

Second Sunday, February 28

Romans 4:13–25

No distrust made Abraham waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what God had promised. Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also (Romans 4:20–4 NRSV).

Elem Eley

GOD CHOSE ABRAHAM to be the earthly, spiritual parent of all those who do not depend on “the law” for eternal life, who rather choose a life of faith in Jesus. Abram was nearly a hundred years old, his wife Sarai close to the same (clearly beyond child-bearing age), when God promised them a son. Faced with this seemingly impossible prophecy, that Abraham “grew strong in his faith” seems straightforward, but just what is faith? How does one grow strong in it?

I am surely incapable of expounding on the mysteries of faith, but I do remind us that faith is the gift of God, leading us to a never-ending life of hope and love. We do not achieve faith by accomplishing good works, rather the inverse. This is salvation and the working out of it. This is grace.

In golf, there’s a saying that “the better you are, the luckier you get.” Consider this: the beginning golfer, employing their best efforts, could potentially hit the ball onto the green, maybe even close to the hole. By contrast, an accomplished golfer routinely lands the ball onto or close to the green. If these two friends play a weekly round together for six weeks - even if neither of them practices or plays except for those six rounds – which is more likely to get a “lucky” hole-in-one? Do you see a correlation here to the believer who diligently engages in a life of faith?

O Lord, keep us humble and empowered, trusting that your gift of faith will move us victoriously through these days of conflict, crisis, and fear. We

choose to trust you, even in the face of danger. In the name of Jesus, and for his glory, Amen.



Elem and his wife Miriam Eley have been Nassau members since 1997. In addition to singing as bass soloist/section leader in the Adult Choir, Elem is professor of voice at Westminster Choir College and an active performer.

Monday, March 1

Psalm 37

The righteous will inherit the land
and dwell in it forever.
The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom,
and their tongues speak what is just.
The law of their God is in their hearts;
their feet do not slip (Psalm 37:29–31 NRSV).

Julia Hill

READING PSALM 37 over and over I did not really know how to start this devotional. But then it became clear. The phrase “their feet do not slip” caught my attention because it reminded me of what happened at the Capitol in Washington on January 6th. And the lack of authoritative presence at the riot. Where were the authorities? They were letting their feet slip when they did not try harder to stop the riot before it got to the point that it did. That is where they were. But friends, in this moment of darkness we must remember that God put us on this earth for a reason. To speak what is true and what is just. “Their feet do not slip” also has a positive meaning: it means we have been firmly rooted because God is with us. This

verse comes to mind: “I can do all things through God who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). We are held firmly by Our Creator just like trees are held by their mighty roots. So yes, the events of the week of January 6th were traumatic and they did shake us to our core; we must remember that like trees have their roots, we have God who gives us strength and peace. And with that we can continue to rebuild to a brighter and peaceful future.

Lord God, we know you to be our strength and our peacemaker. Use the events in Washington as a way to open our eyes to the nation we are and to the nation we need to be. One of peace, justice and acceptance. Guide us on paths of righteousness and equality so that in the coming weeks, we can feel like we are starting to turn a page to a brighter better future. In your name, Amen.

Julia is a junior at Princeton High School. She serves on the Children and Family Ministries Committee. She and her family have been members of the Nassau Church since 2013. She is active in church life from chancel dramas and Christmas pageants to vacation Bible school and the Cardigans (cardmaking group). When she is not on Zoom, she can be found in her room singing and dancing to her favorite Broadway show Newsies or her favorite Netflix show, “Julie and the Phantoms.”

Tuesday, March 2

Hebrews 11:1–3, 13–19

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible (Hebrews 11:1–3 NIV).

John Thurber

GROWING UP, I heard inspiring stories about courageous Christians whose actions shaped my understanding of faith in action. Among them was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* and supported the Barmen Declaration as calls for a more faithful obedience to

Christ in the midst of the growing fascism and racism of Nazi Germany. The more recent examples of Dr. King, Archbishop Tutu and so many others confirm that faith in action can lead us to love with actions and in truth as we confront evil.

