

Lenten Devotional



Sermon on the Mount
Laura James (www.laurajamesart.com)

NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Princeton, New Jersey

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on-line daily lectionary: lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu

Preface

Dear Church Family,

It is an honor to share Nassau's Lenten Devotional as it enters at least its twelfth year of publication. As we journey through the season of Lent, we remember Jesus' life, teachings, crucifixion, and resurrection. This year the devotional is even extended through the first week of the Easter Season!

The 2024 Lenten Devotional team—Roz Anderson Flood, Karen Brown, Elizabeth Gift, Cynthia Miller, and led by Larry Alphs—faithfully invited children, youth, and adults from our congregation and our sister congregation Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church to share their wisdom, questions, and prayers with us all. This devotional would not be possible without them, you, Carol Wehrheim as its faithful editor, and Lauren Yeh as compiler and sender extraordinaire.

Each contributor selected a text from the Common Lectionary and provided a brief meditation and prayer for the day. Over 500 friends from within and beyond the congregation will engage with the devotional in their inboxes daily and dozens more will receive hard copies as we journey together. We accompany one another along the way to strengthen our faith!

Blessings,

Len Scales
Associate Pastor for Faith Formation,
Mission, and Outreach

Your word is a lamp before my feet and a light for my journey.
Psalm 119:105 CEB

Lenten Devotions 2024

February 14 - March 3: Mailed February 7

March 4 - March 17: Mailed February 26

March 18 - April 6: Mailed March 11

Ash Wednesday, February 14, 2024

Psalm 51:1-17

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Psalm 51:10-12 NRSV

I don't know about you, but this year has been a hard one for my faith journey. Heartbreaking world events, political unrest, the pain and grief of close friends, and people just not being nice to each other incline me to deep sadness and even doubt. These concerns large and small create in me a fear that God isn't really there, or at the very least that God isn't all powerful to make things "right". Then one health challenge following another getting in the way of who I am to my core, and even how I pray, have left me feeling cast off from God— not a comfortable place! As we enter this Lenten season, I pray for myself and for all of us that somehow God may imbue us with the sense that we *are* in God's presence no matter what; that we feel comforted and renewed by the Holy Spirit; and that this renewal stirs up our hope and joy in God's salvation to sustain us through whatever challenges we face, and gives us the strength to help others as well.

For a musical offering by Christianne, watch and listen on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcXLUPkgBCQ>

O God, create in us clean and open hearts. Renew in us spirits turned toward you. Don't cast us away from your presence, but keep us near you. Do not remove your Holy Spirit from us, but may it rekindle our joy in your salvation, and strengthen us with a spirit willing to live in your ways. O God, help us to do justice,

love kindness, and walk humbly with you this Lenten season. In Jesus's name, we pray. Amen.

Christianne Bessières Lane 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. Now that her children are in school, she gratefully uses her gifts to create more music to serve God and beautify the world.

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Thursday, February 15, 2024

Psalm 25

In you, LORD my God,
I put my trust.
I trust in you.

Psalm 25:1-2a NIV

I try not to listen to the news these days. The wars in Ukraine, Israel and Gaza, the recent anti-Semitic violence and polarized political scene in our own country, and the catastrophic consequences of global warming lay my spirits low.

As Americans, we are brought up to believe we have agency – or should – but some problems are well beyond our individual capacity to solve. Sometimes the best we can do is to take these matters to God in prayer.

I take heart from the first two verses of Psalm 25 above and from Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer, which graced a lot of dormitory room walls when I was in college in the 1970s, and begins:

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.*

By focusing on what I *can* do (like taking care of my grandchildren and doing volunteer work for causes I care about) and trusting to God

for the larger issues I can't address, I sleep better and live happier.

I am grateful for the faith community we have at Nassau Presbyterian Church that offers support and reassurance in troubled times, and for the many community service opportunities our church offers to “change the things (we) can.”

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of life and for your love and care throughout our lives. Help us to be your hands and feet in the world where we can be, and to trust in you for the rest. Amen.

Elizabeth (Liz) Beasley joined Nassau Church in 2007 and is currently serving on the Mission and Outreach Committee. She retired from Rutgers University in 2019, and divides her time between watching her grandchildren, volunteering with Villages in Partnership and the Our Community Group, coordinating activities for the Present Day Club, and taking writing classes through the Princeton Adult School.

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Friday February 16, 2024

2 Timothy 4:1-5

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

2 Timothy 4:2 NIV

Yes, we are to encourage one another. But is God really calling us to correct and confront? I shudder at the thought. At first blush it strikes me as arrogant. On second thought, maybe this passage is a template, not only for Timothy the Evangelist, maybe it also applies to us in everyday roles, such as manager, parent, or simply a friend.

Will Rogers famously quipped, “It isn’t what we don’t know that gives us trouble, it’s what we know that ain’t so.” How, then, can we be prepared, on a moment’s notice, to prayerfully cast the sturdy lifeline of God’s Word to a colleague, child or friend sliding down the slippery slope of misinformation?

For starters, on a daily basis, we need to prayerfully get rid of what *we* know that ain’t so!

“Search me, O God....And see if there is any wicked way in me” (Psalm 139:23–24 NKJV). “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me....Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your generous spirit. Then will I teach transgressors Your ways and sinners shall be converted to you” (Psalm 51:10–13 NKJV). Amen.

Born in Chicago, Ed Madsen is a self-proclaimed “ABD” (American Born Dane) and retired real estate appraiser, worshipping at Nassau for 30+ years. An occasional contributor to Christian periodicals, he also authored *The Shoestring Letters—A Tribute to the Immigrant*, and co-authored *Don’t You Know Me*, recounting a Soviet prison camp survivor’s confrontation with God. An amateur musician, his compositions include a sweetheart song for the University of Illinois and “Cloverleaf, Official March of the Fourth United States Army.”

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Saturday, February 17, 2024

Matthew 9:2-3

And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”

Matthew 9:2 NRSV

I often see God at work in the kindness and wisdom of other people—the smile from a stranger, a text from a friend, beautiful verses in a poem that describe my own feelings, or the words in a Sunday sermon or scripture that hold just the message I need to hear. Sometimes, it is friends or family who reveal God’s love, and other times it is strangers who unknowingly touch my life. Just as “some people”—maybe friends, maybe not in Matthew’s version—carried the paralyzed man to Jesus, when I look back to the most difficult times in my life, I can see how the words and actions of others carried me back to God, strengthened my faith, and renewed my hope. It can be difficult for me to accept, much less seek help. In this passage, “their” faith—the faith of the people who carried the paralyzed man on a bed through the crowds to Jesus and the

faith of the paralyzed man who allowed himself to be carried—inspires Jesus to forgive the man’s sins and heal him. As we live in community, we care for one another, and through this care we can glimpse God’s wonder and love for us. Sometimes God calls us to carry others, and other times God requires that we allow ourselves to be carried.

Dear Lord, thank you for your endless love. Help us to see, accept, and appreciate how you come to us, heal us, and strengthen us through the words and actions of others. Open our hearts so that we may hear your call to offer your love and hope to others through our own faith. Amen.

Sara Alyea and her husband TJ have been members of Nassau Church for 20 years. She is incredibly grateful that their three children, Ethan, Caroline, and Lindsey, grew up in the church’s loving, supportive faith community. She loves to travel and adventure with family and friends. When not working as a commercial litigator, she spends her time practicing yoga, hiking, cooking, writing, and enjoying family and friends. Sara loves Nassau’s small groups and began facilitating a GriefEncounters group this past fall.

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First Sunday in Lent, February 18, 2024

Genesis 9:8-17

The bow will be in the clouds, and upon seeing it I will remember the enduring covenant between God and every living being of all the earth’s creatures.

Genesis 9:16 CEB

One of my sustaining moments during Covid times was hearing young Josie Brothers sing “I Believe” by Mark Miller. Her clear, reverent voice produced an immediate and uncritical reaction: surely, this was true faith.

That was my first exposure to that song and the first verse touched me deeply: “I believe in the sun, even when it’s not shining.” Back in the days when I did a lot of business travel, I always looked forward to the

plane breaking through a cloud bank into the brilliant sunshine: a good reminder that it's always sunny above the clouds.

It was on one of those trips that I once saw an upside down rainbow. I was in the window seat flying high above stormy weather. A little behind me, where the sunlight hit the cloud bank, were the familiar bands of color with the legs of the arch pointed up toward the plane. The Scripture says that God put the rainbow in the sky as a reminder of “the enduring covenant between God and every living being”; I imagined that the upside down rainbow was the other side of that promise: God’s smile looking down on the creation that is “very good”.

I believe in love, even when I feel it not. Amen.

Tom Coogan and his wife Beth have been Nassau Church members since the early years of this century. He has served as deacon, ruling elder and softball coach.

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Monday, February 19, 2024

Ephesians 2:1-10

All of us once lived...in the passions of our flesh,...and we were by nature children of wrath....But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ....For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:3–5, 8–9 NRSV

Idon't think of myself as a child of wrath, but I do sometimes walk around in a state of indignation. The people I love and the people I work hard to understand—these people are complicated. Their needs are bewildering.

My disabled brother spends his hours looking at the wall. I try to engage him with music and humor and memories, but I don't know if I'm making any difference in his life. Neighbors in my condominium are suspicious of a new family, and I'm being asked to chip in for a hall sur-

veillance camera. Out in the wider world, my country tears itself apart and my planet writhes in agony.

I sometimes feel like that widow who is flagging down the unsympathetic judge (Luke 18:1–8). *I'm here to get some justice, sir.* I begin to recognize myself as (God forbid) a child of wrath—puzzled, resentful, stuck. *Excuse me, sir, can I just get some justice over here?*

So the year grinds on and suddenly it's Ash Wednesday. Before I've had a chance to neaten up my little hoard of frustrations, Lent is prying into my secret treasure box of grievances. Lent forces that rusty lock, and there it all is. There is no escape from this unpleasantness, shame, and wrath.

Lent forces me to admit that I am in the dark. All I can do is just stop. And now Christ's mercy overwhelms me with astonishing grace, and faith redeems those faltering, messy efforts that Paul has called "works".

I am not boasting. I can breathe.

