God is good! Alleluia!

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 21, 2020*

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## Psalm 34:1–10

*I will extol the LORD at all times;  
his praise will always be on my lips.  
I will glory in the LORD;  
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.  
Glorify the LORD with me;  
let us exalt his name together (Psalm 34:1–3 NIV).*

I practiced law in my misspent youth. One day in court, opposing counsel complained I hadn't disclosed something important. The judge looked at me expectantly and I said, "It's in my moving papers, Your Honor. Page 1, footnote 1." Embarrassed, opposing counsel mumbled, "I never read the footnotes." The judge's look suggested you should *always* read the footnotes.

Psalm 34 has no footnotes, but it does have a subheading: *A Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelek, who drove him away, and he departed.* It turns out that when you read the Psalms, you should *always* read the subheadings.

That's because David is on the on the run when he writes Psalm 34. King Saul wants him dead. David is alone, unarmed, famished, and terrified. He feigns madness to stay alive and hides in a cave. It is hard to see how things can get worse, yet what does David tell us?

*I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. I will glory in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.*

Counter-intuitive, isn't it? In trouble, on the run, a death, on his head, and playing crazy to survive; yet, David *praises* the Lord. How? Why?

Because David knows what every one of us *should* know, what the next several verses of Psalm 34 tell us: "I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears....This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles."

David reminds us the Lord is with us *always*; "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them."

Tolstoy famously said that "every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Put another way, each of us have subheadings in our lives of trials, burdens and, yes, even crises. Take

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

to heart David's words: "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him."

*Almighty God, Ancient of Days, you have so many more important things to deal with than my life, but yet you love me and lift me up. Praise be to God. A poor man calls you and you answer. Praise be to God. A poor woman calls you and you respond. Praise be to God. Hear us. See us. Save us. Praise be to God. Amen.*

### **Mark Herr**

Mark has been a member of Nassau Church since 1986. Recently he started his own boutique communications firm after spending the last 20 years on Wall Street. He is married to Rachel Herr and is father of Sarah Hess, Brooks, Cheeky, and Gardiner Herr. He would like to see the reimposition of pew rents so no one sits in his pew (second pew, right side). He means it.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 22, 2020*

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## Revelation 22:1–2

***Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1–2 NRSV).***

As soon as I started reading my assigned passage, I was transported to the annual all-church retreat precisely over Memorial Day Weekend last May. “I’ve got a river of life flowing out of me. Makes the lame to walk and the blind to see. Opens prison doors, sets the captives free...” I could hear the fast strum of the guitar and see the heartwarming sight of young children alongside beloved church pillars making the silly hand motions of “gush, gush” and “drip, drop” to a song that I learned myself decades ago at vacation Bible school and summer church camp. If there is anything that we have affirmed during these weeks of the coronavirus pandemic, it is the power of and human need for music. I find that listening to and/or making music is one of the most common, popular, and effective “coping skills” among my counseling clients, and I make it a priority for my own self-care needs as well. What songs flow out of you throughout the year and especially during seasons of heightened uncertainty? What songs sustain you, uplift you, and remind you of God’s care and promises? Perhaps it is a treasured European hymn, a shorter song like “Going and Coming” that we have dedicated to memory, a hope-filled African American spiritual, a simple Taizé chant, a melodious folksong from Latin America or other parts of the world, a contemporary praise song, or even an Advent carol that brings comfort on the darkest nights. Or is it an inspiring Broadway hit, social movement protest anthem, catchy jazz tune, or from a more modern genre like rock or hip hop? God is still moving in the middle of our hearts, our homes, and the streets of our cities.

