



Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church

2024

LENTEN
Devotional

LENT & EASTER SERVICES

February 14 | Ash Wednesday | Service & Imposition of Ashes
12 & 6:30 pm · Sanctuary

February 18 | First Sunday in Lent
9:30 am · Jones Auditorium
11 am · Sanctuary

February 25 | Second Sunday in Lent
9:30 am · Jones Auditorium
11 am · Sanctuary

March 3 | Third Sunday in Lent
9:30 am · Jones Auditorium
11 am · Sanctuary

March 10 | Fourth Sunday in Lent
9:30 am · Jones Auditorium
11 am · Sanctuary

March 17 | Fifth Sunday in Lent
9:30 am · Jones Auditorium
11 am · Sanctuary

March 24 | Palm Sunday
9:30 am · Jones Auditorium
11 am · Sanctuary

March 28 | Maundy Thursday
6:30 pm · Sanctuary

March 29 | Good Friday
12–3 pm · Sanctuary

March 31 | Easter
9:30 & 11:15 am · Sanctuary

All services (except for 9:30 am on Sundays) are available on livestream.
See fapc.org/live for details.



DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

During Lent, we're reminded that our spiritual journey is shared, and you're never alone. Some find comfort in quiet reflection, walking alongside Christ in prayer for 40 days. For others, the joy is in coming together for worship and shared prayers.

Think of this Lenten Devotional as your companion on this journey. The pastors, officers, and staff at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church share reflections and prayers for each weekday. My hope is that, as you turn the pages, you discover something each day that brings hope and resilience during this Lenten season. May they remind you that you are loved and, through the grace of God, you are enough!

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Ramirez'.

Rev. Werner Ramirez

Associate Pastor for Congregational Care & Family Ministries

To receive the daily reflections by email, drop us a line at fapc@fapc.org. You can download this devotional at fapc.org/lent.



ASH WEDNESDAY

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14

Rev. Sarah A. Speed, Associate Pastor

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. —Joel 2:12-13

I grew up in a family of church workers. As a kid, I could have gone to any one of my aunts and uncles with a question about God. They would have delighted in that conversation, but I almost never did. Most of the time, I preferred to talk to my aunts and uncles about piano lessons, the most recent Nancy Drew book I was reading, or what I wanted for my birthday.





However, I remember the day that changed. I was in sixth grade. It was sunny and hot, the kind of sticky heat familiar in the south. I was in my Aunt Laura's office at the Presbyterian camp where she worked. The walls of her office were covered in crayon colored cards from children, and art that told the story of scripture.

As she shuffled through papers on her desk I asked her, out of the blue, "Aunt Laura, what do you think God is like?" Maybe I was inspired by the art on her wall, or maybe I just needed a distraction from the heat.

Whatever it was, as those words came tumbling out of my mouth, the papers on her desk came to stop. My aunt put down the pen in her hand, looked me in the eye and said "What is God like? I think God is like a grandparent, always waiting on me with open arms."

I chewed on her words for a minute, sixth grade brain picturing God like a grandmother at the end of the driveway.

Then my aunt said, "So as a Christian, I try to spend my life running towards those open arms." She said, "I don't want to walk. I don't want to stroll. I want to run."

That image has always stuck with me—the desire to run towards God, because that is what I want to do too.

In the chaos of a distraction of this broken world, she felt an urgency to keep running towards God's open arms.

I think about that conversation every time I hear this verse from Joel. God said to the Israelites—"Return to me with all your heart." It is a line that invites repentance and relationship. That's why we often use it on Ash Wednesday. However, it's also a line that reminds me of my aunt, who said "I don't want to walk. I want to run" towards God. I want to return. May it be so, this Lenten season.

To add to your devotion today, I invite you to listen to the Chapel Church Music song, "Return to You," inspired by this same verse. The song is available on Apple Music and on Spotify.





HEARING OUR PRAYERS!

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Claire Kedeshian, Elder

Echoing as a single voice or sung in four part harmony:

*“Hear our prayers, oh Lord,
Hear our prayers, oh Lord,
Incline thine ear to us,
And grant us thy Peace!”
—Psalm 143:1.*

While taking a walk in a modest residential neighborhood, my eye caught a wooden box on a pole. Initially, I thought it was a bird feeder or one of those little free library structures which invite you to give one, take one book. However, when I got closer, I saw that it was a Prayer Box complete with paper and pencil to write prayer requests which can be deposited in a slot and accessed daily. “No name required, for we believe that faith is all that is required.” read the typed sign on top of the Prayer Box.

I was particularly moved by this Prayer Box sighting and its small but mighty powers, because my Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church Monday night bible study ends each zoom session with specific praises and prayers for the week requests. Whether detailed or silent, I have learned that prayers are indeed answered. We may not always relish the answers, but ultimately praying brings peace.





A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Glenn Hubbard, Treasurer, Board of Trustees

In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. —John 14:2-3 (New King James Version)

“You did a great job on the solo in church just now, but you don’t look so good to me, Glenn.” These words from Dr. Akerman (“Dr. Joe” to all of us) caught me off guard. A bit of background—I really enjoyed being a tenor in my church choir at the First Presbyterian Church of Apopka, a small agricultural community in northern Central Florida. The whole church loved music as a central part of worship. That Sunday, I had sung a tenor recitative in church with the classic “In my father’s house...” passage. Dr. Joe was our town doctor, a wonderful church leader, and one of my boyhood heroes from his leadership in Boy Scouts in our community, council and nation. I took every word he said very seriously. The truth is I did feel like something was wrong. He found me in my robe near the rest room behind the sanctuary struggling a bit for breath. Worried, he pulled out his ever-present stethoscope and proceeded to check. I was more than bit confused when he said: “I think you have a collapsed lung and need to go to the hospital right now.” He could tell I was worried. Then he stepped outside of his medical role and asked me whether I had listened to the words I had sung in church only a half an hour before. “Do you have faith in those words in the anthem you sang, Glenn? There is a center to our faith and our life, and you sang about it. Focus there, not on your breath. I promise you—it will be a breath of fresh air.” Some harried minutes later, my parents and I were in our car on the way to Orange Memorial Hospital in Orlando, where I was born. Dr. Joe was right—I had surgery to repair a collapsed lung, with only a scar today to remind me. Every time I hear the words “a breath of fresh air,” I think of Dr. Joe, my boyhood church, and the faith they both nurtured in me.

Lord, in this Lenten season help us appreciate every breath as a continuation of a God’s blessing—a breath of fresh air. Amen.