**Blessed Lord, cleanse our hearts and clear our chattering brains.
Rescue us with your mercy and through this faith we will see
justice. Amen.**

Debbie Tegarden has lived in Princeton for many decades and sometimes finds it rather hard to recognize this place. Nassau Presbyterian Church is her anchor and her faith is in God's mercy.

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Tuesday, February 20, 2024

1 Peter 3:8-18a

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 3:8–9 NRSV

Last spring, sculptures created by the late artist J. Seward Johnson quietly appeared around downtown Trenton, New Jersey, near my

office. Through the seasons during my daily travels, I would see pedestrians interacting with these creations, depictions of humans from various walks of life. One installation features tourists posing for pictures. People would preen with the frozen posers as a friend would snap pics while standing next to the photographer. Nearby, a hot dog vendor offers his product to an imaginary customer.

This area is no stranger to this type of art. A George Segal sculpture, an ode to steel workers titled *The Constructors*, stands in front of the Roebling Building on State Street. It's been there since the building opened in the late 1980s.

On the other side of the Roebling Building lurks a depiction of a bespectacled man with brown hair, a mustache, and sporting a feathered hat. He is dangling a dirty old rag over a garbage basket, poised to drop it where it belongs. I laughed when I first saw it.

Later, I received feedback on this work. People who knew me were calling it "the Marshall sculpture," thinking it looked like me. That prompted a closer inspection. I did not see the resemblance. When I looked at the title Johnson gave it, I thought maybe God was trying to tell me something that lines up with 1 Peter 3:8, to have "love for one another... and a humble mind." The sculpture title read, "Holier than Thou."

Gracious God, help me to promote unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Show me how to give blessings to others as you have provided countless blessings to me. Amen.

Marshall McKnight is a child of God, a worshipping member of Nassau Church where he serves as a ruling elder and as a member of the Mass Incarceration Task Force. He also serves as a mentor through the Mercer County-based nonprofit Life-Ties. He works for the State of New Jersey.

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Wednesday, February 21, 2024

Psalm 77

Your way was through the sea,
your path, through the mighty waters;
yet your footprints were unseen.
You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Psalm 77:19–20 NRSV

Psalm 77 opens with the psalmist crying out to God. In the depths of their despair the psalmist's cries ring with the tension between doubt and hope. The tension between the hope that church school promises are true—that “God may hear me”—and the doubt that creeps in when God feels absent (v. 1).

We hear it again in the psalmist's later complaints against God: “Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion” (vv. 7–9)?

God, are you still with me? Have you heard my cry? Won't you do anything about it?

It is from this lonely place of doubt that Psalm 77 takes a turn: “I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD” (v. 11). The psalmist stops calling out to God and begins calling to mind an awareness of God's power and love.

The final verses speak to the heart of the psalmist's tension. In their reflection on God's wonderful acts of redemption, the psalmist becomes aware of God's ever-present help, even when God's “footprints were unseen”.

Perhaps this verse bring to mind another poem about God and footprints. But the psalmist does not offer a cliched metaphor about God carrying them through their troubles. Instead they offer a reminder that redemption often comes in the form of other people—people like Moses

and Aaron who are God's very hands and feet and heart, caring for us like a shepherd cares for his flock.

Loving God, you knit together our flesh and bones and breathed your very spirit into us. As we breathe in may we remember that you are in us. As we breathe out may we remember that you are all around us. And when we feel most alone, call to our minds your wondrous acts of love. May we experience you in the smiles, the words of encouragement, the embraces that remind us that we are not alone. Amen.

Jade Hage has been a member of Nassau Church since 2019, and although she moved to the District of Columbia this year to take up a new post teaching high school English, she still considers Nassau her home. Hailing from Monterey, California, Jade first moved to Princeton to start her teaching career but stuck around to complete an MDiv at Princeton Theological Seminary. She is thrilled to be back in the classroom again, but misses her Nassau family.

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Thursday, February 22, 2024

Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

"Do not be afraid, Abram.

I am your shield,
your very great reward."

Genesis 15:1 NIV

The story in the Bible about Abraham and Sarah was always close to my heart. Abraham's faith and trust in God is guiding me and it has been a light for me, especially on the dark days. Every year, I pick a motto or motivational word. My 2023 special word was *light*. There are about two hundred references to *light* in the Bible. One of them is in Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds."

My house has always been opened for friends, sometimes even for strangers. But I wish the house where I live, which is a gift of God,

would be a lighthouse. And I would like to be the light that helps others to shine or even just to rest peacefully. I would like to reflect the light of God's love to others in a warm, invitingly beautiful way.

There is a Lighthouse Challenge in New Jersey every October where you visit multiple lighthouses throughout our state. With my dear Hanka we visited several lighthouses this fall and we will continue next year to witness history, beauty and hard work. It worked so well with my 2023 motto and confirmed even more that I want my house to be a light shining for all that need it.

Dear Father, no matter what we are going through, help us to remember that the light of Christ will heal hurts and restore joy. Amen.

Agnes Olah, retired bank executive, lives in Somerset and has been part of the Nassau Church community for the past 12 years. Agnes enjoys assisting in various children's activities at Nassau: Sunday School, VBS, Christmas pageant and craft projects. She also participates in the Church Mouse program and leads the Greeting Cards and Crafts projects that help fund Nassau's mission partners.

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Friday, February 23, 2024

Psalm 22:23-31

All of you who revere the LORD—praise the LORD!

All of you who are Jacob's descendants—honor the LORD!

All of you who are all Israel's offspring—
stand in awe of the LORD!

Because the LORD didn't despise or detest
the suffering of the one who suffered—
the LORD didn't hide the LORD face from me.

No, the LORD listened when I cried out to the LORD for help.

Psalm 22:23–24 CEB

I write to you as 2023 becomes 2024, and I've never been more thankful for Psalm 22. The author holds nothing back: *Why have you left me all alone?* (v. 1)—*My heart is like wax; it melts inside me* (v. 14b). Yet the

psalm ends with promises that *Every part of the earth will remember and come back to the LORD; every family among all the nations will worship you* (v. 27). The authenticity of this psalm melts my winter-chilled heart as I see daily images of the terrors of war and the horrors of famine. I must maintain faith that God will never, never ever despise the suffering of the one who suffers, and I must not either. Psalm 22 will be woven into my heart this Lenten season as I yearn for peace in the world and wisdom in the hearts of those who lead our world during war, insurrection, famine, loss of biodiversity, food waste, soil degradation, plastic pollution, and climate change.

Lord, you have heard the cries of your people through the ages and have provided paths of deliverance. Do not turn away from us as we cry for mercy for ourselves and for every family among all the nations. We long for the day when “all the earth’s powerful will worship [you] (v. 29), when we can proclaim [your] righteousness to those not yet born, telling them what God have done (v. 31)”. Lord, may it be so.

Trevor Thornton and his husband, Thomas, live in Nashville, Tennessee, where they are very grateful for Nassau’s wonderful online resources. Currently a full-time faculty member of Tennessee State University, Trevor hopes to attend the University of Oklahoma in the fall to pursue his DMA in Piano Performance and Pedagogy.

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Saturday, February 24, 2024

Mark 8:27-30

He asked them, “And what about you? Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Mark 8:29–30 CEB

Mark 8:29–30 is a short vignette yet so powerful. In verse 29 Peter declares, “You are the Christ.” Earlier in Mark 8, Jesus is frustrated with the disciples not yet understanding his ministry. This makes Peter’s declaration a poignant and pivotal moment.

Equally powerful is verse 30 in which Jesus tells the disciples not to say anything about this moment of illumination. This was a strict order. Some translations include: firmly ordered, commanded, charged, or warned them. It seems right that their next step of faith is to shout it from the rooftops; after all, Israel had been waiting for the Messiah for hundreds of years. Yet, Jesus firmly presses pause. How counterintuitive is this for the faithful to stop in their tracks?

We know how the account unfolds. We can see that the critical timing of the cross is at stake and why the pause is crucial. Also, although the disciples finally grasped that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, they didn't yet fully comprehend it, that he would rule hearts and not take over the Roman Empire. This too would require a pause, as to not start a war.

The disciples must have been confused; yet at this point they must have known to do what Jesus said. How about us? When our sense of God's peace directs a pause button on what would seem to be a natural next step of faith, we are likely just as confused. Can we trust and take that pause?

Lord Jesus, how grateful we are for your great love for us. Thank you for your good plans for our lives in your kingdom. Help us to discern your direction, including your times of pause, especially when it seems to be counterintuitive to us. Amen.

Karen S. Berliner is wife to Jeff and mother to Rachel and Sarah. She and her family have been at Nassau for about 12 years. Karen currently serves as a ruling elder, participates in a variety of church activities and is so grateful for her church family. Additionally, she's a bit of a Renaissance gal with her work and interests in diverse areas.

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Sunday, February 25, 2024

Psalm 22:23-31

My God! My God!
why have you left me all alone?
Why are you so far from saving me—so far from my anguished groans?
Because he didn't despise or detest
the suffering of the one who suffered—he didn't hide his face from me.
No, he listened when I cried out to him for help
I offer praise in the great congregation because of you,
I will fulfill my promises in the presence of those who honor God.
Let all who are suffering eat and be full!
Let all who seek the LORD praise him!
I pray your hearts live forever!

Psalm 22:1, 24–26 CEB

Good Friday, the day of suffering for Jesus Christ. This day intensifies our anguished cry of suffering in our seemingly endlessly broken world. The darkness of the cross casts intense light on the suffering of our day, the news, the relentless updates of suffering on social media, the disappointments we face in our daily lives and the tragedies that touch us all contribute to our cry to God, “Why have you left *me* all alone?” The psalmist invites us to continue to pray to our God despite the suffering of this day. And in that invitation, the psalmist takes us on a journey, a journey that leads us to the realization that suffering does not separate us from God, but our suffering unites us with God. For God shares in our suffering and God understands our suffering. When we are awakened to God's understanding, we can offer our thanks to God and renew our promise to lead our lives as best we can in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. The promise to strengthen the fainthearted, to love those whom no one loves, to push through our despair, to help those in need, to feed the hungry and to work to break the bonds of oppression—all in our small, little corner of the world. This is, indeed, the journey from the cry of suffering to the offering of praise. Thanks be to God.