*God of all seasons, we give thanks for the songs and other creative expressions that bring us hope and healing. Be present with me today and help me to remember that your river of life is everflowing. Inspire others to remind me of this when mine feels like just a “drip, drop” and nudge me to be that reminder to others when I feel the “gush, gush” flowing within my heart. Amen.*

### **Brandy Alexander**

Brandy is a member of the Adult Education Committee and a licensed social worker privileged to serve the Latinx immigrant community in New Brunswick. She and her husband Francisco Pelaez-Diaz began attending Nassau upon moving to Princeton in 2012, and now together with their young children Oliver and Max, they continue to worship regularly and build the beloved community with our faith partners at

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church, Westminster Presbyterian Church in Trenton,  
and Princeton Theological Seminary.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 23, 2020*

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## Psalm 130

***I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;  
my soul waits for the LORD  
more than those who watch for the morning (Psalm 130:5–6  
NRSV).***

After a trip overseas a few months ago, I had several nights of severe jet lag. I lay in bed, bored and wide awake, occasionally looking at the clock and finding that time was passing with excruciating slowness. Or I would read a book, frustrated by the knowledge that during the coming workday I would be exhausted.

The world (and privilege) of international travel seems remote now, but the sensation of waiting and watching—longing for the morning—is painfully present. I think of healthcare workers and caregivers on night shifts, 24-hour store clerks and newly unemployed people kept up late by worry. All of us, whether we are sleeping at night or not, are floating in a state of uncertainty and unease. We are waiting for answers, an opportunity to resume normalcy and feel safe. How long will this go on?

“My soul waits for the LORD,” the psalmist says, “more than those who watch for the morning.”

In God’s beautiful, complicated world, morning always comes, even if the night seems long. The psalmist doesn’t despair, but rather waits patiently and expectantly—sure that according to God’s gracious plan, another day will dawn. That expectant waiting is the very definition of hope.

As well, don’t forget that “watching” can also mean taking care of something. Babysitters watch children. The watchman guards the people and possessions under his care. And shepherds, keeping watch over their flocks by night, encounter an angel bringing tidings of great joy. God calls us to use this hard, uneasy night of waiting to care for each other. God promises that morning is on the way as always. In the meantime, keep watch.

*God of still nights and busy days, our hope is in you. Inspire us to watch over each other with the same love that you show for us. May we see and act on the opportunities for connection and care that are all around us. Amen.*

Michele Minter

Michele worships at the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church, works at Princeton University and lives in Plainsboro with her family.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 24, 2020*

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## **Psalm 122**

***Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:***

***“May they prosper who love you.***

***Peace be within your walls,***

***and security within your towers.”***

***For the sake of my relatives and friends***

***I will say, “Peace be within you.”***

***For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,***

***I will seek your good.***

In this time of uncertainty, I find myself praying for our world in many ways. I pray for peace within our Nassau community. I pray for peace between groups of people and countries. I pray for peace among our nation’s leaders. And finally, I pray for peace beyond what we as humans can do or see. It is difficult to imagine putting our complete faith in God and ask for security in a time like this, but the line “I will seek your good” reminds each of us that God is benevolent and giving. He hears our prayers and He responds in many ways.

One part of attending Nassau Church that I miss dearly is passing the peace of Christ during worship. We have also done this in the K-1 Church School class I assist with on Sunday mornings to greet the children and teachers. A handshake and the phrase “Peace be with you” may be simple, but it is the act of returning that peace, of sharing and reaffirming that peace, that makes me smile and fills my heart with joy. How wonderful it is to know that we all gather, in mind, body, and spirit, to rejoice in the Lord who grants us peace wherever we may be.

*Heavenly Father, may you remind us to share your peace with our friends and family near and far. Amen.*

### **Josie Brothers**

Josie is a senior at Princeton High School and a member of Nassau Presbyterian Church. She is a deacon, assists with the younger church choirs and Church School, and is involved in Cantorei choir and fellowship. At Princeton High School, Josie enjoys singing school choirs and with her a cappella group, The Cat’s Meow. She will be attending Elon University next year.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 25, 2020*

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## Galatians 5:22–25

***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness (Galatians 5:22 KJV).***

Finally—we come to this verse, breathing into our hearts like a shaded breeze in a parched desert. After oceans of biblical ink admonishing me to sell and give more to the poor, to hop to and build peace, create joy for others...all those reminders of how inadequately I measure up to the perfection of Christ and all the suffering saints...all those messages that Christianity is like golf—something you never do well enough...at last comes this verse saying, “Hey Bart, my little, befuddled child of God, pause, take eat of the fruits that My spirit has planted in your soul—the fruits that grow to their fullest when cultivated by following My way.”