Over this past year, we have been reminded how deeply racism is ingrained in our country. The timeline of Black deaths caused by police violence grows endlessly. Confederate flags and racist symbols were on display at the Capitol during the January 6th insurrection. The legacy of white supremacy and racial caste lives on, most recently in efforts to invalidate Black votes in swing states. Racism is our original sin. Black lives matter.

Every form of racism is contrary to the will of God, yet racism remains pervasive. What does our faith require? The challenge for us is to start by examining the racism in our own lives and to heed the call to participate in the struggle for racial justice throughout our community, across the nation and around the world. Being church today means overcoming racism by establishing right relationships everywhere as we strive to create the Beloved Community.

O Lord, thank you for making one human family of all the peoples of the earth. We confess that we have failed to hear the voices of our Black and Brown neighbors crying out for racial justice. Help us to not become weary in doing good, and give us the strength to respond to those cries through courageous acts of discipleship. Through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, Amen.

John is a ruling elder on Session and chair of the Cemetery Committee. He and his wife Connie Cloonan joined Nassau Church in 1995 and live in Lawrence Township. They have two adult children (both married), and three grandchildren – all of whom bring them great joy.

Wednesday, March 3

John 12:36–43

Nevertheless among the chief rulers, also many believed in Jesus; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42–43 KJV).

Bart Jackson

THE EXCUSE: “Faith and belief are very private, individual matters. ‘Tain’t nobody’s business but my own.”

WHAT I REALLY MEAN: Of course I’m not going to go telling everyone that I am a devoted Christian. They’ll think I am some unthinking, Bible-thumping, glassy-eyed slave to a creed outworn, mindless. I need to impress friends and important strangers that I’m a profound, independent thinker. (Note the sweet Satanic seduction here: he’s got me taking a stab at perceiving other peoples’ perceptions of my belief—and fear gets planted.)

Don’t get me wrong. I give to the poor and hungry, try to lift the spirits of all those I meet, share all that joy. And my prayers reflect immense gratitude for the blessings lavished on me as I stumble along Christ’s path. But my reputation—they might cast me out.

Then suddenly I harken the gospel of P.T. Barnum: “Without promotion, something terrible happens: Nothing.” All that joy God pours into my soul...all those blessings seen shining through me, all fall dead. God’s light gets viewed as mere personality quirks. By not connecting my deeds with their true Author, I’m denying others the greatest gift, the good news of what Christ’s way has to offer. Perhaps it’s time I began sharing a little promotion about Christ’s path to God. He may not need it, but my friends sure do. Besides, if you spend a great deal of time worrying about doing something that will make you appear foolish, you’ve already done it.

Dear God, let the light of your presence and your blessings shine forth in my life, and grant me the courage to proudly and loudly boast in you, the source of all my joy and strength. Amen.

Bart sings lustily at the computer screen with the rest of Nassau choir's distant choristers; pontificates ceaselessly at the Men's Breakfast Zoom; and enjoys phone chats with the many warm & intriguing friends the Jacksons have made during their 16 years at Nassau. He is the founder of the Prometheus Social Enterprise Awards, CEO of Prometheus Publishing, Host of The Art of the CEO radio show, and best known as the husband of Lorraine.

Thursday, March 4

Exodus 19:1–9a

Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples" (Exodus 19:3–5a NRSV). So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. 8 The people all answered as one: "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:7–8a NRSV).

Trevor Thorton

IF YOU HAVE READ the rest of the story, you may be tempted to laugh at the Israelites as they "answer as one" that they will do all the Lord commanded. Perhaps promises are more easily made while looking down at the world from the safety of eagles' wings? The Israelites are such a painfully accurate picture of humanity sometimes. How many promises have I made on the mountain top that I have broken in the valley?

If you are like me, the past year has been a trying time filled with uncertainty, sleepless nights, and heightened emotions on all sides. I found myself making promises: to fight for justice, to advocate for those who are oppressed, and to search for ways to serve essential workers and people who

have lost their jobs. But in the day-to-day reality of my life (mostly spent looking at a computer screen), it is easy to lose sight of these important promises.