SHARED SPACE

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17

Christine Boyle, Director of Outreach & Missions

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am among them. —Matthew 18:20

Sitting in shared space is such a blessing to me. It reminds me how much I value my relationships with family, friends, church members and yes—even colleagues! It reminds me how much we are united by common love and passion.

In early January, my colleagues Sherria Hanberry and Julia Shaw, and I were reviewing Ecumenical Outreach Partnership (EOP) program metrics and discussing client matters. Julia shared a particularly sad client update. One of our street homeless clients missed a time sensitive voice mail on his phone regarding available housing—a single room in a safe haven. The client had been desperate to get off the streets. Unfortunately, by the time the client accessed the message the window to respond to this housing option had passed. He cried. Julia received those tears and shed her own; they went for pizza and talked. They sat in shared space. As Julia recounted this story to us, we each teared up. We sat in sadness in shared space, with care, compassion, and client desire and readiness, uniting us. Then, with true assurance, I said, “Well, if he got housing once, he will get it again.” What joy we shared at this prospect.

For me, Lent is a season to sit in shared space, with the cross uniting us to the greatest love story ever, the Paschal Mystery. The spaces which we are invited to—joyful, sorrowful, glorious—through the cross unite us to humanity of Christ, who longs to sit with us in our everyday.

Thanks be to God.





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MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19

PEARL

In Jerusalem my beloved was slain,
And rent on the Cross by ruffians bold:
Willing to bear our woes and pain,
He took to himself our sorrows untold.
His face, so fine to see and fair,
They lashed and flayed without restraint;
For all our sin he had the care,
He whom sin could never taint
He let himself be scourged, constrained
And stretched on a crude, massive beam,
Where meek as a lamb, without complaint,
He died for us in Jerusalem.

Author unknown, late 14th century





DO NOT WORRY

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

John Kern, Elder

So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. —Matthew 6:34

This is my truth: life is difficult, uncertain, and full of change. It is also true that in the midst of fear, anxiety, and depression, hope arrives bringing a sense of peace washing over me, telling me that God loves me and will provide a way through.

I am living in a season of change: I am ageing and I am still adjusting to a different life in retirement. I am trying to find and renew passions, learn new things, and create new sustaining relationships. My life here at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church has been an important part of that. Coincidentally, my “Star Words” have been: Passion, Freedom, and Build!

In our culture we are taught to plan and work toward the future. How do we reconcile that with living each day at a time and trusting God to provide? I may have dreams and make plans and move toward a future, but the truth is, it's in God's hands. I trust he will bring blessings never dreamed of—and peace. God makes his presence known in small and surprising ways: a beautiful day; flowers reappearing after a long dormant winter; a delicious meal; unexpected kindness from a stranger.

I don't know what the future holds but I do know that God will provide.

O God and Heavenly Father, Grant to us the serenity of mind to accept that which cannot be changed; courage to change that which can be changed, and wisdom to know the one from the other, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.





THE FACES OF JESUS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Julian of Norwich, late 14th century

I have three kinds of understanding of the expression of our Lord's face. The first is the suffering face which he showed while he was here, dying. Although this is a sight of mourning and sorrow, it is also glad and cheerful, for he is God. The second face is pity, grief and compassion; and he shows this face to all those who love him, with the certainty of protection for those who need his mercy. The third is the blessed face which he will show for ever, and I saw this oftenest and the longest.

And so when we sorrow and suffer, he shows us the face of his Passion and his cross, helping us to endure through his own blessed strength. And when we sin he shows us his face of pity and grief, strongly protecting and defending us from all our enemies. And these two are the faces which he most often shows us in this life; and mixed with them is the third, which is his blessed face, shown in part as it will be in heaven. And that comes to us through gracious touching and sweet illumination of the spiritual life by which we are kept in certain faith, hope and charity, with contrition and devotion and also with contemplation and every kind of true pleasure and sweet comfort. The blessed face of our Lord God works this in us through grace.

from Revelations of Divine Love





HAPPY DANCES AND A SHOULDER TO CRY ON

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22

Lydia Kalmen-Tran, Deacon

“Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” —Joshua 1:9

I am resting my soul after a season of the most exciting of life's joys and the depths of life's sorrows. September started off with the most special and precious days of my life... my wedding day. I know God was present in Kirkland Chapel as my husband and I said our “I Do's” and shared our love and joy with those we love. God celebrated with us. God was with us just two weeks later when my mother-in-law tragically passed away. God gave me the strength I needed that night as I sat with my husband and sister-in-law, he gave me the strength I needed to be the rock they needed. God mourned with us, he comforted us and surrounded us with love from family, friends, and our church family. A month and a half later God rejoiced with my husband and I as we read the results of the at home test... pregnant! We were over the moon. God was with us at the first sonogram appointment when there was no heartbeat when there should have been one. Miscarriage. God sent an angel right then, a nurse who was the mother hen we needed in those moments. Jesus wept, John 11:35. That two word Bible verse kept repeating itself in my head for days. Jesus wept. He knows the depths of our sorrows. God was with my husband and I as we mourned another loss. God held us in his arms and cried with us. He surrounded us with love. God celebrates our joys, cries with us in our sorrows. He is with us wherever we go.

It's no coincidence that our star word for this year is *comfort*. Seeing that star word for this year felt like God whispering to us “Take comfort, you can both rest now. You've been through a lot. Take comfort, I am here.”

Thank you God for doing happy dances with us in times of joy, crying with us and comforting us in times of sorrow, and thank you for being by our side on the calm, average in between days. Your love surrounds us always and we are forever grateful. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.





COMMUNITY

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23

Bob Henn, Trustee

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. —1 Peter 4:6-10

Several years ago I co-chaired the annual pledge campaign with Charlotte Smith Frankowski and we choose the theme “Faith, Community, Commitment.” Faith brings you into Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church where you find a loving, supportive community which leads to commitment. At that time I said, “My faith has been strengthened here. As I became engaged in activities beyond worship and developed personal relationships, I found my faith and sense of community were strengthened.”

During the past four months, following Jane’s spinal surgeries, the loving community which is Fifth Avenue has been an essential part of our lives. The many flowers, home baked breads and homemade dinners were the tangible evidence of the love and support we received, and the many prayers, good wishes and love were palpable and sustained us during challenging times. We have been blessed with friends and pastors who reached out with genuine concern and love. It has been, and will continue to be, a long road to full recovery, but it is not one we walk alone.