God has sent his spirit into each of us gracing us with that small seed, that spark of His very own divinity. And I am forever amazed at the depth of this gift: a piece of God’s own self lies within me—within us all. ‘Tis a grace as great as God’s offering His own son. And these rewards: the gift of love from above & all surrounding me; being imbued with peace beyond my understanding; the serenity be longsuffering and gentle of heart. All our other needs are merely avenues to these fruits that we seek most. These divine aspects are ours to partake, and to share and further cultivate.

After a lifetime of hammering out my own personal principals, one realization comes: Any rule I take to guide my actions had better involve some major benefit for me. Otherwise, like the rest of us, I’ll grind through it with resentment, or soon abandon it. Let’s be honest. Sacrifice has it vital place, but it makes a miserable life purpose. And these gifts of the spirit listed in the text—these glimmering hints of the divine that God has seeded in us all—bring greater rewards than any person might ever hope. They inspire me on God’s way, and daily fill my heart with gratitude—yet another blessing.

*Sweet God, praise and gratitude be unto you for sending us your spirit and planting the seeds of your loving self within us all. Help us to learn, like you, to share these gifts freely, within ourselves and with all around us; and guide us into lives of gratitude. Amen.*

### **Bart Jackson**

Bart, 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 16 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.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 26, 2020*

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## **Ephesians 2:13–14**

***But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us (Ephesians 2:13–14 NRSV).***

“Where are you in your walk with Christ?” That was a question posed to me by a possibly well-meaning chaplain at one of those college freshman orientations where you meet people you never see again in the next four years. I think he may have been trying to gauge my level of faith, or discern how much scripture I had under my belt. I gave him an inchoate response, and ran off to do more trust exercises. Now, from the vantage point of many years spent walking with Jesus, I know that isn’t the right question. Faith cannot be achieved, only given. Wherever I am, so is Christ. If I have days, weeks, or even months of doubt, He still is with me; He believes when I do not. Once we were far away, but now, through the gift of the Resurrection, we are brought near. And for all time.

*Dear God, we thank you and praise you now and at all times. As we stay away from one another during this ill season, unite us through your most precious Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

### **Cecelia Tazelaar**

Celia is a deacon and has been active in small groups and children’s ministries over her past eight years of membership at Nassau Church. When she is not socially distancing, she is an active volunteer on a number of local organizations, does real estate sales, and enjoys spending time at the Jersey Shore with her husband Eric.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 27, 2020*

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## **Acts 2:1–21**

***“Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”  
(Acts 2:21 NRSV).***

That sounds easy.

Step 1: Call on the name of the Lord.

Step 2: Be saved.

Unless the name has to be the one used by the prophet Joel; I'm not sure I can pronounce that. And is it enough to call it once? Now it's getting complicated. Maybe the other parts of this passage can help.

I've always been impressed with the emphasis that the Pentecost story puts on the hearing and the understanding. It's kind of a short version of the whole Book of Acts: somehow, people from all over the world are able to understand, personally, the witness emanating from those First Believers. The marvel on Pentecost was *that* each person understood the message, not *what* was being proclaimed or *how*.

Maybe we can "know" about being saved in the same way that the Pentecost crowd could understand the message in their own language (the story doesn't really say if the crowd verified that they all heard the same thing). If in my heart of understanding, beyond the limited way that words can treat matters divine, I have some sense of what it means to be saved, then I believe I believe that I am on that path.

