

## Fourth Sunday, March 14

### Ephesians 2:1–10

You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. It's not something you did that you can be proud of. Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives (Ephesians 2:8–10 CEB).

Rebekah Sterlacci

**T**HE PAST YEAR has been a lot. It's like if you could put everything awful you could imagine happening with everything awful that you never imagined happening, then you might be able to begin to describe the past year—but even then you might not come close. We are helpless. We are in need of saving. In our faith, we come to God, grateful for the gift of salvation.

In an attempt to simplify and structure my reflecting over the past year, I've started writing haiku poetry in my journal. Here's a haiku pairing to reflect on this passage from Ephesians:

You, my friend, are saved.  
 It's not about you, your work.  
 God's grace is a gift.

Have faith. Practice it.  
 Even in challenging times.  
 With thanks, go do good.

*Lord God, thank you for your grace and for saving us. Even when everything feels strange, confusing, and painful, we know that you have given us the gift of salvation and that we can trust in your plans for us. Amen.*



Rebekah is the District Supervisor of Visual and Performing Arts for Piscataway Township Public Schools and the Artistic Director of the Piscataway Choral Collective. Rebekah and her husband Jason (and almost seven-year-old Jonas) have been a part of Nassau Church for nine years. At Nassau, Rebekah is chair of the Worship and Arts Committee. Rebekah loves cooking vegan food, drinking espresso and IPAs, practicing yoga, running/hiking, and curating Spotify playlists.

## Monday, March 15

### Exodus 15:22–27

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What are we to drink?”

Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink (Exodus 15:22–25 NIV).

Benjamin Yeh

**I**SN'T IT WONDERFUL to have that piece of wood, which could turn the bitter water edible, a handy water filter you may carry wherever you go, with the assurance of water fit to drink? But, even with that from God and the manna and the quail afterwards, the Israelites kept on grumbling, arguing, complaining along the journey for 40 years!

Father Alfred D'Souza once said, “For a long time it seemed to me that life was just about to begin, real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, a debt to be paid....At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were MY LIFE.”

Yes, these obstacles, problems, challenges are our life! And, luckily, we have choices: either to long for the real life to begin sometime later, and keep on grumbling, arguing, and complaining along the way until the last minute—or to walk with our Lord now, asking for his mercy, power, and wisdom, to pick up the piece of wood God has shown us, to turn every drop of bitter water and obstacles into soul-quenching drink and blessings.

*Dear Lord, forgive us for squandering your grace and gift, blind to your omnipresent love and power. Help us to face life's obstacles with courage and wisdom, witnessing your power to turn bitter water into sweet springs. Amen.*

Benjamin and his wife Emily have been members of Nassau Church since 2014, when they moved from Taiwan to Princeton. He is currently a ruling elder and serves on the Human Resources Committee. Emily serves on the Children and Family Ministries Committee. They have two children, Jonathan and Symphony.

## Tuesday , March 16

### Numbers 20:1–13; Psalm 82

They quarreled with Moses and said, “If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord! Why did you bring the Lord’s community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? (Numbers 20:3–5a NIV).

How long will you defend the unjust  
and show partiality to the wicked?  
Defend the weak and the fatherless;  
maintain the cause of the poor and the oppressed.  
Rescue the weak and needy;  
deliver them from the hand of the wicked (Psalm 82:2, 3 NIV).

Larry Alphs

**T**HE READINGS FOR TODAY speak poignantly of our time. We have been in lockdown for a year. It is hard. Friends have died and we could

not be with their families to comfort them. Grandchildren have been born but not hugged by their grandparents. Jobs have been lost. Rents and mortgages cannot be paid. Schooling has been disrupted. Social gatherings have been curtailed. Church services are virtual. We are lost and afraid. When will this be over? Who will hear our cries?

As a youth hearing the stories of the Israelites in the wilderness, I wondered how they could be so faithless. They had heard the Lord's promises. They had Moses and Aaron and Miriam among them. Why didn't they believe and trust in the Lord's goodness? But reading more carefully, we learn that Miriam had just died. Instead of the fertile fields of Egypt, they were marooned in a desert, hungry and thirsty.

Given the events of the past 12 months, we can empathize with the Israelites and their cries for salvation. They resonate with cries we have heard from friends and family and, at times, ourselves. For some these cries focus on the hardships of the COVID pandemic. For others these cries are added to generational cries for deliverance from poverty and injustice. We too pray for deliverance. We pray for strength to the weary and increase of power to the weak so that once again we can run and not grow weary, walk and not be faint.

*Lord, our Rock, our Redeemer, hear our cries. Call us by our name.*

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

*You have promised that in our times of trial you will provide a way out so that we can stay standing.*

*Help us to stand.*

*Kyrie eleison*

*Have mercy upon us.*

*Kyrie eleison*

*Amen.*

Larry has occupied a balcony seat at Nassau since 2007. A farmer, pharmacologist, psychiatrist and scientist, he waits patiently for this crisis to pass, nour-

ished by audio and video calls to his family spread across the globe...rejoicing in his grandchildren...looking for a new day when we can be together again.

## Wednesday, March 17

### Isaiah 60:15–22

Whereas you have been forsaken and hated,  
with no one passing through,  
I will make you majestic forever,  
a joy from age to age.

...and you shall know that I, the Lord, am your Savior  
and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob (Isaiah 60:15, 16b NRSV).

Cynthia Moorhead

**T**HE ISRAELITES were despised, wandering, and longing for a return to Zion. They were a people without a home and hated wherever they went. The prophet Isaiah tells them the Lord will save them and make them “majestic forever.”

People throughout history have claimed this promise: the marginalized and destitute, Black slaves in the antebellum South, persecuted Jewish prisoners in Nazi concentration camps, immigrants risking their lives traveling to a safer home.

And now our world is suffering the horrors of a pandemic. All of us are seeking the promise of this saving grace. Isaiah’s words also tell us “to know that I, the Lord, am your Savior and your Redeemer.” This is our part to play. These words are our light in the darkness.

*Dear God, in depths of despair, in shouts of joy, help us to know that you are our Savior and our Redeemer. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.*

Cynthia is a long-time member of Nassau Church. With her husband Jim, she is part of three generations now actively involved in our congregation. She has been teaching three- and four-year-olds in church school for more years than

she can remember.

## Thursday, March 18

### Psalm 92

It is good to give thanks to the Lord,  
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;  
to declare your steadfast love in the morning,  
and your faithfulness by night.  
For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work;  
at the works of your hands I sing for joy (Psalm 92:1–2, 4 NRSV).

Nancy Prince

**I**T IS NECESSARY for me to give thanks to the Lord, to notice and to speak gratitude. This morning on my walk out-of-doors I felt inspired to really pay attention to all of nature around me. I felt a connection to the hymn, “This Is My Father’s World”, a hymn I learned as a child in Sunday School at my village church. “...of rocks and trees, of skies and seas, his hand the wonders wrought.”

The outdoor world of Skillman this morning was beautiful. The blue sky kept increasing as the clouds drifted away. The scenery was a display of winter plants and trees, yet worthy of being noticed. I saw crystals of remnants of snow at the edge of the path I traced with my footsteps. Even ice particles are worthy of notice.

I admired the professional care of the landscapers who maintain the lawns and the planting fields beyond the cultivated areas. I felt appreciation for the workers who faithfully and skillfully create a most attractive outdoor visual effect.

During this time of the pandemic the walks in nature have been inspiring and restorative for me. I have benefited socially and spiritually when I have made the walks with special walking partners.

*Gracious and most loving God, thank you for your abundant and unceasing love for all of life. Guide us in our daily lives to show your love and to do your will at all times. Amen.*

Nancy is a retired middle school teacher. She has served as a ruling elder and a deacon. She sings with the Nassau Church Choir.

## Friday, March 19

### Psalm 95

For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand.

O that today you would listen to his voice! (Psalm 95:7 NRSV).

Bob and Nina Seaman

**T**HE YEAR 2020 WAS FILLED WITH CHALLENGES, and, so far, 2021 seems to promise more of the same. As we look at the state of our nation: a raging pandemic, massive unemployment, civil unrest, we ask, “Where are you, God? Why is this happening?”

The psalmist has words of comfort. We are in God’s hands. We are God’s people.

The psalmist also has an admonition. Listen for God’s voice. God is reminding us that we are called to be disciples, to feed the poor, visit the prisoner, welcome the stranger, pray for the sick and grieving. In the words of Micah, “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (6:8 NRSV).

God has spoken, let us open our hearts and minds to God’s calling.

*Lord, help us to be those who listen for your calling and put your words into action. Give us strength for the living of these days. Amen.*

Nina, a retired teacher, and Bob, a retired clergy, live in Plainsboro and long to get back to their summer home in Nova Scotia.



## Saturday, March 20

## John 12:1–11

Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil (John 12:3 NKJV).

Symphony Tsai

**J**ESUS DIED ON THE CROSS FOR US, and something we can do in return is to make God our top priority. We should be willing to do anything for him, just like how Mary spared no expense to show her love for Jesus. She poured out the most expensive bottle of perfume on Jesus' feet and then wiped them with her hair, when she could've sold the perfume for quite a lot of money.

I know it is difficult to put God as priority, especially when we have so many things to pursue in our daily life. Our attention is easily distracted and our worries may carry us away. I wish I could have more time with God and he would guide me and lead me among the noises and distractions.

*Dear God, please help me learn how to put you as priority. Guide me and lead me, especially when I am confused by the distractions. Amen.*

Symphony is a sixth grader at Princeton Day School. She has been at Nassau Church since kindergarten and began singing in choir at third grade. She enjoys drawing and playing the violin.