To further your reflection, listen to “Be Still My Soul” on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tojnPam4ymA>

Loving and most gracious God, I believe you hear my suffering even when I cannot put it into words. You listen, you hear and you share in the suffering I feel for (*name what you suffer for*). I trust in you and look ahead to the dawn of Easter Sunday and the renewal of life on earth. Amen.

Kim Kleasen is a current deacon and a ruling elder. She is a long-time member of the Adult Choir, a flautist and sees the creativity each of us possesses as a pathway to deepening faith and purpose. She completed a course of study in spiritual direction at General Theological Seminary during the pandemic where she focused on the arts as a pathway to faithfulness. Her study launched the *Art of Faithfulness* at Nassau, where she is one of its leaders.

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Monday, February 26, 2024

Genesis 21:1-7

Sarah said, "God has given me laughter. Everyone who hears about it will laugh with me."

Genesis 21:6 CEB

Like Advent, the Lenten season involves the process of waiting. Lent takes us through the journey of the betrayal and suffering of the cross, the reminders of our own mortality and the cruelty of the world. But the story ends in the greatest promise given by God—the resurrection and life everlasting.

While inexplicable disasters and disunity surround us, are we to crawl to our corners with a little mixture of hope and doubt and piously wait with our chins up in fear? For something?

God calls us to higher ground. In the book of Genesis we read "the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him." And what does Sarah say? "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." God chose the name for their son, Isaac, which literally means the one who laughs or rejoices.

We can imagine that both parents may have wanted their promise fulfilled a little sooner. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “God does not give us everything we want, but God does fulfill his promises—leading us along the best and straightest paths to himself.” An African American hymn, “He’s an On-time God” states this even better: “He may not come when you want him, but he’ll be there right on time.”

Dear God, in this season of Lent, lead us to the altar. Remind us of the blood of Christ shed for us, the promise of the resurrection, the communion of saints, the joy of the promise of life everlasting, and your perfect on-time promises. Amen.

Patty Thel is a retired choral conductor who worked at Westminster Choir College, Princeton Day School, Trenton Children’s Chorus and as Sunday school teacher and interim children’s choir director at Nassau Church. She and her husband Steve have three children, Betsy, Tommy and Joe, who grew up in the church.

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Tuesday, February 27, 2024

Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45

Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
Look to the LORD and his strength;
seek his face always.

Psalm 105:3-4 NIV

Hope, although persistent, is often hard to recognize in doubtful times. Recently I’ve found hope particularly hard to come by, at least in terms of global current events. However, I’ve come to the conclusion that hope does not only have to be found on a larger scale, but can be just as impactful on a smaller scale. For example, hope is found in things like a small kind gesture exchanged with a stranger, or the changing colors of the leaves as the seasons begin a new cycle.

I often find myself turning to pages of the Psalms in times of doubt or when I’m in need of encouragement. In a world where envy and hatred

persevere, it's often easy to lose sight of the “glory” and “rejoic[ing]” the psalmist describes. However, as these verses remind us, hope and glory will never cease to exist through God.

In these verses, we are reminded of the splendor in the holy name of the Lord, and the steady comfort provided through God's strength. We are invited to find joy in the very essence of God, recognizing God's boundless strength and limitless love. So, as the psalmist reminds us, let our hope not be founded in wavering circumstances but in God's “strength” and “holy name.”

Loving God, help us to recognize and honor your abundant compassion and unceasing strength as we navigate the uncertainties and obstacles of life. We give thanks, Lord, for your love and the hope you bring to us. Amen.

Jenna Stucky is an eleventh grader at Princeton High School, and has been attending Nassau Church for the past seven years. She enjoys singing in her a capella group and choir at school, and loves to spend her free time reading and listening to music.

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Monday, February 28, 2024

Jeremiah 30:12-22

“But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,” declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 30:17a NIV

Several waves of wars and deportations took people from Judah and Jerusalem away to a miserable 70 years of exile in Babylon and set the stage for Jeremiah's 45-year ministry (est. 627–582 BC) that was based in Jerusalem in a time of dramatic historical changes. Jeremiah's prophecies, critical of several kings in Jerusalem, were controversial and definitely politically incorrect. At one point, he was accused of treason when he openly urged the people of Jerusalem to defect to the Chaldeans to reduce destruction of the city.

However, it seems that God's conduit to the people in exile was Jeremiah's enthusiastically confident prophecies that God would return the

Israelites to their lands, Babylon would be punished, and that the Israelites would, under God, prosper into the future.

For some, this passage resonates today in many parts of the world as various groups of people struggle to govern themselves based on ambitions and perceived history.

God, our generation today experiences different crises, fears, uncertainties and opportunities than did Jeremiah 2,600 years ago. We pray that, like Jeremiah, we are able to recognize that our Christian faith brings us confidence to proceed forward for our nation's and our peoples' successes. Amen.

Val Mathews has enjoyed challenging careers in the US military-industrial complex, as well as various interesting projects from search for extra-terrestrial intelligence to Texas oil field technologies to living with a family in southern Russia. Retired twice, he is active on the board of a military prep high school. He and his wife Martha enjoy their three children and six grand-children. Martha is in Adult Choir, while Val enjoys and appreciates the Nassau Men's Breakfast Group.

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Thursday, February 29, 2024

Exodus 19:1-9a

Then YHWH said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after."

Exodus 19:9a NRSV

Great idea in theory, God: speak to Moses directly from a dense cloud in front of the Israelites so that no one will misconstrue your words. No one will question the authority of Moses.

I can see the plan falling into chaos from the start, long before the incident of the golden calf. "Is that what you heard God say? Clearly your ears are filled with desert sand. I distinctly heard God say the exact opposite!"

Life can be messy and confusing. It can be hard to discern God's voice and intentions for our life. Thank God for Jesus of Nazareth, who offers

us a way into the heart of God. But even then, followers of Christ can have diametrically opposed perspectives on what it means to be a faithful Christian.

The Cloud of Unknowing is a spiritual classic from an anonymous fourteenth-century monk who wrote about his “naked intent direct to God.” For this monk, the cloud of unknowing is a loving impulse to remain directly connected with God, avoiding distractions.

On this Lenten journey with Jesus at our side, we seek together to discover the Reign of God in our midst. And this is where life can get messy. And fun. Because God can't do it alone. We can't do it alone. We have to, rather we *get* to, be there for one another. Listening to and learning from one another about this mystery we call God.

God of revelation and mystery, we need daily reminders that you care about us, that you are always revealing yourself to us. Thank you for your endless creativity in showing up for us in new and surprising ways. Help us to open our eyes and hearts to your abounding beauty and love. Remind us that we were not created to go about it alone. We get to be there for one another, emboldened by your love. Amen.

Jonathan C. Shenk is a minister in the PCUSA and entrepreneur. He is the owner of Greenleaf Painters, a local painting company. He is also a certified spiritual director and founding member of the Trenton Microloan Collaborative, a joint venture of Nassau and Westminster Churches. He lives in Princeton Junction with his wife, Cynthia Yoder. Their son, Gabriel, is a high school English teacher and frontman for Sonoa, an indie rock band.

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Friday, March 1, 2024

Psalm 19

They are more desirable than gold—
than tons of pure gold!—
and they are sweeter than honey—
even dripping off the honeycomb!

Psalm 19:10 CEB

In this world that we live in, we are easily consumed by materialism and greed. We might be concerned by the clothes we wear, the car we drive or how many friends we have on social media. When we allow this to become our focus, we do not feel any better about ourselves and in fact we may even feel just a little bit worse. We each have a hole in our heart. We often think that the only way to quell our aching heart is to pursue worldly desires, yet we don't always stop to consider what we may want—or need—spiritually. As humans, we blind ourselves by the item in our Amazon shopping cart and neglect the gifts God has already given us. God has given us the most fulfilling gift: his love. As the scripture says, God's gifts are "more desirable than gold". Our hearts crave what God gives. When we turn to God as our source, we become channels of God's love. As these channels, it is our responsibility to heal the aches of others and fill the holes in their hearts. Practically speaking, this may be listening to someone when they need to be heard or inviting a classmate to church. Not only will this fill the holes in others' hearts, it will satisfy our own hearts too. God's love is the gift that keeps on giving, and we can delight in knowing that we are recipients and donors of this grace.

**Dear Lord, you have given us the wonderful gift of your love.
Help us to remember this wonderful gift and, by your spirit, be
a blessing to others. In your holy name, Amen.**

Rachel Berliner is an active member of Nassau Presbyterian Church, serving as a deacon, singing in the youth choirs, participating in Christmas pageants and chancel dramas, and once-in-a-while telling a Bible story during Time with Children.

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Saturday, March 2, 2024

Psalm 19

Heaven is declaring God's glory;
the sky is proclaiming his handiwork.
One day gushes the news to the next,
and one night informs another what needs to be known.

Psalm 19:1–2 CEB

When we awaken to a beautiful sky or a cloudy sky that portends much needed rain, we are continually reminded of the created world in its simplest beauty. How many times have we marveled at the amazing colors of a sunset with its pinks and blues and thanked God for all we see and our good fortune. In the created world, we feel surrounded by the love of God, in the sky, the sun, moon and stars and the knowledge that God will continually show us another example of God's power as one day flows into the next.

Let us pray that we may awaken to the miracle of a new day with continued energy and commitment to profess our faith in God. Amen.

Marie Shock is currently a ruling elder, involved in card making led by Agnes Olaf, church baking and has taught Sunday School. She especially enjoys meeting fellow parishioners in the small groups ministry and hearing the talented speakers in Adult Education. She is retired from private school administration, enjoys spending time with her toddler twin grandchildren, playing bridge, long walks and reading.

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Sunday, March 3, 2024

Psalms 19

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

Psalms 19:1-4 NRSV

When I read Psalm 19, I hear beautiful music in my head. “The Heavens Declare the Glory of God” is the most memorable chorus in Haydn’s “The Creation”. Handel uses “Their Sound is Gone Out to all Lands” (as filtered through Paul) in “Messiah”. The King James Version includes the dedication “To the chief musician. A Psalm of David.” No wonder I hear music!

I don’t really like to talk about the meaning of music. As the psalmist says, “there is no speech, nor are there words.” To me, music just is. In the process of making music, I become one with the music. If I have to talk about it, I will say that music gets me out of myself, and connects me to a spiritual energy. For all of us, there can be a transcendent reality beyond words. Some find it in gardening, some (oh, that’s me, too) find it while walking in nature, and some find it while kayaking. I call it God.

But here I am, with words. I pray that we all find the mystery and beauty beyond words.

Listen on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/GmPlG5cOWcw?feature=shared>

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer (Psalm 19:14 KJV) Amen.

Frances Slade is the Founder and Artistic Director Emeritus of Princeton Pro Musica. She was a choral director at Rutgers University and music director at All Saints Church in Princeton. Today, after a career in music, her passion is playing the piano. She also loves English country dancing and contra dancing. A native of Atlanta, she has lived in New Jersey since the late 70s. She has been a member of Nassau Church since 2007. She enjoys life with her partner, Rainer Muser.

Monday, March 4, 2024

1 Corinthians 3:10-23

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

1 Corinthians 3:16–17 NIV

It is comforting to know that we are not alone, nor are we simply our singular human selves. Together, as believers, we are God's temple.

As children of God, we are a reflection of God in us and God among us. God is always with us and is in every living being.

To feel closer to God, all we need to do is focus on God and talk to God. We should tell God everything from our joys to our worries and sorrows. God already knows everything but our communication with God is vital for our wellbeing because only God can give us peace and consolation, as well as the joy that comes through contentment in God.

These verses remind me that God should be my focus, not the troubles of each day. God has a plan for each of us, God's beloved children.

Dear Lord, we know that through you all things are possible. Please help us to remember to focus on you throughout each day. Rejoice in the Lord always! Amen.

Debbi Roldan is the facilitator of the Nassau Prayer Chain, which she began in 1999. It has grown to 95 prayer angels. She is involved in various philanthropic endeavors. She loves music, tennis, sailing and traveling.

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Tuesday, March 5, 2024

Psalm 84

How lovely is your dwelling place,
LORD Almighty!
My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.
Even the sparrow has found a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young—
a place near your altar,
LORD Almighty, my King and my God.

Psalm 84:1–3 NIV

When you read scripture in solitude, do you hurry over the “begats,” with little possibility of truth registering at a meaningful depth?

It seems to me that the reading of scripture in corporate worship often appropriately presents words and thoughts in a relatively broad way, allowing individuals to establish their own emotional connections. The reader maintains a degree of formality and emotional distance in the group setting. Yet in the private, more expressive arena, we should know that words convey thoughts, arising from perhaps nebulous emotion or feeling. (The reverse order—*feeling, thought, words*—essentially describes the process of how we speak or write.) If we first explore the text to identify the impulse that inspired it, then a more complete delivery results, carrying the ring of truth.

The personally vivid nature of the Psalms attracts many of us. Today’s selection reminds me of musical settings that I have sung, thus my artistic palate instantly has color. Even if you do not relate to my emotional accent in this short reading of Psalm 84:1–3, your openness to consider a dramatic reading may lead you to find more of the psalm’s power in your own life.

Read these verses aloud, attempting to “be expressive” in sound and

attitude, even if you feel embarrassed or that you are merely pretending. You will begin to connect with the fundamental truth, through your own willingness to express.

Hear Elem's reading of Psalm 84:1–3 here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6envC4oAec>

Lord, I choose to hear your written word in depth, not merely by poring over words through an exclusively intellectual lens. Help me to connect with the humanity in your divine word. Amen.

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

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Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Psalm 84

My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.
Even the sparrow has found a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young—
a place near your altar,
LORD Almighty, my King and my God.

Psalm 84:2–3 NIV

How many?" asks the temple sales associate. "Just one, please. But could you make it a fat one?" I joke to see if it will cut through the business façade. "My family could use an extra blessing this year, if you know what I mean." But he just grabs the first dove he gets his hands on, takes my payment. "Next!" I take my dove across the courtyard to the sacrifice line. It's long.

I don't get it. The journey up to Jerusalem was a blast. We sang our hearts out, about our souls yearning, even fainting for the courts of the Lord. As the gates came into view, my burdens were light, our hearts softened. One kid on my shoulders, my arm around an Ethiopian I just met. And then this, on a line with a nameless bird. I look at her, "What's your name?" If you're going to please the Lord for me, we might as well get to know each other while we await your sacrifice." Nothing. "Francine," I call her, as the priest's intern wheels a cart of carcasses past us.

The guys back home say it's been this way since King Darius bankrolled the rebuilding of the temple, if only the people of Israel would sacrifice for him and his dynasty. At the time, it seemed the very hand of God, they say. They—we—got our identity back. But at what cost? Now this soulless, sacrificial economy: I give you my earnings, you give me a bird, God gives me absolution. Make sure the priest gets your name right, they say. Nobody wants to come all this way just to bless someone else by accident.

Just then, there's this commotion over by the money changers and dove benches. Whoa! My God! What's he... "My house," he says to the gathering crowd, "will be a house of prayer for all nations!" I find myself at his feet, my hands open. Francine flies to his shoulder and nestles in.

I look around. The Ethiopian is kneeling in awe. But not everyone looks happy. Is this what we've been longing for? I feel fear, but I also feel light as a feather.

Lord, when we make your temple into a market and the market into a temple, free us to learn anew from the sparrow and the swallows who, in Psalm 84, find their true home near your altar. Amen.

Ryan Juskus is husband of Kendra, father of Langdon and Elias, and an environmental teaching fellow at Princeton University. A New Jersey native, he is glad to be back after twenty years in the Midwest and South.

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Thursday, March 7, 2024

Ephesians 1:3-6

...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be **holy** ἁγίων and without blame before Him in **love** ἀγάπη...

Ephesians 1:4b NKJV

I approach this verse troubled by its implications. As a Presbyterian, particularly in the time of Lent, I am invited to “dwell in Scripture,” c.f. Psalm 23’s “dwell in the house of the LORD,” i.e. to dwell in our sanctuary.

Invited, elected, chosen, made holy, made ἁγίων. Surely this association is gladdening? However, the Passover lamb, unblemished, without blame, also becomes ἁγίους to be offered to God. Peter panicked at the eleventh hour when he finally understood Jesus wasn’t kidding, “...that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

Still, what, is there for me to fear? Consider: Rev. Dave confirmed for me that “once an elected elder, always one.” John Calvin tells us in his commentary on this verse that, “...the perfection of believers consists in ἀγάπη; not that God requires ἀγάπην alone, but that it is an evidence of the fear of God, and of obedience to the whole law.” And what is “obedience to the whole law” from Nassau Church’s perspective? “To do justly, love mercy—ἀγαπᾶν ἔλεον—and walk humbly with your God.” What is the extent of ἀγάπη? “For God so loved—ἠγάπησεν—the world that he gave his only begotten Son.” For what purpose now?

For me to express ἀγάπην. For me to walk the predestined Lenten path with Jesus through the doorway of Nassau Church, beneath the banner of Micah 6.8, to Calvary.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”
Amen.

Bill Stoltzfus III, a former local private school teacher and apparently still an elected elder of Nassau Church, has been attending worship in the guise of a perennial prodigal son since the fall of 1976.

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Friday, March 8, 2024

Ephesians 1:7-14

In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Ephesians 1:7–10 NRSV

The Letter to the Ephesians opens with a torrent of theological terms—redemption, forgiveness, grace—all rushing by so rapidly that we can scarcely count much less analyze them. But we at least have experiences that afford glimpses of their meaning. All of us, for example, have hurt someone and had to ask forgiveness; or we may have done something that makes us feel momentarily worthless, and we then understand that our wholeness as persons comes as a gift of God's grace.

But what do we make of the letter's assertion that these sightings of God's "good pleasure set forth in Christ" are part of "a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." What do we make of this mind-blowing assertion? Can we even imagine a redemption so total, so all encompassing? The epistle quite rightly speaks of these things as the mystery of God's will, for we certainly cannot unravel them.

We have not been given a magic decoder ring or a blueprint for the future. Yet we are not without a preview. When God entered human life as a baby in Bethlehem, when Jesus embodied in his adulthood the ideal human life even to the point of death on a cross, and when he was resurrected on the third day, he gave a foretaste of the divine plan "to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

Dear Lord, grant that we might find in the death and triumphant resurrection of Christ hope for ourselves and our entire world. Amen.

Jim Moorhead is a professor emeritus of American church history at Princeton Theological Seminary. For over three decades he and his wife Cynthia along with their children (Evan, Stefan, and Olivia) have been part of the life of Nassau Church.

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Saturday, March 9, 2024

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he redeemed from troubles
and gathered in their lands.

...

Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress;
he sent out his word and healed them,
and delivered them from destruction.

Psalm 107:1-3, 19-20 NRSV

God redeems, God gathers.
God saves and heals.
God delivers.
When we cry out in distress,
God responds
with life-giving love.
All we have to do is
give thanks.

O give thanks to the LORD, for God is good! God's steadfast love endures forever! Hallelujah!

Michele Minter worships at the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church, works for Princeton University, and lives in Plainsboro with her husband, Jeff Yuan.

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Fourth Sunday, March 10, 2024

Numbers 21:4-9

But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses.

Numbers 21:4b NIV

There they go again. For stubborn, stiff-necked, unrelentingly ungrateful people, can you top the Israelites in the Sinai? A month-long trip has stretched into years. Here they are—again—complaining. Numbers 21 tells us, “They spoke against God and against Moses, and said, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!’”

By my rough count, that’s about the 12th time they’ve done this since Exodus. What happens?

God smites them—again. Moses saves them—again.

But this isn’t about what’s on the menu. What angers the Lord is the lack of faith. How brittle is their faith that they make golden cows? Why don’t they believe? With our smug 21st century minds, we read Numbers 21 and ask the same question the Lord undoubtedly asks: What will it take to get through to them? Which is probably the same question the Lord asks when he looks at us. Because when we look in the mirror, the Israelites of Numbers 21 are staring back.

No other Gods? Love thy neighbor? Forgive 77 times? Turn the other cheek? Not on our best days and we don’t have “best days” very often. But we have something else, something more powerful than Moses. Paul reminds us in Hebrews 8:12 that God said: “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” We top the stubborn, stiff-necked, unrelentingly faithless Israelites even on our best days.

Thanks be to the God that we have the Risen Christ.

Almighty God of our Fathers and Mothers, as we wander in our own wildernesses, save us from ourselves, from our arrogance and smugness and pride. Help us to hew more faithfully to your Word today than we did yesterday and even more so tomorrow. And, when we fail, thank you for your endless love and abounding forgiveness. In Christ's name. Amen.

Forty years ago, **Mark Herr** wandered into Nassau's pews, a young man looking for a church home. In a twinkling of an eye, Mark Herr married, raised a family, and became an old man, still in Nassau's pews (second pew, far right side; don't sit in his pew), still in his church home.

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Monday, March 11, 2024

Exodus 15:22-27

And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"

Exodus 15:24 NRSVUE

Um. Um. Um. Well, isn't this something? God uses 80-year-old Moses to negotiate the Israelites' freedom. Miracles unfold. Once free, with just three days in the wilderness, what happens? Finding no water, then finding bitter water, the people grumble and complain. In the face of difficulties, they forget what God had just done for them. God gives Moses a piece of wood that turns bitter water sweet—yet another miracle and demonstration of the incredible power of God. God takes our problems and promises to heal. All we have to do is trust and believe.

Have I been guilty of forgetting my many blessings? Do I grumble when faced with a perceived hardship? Sure. Each time I face a new trouble, why complain? Why not wait for the lesson? What does God want me to see and think and do while in this "wilderness"? I try not to let bitter things make me bitter. God is not finished with my story, your story, with Witherspoon's or Nassau's story. Instead, why not love and trust that God only wants the best for us? Embrace a new way of

thinking, responding, and living. Having been brought out of Egypt (*no small thing*), why not be assured of the sweet water God has waiting for me and all of us?

Dear Lord Jesus, let us remember your promise: “for I am the Lord who heals you” (Exodus 15:26d). Let us experience difficulties as opportunities to learn and practice spiritual obedience. Let us remember the great things you have shown us. Let us trust that you can take our brokenness and the bitterness in this world and lead us to the sweet waters of Elim. You will do this in your time, not ours. You are the God who heals. Amen.

Denyse Leslie is a child of God, blest to believe in Jesus and his sacrifice, to be able to enter with confidence into God’s presence in prayer and meditation. She is a long-time member of Witherspoon Street Church, currently serving as clerk and ruling elder. She is a member of the WSPC–NPC Joint Partnership and one of four founders of the Bending the Moral Arc Courageous Conversations program, which is finding a life within and beyond our two congregations.

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Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Numbers 20:1-13

And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.

Numbers 20:11 KJV

And Moses prayed, and lifted up his hand.
And from the barren rock of their abode
a spring of living water sweetly flowed
to bring them solace in the desert land.

Once, twice he struck the rock. And then the band
of Israelites, right weary on their road,
drank gratefully, for thus their Father showed
His mercy, by His prophet's strong command.

So now within the desert of our days
may we find springs of mercy, and prevail
against the hopeless thirst of empty souls.
And give us grace, O God, to reach our goals,
and may our faith not stumble, falter, fail,
as in the desert still we sing Thy praise.

Give us grace, O God, to reach our goals,
and may our faith not stumble, falter, fail,
as in the desert still we sing Thy praise. Amen.

Janet Anderson has lived and worked in Princeton for several decades. Among other things she is a writer, reviewer, and poet.

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Wednesday, March 13, 2024

John 8:12-20

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

John 8:12 NRSV

I worry sometimes that John’s figurative use of light and darkness has become so common in the language of our faith that we no longer ask what it really means. Jesus is the light of the world. Well, of course he is, and a good thing, too.

Light in my own work is always more important than the objects I photograph. You already know what tulips look like, but maybe not in the light in which I photograph them. And while light is never more important than people in my photographs, it is essential to understanding who they are and why they matter.

Emmet Gowen, a fine photographer who taught at Princeton for many years, once wrote this about sunlight: “...the living presence and beauty of a glorious and luminous light has no enemies. Our shortcomings forgotten; we are all for a moment its children.”



(c) 2021 Ned Walthall

Now and again—the trick is to know when—glorious light floods into the main concourse of Grand Central Terminal and anyone who is enveloped by it—anyone—becomes it and God’s child. Your color, your creed, your citizenship status, your income, your successes, your failures, your embarrassments, your crimes, your misdemeanors, your shame or lack of it, your struggles with English, your declining mental or physical health, none of these—none—alters that central fact.

Why not?

Because the light there begs these two questions: Are you not my neighbor? Am I not yours?

Light has no enemies.

Who are my neighbors, God? Help us figure this out. Aren’t they people who are a little down on their luck but not too much, in need of a cup of sugar, a tire change, grateful for that and polite enough not to ask for more.

Surely not people whose needs are so deep that we are afraid we will be swallowed by them. They can’t be counted as neighbors, can they?

Who *is* my neighbor, God, really? Who? Amen.

Ned Walthall is a photographer based in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. He received his MFA from the Institute of Art and Design at New England College (formerly the New Hampshire Institute of Art). He has shown work at The Amanda Smith Gallery in Johnson City, Texas; The Arlington Museum of Art in Arlington, Texas; The Barrett Art Center in Poughkeepsie, New York; Gallery 14 in Hopewell, New Jersey; The Glasgow Photography Center in Glasgow, Scotland; The Midwestern Center for Photography in Wichita, Kansas; the New England School of Photography in Boston; and the Southeast Center for Photography in Greenville, South Carolina. His work can be seen at nedwalthall.com and he can be followed on Instagram at [@walthallphotography](https://www.instagram.com/walthallphotography).

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Thursday, March 14, 2024

Psalm 51:1-12

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Psalm 51:10–12 NSRV

Create in me a clean heart, O God.” Could there be a more Lent-en prayer? It’s almost childish— reminiscent of a vague New Year’s resolution to “exercise more” or “be better”—or a belated Christmas request, like “Hey God, if they’re out of Playstations, I would also take a clean heart”. As if it were that easy, as if God were a genie granting wishes, and we could just wish away our wrongs, our sins, or our past. Maybe it’s the absolute-ness of the term that seems unrealistic. Should we instead ask for a “cleaner” heart?

Later in Psalm 51 we also see mention of a “broken and contrite” heart. At least the first part feels more doable, for whose heart hasn’t broken at some point, either from things happening in the world or our lives? Of course, the “contrite” part is the snag; that’s where it comes back to us having to look inward. Too often I look outward and my heart breaks for the world; but how do I look at myself... my life... my heart... and really own my brokenness? And if I do, how do I get to work creating a cleaner heart?

God, in this season of Lent, keep us in your presence and let your Holy Spirit restore our broken hearts. Amen.

Tim Flood is a ruling elder and serves on the Adult Education Committee. He and his spouse Kate Torrey have been members at Nassau Church since moving to the area in 2018, and live in Lawrenceville with daughters Lily and Willow. Tim’s Catholic upbringing means that contrition comes easily (at least in theory), but he’s still working on a cleaner heart.

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Friday, March 15, 2024

Psalm 51:1-12

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love:
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

Psalm 51:1 NRSV

I find David to be a problematic figure in the Bible. David is a rock star king, with all the pluses and minuses. With the Book of Psalms, David has more hits than Taylor Swift, but in spite of God's numerous blessings, David is never satisfied and his transgressions are numerous and serious.

Psalm 51 is sort of typical of David as he writes in verse 7: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." In other words, just let me drink the Kool-Aid and get on with it. There is even a sort of bargaining process in verses 12 and 13: "Restore in me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you." In other words, get forgiveness first and then sing God's praises. I am left wondering if David is truly penitent.

But David's continuous pleading eventually wins out, and sort of convinces me as well. God does inflict punishment during David's lifetime, but in the end leaves David's legacy intact, with Solomon (David's son from Bathsheba) on the throne, and his lineage continuing to Joseph. Furthermore, if God can repeatedly forgive David, then there is hope for the rest of us.

**"Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit" (Psalm 51:10-12)**

**This I ask as promised through the sacrifice
of your son Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The son of a Roman Catholic father and Russian Orthodox mother, **Bill Katen-Narvell** was raised as an Episcopalian in Atlanta, Georgia, before coming to Princeton, first as a university student, then as the husband of BJ, who was brought up in Nassau Church. After a 14-year span living elsewhere (mostly Connecticut), Bill, BJ, and three daughters returned to Princeton in 1993. During his career in financial systems development for Citibank and State Street, Bill has been a 30-year member of Nassau Church where he has been a deacon and served on the Cemetery Committee.

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Saturday, March 16, 2024

Micah 4:1-5

[The God of Jacob] shall judge between many peoples,
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against the nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore;
but they shall all sit under their own vines and their fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

Micah 4:3-4 NRSV

As I write this devotion, 16 weeks before it will be appear in print, we are bombarded with news of a ceasefire in the Holy Land, ending in a prolonged response to a horrific terrorist attack. Innocents on both sides of a centuries old conflict suffer. How long? How long will it take? Will we ever walk in God's way and in God's path? When will the day be that swords become plowshares and spears pruning hooks? When will *all* our neighbors know safety, peace, homes, food, and healthcare? When will all have their own vines, fig trees, and freedom from fear? We are called to learn God's way and walk in God's path. How am I, we, securing God's kingdom? Are you and I focused on spreading the love of Christ or conflict? May we take a moment this and every day to remem-

ber: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Gracious God, thank you for the abundance of blessings you have graced us with. Help us to remember to walk in your way, each and every day, and that your call is to love all, always without exception. Amen.

Claire M. Mulry has worshiped at Nassau Church since 2001. She is grateful to God for all the blessings, and to her wife Holly Hardaway, Nassau Church, and her Bending the Moral Arc siblings for their fellowship, love and patience as we grow in love and towards justice.

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Fifth Sunday, March 17, 2024

John 12:20-34

“Who is the Son of Man?”

John 12:34

You watch the people following Jesus and you just shake your head. Jesus teaches, preaches, does miracles, and raises three from the dead. They just don’t get it. Absolutely clueless about him and what he’s about.

Cue John 12:12. Hosannas, palms, cloaks, a parade. Jesus is riding on a donkey and disciples are riding high.

Jesus goes dark. “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified ... Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. . . Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.”

A thunderous heavenly voice underlines the point. The response?

“We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?”

Jesus can be forgiven for an “Oy, vey.” Ed Furillo should pop up á la Annie Hall’s Marshall McLuhan and shout to Jesus, “They just don’t get it. They’ll never get it!”

Two thousand years later, we’re no better. We study scripture, hear the Word, and still don’t get it. We know we’re supposed to love our neighbors and have no other gods, but here we are, hating on the other guys, lusting after mammon, an endowed chair, thy neighbor’s wife.

Yet Jesus doesn’t throw up his hands. He goes to that cross for us. He dies for us. He redeems us.

He refuses to give up on us. He searches for us as if we are missing lambs or lost coins. He refuses to lose . . . us. Even when—especially when—we don’t get it.

Dear Lord, you could not have picked more incompetent followers than us. And yet, you don’t give up, offering us the cup of salvation every day in the face of all evidence to the contrary that we will drink from it. Never forsake us, Lord. We need you. You’re all we got. You’re all we need. Amen.

Mark Herr, a member of Nassau Church, is an increasingly ornery old man who likes to write Lenten devotionals.

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Monday, March 18, 2024

Psalm 119:9–16

I seek you with all my heart;
do not let me stray from your commands.

Psalm 119:10 NIV

Psalm 119 encourages us to stay close and focused on God's word no matter what else is going on around us. Every day we're reminded that good and evil are at war with each other and that people are living in unimaginable desperation and peril. *A lot going on around us.*

This past Christmas Eve at Nassau Church the congregation witnessed the pain of a man's desperation and cry for shared prayer and, later, a homeless woman alone in the darkened street outside our church, standing back, as congregants headed for home. *A lot going on around us.*

I have read and reread Psalm 119 (it is the longest psalm in the Bible) and reread it again. But for all the complexity and length and brilliant design of 119 here's the simple beauty of my personal and deeply comforting 119 takeaway: "I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands."

Dear God, keep us aware of the *lot going on around us*. Keep us tied to the beauty of your message and to your call for us to hear it, follow it and lean into it. Amen.

Pam Wakefield has served a ruling elder, deacon and is currently a member of the Mission and Outreach Committee. She is also actively involved with Bending the Moral Arc, the Witherspoon Street Church and Nassau Church effort at difficult conversations about racism.

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Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Psalm 119:9-16

I will delight myself in thy statutes:
I will not forget thy word.

Psalm 119:16 KJV

Honestly now: How much joyous delight do I really take in the commands Jesus preached to those gathered around the Sea of Galilee? Since childhood, I've been taught that Jesus delights in my sacrifice, service, and absolute selflessness. But wait a moment. As I re-read his statutes, Jesus doesn't say serve your neighbor, He calls me to love my neighbor, to reconcile with all people, and even get rid of my hate before bothering with any sacrifice. Christ goes right to the heart of me, urging me to an emotional makeover filled with love and caring and compassionate involvement with my fellows. That's the wisdom of Christ: once I've filled my heart with love, the hands, mind and all that service will naturally follow. And as I think about it, he's right. I've been filled with love before (Oh mercy, do I remember.) Life just tasted better. Walking the extra mile was no sacrifice. 'Twas an opportunity to get to know a stranger better. Somehow, I lifted my spirit beyond myself and out onto all the folks around me. My pains, my stuff, my fending off some perceived enemy seemed unimportant. I felt empowered to be an angel. Yes, love that condition in which my own well being depends on the well being of others. I take great delight in that...and Christ offers a way—a word—that I truly want to hold close and never forget.

Sweet God, help us to lift up our eyes and discover the joyful delight in the way that Jesus holds out for us. May we ever savor that love you have planted in each of our hearts, and give thanks to you as we share it and bask in its warmth. Amen.

Bart Jackson sings lustily in the Nassau choir; pontificates ceaselessly at the Men's Breakfast Meeting; and gratefully enjoys the intriguing chats and many warm friendships the Jacksons have made during their 18 years at Nassau. He is founder of the Prometheus Social Enterprise Awards, CEO of Prometheus Publishing, hosts "The Art of the CEO" radio show, and is best known as the husband of the lovely Lorraine Jackson.

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Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Psalm 119:9-16

I delight in your decrees;
I will not neglect your word.

Psalm 119:16 NIV

This psalm is praising God for making rules. Rules are made to make sure no one is doing the wrong thing. If we didn't have laws, someone could just rob a bank, and they wouldn't go to jail. In school, you can't be playing a game during class and you can't be hurting someone. When I (Lee) stiff-armed a guy on the soccer field, I got called for a foul. In sports, they have rules so it's not a bunch of chaos. They have rules to keep people safe like targeting in college football or roughing the passer. Sometimes rules aren't always fair. Wrong calls are made, but God is always right.

Dear God, thank you for making rules and for always being right and trying to keep us safe. Amen.

Lee Lord and Ned Lord are twins and are in the fifth grade at Riverside School. They go to Nassau Presbyterian Church. They play travel sports: swimming, soccer, and baseball.

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Thursday, March 21, 2024

Philippians 2:1-11

Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:4-5 CEB

These verses emphasize a cliché that everyone has known since pre-school: don't be selfish, put others before yourself. At first, these verses sound pretty doable. You start to think, ok, I'll let my friend eat the last bag of chips next time. However, in a split-second moment of making a decision between yourself and someone else, the immediate human reaction is to put yourself first. To grab the last bag of potato

chips because you haven't eaten in hours, even if your friend hasn't either. I, myself, often experience these problems. For instance, I go to a school that is extremely academically competitive. The school environment focuses heavily on grades, specifically the comparison of one's grades to another. I remember a time a few months ago when I had learned an important piece of information that helped piece together the understanding of a biology concept. My friend who had been struggling with that topic had asked me for help. I had pondered not giving her the information, because I wanted a better grade on the test. However, in that moment I felt the wisdom of God show me that it was important to help my friend out and teach her the topic. In the long run, it made both of us feel more successful as she understood the concept and I had done the right thing. Although it may seem beneficial to be selfish, in the long run, you will feel closer to God when you put others first.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your wisdom and for helping us to make the right decisions and put others' needs above our own. In Jesus name, Amen.

Sarah Berliner is a freshman in high school who has been a part of Nassau since 2011. She has participated in many Christmas pageants, chancel dramas, attended Fellowships, choirs, VBS's, and is part of this year's confirmation class. Outside of church, she likes to play field hockey, sew, and spend time with her older sister Rachel and her friends.

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Friday, March 22, 2024

Philippians 2:12-18

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

Philippians 2:14-15 NRSV

"Sir, Candidate Kelsey, yes, Sir."

The most nervous I have ever been was the day I reported for the U.S. Army in Newark, New Jersey, on September 17, 1969. I had enlisted, but

I would have been drafted because the war in Vietnam was raging. My father had fought in WW II and my grandfather in WW I, and now it was my turn. I was petrified because I had no idea what was about to happen as I left my fiancée and family.

My father's advice was to obey every order I was given ASAP.

Dad's words were right on target, and I did well in the service. As I have gone through the rest of my life, I have realized that these words, like Paul's, make it easier to handle the bad times as well as the good.

Let us walk in humility, always recognizing that we are not the center of the universe. By obeying the words of Jesus and doing what is right, we might help others to see the light of God. Amen.

John Kelsey and his wife Pam joined Nassau Presbyterian Church when they moved to Princeton in 1974. Their offspring, Lisa Pisano and Jay Kelsey, were raised and got married at Nassau Church and now their children are involved. John can be recognized as the person who competes with Reverend McFeaters to be the last person to sit down when greeting and passing the peace during the worship service.

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Saturday, March 23, 2024

Mark 10:32-34; 46-52

Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The blind man said, "Teacher, I want to see."

Mark 10:51 CEB

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus had warned his disciples about his impending death and resurrection, yet their world shattered when he was arrested and crucified, leaving them engulfed in fear and confusion. Do uncertainties about Jesus' resurrection persist in our lives, echoing the disciples' doubts and fears?

As they draw closer to Jerusalem before Jesus' final passion filled week, Bartimaeus, a visually impaired destitute who heard of the miraculous powers of Jesus, believed that if he could get Jesus' attention, he could break free from his world of darkness. So, despite many attempts by the onlookers to quieten him, he shows deep faith by fervently crying out to Jesus for mercy. Jesus, moved with compassion, asks him what he needs; Bartimaeus pleads for sight. Instantly healed, Bartimaeus does not walk

away, but follows Jesus as he continues on his way to Jerusalem.

Reflecting on this encounter, how do I make my faith grow amid doubts and fears? Just as Bartimaeus' eyes were opened and the first image was the face of Jesus, I eagerly wait for the day when I shall see Jesus too. Today I seek the presence of the Spirit of Christ to make my life brighter and more beautiful, trusting in his transformative power to fill me with joy and peace, and hope that will overflow from within me.

**Lord Jesus, let my soul magnify you and my spirit rejoice in you,
my Savior. Amen**

Mani and Monisha **Pulimood** are blessed with two sons, Nikhil and Philip. Nassau Church has been their spiritual home since 2004, and the family sits in the back on the right side. Mani serves on the Worship and Arts Committee, and as Nassau's communion preparer. He has served as an elder, choir parent, greeter, and church school teacher. He enjoys leading and participating in small groups, and online evangelism. You can find him actively engaging on X (formerly Twitter) @ManiPulimood.

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Palm Sunday, March 24, 2024

Mark 11:1-11

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Mark 11:9 NIV

Who doesn't love a parade? It's Palm Sunday and churches are orchestrating processions, waving branches, singing royal psalms of praise to the King. And next week will feature new celebrations, sanctuaries erupting with Alleluias. But don't think that we can live from parade to parade, that there is no Good Friday in between. Today, when the crowds leave, stay. Stay and open your heart to the suffering Christ. Open your heart to all those who suffer. This is preparation for resurrection.

**Spirit, open my heart.
May I weep with those who weep;**

share the joy of sister, brother.
In the welcome of Christ,
may we welcome one another.
Spirit, open my heart
to the joy and pain of living.
As you love may I love,
in receiving and in giving.
Spirit, open my heart.
Amen.

Spirit, Open My Heart by Ruth Duck ©1996 The Pilgrim Press. From *Glory to God* #692

Martin Tel is the Director of Music at Princeton Theological Seminary and organist at Dutch Neck Presbyterian Church.

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Monday, March 25, 2024

Psalm 36:5-11

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.

Psalm 36:7–9 NRSV

During college, I learned that a friend of mine started all of her prayers with, “God, thank you for being SO BIG.” While it seemed more elementary than, say, “hallowed be thy name”, it was really a reflection on how much more there is to God than we know or can see. It was a shoutouts to God’s care and love, deep and wide, and an admission that we are much smaller and do not know all that God knows. It was a simple, quick, humbling reminder that set the tone for the rest of the prayer. I eventually adopted it myself.

I love the images of God in this psalm that feel big and abundant. We all fit under God’s wings. We all have a place at the feast and river of God’s delights. We can trust God to provide for all of our needs. God

is a fountain flowing; God is light that covers everything! God's love is steadfast and unfailing. And through all of this grandiosity, God is close to us.

For the Season of Lent, we get the chance to step back and pare down our lives. We think less about indulgence and more about prudence. We take time to reflect and repent. But what allows us to do this? We trust that God continues to abundantly provide for us and care for us through it all, no matter what. God is big like that.

God, teach us to trust in your abundant love and care. Humble us, protect us, and care for us as we seek you in this season. Amen.

Amy Ballard is a new member at Nassau Presbyterian Church. She and her spouse Brian live in Princeton with their two little ones. Amy works in adult education programs and supports other educators through trauma-informed training. She loves the rhythms of the liturgical calendar and especially the chance to reflect throughout the Lenten season.

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Tuesday, March 26, 2024

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

1 Corinthians 1:27 NIV

Strength and wisdom are on full display at Ann Klein Forensic Center in Trenton, New Jersey. Several times a day, the sounds of shuffling feet and clinking metal fill the hallways as guards watchfully escort residents to and from classes, therapy, and appointments. The guards are stoutly equipped with guns, pepper spray, and restraints. Meanwhile, the residents are minimally covered with zero protection. The contrast is stark.

Residents, clients, inmates, prisoners. What does it matter what they are called? After all, each one has committed crimes so terrible they were deemed unfit to reside among “normal” prisoners. It might be that these folks are the most easily dismissed population of women and men on earth: fools who can hardly comprehend why they are there in the first place. And yet, at least according to society, deserve to be there more than anyone.

Nobody deserved to be crucified more than Jesus of Nazareth, at least according to society at the time. The contrast on that day was stark, too. Surrounded by guards heavily armed, Jesus had little choice but to comply as he was led to his death. Most residents of Jerusalem would have agreed with the assessments of their leaders and dismissed Jesus to his fate. Like the residents of Ann Klein, the crimes Jesus committed deserved harsh punishment and, like the judges, juries, and guards, we on the outside stand in judgment over them.

Paul rejects this entire dynamic and calls us to do the same. As difficult as it may be to imagine, the residents of Ann Klein—yes, even they—have something to teach us. Taken at face value and in the context of Paul’s entire letter to the Corinthians, we must be suspicious of those whom society has rejected as foolish and weak. Anytime we align ourselves with the power and wisdom of a society who, by extension, rejected Jesus, we open ourselves up to profound correction. Conversely, when we open ourselves up to the lowly and condemned, in spite of the discomfort it causes, the power of the cross is revealed.

Later in the New Testament, the book of James counsels us, “Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord and you will be lifted up.” Here in 1 Corinthians, Paul prepares us for such a reality. We need the preparation since the world in which we live demands the opposite. For the residents of Ann Klein, no preparation is needed. It’s just their way of life.

God of the condemned, grant us your wisdom as it was displayed upon the cross of Christ. Let us reject the power of the world and instead search after the humility of a life of service and compassion. We pray for those who are incarcerated, the lowly, and the despised. We pray they might know your redeeming Spirit and experience love, mercy, and forgiveness. Let them, and us, be found by you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Aaron Twitchell was ordained at Nassau Presbyterian Church where his vocation was shaped by the staff and the entire congregation. Over the years, he served at schools, hospitals, a large Presbyterian church, and hospices. He is currently the program director for an end of life support non-profit. Aaron is grateful that he can do ministry while still participating in the life of Nassau Church, where his daughters sing in the choir and attend youth group. He lives in Hopewell.

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Wednesday, March 27, 2024

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

Hebrews 12:1-2 NRSV

Grace Thomas is the exuberant daughter of Allen Thomas, who grew in Nassau Church, and the granddaughter of Gordon and Deborah Thomas.

Dear God, let all people run the race that is set before us and never tire. Amen.

Gordon Thomas and his wife Deborah have been members of Nassau Church since 1986. Gordon is a pre-K church school teacher and has been a member of the technical staff at Bell Labs and a professor of physics, now emeritus, at NJIT.

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Maundy Thursday, March 28, 2024

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

John 13:34 NRSV

On Maundy Thursday we are reminded of that memorable scene in John 13 in which Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. He does this, as the gospel tells us, fully knowing that his time had come and that he must now offer final instructions to his followers for how to conduct themselves after his physical departure from them. Washing the feet of dinner guests was a lowly task, as we might imagine, but it was one on which Jesus insisted, despite Peter’s heated objections. After he had washed the feet of the disciples, including Judas, Jesus gave the new commandment for life in community among his disciples: “love one another” (13:34). He adds that such behavior is to be the outward sign by which others will recognize them as his disciples (13:35).

Foot washing has never appealed very much to me, and, apart from our children when they were small, I have never washed another person’s feet. But this remarkable example offered by Jesus himself is a guide for all of us to live a life of putting others before ourselves. That is no easy task, but it is the goal to which we are called and one which Jesus, who had much farther to stoop down than we do, exemplified in his own behavior. The humble service he orders may not take the literal form of foot washing but it does require a mindset and a determination to act accordingly.

Lord, give us the desire and energy to follow your command that we love one another as you have so generously loved us. Amen.

James VanderKam was on the Old Testament faculty at the University of Notre Dame before his wife Mary and he moved to Princeton in 2019 to be closer to their children and grandchildren. They joined Nassau Presbyterian Church in early 2020, just in time for the pandemic closures.

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Good Friday, March 29, 2024

Hebrews 10:16-25

Let's hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, because the one who made the promises is reliable. And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds. Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near.

Hebrews 10:23-25 CEB

Encourage each other." Yes, let's! Don't miss the "Let's." Most of us tune into the judgment – "...hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering." Oh, right. I should. I wish I had. But I wavered. But I waver. But I'm going to waver again. Wavering is a part of being human. I am not alone. We all waver.

Let's. Instead. Hopeful words. No matter what you did before. Or are doing. Or think you are likely to do again. There's another way. Instead. "Instead, encourage each other." We all waver. You are not alone. But let's encourage one another. Because the goal is to hold on to the confession of our hope. Not just hope itself, but the confession of our hope. Say it out loud. My hope is in the promises of Jesus. Because Jesus is reliable.

So, on this Good Friday, when all hope vanished, and the disciples wavered, and confession felt meaningless, even on this Good Friday, let's encourage each other to hold on to the confession of our hope. Let's "consider each other carefully." Let's "meet together with other believers." We are not alone. Hold on, friends. Our hope is in the promises of Jesus. Jesus is reliable.

Empower us, O Christ, the community of believers, to encourage each other. Our hope is in you. Amen.

In retirement, **Joyce MacKichan Walker** continues teaching and writing and living in hope, fed by the vital ministry of the Nassau Presbyterian Church community.

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Holy Saturday, March 30, 2024

Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16

My times are in your hands;
deliver me from the hands of my enemies,
from those who pursue me.
Let your face shine on your servant;
save me in your unfailing love.

Psalm 31:15–6 NIV

Holy Saturday distills the Lenten season's practice of waiting into one 24-hour period when we recognize our suspension between death and resurrection, despair and hope.

The characters of Jesus' temporal story did not know they hung between these two states of being. They may not have been convinced that they were waiting for anything, in spite of their Lord's promises. The recent horror and hopelessness of the crucifixion likely eclipsed Jesus' words about resurrection.

As believers today, we know the assurance of Easter Sunday. Still, our entire lives are a Holy Saturday of sorts. We look forward to Christ's return, but we confess that we sometimes despair of it. And we hang between so many other tragedies and glories too: waiting for deliverance, waiting for peace, waiting for healing, waiting for restoration, waiting for justice, waiting for dreams to take shape, waiting for faith to return. So often we pray, with the psalmist, "In you, LORD, I have taken refuge. ... Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me" (Psalm 31:1a–2).

Yet even the practice of waiting threads a bead of hope on the long strand of our anxious days. And in those days, as the Psalmist implies, we are not so much suspended as we are held: "My times are in your hands. ... Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love" (Psalm 31:15a, 16).

Lord, hold us in every season of waiting, and may we always be aware of your unfailing love. Amen.

Kendra Langdon Juskus has been attending Nassau Church since the fall of 2022. She is a freelance editor and a poet. Kendra is married to Ryan, a fellow at Princeton University, and is the mother of Langdon (11) and Elias (9).

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Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024

John 20:1-18

At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

John 20:14 NIV

Last August near an In-and-Out in Denver, Colorado, my oldest son went missing. We stayed positive for a while; but, as darkness fell, our hope faded. Time ticked by, and person after person shook their heads when I showed them a picture of my sixteen-year-old child and asked, “Have you seen this boy?”

My husband decided our younger three children and I should stay at In-and-Out while he drove around looking. The four of us sat at an outdoor table in mostly silence. Then, a thin, young woman came over to us. She touched my shoulder and said, “I’m sorry about your son. I wondered if you needed a hug.” I stood up and cried in her arms. She held me while I wept.

Our son was found later that evening. The picture I showed to everyone when he was missing is now my contact photo for him. With each text or call, I see it and recall the range of emotions of that night in Denver. I remember the fear, the relief, the gratitude. I remember the love and care shown to me. I wonder if, on that night, like Mary, I had my own unacknowledged encounter with Jesus.

Dear God, thank you for the joy in the morning and your presence in the darkest of nights. Help us be Easter people by embodying Christ in how we treat others and your creation. Amen.

Anne Thomsen Lord is a deacon, ruling elder, and on the fifth grade church school teaching team. She graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary last May and works as a lifeguard. Her four sporty children provide her ample opportunity to showcase her skills in laundry, driving, snacks, and logistics. She loves them very much.

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Monday, April 1, 2024

Genesis 1:1-19

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

Genesis 1:6–7 KJV

Tatting. An ancient art form reflected, via thread and special tools, in intricate forms of knots, lace, and loops in doilies, necklace collars, table coasters, and decorative pieces that adorn fireplace mantels, tables, and an abundance of other surfaces. I am reminded of tatting whenever I visit Christkindlmarkts before Christmas, and the beauty of tatted lace never fails to amaze. The delicate nature and elegance of these pieces as well as the legend that fishermen began this craft centuries ago by giving old sections of worn fishing nets to weavers are telling reminders of God's handiwork in the interconnectedness and design of life. The element of fishermen and involvement of weavers with their loops, knots, and ultimate outcome of fine lace reminds us that lace is like life. We are all connected to each other. And we are connected to God. God's creation of heaven and earth, while separate, are, indeed, fused by solid firmament but crafted from love, detailed imagination, creativity, and talent. Our lace is an infinite pattern we can admire every day. International Tatting Day is always observed April 1, so it is fitting to comment on this centuries-old craft on this first day of April following Lent. Standing at a Christkindlmarkt booth, with eyes aglow and focused with wonder on each piece showcased on the counters, walls, and hanging from booth ceilings, I see a conversation of threads and colors, of people and spirits. Of pure, unadulterated, gorgeous art, given as God's gift to us.

Dear God, Dear Jesus, please help us to identify and appreciate the smallest detail in life, but please also help us to look beyond these details to see the world you have created – a world that is infinite and vastly more extensive than is our own. In our hands

a flower petal is as large as the size of the brightest star when we gaze toward the heavens, and we are grateful for your hands in the interconnected creation. Amen.

Cynthia Lynn Miller grew up in Northbrook, Illinois, and currently lives in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. She works in international market research as well as is a novel and article writer in her spare time. She grew up Presbyterian and has been a member of Nassau since 1997. She thoroughly enjoys contributing to the Adult Education Committee and the Lenten devotionals.

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Tuesday, April 2, 2024

Genesis 1:20-2:4a

And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky. So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:20–2:1 NRSV

The manta ray soars on its back right below the surface of the water. Bundles of phytoplankton the size of fuzz you pluck from your shirt fly into its mouth. The flat, majestic creature bends its wing-like fins to conduct a perfect roll.

The manta ray, or hāhālua in Hawaiian, is a massive beast that can weigh up to 3,000 pounds. Yet, its diet depends on the smallest of God’s creatures. They are gentle, beautiful teachers.

Native Hawaiians share their creation chant that holds in reverence the “living creatures” with which “the water teems,” as our verse for today describes. May we look for God’s majesty in our waters and our air.

May we learn from and with our Indigenous siblings who time and again are first to respond to environmental crises. May we remember that the Earth was created good and we were tasked with naming each good, living thing.

Dear Creator God, Thank you for the birds chirping outside, the trees they occupy, the worms that break up the soil in which they are rooted. Thank you for this good interconnected world. Amen.

Isabella Shutt is a senior studying public policy at Princeton University. She was brought to Nassau by Princeton Presbyterians, the young adult ministry led by Revs. Len and Andrew Scales. This reflection was inspired by a class taught by Prof. Ryan Juskus on Religion and the Environmental Justice Movement.

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Wednesday, April 3, 2024

Mark 16:1-8

So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Mark 16:8 NRSVUE

Although he had told his followers what to expect, Jesus's death and subsequent resurrection was a surprise for them. In Mark's version, news of the resurrection was not only surprising but actually alarming to the women who came to prepare His body for burial. So alarming, in fact, that they fled his tomb with terror and amazement, and told no one about their conversation with the angel. In my walk of faith, I have encountered many surprises as well, and I have responded to some of them just like these women—by running away, paralyzed by fear. The goodness in the gifts God gives us is not always evident on the surface. Sometimes we need time to remember that God uses the surprises in our lives to lead us to lives of fullness, not deprivation. We may be asked to give deeply, there may be sorrow on that path, but redemption, grace, and overwhelming joy are just waiting for the moment when we can release fear and embrace the truth of an impossible, unimaginable resurrection.

Dearest Lord, thank you for the sacrifice and resurrection of your son. Accept our gratitude for the joy that comes from walking

with you in faith, and help us not to fear your surprises, but instead to recognize them as the gifts they are. Amen.

Karen S. Brown is a long-time members of Nassau Presbyterian Church. She has served as a deacon, been on the Adult Education committee, and is currently involved in the Mission and Outreach Committee and Bending the Moral Arc. She works in clinical research in the biotech industry and splits her time between Lawrenceville, NJ and Somerville, MA, along with her husband James Takasugi and their two cats, who would be happier if Karen and James just stayed in one place.

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Thursday, April 4, 2024

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42, 46-47 NIV

The Lenten days of preparation are past. Easter has come. Where do we go from here?

Jesus' disciples went forward with "breaking bread, prayer, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people." One reason for the growth of the early church was its caring for one another: slaves and masters, female and male.

Later the church seemed to fall far from this practice and only cared for those who believed in the same way, taking strong theological positions on points that no human can fathom. If one did not accept the orthodox position, excommunication or worse (usually worse) was the outcome.

This problem persists. I am currently bombarded with text messages from Christian leaders who start with an attestation of their Christian faith followed by demonization of those who do not hold their views. Happily, I do get messages from Nassau friends and other Christian

friends in Mercer County expressing a desire to struggle with complicated problems with mutual love and respect. These counter my pessimism.

In this Easter season may we continue to be witnesses to the miracle of Easter and struggle together on the hard questions that we face... just as Christ loved us.

Oh, Lord, how good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity.
It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe (Psalm 133:1-2).
Amen.

On Sundays **Larry Alphs** usually finds himself among the Nassau Presbyterian balcony worshipers. On weekdays he can be found at his home office with colleagues or family who are thousands of miles away. On Saturdays he can be found on his bike or in his garden.

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Friday, April 5, 2024

Daniel 2:1-23

He changes times and seasons;
deposes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding.
He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what is in the darkness,
and light dwells with him.

Daniel 2:21-22 NRSV

Daniel Becomes the Light

(After Mattia Preti's Daniel Interpreting Nebuchadnezzar)

Cloaked in persimmon, Daniel
absorbs the light, Daniel becomes the light.
The condemned fade in palace shadow,
a king mesmerized.

Nebuchadnezzar, tethered to tarnished
throne, stunned by Daniel's incantation
of world-changing prophecy -
royalty trapped in servile wonder.

Look to the window, to the sky,
an angel on the periphery,
beckons electricity,
crested clouds of lightning.

God's glory transfigures humans
into prophets and saints.



Preti, Mattia (1633-1699) Daniel interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's Dream [Oil on Canvas] Heritage Malta, www.heritagemalta.mt (accessed 15 February 2024).

Dear Lord, thank you for showering us with your grace and glory so that we may walk in the light and not in darkness. In the name of your son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Roz Anderson Flood is leading poetry events this year, as part of Nassau's Art of Faithfulness initiative. She is a deacon (and ruling elder not currently on Session). She also sings second alto in the Adult Choir and serves on the Worship and Arts Committee.

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Saturday, April 6, 2024

Psalm 133

Look at how good and pleasing it is
When families live together as one!

Psalm 133:1 CEB

*I wish I lived closer so I can support you better,
I said to a friend following his difficult health diagnosis.
Therefore, when two friends invited me to travel
together to visit him, I eagerly agreed.
In our presence, know that you are loved.
I came along to comfort—I left blessed.*

In life, it often feels like we are walking through our respective journeys alone. We try to keep up with life demands in this fast-paced world. Despite the abundance of things and people that surround us, it is easy to feel lonely.

As a person of faith, I strive to look for God in my surroundings. It is through this practice that I find comfort and assurance in the God who cares and is intentional about the details of my life.

During our hospital visit, we intended to be there and give encouragements. What I didn't expect was that we received something in return. We listened to trying stories in that small two-patient room; and yet

despite the hardship, it was clear that their stories are ones of relentless faith in the same God that possesses the same immense care and intention as the One I know.

Psalm 133 speaks about the unity of God's people as treasured goodness. It is likened to precious oil that anointed Aaron and the much-needed, life-giving morning dew that descended upon Mount Zion.

Every day, we must remember to look for God in others—especially on difficult days. Amen.

Fiona Christano grew up in a Mennonite Church in Kudus, Central Java, Indonesia. She lives in Princeton with her spouse, Iksan Lewono; their two beautiful children, Ian and Isabel; and a sweet Chihuahua mix, Olivier, who was rescued off the street in Mexico. Her lifelong dream is to experience living in a tiny house.

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Lenten Worship

In the Sanctuary unless otherwise indicated.

*Services that will be livestreamed.

Ash Wednesday

February 14, 12:00 PM*

ISAIAH 40 : 1-8

Lent I (Communion)

Sunday, February 18, 9:15* & 11:00 AM

LUKE 10 : 25-37

Lent II

Sunday, February 25, 9:15* & 11:00 AM

LUKE 8 : 26-39

Lent III

Sunday, March 3, 9:15* & 11:00 AM

LUKE 15

Lent IV

Sunday, March 10, 9:15* & 11:00 AM

ACTS 8 : 26-40

Lenten Communion

Tuesday, March 12, 1:30 PM

at Stonebridge

I CORINTHIANS 11 : 23-28

Lent V (Youth Sunday)

Sunday, March 26, 11:00 AM*

(education for all ages at 9:30 AM)

ACTS 5 : 16-29

Lenten Communion

Tuesday, March 19, 1:30 PM

at Windrows

I CORINTHIANS 11 : 23-28

Palm Sunday

March 24, 9:15* & 11:00 AM

LUKE 7 : 11-17

Service of Wholeness & Healing

March 24, 2:00 PM

Niles Chapel

ROMANS 8 : 18-28

Maundy Thursday (Communion)

March 28, 7:30 PM*

Tenebrae Readings:

MATTHEW 26 : 20-25;

LUKE 22 : 39-44;

MARK 14 : 26-31, 66-72;

MATTHEW 26 : 59-67;

MARK 15 : 12-20; LUKE 23 : 33-46

Good Friday

March 29, 12:00 PM*

The Way of the Cross:

MARK 15 : 1-20;

LUKE 23 : 26-49; JOHN 19:25-29

Easter Sunday

March 31, 6:30 AM

Princeton Cemetery

Easter Sunday

March 31, 9:00 & 11:00 AM*

MARK 16 : 1-18

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