During communion on Epiphany Sunday we all selected a “Star Word” from a basket, and as Werner said you do not choose the word the word chooses you. My star word is “Community.” While the goal is to reflect on your star word for the next 12 months, which I will certainly do as it sits on my dresser for me to see every morning, I also reflect on how important community has been to Jane and me during the past four months. I give thanks for God’s guidance which led us to walk through the doors of this church and into this loving community.

Gracious God, I give thanks for this loving church family and ask that you help me to always follow your commandment to love my neighbor as myself. Amen.





THE SAINTS' ANCHOR-HOLD IN ALL STORMS AND TEMPESTS

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24

John Davenport, 1661

Thus one discouragement follows another, as circles in the water whereinto a stone is cast, which should humble you for neglect of stirring up your hope unto exercise. But yet, let it not discourage you. For true hope is sometimes in a believer, as in those trees, spoken of in Isaiah 6:13, whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves. It is only winter with you, then life is hid in the root, though no sign of it appears outwardly; that you may learn not to trust in grace received, but in Christ; depending on Him to quicken and actuate His own gifts of grace in you, waiting with fervent desires and prayers for the Sun of Righteousness to arise upon you, with healing in His wings. In the meantime, remember that Christ Himself has pronounced them blessed who are poor in spirit and mourn, are meek, and hunger and thirst after righteousness, and that He has promised unto such that heaven is theirs. They shall be comforted, shall inherit the earth, and shall be satisfied. Let such encouragements quicken your hope, and quiet your hearts, that it shall be with you according to His Word, and that your hope so grounded shall not make you ashamed.





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MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26

THE CRUCIFIXION

Al men that walk's by waye or strete,
Takes tente ye schalle no travayle tyne,
By-holdes myn heede, myn handis, and my feete,
And fully feele nowe, or ye fyne,
Yf any mourning may be meete
Or myscheve mesured unto myne.
My Fadir, that alle bales may bete,
For-giffis thes men that dois me pyne.
What thai wirke wotte thai noght;
Therefore, my Fadir, I crave
Latte nevere ther synonyms be sought,
But see ther saules to save.

The York Realist, c. mid-fourteenth century





LEAN BACK ON THE EVERLASTING ARMS

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Rev. Dr. Kenneth O. Jones (1918–1996)
Associate Pastor from 1963 to 1996

Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. —Psalm 119:132-33

O God, our Redeemer, we come to this sacred table of the Communion of Our Lord Jesus Christ—we come, not because we must, but because we may; we come not to express an opinion but to pray for a sense of His presence.

Keep us, O God, from sharing in Christ's Communion given in the midst of the world's needs, while we remain secure and untouched in the comfort of this Sacrament. Keep us from sharing in the sacrifice of this Table, made on a cross between two thieves, while we are proud in our hearts that we do the right things and make the respectable responses.

O God, take away our sin with the sin of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.





MOVED TO ACTION

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

Shannon Duke, Seminarian

The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.
—Luke 23:55-24:1 (New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition)

Though my faith has always been more intellectual than spiritual, neither of these two modes point to the aspect of my faith that makes it steadfast. If intellectualism and spirituality were my only two options, I would have walked away from faith a long time ago. If I had to think it, I would think myself out of it. If I had to feel it, I would feel abandoned. There is something else, something harder to name, that has kept me tethered to the God of love in every season of doubt and grief. Faith is real to me when I do it. It is real to me when it is lived.

I believe in God when I am washing someone else's dishes and when I sit in silence with a friend who is grieving. I believe in God when friends welcome me into their home for six months and when strangers help me break into my car because I've locked the keys inside. Faith is real to me when it is tangible, when it moves us to action.

This is the faith of the women who came to the tomb. They do not know that the story isn't over, but they are faithful anyway. They prepare spices, and still they follow the way of love all the way to the tomb.

God, in moments when it seems like justice and love have surely lost, may you give us the strength to be faithful still. Amen.





WHEN HOPE PREVAILS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29

Rev. Kate Dunn, Parish Visitor

"...we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." —Romans 5:3-4

Many years ago, I worked as a caseworker in supportive housing for seniors. One of my clients, Mr. C. had had a hard life, having lived for years on the street. A recovering alcoholic in his sixties, he'd lost an eye in a drunken brawl, walked with an uneven gait from a stroke, and had significant cognitive impairment from drinking.

Mr. C. wanted to find his family, with whom he'd had no contact for over forty years. He thought they lived in Georgia or Queens and was unclear about their names. The youngest of several siblings, he feared they might be dead. Together, we searched his records and his memory, sending out letters, emails, and making calls to try to find any family, to no avail.

Finally, Mr. C. said if someone would drive him around Queens, he could find his childhood home. Perhaps whoever lived there now could help him. I asked what neighborhood in Queens. He didn't know but said he could find it. I thought, we have to let him try, so he'll know he did everything he could. Our cook, Max, had a car, and one day, Mr. C., Max and I spent hours driving around Queens, prepared to go wherever Mr. C. told us to go until he was ready to stop looking.

About 2 pm, Mr. C. had us drive slowly up and down several streets. Then he said, "Stop the car." He got out and limped with his cane up and down the sidewalk till he stopped and stared at one house for a long time. Then he banged his cane against the door.

An elderly man opened the door, yelling, "What do you want?"

Mr. C. said, "I'm Irving."

The man stared like he was seeing a ghost. Then he whispered, "Irving. We thought you were dead."





For the next couple hours, Max and I sat in a corner, witnessing a return of the prodigal son moment. Neighbors came bursting in with food and hugs. Mr. C. spoke on the phone with siblings and cousins out-of-state. Smiles beamed and tears flowed, and joy filled the home.

When we returned to the senior residence, the staff stood prepared to console Mr. C. on his disappointment. They weren't prepared for him to burst in saying, "I found them! I knew I could find them, and I found them." Joy filled that home, too.

Gracious and loving God, grant all your children your presence, comfort, strength, guidance, and peace in their times of greatest trial. Let us know this truth: that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope. Bring into the lives of your children who suffer the most moments of prodigal joy. May hope prevail. Amen.

TO BE LIKE JOSEPH

FRIDAY, MARCH 1

Ashley Gonzalez-Grissom, Director of Engagement

...I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? —Genesis 50:17-19

Throughout Joseph's story we see his tender heart yield in the hands of his siblings. As a boy, Joseph's brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites because they envied him, but as Joseph comes of age in Egypt, he is put in charge of Pharaoh's land and food. When his brothers plead with him for food during a famine, he does not deny them. Joseph ends up preserving the life of his family, most of whom abandoned him, and forgiving his brothers. By the grace of God, Joseph chose not to remain hardened by the pain his family caused him. He wept, he told the truth, and he blessed those who persecuted him.