*Lord Jesus Christ,  
Have mercy on my soul. Amen.*

### **Tom Coogan**

Tom and his wife Beth have been Nassau Church members for 15 years. Tom has served as a deacon, ruling elder, small group leader, and softball coach.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 28, 2020*

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## 2 Corinthians 6:1–2

*As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says,  
"In the time of my favor I heard you,  
and in the day of salvation I helped you."  
I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation (NIV).*

Paul pleads and perhaps in frustration badgers people in the early church in Corinth to acknowledge and appreciate God's grace, not to ignore it. He emphasizes that he and his team have done nothing to keep them from believing in Christ. We conclude that Paul exhibits leadership, courage and urgency, plus he applies appropriate pressure to encourage them to take action now, without delay.

Today, in our own lives and time, we as individuals, corporations, churches or larger societies may be called on to act decisively, courageously and with common sense.

*Lord, we are grateful to be alive in this once-in-a-lifetime event in history. Yes, we are going through a difficult time. While the virus pandemic may choke the spirit of some of us, please give us strength, stamina, and a positive attitude to help us to work thru this. Help us to sense your presence in our lives. Amen.*

### **Val Mathews**

Val enjoyed successful careers in electronic warfare development, international technology, and business. As a corporate officer in an international company, he worked, traveled and lived briefly in southern Russia. Val retired twice and now volunteers with two non-profits. His wife Martha is in the Nassau Adult Choir.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 29, 2020*

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## Mark 4:26–29

***He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come” (NRSV).***

For 67 years of my life, September has always been the first month of the calendar year. Halfway through every “year,” Spring Break would be eagerly anticipated. As a life-long educator, I have watched God’s seed in each student germinate. Having worked at independent schools (as well as public schools), I have been able to marvel at how my student’s potential (seed) has flourished and grown, just as Mark assures in this passage. I wish public schools had reunions so I could catch up with former students.

As a youngster, packing up the station wagon for our Thanksgiving drive to my grandparents in Philly was a family ritual. Learning how to load and unload a car quickly was an essential skill for a child—most trips of any length in the “old days” included at least one flat tire that had to be changed by hand. (I drove that car through high school). Life then was far less predictable and “safe,” yet children of all ages were afforded far more opportunities to make decisions, use common sense, and learn from mistakes than kids today.

Mark’s verse calls us to have faith in Christ’s reassurance that each child is like a seed and will grow by Christ’s promise to full potential. I believe that every child with whom I’ve worked is a blessing that God has offered to their family, their place of worship, the global community, and the world. My grandmother used to say, “If you love what you do, you never go to work a day in your life.” For me, I’m finding it hard to put the sickle to the educator part of my life, after eagerly waiting for so many Septembers.

*Dear God, thank you for the blessing of children, and be with these seeds of future generations and their parents during this unusual, unexpected, anxious and challenging time. Thank you, dear Jesus, for walking beside me each day and for guiding me as I try to sow your tender mercy and compassion on all my students. Amen.*

### **Penn Bowditch**

From the time I could walk, I was molded by the freedom to explore a river, the woods, the hills, and a small Connecticut town with a brother and several neighborhood friends. I am blessed to have had parents who trusted what they had taught us, and who had faith that Christ would protect children as we built, climbed, rode, ate, jumped from, and landed on anything we could find.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 30, 2020*

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## Philippians 2:1–11

***If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete... (Philippians 2:1–2a NRSV).***

Paul is writing this letter under extreme conditions. He is in jail awaiting trial. The outcome is his death. So, when he hears his beloved church in Philippi, his companions in Christ, have turned fearful and antagonistic, he is more than eager for things to be set right. Because you know, and I know, and Paul knows that left untreated—quarrels and resentment can lead to bitterness and estrangement. The Christian family, now more than ever, doesn't have that kind of time to waste.