As we face the anniversary of our world being turned upside down by COVID-19, I invite you to take a few minutes right now to ponder the promises and intentions that are deeply etched on your own heart.

I find comfort in the words of Paul: “it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill God’s good purpose” (Philippians 2:13).

Lord, may our words and actions shine light where there is darkness and show love where there is hate. Amen.

Trevor and his partner Thomas VanWart, live with their dog Luna in Kingston. He is on faculty at the New School for Music Study, and on staff at the New School’s umbrella organization, the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy. In the last year, much of his non-teaching work consisted of creating, curating, and coordinating the translation of resources for piano teachers as they moved their instruction online.

Friday, March 5

Psalm 50

But to the wicked God says:

“What right have you to recite my statutes,
or take my covenant on your lips?

You give your mouth free rein for evil,
and your tongue frames deceit.

These things you have done and I have been silent;
you thought that I was one just like yourself.

But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you” (Psalm 50:16, 19, 21 NRSV).

Karen Brown

IWRITE THIS DEVOTIONAL on the day of President Biden’s inauguration, praying for healing but worried about where our sadly divided na-

tion will be by Lent.

Psalm 50 speaks of judgment, of God's judgment against the wicked. I have fought all my life against being a judgmental person, and I used to struggle with verses like these. I always believed that we should try to understand and be tolerant of those with different views and practices than our own. What I have learned over the last four years, however, is that there is a place for judgment. There is an objective standard, a line in the sand, and actions and beliefs that cross that line must be judged. We must be willing to stand up and say, "This is wrong." White supremacy is wrong. The spread of disinformation is wrong. Incitements to violence are wrong. Refusal to take the actions necessary to combat a deadly pandemic—that is wrong. As a Christian, I am not called to tolerate these actions. There are some things people can do, can believe, that I am called to judge. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote during the Nazi era, "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act." The challenge, of course, is to draw the line correctly, where Jesus would draw it, so that you stand against evil without straying into intolerance. That is the lesson I hope our nation can learn.

Dearest Lord, please guide us in our struggles to love our neighbor without tolerating wrong. Help us to draw our lines firmly but carefully, guided by your scripture and your spirit. Amen.

Karen and her husband James Takasugi have been members of Nassau since 1995. She has served as a deacon and a member of the Adult Education Committee, and is currently on the Mission and Outreach Committee. Her day job involves working in the biotech industry to help develop drugs for cancer patients.

Saturday, March 6

Psalm 51

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me (Psalm 51:10–12 NIV).

Lois Foley

REFLECTION HAS BEEN MEANINGFUL to many of us these last months. Days of quiet solitude have provided me ample time to look back at my life. While we cannot turn back the hands of time to erase mistakes, through our relationship with Christ we have a lifelong companion who has seen it all. His love allows us to face our mistakes and provides the promise of a different path if we open our hearts and lives to him, whether new to the faith or not. We regularly separate ourselves from God, just by virtue of our human nature. Even so, God waits us out every single time we foolishly believe that we can go it alone. No need for revisionist history. He wants to walk next to us with an outstretched hand and with forgiveness.

We will all experience sickness, great loss and grief as we move through life. None of us will escape. Yet, with the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we will never walk through any of those situations by ourselves. In the quietest hours and days of our lives now when many feel the most isolated, he sustains us and gives hope of renewal. He restores us with the joy of salvation through his boundless patience, understanding, companionship and love. For me, though it may have taken 55 years of ups and downs to fully grasp that the peace, which has overtaken me since I have been willing to do so, is like no other.

God, make us willing and open to accept your presence in our daily lives, to accept your guidance and your love. Grant us peace and renewed hope as we move through life from this day forward. Amen.



Lois has been a member of Nassau Church since March of 2018. She enjoys her participation in the Church Mouse program and has participated in several of Nassau's small groups. Lois is a family law paralegal to a New Brunswick firm. She enjoys distance walking and is mom to grown children Meghan, Rachel (husband Adam) and Bryan. Although not yet a grandmother, she loves her daily texts and Facetimes with 12 great nieces and nephews who always bring smiles.