Lord, help us to be like Joseph today—to forgive those who have wronged us and to strive for our own healing. We trust that You are seated next to us as we try, forever a safe place to land. Amen.





THE DISPLACED HIP

SATURDAY, MARCH 2

Jaime Staehle, Director of Christian Education

“Then the man said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed.” —Genesis 32:28

In Genesis 32 we find Jacob returning to his homeland after years of being away. In his anxiety he sends his family away and spends the night alone by a river, praying to God. There, he encounters a mysterious stranger with whom he wrestles through the night. It is after this wrestling that a significant moment unfolds. The mysterious man blesses him, saying “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed.” This verse not only marks a change in name but signifies a transformation, one that reverberates through Jacob’s very being. The hip joint, a crucial pivot point in the body, represents stability, strength, and mobility. Yet, in Jacob’s wrestling match, it is displaced, leaving him limping but profoundly changed.

Like Jacob, we too wrestle with God, with doubt, with failure, and with our own humanity. Lent invites us to confront the brokenness within us, to wrestle with the questions that linger in the depths of our souls. Just as Jacob’s hip was displaced, so too are our illusions of self-sufficiency and control disrupted. In the wrestling ring of our hearts, God confronts us with our vulnerabilities, our shortcomings, and our need for grace. It is in this vulnerable state that true transformation begins.

Dear God, as we journey through Lent, may we embrace the discomfort of our displaced souls. May we limp humbly before you, acknowledging our need for healing and renewal. Like Jacob, may we emerge from our wrestling matches not unscathed, but profoundly changed. As we limp through Lent, may we find solace in the words spoken to Jacob: “You have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.” Amen.





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MONDAY, MARCH 4

MARCHING MEN

Under a level winter sky

I saw a thousand Christs go by.

They sang an idle song and free

As they went up to calvary.

Careless of eye and coarse of lip,

They marched in holiest fellowship.

That heaven might heal the world, they gave

Their earth-born dreams to deck the grave.

With souls unpurged and steadfast breath

They supped the sacrament of death.

And for each one, far off, apart,

Seven swords have rent a woman's heart.

Marjorie Pickthall, 1922





LIFTING UP MY ANXIETIES

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

Jill Borrero, Elder

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. —Matthew 6:34

I raced to my son's elementary school after receiving the call from the school nurse. There had been an accident on the playground and my younger son, Oscar, had to be picked up. When Oscar walked out, he was bleeding and had tissue protruding from right above his left eye. My anxiety immediately bubbled up. Another ER trip. Five hours, countless tears, and seven stitches later, we were ready to go home.

Having two curious and rambunctious boys meant many ER visits when they were younger. From x-rays to stitches to staples, my anxiety was often greater than theirs. Would they be ok? Would they have scars? What will the future look like for them?

Now that I have a teen and tween, those fears in the ER seem simple. New anxieties have emerged. Will they find the right group of friends? Are they resilient enough? Will the world be kind to them and will they be kind to others? Will they lean on each other for support? Will they carry too many physical and emotional scars?

Time and time again, I return to this verse and lift up my anxieties to the Lord. It brings me back to the present, allows me to trust in Him and remember how blessed I am.

Loving God, it is in you that all things are possible. It is in you that we can set aside anxiety and live in the present.





GOD ALWAYS TIES A STRING ON YOUR FINGER

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

Shane Markstrum, Deacon

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. —2 Timothy 1:6-7

I admit that I do not always find it easy to identify as a Christian in public. My aptitude for science and pursuit of a career in software has put me in the company of people skeptical of religious beliefs. I find it ever so tempting to just put my head down and pass through unnoticed. Sometimes I do exactly that.

But when you put your head down, you are likely to see your hands. And God has a funny way of always tying a string on your finger to remind you that He is there. It is a gentle call to remember, yet ever present.

At work, we have a Christian affinity group open to anyone. If you join the group, you get a virtual “badge” on your work profile page that identifies you as a member. For many years, I kept my head down and did not join. But then I started noticing others that I work with had the badge on their profile pages. There was God and his string telling me that I should profess my faith.

Today, I am a part of that affinity group, and I do have that badge on my profile page. I also have a “Search and You Shall Find” t-shirt that I wear frequently. God’s reminder to wear my faith publicly helps me to live out His will and construct a positive image of the Christian life for those around me. I hope that they might see in those acts the string God tied around their own fingers reminding them.

Heavenly Father, You are ever patient and ever welcoming. May You let our church and its members be Your faithful representation and reminder to the world of Your goodness and salvation. Amen.





IN NOTHING BE ANXIOUS

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

Timothy Dwight V, 1899

In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.

—*Philippians 4:6-7.*

The teaching of the New Testament is not, that we need not or should not be anxious for anything, because there is a destiny and fate which we cannot change—that we can only perform blindly the task which falls to us, there being no thought of us, or care for us, above ourselves. But it is, that we may make known our requests to a wiser Friend—laying before Him every pure thought, every plan and purpose and hope, every conception we have of what is best for the success of our working—that we have with Him the intercourse of a reverential fellowship;—but only that, in the appreciation and acknowledgement of His wisdom as far greater than our own, we commit the decision to Him.

And this is to be in everything, and with giving of thanks.

PHILECTA'S PRAYER

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

Paul Griggs, Elder

I have always found strength through the relationships and stories of others. My mother, Katherine (Kappie) Griggs, is 82 years old. She has had a profound impact on me at every stage—her stories and our conversations warm me up... they help me dream, they remind me of who we are and what we are meant to do and be...they remind me of the love we are called to pour out.

One of my mom's close friends moved to Uruguay with her daughter and her daughter's partner a few years ago. At the time, my mom talked about the impact





this friend, Philecta, had had on her, and how she'd miss her dearly and wondered if she'd have the chance to see her again. I felt her sadness, despite the excitement, love and wonder she had for her friend amidst this new adventure.

This week, my mom made the trip to Uruguay to see Philecta. These great friends are back together, eating, laughing, loving, enjoying the presence of each other amidst the beauty of this world. Seeing their smiling faces through pictures has reminded me of a prayer of Philecta's that my mother shared with me years ago. Philecta's prayer seems fitting during this season of taking stock and slowing down. I am sharing it here. God is with us at every step—supporting us, nurturing us, lifting us up. God is love. Amen.

Loving Heavenly Father, How fortunate we are to be your children—to know the assurance of your love at every moment of our lives—to know we are yours and no circumstances can take us out of your hands.

Because we know you do want only good for us, we can thank you for all the mountain top experiences from where we can see life so clearly; be a part of activity; work in your service. And, dear Lord, we can thank you for the valleys in our lives. But, we need your eyes to see the valleys properly. With our weak human eyes, we only feel surrounded by unapproachable mountains. We feel lonesome and a burden to those around us; a burden to ourselves; and, yes, even a burden to You, Lord. But, with your eyes, Father, we can see the valleys of our lives as you do and as you want us to see them. The valleys, where you have brought us to rest in your arms; to enjoy Your presence in a new way: in lush abundance impossible with the busy life on the mountain top.

Lord, let me see my life in the valley for the beautiful place it is. Help me to relate my spiritual valley to the physical valleys I know. For it is there where the colorful flowers bloom and the waters freely flow bringing new green beauty to the land about it.

Thank you, Lord, for my spiritual valley. Help me to enjoy it daily by learning more of You as I am separated from the busy world, by praying for those busy on the mountain tops and by resting in your arms patiently for your direction. I ask for your strength to be worthy of this new responsibility in my life. I pray in the name of Jesus, my Savior and Lord. Amen





THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

Reinhold Niebuhr

We must not deny that there is a kind of religion that enhances the ego and gives it an undue place in the world. But from the standpoint of our faith we should take our humble and contrite place in God's plan of the whole, and leave it to him to complete the fragmentation of our life.

O God, who has promised that all things will work together for good to those that love you, grant us patience amidst the tumults, pains and afflictions of life, and faith to discern your love, within, above, and beyond the impartial destinies of this great drama of life. Save us from every vainglorious pretension by which we demand favors which violate your love for all your children, and grant us grace to appropriate every fortune, both good and evil, for the triumph of the suffering, crucified, and risen Lord in our souls and life. In whose name we ask it.

.....
MONDAY, MARCH 11

LETTING YOURSELF BE KNOWN

But you come from below, Jesus.
Bleary eyes in a manger.
A steady gaze as you walk among us.
Or stare straight from the cross.
You look at me with nothing more,
nothing less, than with the love that first
interrupted my life with your existence.

Kate Bowler
from *Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day!*
Daily Meditations for the Ups, Downs & In-Betweens





I AM NOT ALONE. NEITHER ARE YOU.

TUESDAY, MARCH 12

Mae Cheng-PaVon, Elder

Among my very first memories of walking on spiritual ground is the ingrained image of my grandmother pouring over her large-print Chinese-language Bible every morning, reading aloud every word that her finger guided her across. A woman who had to teach herself to read and who came to Jesus late in life, it was clear, even to a young child who could not comprehend the meaning of the words coming out of her mouth, that my grandmother was trying to grasp every word she uttered as if her life depended on it.

My grandmother likely did not connect every day to the passage she read, but she nevertheless recognized the importance of making herself available daily to listen to what God had to tell her. It was a good way to fortify herself for what the day had to bring.

It's now a no-brainer for me to start the day the same way as my grandmother, and to emulate her daily ritual after having witnessed her discipline in choosing to start the day with God in mind. In all honesty, the words don't seep into my heart every morning. Some days it's just to check the box. But in the mornings when I'm in need of counsel, seeking strength for a challenging day ahead or simply looking for peace, I quickly recognize that I don't have to go far to find just what I need. If anything, it's a reminder that God is always with me, that I am not alone. Neither are you.

Heavenly Father, give us the faith to receive your word every day. May the words meet us where our need is greatest and empower us to live each day sharing your grace with others.





ON THE INCARNATION

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

St. Athanasius

Now if by the sign of the cross, and by faith in Christ, death is trampled down, it must be evident before the tribunal of truth that it is none other than Christ himself that has displayed trophies and triumphs over death, and made him lose all his strength. And if, while previously death was strong, and for that reason terrible, now after the sojourn of the Saviour and the death and resurrection of the of his body it is despised, it must be evident that death has been brought to nought and conquered by the very Christ that ascended the cross. For as, if after nighttime the sun rises, and the whole region of earth is illumined by him, it is at any rate not open to doubt that it is the sun who has revealed his light everywhere, that has also driven away the dark and given light to all things.





IT STARTED WITH A SMILE

THURSDAY, MARCH 14

John Wyatt, Elder

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” —Matthew 18:20

I was raised in the Presbyterian faith. By Midwestern standards (as defined by my parents) this required going to Sunday school, attending Vacation Bible School, singing in the choir, and sitting silently through services every Sunday.

When I made The Big Move to New York City in 1981, finding a church was not at the top of my To Do list. I was too busy auditioning, performing, and working brunch every Sunday at an Upper West Side restaurant. God, however, had other plans.

In 1986 a Christmas Eve service drew me to Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. Four years later I finally made the decision to join the church. Back then, a special Coffee Hour was held for new members. When I arrived at the entrance to Bonnell Hall I was met by a sizeable reception line of church members waiting to welcome me into the congregation. I moved swiftly down the line shaking hands (and quickly forgetting names) until I came to...Ena Malone. Ena was one of the coordinators for the EETS program (aka Eastside Elderly Tenant Service—later renamed Meals on Heels). She described the purpose of the program and invited me to volunteer. As she did so, a warm, welcoming smile lit up her face. I was hooked!

That single moment marked my path forward. Now, over thirty years later, Meals on Heels remains at the heart of my church life. The people I've met have become my family. They've anchored my life with laughter, celebration, and fellowship.

Thank you, Ena. Your smile started me on God's path!

I am knowing there is one God. One Life, Truth, and Spirit. That life, truth, and spirit is part of me, now. I am knowing God radiates through me with His Thoughts, His Words, and His Smile. Amen.





ORTHODOXY

FRIDAY, MARCH 15

G.K. Chesterton

That a good man may have his back to the wall is no more than we knew already, but that God could have His back to the wall is a boast for all insurgents forever. Christianity is the only religion on earth that has felt that omnipotence made God incomplete. Christianity alone felt that God, to be wholly God, must have been a rebel as well as a king. Alone of all creeds, Christianity has added courage to the virtues of the Creator. For the only courage worth calling courage must necessarily mean that the soul passes a breaking point—and does not break. In this indeed I approach a matter more dark and awful than it is easy to discuss; and I apologize in advance if any of my phrases fall wrong or seem irreverent touching a matter which the greatest saints and thinkers have justly feared to approach. But in the terrific tale of the Passion there is a distinct emotional suggestion that the author of all things (in some unthinkable way) went not only through agony, but through doubt. It is written, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” No; but the Lord thy God may tempt Himself; and it seems as if this was what happened in Gethsemane.





CHURCH BELLS

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

Lynn Wishart, Deacon

Enter with the password: "Thank you!" Make yourselves at home, talking praise.

Thank him. Worship him. —Psalm 100:4 (The Message)

My delight in hearing church bells began when I was a toddler. The Methodist church in my small town had a bell in its belfry, and on Sunday a bell-ringer would pull on a rope 15 minutes prior to the worship service. My family worshipped at the Presbyterian church located a block farther down Main Street, yet that bell always beckoned me to worship. At some point during my early teen years, the manual bell ringing gave way to a set of mechanized chimes. The chimes rang out not only on Sunday but also twice daily to remind the entire community of the time of day and of the presence of God.

Decades later, during the stillness of the pandemic, the Episcopal church in my Manhattan neighborhood restarted using its long-silenced chimes. Each day as I listened carefully for those chimes, playing ever-so familiar melodies, I felt the embrace of God's comforting presence, and, once again, heard God's calling me to worship. My response was to offer a daily prayer of thanksgiving and of supplication.

Within the last year I visited Egypt and Morocco where I heard the repeated daily calls to prayer, and again I was reminded of the tolling bell of my childhood. I learned that only in Morocco do the Islamic communities always have on-site muezzins recite the adhān. In Egypt, mosques play recorded announcements. While not equivalents, both the Muslim call to prayer and the church bells announced the significance of faith in the everyday life of a community.

Whether with bells, chimes, criers, or through some other invitation, God calls us to worship and fellowship. We need to listen with our hearts—then respond to God's call with praise and prayer.

Lord, thank you for the bells that ring in our hearts welcoming us to worship. May we always find comfort in your choosing and calling us. May our response to your call echo your steadfast love for the world. Amen.





MONDAY, MARCH 18

UNTITLED

Thee, God, I come from, to thee go,
All day long I like fountain flow
From thy hand out, swayed about
Mote-like in thy mighty glow.

What I know of thee I bless,
As acknowledging thy stress
On my being and as seeing
Something of thy holiness.

Once I turned from thee and hid,
Bound on what thou hadst forbid;
Sow the wind I would; I sinned:
I repent of what I did.

Bad I am, but yet thy child.
Father, be thou reconciled,
Spare thou me, since I see
With thy might that thou art mild.

I have life before me still
And thy purpose to fulfill;
Yea a debt to pay thee yet:
Help me, sir, and so I will.

But thou bidst, and just thou art,
Me shew mercy from my heart
Towards my brother, every other
Man my mate and counterpart.

Gerard Manley Hopkins





MEDITATIONS ON THE PASSION

TUESDAY, MARCH 19

Richard Rolle, 14th century

Sweet Jesu, I thank you for all the steps and footprints which you made in this direction and that at the time of your passion, and, I implore you, send me the grace on all my paths and ways that they may be directed toward your honor and the salvation of my soul; and send me the grace to move to your service of my own will, and not to give up, whatever the discomfort or sacrifice; and make me feel disgust at the notion of moving toward any physical pleasure that is against your will, sweet Jesu.





AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

Alyce Andrews, Trustee

"Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?'" —Genesis 9:4

I struggled to come up with a topic for this year's devotional. Things feel out of control, the political rhetoric seems to be at all time high and in spite of the booming U.S. economy, there is so much suffering. And that is just in the United States. Imagine living in the Middle East, Ukraine or trying to get across a hostile border as your last hope to leave in peace.

One of the reasons I joined the church years ago was to get involved in outreach. It's a wonderful way to help others but it's a way to feed your own soul. And there are many other ways to do that, lectures, music, fellowship. Recently, I joined the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church—Temple Emanuel interfaith discussion group formed by Rev. Sarah A. Speed and Rabbi Sara Sapadin. The group meets monthly to discuss Bible passages and our interpretations of them. The last session focused on Genesis 9:4. A few days later, I heard the old Hollies' song, "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother" on the radio. I am sure the subtlety here is astounding you, but both these things made me think of something going on in my family. It's a story as old as the Old Testament. In spite of similar upbringings, there are times when someone in a family needs more help than others. Rather than feel resentful (and boy I do many times), I pray to be a kinder person and to realize I am blessed to be able to help.

Sometimes the people who need help are right in front of you, and sometimes you don't know why they need help, but they do. We are our brothers' keepers.

Lord, please open my eyes. Please let me see those around me that are in need of my compassion. Compel me to listen to them, to hear their needs. Give me the heart to be interested in their troubles and show me the ways I can help. Amen.





THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

Ernest Hemingway

The breeze was steady. It had backed a little further into the north-east and he knew that meant that it would not fall off. The old man looked ahead of him but he could see no sails nor could he see the hull nor the smoke of any ship. There were only the flying fish that went up from his bow sailing away to either side and the yellow patches of Gulf wee. He could not even see a bird.

He had sailed for two hours, resting in the stern and sometimes chewing a bit of the meat from the marlin, trying to rest and to be strong, when he saw the first of the two sharks.

“Ay,” he said aloud. There is no translation for this word and perhaps it is just a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands and into the wood.





IN RELATION TO JUDGING

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

Greg Dow, Elder

Jesus said: “Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

—Matthew 7:1-5

Children are truth-tellers. Over the years, my kids have often said to me “Dad, don’t be so judgey,” which always sets off a hearty round of protest from me. “But seriously,” I would say, “just look at that person’s tattoos,” or piercings, or hair, or outfit, or whatever had caught my disapproving attention. My three girls would respond by rolling their eyes and urging me to just let people be.

These days, I have in-depth conversations with my grown children and their friends about the way people express who they feel they are—mostly with me scratching my head and asking lots of questions. What I have come to learn is that although they do not attend church and don’t consider themselves at all religious, my children are far more accepting of others than I will probably ever be. They have modeled tolerance for me in a beautiful way, which is a lesson I continue to try and learn every day.

Merciful father, help me to be strict in judging myself, and lenient in judging others.





PIERS THE PLOUGHMAN

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

William Langland, c. 1377

Then on the Cross He overcame His enemies, and became a great conqueror. Death itself could not destroy Him or lay Him low, but He rose again, became a king and took hell by storm. Then He was called the Conqueror of the living and the dead, for He led forth Adam and Eve and numberless others who had lain for many long years in Lucifer's power, and gave them all the bliss of heaven.

And since He gave unsparingly to all His loyal liegemen—gave them places in paradise when they left this life—He may well be called a Conqueror, and that is the meaning of Christ.

But the reason for His coming to us in this way, with the Cross on which He suffered, is that the Cross may teach us a lesson. For we must learn to use it when we are tempted, to fight with it, and so prevent ourselves from falling into sin.





PALM SUNDAY

PALM SUNDAY, MARCH 24

Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston, Senior Pastor

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

'Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!' —Matthew 21:8-9

Everyone loves a parade. Well, most everyone. Living in New York, in the face of resulting traffic snarls and messed up commutes, it is possible to get parade fatigue. Although, I hope we will never tire of our most famous, homegrown procession—the ticker tape parade.

Moving along Broadway, through the “Canyon of Heroes,” from the Battery to City Hall, ticker tape parades shower marchers with confetti tossed from windows and the tops of buildings.

In August 1945, the ticker tape parade marking the end of World War II happened over two glorious days. The Department of Sanitation estimates that over 5,000 tons of shredded paper showered the city during that massive celebration.

The very first ticker tape parade was a spontaneous event. On October 28, 1886, President Grover Cleveland and dignitaries from France were marching down Fifth Avenue to Battery Park. From there, they would board boats and head into New York Harbor to dedicate the newly installed Statue of Liberty.

As these officials passed by the New York Stock Exchange, impish office workers opened their windows and began to unspool ticker tape—the thin strips of paper that recorded stock prices—onto the dignitaries below. The streamers cascaded and tumbled through the air before landing on the parade. People loved the snow-like effect.

Since that first celebration, New York City has toasted the famous, the courageous, the victorious and the beloved with 204 different ticker tape parades. Teddy Roosevelt—married in Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church's sanctuary—was





saluted with ticker tape. Albert Einstein, Harry Truman, and the astronauts from Apollo 11 were all showered with ticker tape. American pilot, Amelia Earhart, was twice honored with ticker tape. And yes, as painful as it is for a Mets fan to admit, the New York Yankees have been celebrated with ticker tape nine different times!

There is something wonderful about the roots of this tradition: people grabbing whatever they could find to create a snowstorm of spontaneous revelry. Maybe the best parades, the ones that truly sweep us up—to dance in the street and toss confetti from windows—are not carefully orchestrated.

Maybe the best parades are a lot like Palm Sunday.

Gracious God, instill in our hearts the desire to celebrate the right things this Palm Sunday. Unlock our hearts and free us to shout “Hosanna” to the One who entered Jerusalem with a gentle heart astride the humblest of steeds. Amen.

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MONDAY, MARCH 25

THE DREAM OF THE ROOD

Now I look day by day
for that time when the cross of the Lord,
which once I saw in a dream here on earth,
will fetch me away from this fleeting life
and lift me to the home of joy and happiness
where the people of God are seated at the feast
in eternal bliss, and set me down
where I may live in glory unending and share
the joy of the saints. May the Lord be a friend to me,
He who suffered once for the sins of men
here on earth on the gallows-tree.
He has redeemed us; He has given life to us,
and a home in heaven.

Unknown author, c. 8th century





WHY DID GOD DIE?

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

St. Gregory of Nyssa

What further objection do our opponents bring forward? In its extreme form this: that the transcendent nature ought never to have experienced death. Rather could He, with his excessive power, have easily accomplished this purpose without this. But even if, for some ineffable reason, this actually had to happen, he at least did not have to be humiliated by a shameful manner of death. For, they urge, what death could be more shameful than that on a cross?

What do we reply to this? That the birth makes the death necessary. He who had once decided to share our humanity had to experience all that belongs to our nature. Now human life is encompassed within two limits, and if he had passed through one and not touched the other, he would only have half fulfilled his purpose, having failed to reach the other limit proper to our nature.

But someone, perhaps, with an accurate grasp of our religion might more reasonably claim that the death did not occur because of the birth, but that, on the contrary, the birth was accepted by Him for the sake of the death. For he who eternally exists did not submit to being born in a body because *he* was in need of life. Rather was it to recall *us* from death to life. Our whole nature had to be brought back from death. In consequence he stooped down to our dead body and stretched out a hand, as it were, to one who was prostrate. He approached so near death as to come into contact with it, and by means of his own body to grant our nature the principle of the resurrection, by raising our total humanity along with him by his power.





DWELLING WITH DUTCH TRAPPISTS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

Junyoub Lee, Seminarian

O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart.

—Psalm 15:1-2

I felt desiccated this winter, after I submitted my last doctoral exam. So I traveled to the Netherlands, and checked myself into Koningshoeven Abbey renowned for their brewery and tranquility. These Trappist monks pray and labor in contemplation, and converse once a week. I had been on several retreats at a monastery next to my seminary that welcomed students with cozy rooms and hearty meals cooked by monks. I loved the silence and stillness of the sanctuary and the guesthouse, where I could bare my life before God.

Over the six daily services that began at 4 am and ended at 8 pm, however, my heart grew restless with Dutch words that I could not digest. Despite the monastery's exquisite architecture and evocative chanting, I could not meditate long without words to chew. With my Protestant instinct, I began devouring the English Bible that a monk gave me. I perused the Psalms, as most of the liturgy was reciting the Psalter.

Besides the psalms of praise and lament, I began noticing the psalms of confession. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean" of Psalm 51:7 became my mantra as I meandered the monastic gardens. I began to recount the ways I fell short of my hopes and God's love amidst the bustle of town and gown.

Six times daily, the Psalms embalmed and embraced me with God's promise. Just as John the Baptist said we must decrease so Christ may increase, God's words and deeds became more vivid as my words and deeds dimmed at the abbey. Under snow and stars, I savored our Sabbath.

Holy God, thank you for the monks and nuns who pray for us. May we also relish the freedom of your laws. Amen.





COMMANDMENT: FOOT WASH

MAUNDY THURSDAY, MARCH 28

Rev. Dr. Jonah So, Executive Pastor

So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.—John 13:14

In college, one of my goals was to give off the impression that I was a loving older brother who would protect, care for, and watch out for my little sister. To anyone willing to listen, I would boldly declare, “I would die for my sister!” I also believed this claim helped me to understand Christ’s love for me as I rationalized: my heart is in line with Jesus because just like he was willing to die for me, I would die for my sister.

At a retreat, to impress the guest preacher during a mealtime conversation centering on sacrifice, I blurted out that very phrase. The preacher smiled, nodded, and tilted her head ever so slightly and replied, “That’s beautiful. But would you live for her?” Without hesitation, my response was, “No way.”

I imagine Peter felt similarly when his best friend, the miracle maker, the powerful preacher, knelt before his students to wash their feet. Peter, who would declare later in the chapter, “I will lay down my life for you (v. 37),” was ready to go down with Jesus in a blaze of glory. Peter objected, “You will never wash my feet (v. 8).” I would argue that the objection was part self-serving because Peter did not want to serve others. But that is exactly what Jesus had in mind. The rabbi took a humble posture of servitude and expressed the expectation that his students do the same. Jesus set an example for Peter and the others on how they should *live*, he did not place any emphasis on how they should *die*.

In the musical, the sage George Washington said to the hot-headed Alexander Hamilton, “Dying is easy, young man. Living is harder.” Maundy Thursday captures this paradox. Jesus gave us a new commandment (the root meaning





for Maundy): “Love one another” and demonstrated how, by washing the feet (the Christian definition of Maundy) of others. This is how we are to live. Jesus would take care of the “dying” part on Friday.

Humble Christ, we crave the glory, we honor the idea of martyrdom, but we want it to be easy and quick. You died for us so that we could live for you. Help us to obey your command so others will know your love. Amen.

GRIEVING HEARTS

GOOD FRIDAY, MARCH 29

Rev. Werner Ramirez, Associate Pastor

“Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, ‘Certainly this man was innocent.’ And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts.” —Luke 23:46-49

This devotional might be uncomfortable to read for some of you. That’s ok. I invite you to read with curiosity and ask questions. The cross brings up an awareness and similarities that people of color in the United States have often felt.

This past winter, I read Dr. James H. Cone’s *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Within his words, I read a sacred tapestry of the crucifixion, the cross, and the lynching tree as they weave together, unveiling a powerful narrative of faith, justice, and racial prejudice. Cone’s profound words echo in the chambers of my heart, reminding us that “The cross and the lynching tree interpret each other.” These symbols, etched in history, challenge us to a deeper understanding of the redemptive story we are called to live.

As we contemplate the crucifixion as a first-century lynching, we stand at the crossroads of discomfort and revelation. The crowd’s cry, “Crucify him!” resonates through time, intertwining with the haunting echoes of a mob’s cry to the likes of Emmett Till, “Lynch him!” Both cries echo the cruel, agonizing, and contemptible deaths reserved for society’s despised.





Let's pause to wonder about the centurion's revelation, a profound acknowledgment of Jesus's innocence. As we reflect, what parallels might we draw between this centurion's insight and people of the "lynching era"? Does it spark ideas about the irony embedded in historical actions? We often see something wrong in this world, but what do we do about it? Do we stay quiet? Do we simply post Facebook status? Are we called to do something more profound that challenges structures and, at the same time, uplifts human dignity?

Both the cross and the lynching tree leave us with much to grieve, yet we know that the story does not end with Good Friday. Resurrection is coming. As resurrected people called to pursue racial justice, we must confront uncomfortable truths and dismantle structures perpetuating discrimination. Jesus, dying on the tree of shame, calls us to recognize the echoes of injustice and respond with a transformative love that heals wounds and restores dignity. The gospel invites us to be active agents in dismantling systems that devalue and oppress based on skin color.

On this Good Friday, we mourn the passing of Jesus the Christ and mourn the sorrowful impact of racism, acknowledging the lives lost and the hurt it has put on people.

Merciful God, open our hearts to the discomfort of history and the echoes of injustice. Resurrect within us the passion to pursue racial justice, dismantling structures that perpetuate discrimination. May the cross and the lynching tree be our guideposts, leading us to embody the radical love exemplified by Jesus. As we journey towards justice, may we honor the innocence in every one of your children. Amen





OUR DARKEST DAYS OF WAITING

HOLY SATURDAY, MARCH 30

Rev. Natalie Owens-Pike, Director of Ministry to the Online Campus

“Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.” —Luke 23:50-56

On Holy Saturday, we are reminded to not rush past our waiting. Joseph, the man who asked for the body of Jesus to give him a proper burial, *waited expectantly for the kingdom of God*. The women from Galilee followed him to the tomb, and prepared what was needed to honor Jesus in his burial. These gestures of love, of preparation, were done without knowing what was to come. Jacob couldn't know when or how to expect the kingdom of God. The women from Galilee did not know their Lord would rise from the very tomb they laid him in. That day had not yet dawned. On Holy Saturday, we must rest in the time of darkness before the stone is rolled away. So, too, may we be encouraged on our darkest days of waiting, when we struggle to anticipate the dawn.

Holy One, be with us in the darkness of this holy day. Give us the faith of Jacob and the company of the women of Galilee, even while the tomb is still closed. Help us to rest in the waiting of our lives, even when we don't know when the Easter dawn will rise.



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Mae Cheng-PaVon **Elder**

Greg Dow **Deacon**

Paul Griggs **Elder**

Sam Griggs **Youth Elder**

Bob Henn **Trustee**

Glenn Hubbard **Trustee**

Lydia Kalmen-Tran **Deacon**

Claire Kedeshian **Elder**

John Kern **Elder**

Shane Markstrum **Deacon**

Lynn Wishart **Deacon**

John Wyatt **Elder**

Staff

Christine Boyle **Director of Outreach & Missions**

Shannon Duke **Seminarian**

Kate Dunn **Parish Visitor**

Ashley Gonzalez-Grissom **Director of Engagement**

Junyoub Lee **Seminarian**

Jaime Staehle **Director of Christian Education**

Cover Art: Dustin Parent, Jesus of Nazareth, 2014.

Discover more art from Dustin Parent on Instagram @theartofdustin or at Saatchi Art saatchiart.com



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An abstract painting of a human face, rendered with thick, expressive brushstrokes. The colors are vibrant and varied, including shades of blue, yellow, red, and pink. The eye is a prominent feature, looking directly forward. The overall style is reminiscent of modernist or expressionist art.

FOR THE MOMENT ALL DISCIPLINE
SEEMS PAINFUL
RATHER THAN
PLEASANT

LATER IT YIELDS THE PEACEFUL FRUIT OF
RIGHTEOUSNESS
TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN
TRAINED BY IT.

—HEBREWS 12:11