And so Paul offers his gospel medicine: the encouragement, consolation, compassion, and sympathy of our Lord. It is the medicine needed to heal our wounds and lift our spirits. He knows any time we find ourselves on the verge of self-destruction it's because we have neglected that which is most human, most valuable, and most basic—the work of human nurture and of tending the bonds of Christian community. Sometimes this work is seen as too relational and insignificant, too mundane, and un-dramatic, too distracting from the serious business of world rule. Not true!

The urgent work of encouragement, consolation, compassion, and sympathy is prevailing and powerful. Through acts of love—what Nelle Morton calls “*hearing each other to speech*”—we can build up the personhood of one another through the offerings of courage and hope. There is no better time to stake a claim into courage and hope.

In the midst of our anxieties of the future, our worries over health and family, finance and world, our Lord calls us to see one another, not as disconnected and home-bound, but as deeply interconnected members of the household of God.

And so dear friends, may each of us, declare in one voice: “At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10–11 NRSV).

*Good and gracious God, take each one of us out of our worries and into the living, spirited world of Christ Jesus. He has risen from an extravagant death to offer an abundant life. May we be his encouragement and consolation. May we offer his compassion and sympathy. Amen.*

### **Lauren J. McFeaters**

Lauren loves a good mystery. Whether it be reading Dorothy Sayers, listening to John le Carré, or diving into the plays of Tennessee Williams and August Wilson, she is totally devoted to listening for subtext. It's all about solving the mystery of what's not being said.

# EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

*May 31, 2020*

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## Ezekiel 37:1–14

***“I will put my spirit within you” (Ezekiel 37:14 NRSV).***

In the Hebrew text of this familiar Old Testament passage, the word for breath and spirit is the same: *ruah*. Being mindful of the repetition, the reader senses an emphasis, almost a multiplication. Breath. Spirit. Breath. It’s like that valley so full of death comes to life with the mouth to mouth resuscitation of the Spirit of God. Spirit. Breath. Spirit. Breath. It started with the noise, the rattling. Spirit. Breath. Spirit. Breath. And the bones coming together, then they stood on their feet. Spirit. Breath. Spirit. Breath. They stood on their feet, a vast multitude, and they lived.

At the end of her book *The Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, historian and Harvard President Drew Gilpin Faust describes the impact of the sheer magnitude of death on the people. “The Civil War generation glimpsed the fear that still defines us—the sense that death is the only end...We still struggle to understand how to preserve our humanity our selves within such a world.”

The biblical narrative that tells the story of Pentecost come in Acts 2. However, Ezekiel and the valley of the dry bones is a narrative that tells of the Spirit of God as well. In these tragic days when we have been confronted by the sheer magnitude of death, Ezekiel provides a compelling witness to the hope we have in God and the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of the Lord blows like a mighty wind, not just on thousands to be baptized, but on the driest heap of life-less-ness humanity can ever imagine. Yes, the Spirit of the Lord blows over a people devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers. And yes, the Spirit of the Lord blows upon the fear that still defines our very humanity—the sense that death is the only end. The Spirit of the Lord blows in those places in the world where humanity’s ability to preserve itself is seriously in doubt. In other words, Pentecost Sunday is not just about the Holy Spirit in the church, not just about the Holy Spirit in; my life or yours, Pentecost Sunday is about the Spirit of God at work when life and death and suffering and the world, when it’s all beyond comprehension.

*Come O Holy Spirit, come.  
Come, O Holy Spirit, come.  
Come, O Holy Spirit, come. Amen.*

### **David A. Davis**

Dave has been the pastor, head of staff, at Nassau Church since September of 2000. He served the First Presbyterian Church of Blackwood, New Jersey for 14 years. He serves as

## EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL ❖ 2020

an adjunct instructor at Princeton Theological Seminary teaching courses in preaching and worship.

*Your word is a lamp before my feet and a light for my journey.*

Psalm 119:105

NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH