

A Lenten JOURNEY

2022



A COLLECTION OF DEVOTIONS
VOLUME XXV

Preface

A long and wonderful tradition at Westminster Canterbury Richmond is to offer “The Lenten Journey” to our community. Each person’s journey is sacred, and we give a special word of thanks to all who shared of themselves in offering their reflection for this, our 25th edition.

The season of Lent is a period of sustained focus on the journey of Jesus Christ toward the cross. The mood of Lent is usually more subdued, a time for sober reflection on the cost Jesus paid for setting us free from our sins. Like the season of Advent, Lent points beyond itself, this time to the joys of Easter, where we celebrate the fact that the darkness of sin and death gave way once and for all to the glorious life of Jesus raised from the dead.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, when we gather to receive a cross of ash on our foreheads. Sounds a little odd, right? It’s an old tradition, one that reminds us of our frail mortal nature (“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return.”). It is also a symbol of our sorrow for the sins that we have committed. Thus begins a period of around forty days of repentance and self-examination where many of us will undertake various forms of fasting and self-denial as spiritual disciplines, aiming to take the next step with Jesus in breaking the power of sin in our lives.

It is our hope that “The Lenten Journey” will walk with you on your journey toward the cross. Know that the prayers of this beloved community are with you.

— Rev. Dr. Lynn McClintock
DIRECTOR PASTORAL CARE

Introduction

SELF-REFLECTION

Self-reflection does not happen automatically, by going to church or calling oneself a person of faith. The logistical demands of the day beckon our attention, whether it be a doctor's appointment, a long line at the CVS, or the birthday present we need to obtain by Friday. Cultural distractions also summon us, from social media to the latest political showdown to playing Wordle (which I love!) on our computers.

Yet the season of Lent reminds us of our capacity for self-reflection, our mortality, and the mystery that lies at the heart of our faith. The author of Ecclesiastes declares that God has placed "a sense of the eternal" into human hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11), meaning that we have a desire to know what transcends the daily routine of our lives. Lent invites and arguably requires us to slow down, minimize the clutter, and think about the larger questions of who God is, who we are, and what we plan to do with our few days on earth.

The book of Psalms provides a vocabulary for this type of reflection. From the outset, Psalm 1 encourages believers to "delight" in God's instruction and "meditate day and night" on it. Through study, prayer, and contemplation, we invite God's presence more deeply into our lives. We also leave room to understand more clearly the lonely and life-giving sacrifice of Jesus Christ, whose self-reflection and denial in the wilderness can serve us a model for us, however imperfectly we follow it.

So if we can leave space for Wordle in our daily routine, we can also meditate with fear and wonder on all that God has provided and all that we do not yet understand. I hope you will use these excellent reflections as a helpful template in your journey.

— Rev. Dr. Samuel L. Adams

MARY JANE AND JOHN F. MCNAIR CHAIR OF BIBLICAL STUDIES
AND PROFESSOR OF OLD TESTAMENT
UNION PRESBYTERIAN SEMINARY

OUR SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

*“O God beyond all praising we worship you today
and sing the love amazing that songs cannot repay;
for we can only wonder at every gift you send,
at blessings without number and mercies without end;
we lift our hearts before you and wait upon your word,
we honor and adore you, our great and mighty Lord.*

*Then hear, O gracious Savior, accept the love we bring,
that we who know your favor may serve you as we sing;
and whether our tomorrows be filled with good or ill,
we'll triumph through our sorrows and rise to bless you still;
to marvel at your beauty and glory in your ways,
and make a joyful duty our sacrifice of praise.”*

These are the lyrics to my favorite hymn written by Michael Perry and sung to the tune Thaxted by Gustav Holst. The beauty and truth of the lyrics combined with the majesty of the music lift my heart and soul in praise of God. This hymn helps me to celebrate the ways I see God's beauty and wonder in life, giving voice to feelings of love and joy that seem beyond words. But it also comforts me in difficult seasons, reminding me of God's constant and persistent presence in my life. It allows me to look away for just a moment from whatever I am experiencing and fix my eyes on the One who not only loves me but loves all of creation and can see the whole arc of time. It lets me look away from my individual experience and focus on the One who holds all things. God is truly beyond all praise, but may we continue to lift our hearts and voices in wonder and love, offering our own sacrifice of praise.

— Jenny te Velde, PASTORAL CARE

APPRECIATE YOUR BLESSINGS

The beauty of a sunrise isn't in the brightness of the light. It's in the way it lights up the world for us to see all that we have been given to see and appreciate.

The beauty of a song isn't in the instrument that produces it. It's the way the notes find our souls and lifts us up in joy.

Our lives are not meant to be linear. Yes, we all are born, we exist and then we die. But our lives are meant to reflect the discovery of all the gifts we are given by God. We are meant to cherish each day, knowing that every minute is a gift to be unwrapped, layer by layer.

It could be very easy to see life as a daily grind, something to get through. We're rarely ever where we want to be, doing what we want to do. But if we can find a way to look for the blessings, they're there.

Make the most of each day by finding joy in even the smallest of gestures, like a smile or the surprise of hearing from an old friend you thought you'd lost to time. Or finding something precious you thought you lost.

Give yourself the freedom to slow down. In rushing to the finish, we can't help but miss out on things like moments of beauty and joy we can never relive. Choose to carry less. It's really hard to wrap your arms around someone when they are full, of either burdens or spoils.

God walks beside each and every one of us, have meaningful conversations along the way. Let yourself accept his wisdom and experience his love.

— Kim Novelli, SALES

Friday after Ash Wednesday

EZEKIEL 18:1-4, 25-33

PSALM 95

JOHN 17:9-19

WHAT CAN I DO?

I pray for you
And my prayer seeps
Into the world;
A healing sound,
Touching all in need.

One prayer
For one person
Reverberates
Each word translates
Into other sounds.
One prayer,
But only one required.

You are a basin,
I am a pitcher,
The water is God.
— Marty Glenn Taylor, RESIDENT

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

EZEKIEL 39:21-29

PSALM 30

JOHN 17:20-26

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

Matthew 6:5

My mother often shared stories with us about her memorable experiences during the depression years. My mom and dad were living with four children in a very rural area in New Jersey. My dad, as a carpenter, found work in the Kearny shipyards. One day, he brought home a young man and his wife who had no place to live. He thought the wife could help my mom with the children. That made eight mouths to feed! Food supplies were slim to begin with, and one day there just wasn't enough in the pantry to even make a simple meal.

My mom loved the Lord and always believed in prayer. We said grace at every meal and kneeled together every night around our parents' bed to say prayers.

Not having enough food was a major concern for her. She prayed about it but also didn't want us to be concerned. She had a few apples and had picked some new shoots of dandelion leaves to make a salad. That would have to do.

Later that afternoon, she heard something at the front door. When she opened the door, there was no one there. There was only an over-flowing grocery bag! There was bread, potatoes, vegetables and cans of meat and soup!

Our grace and prayers were extra long that night, with overwhelming gratitude for these gifts of physical and spiritual sustenance!

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the 'Bread of Life.' He who comes to me shall not hunger and he who believes in me shall not thirst" (John 6:35).

— Pat Kawana, RESIDENT AND FORMER STAFF MEMBER

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

I was in college during the “summer of love.” It was during the Vietnam War, but my generation was going to change the world for sure. We chanted “make love not war” and “love is the answer.” Now I wonder what happened to us? Where did our seemingly naïve optimism go? The world today seems to be filled with more hatred than love. How did we get here and how do we get out?

The Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Michael Curry, says that the way out and the way forward is LOVE. He says the opposite of love is not simply hate but, “unenlightened self interest.” He quotes Jesus, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another” (John 13:34). Again Jesus says, “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

So who is my neighbor?

Is my neighbor just the one who lives in my same block and looks like me? Is my neighbor someone who has my same beliefs and is of the same denomination as me? What would it look like if we worked to love the other? Not based on self-interest but on self-giving? This is what Jesus commanded us to do – “Love one another as I have loved you.” Gender, race, ethnicity, class do not matter. As Bishop Curry says, “Love is not about being nice – and it is not naïve. Love for the other will save us, our country, our world, and it will save us all. LOVE is the way.”

— Sam Fuller, RESIDENT

COME AND FIND A QUIET CENTER

*“Come and find a quiet center in the crowded life we lead.
Find the room for life to enter, find the frame where we are freed.
Clear the chaos and the clutter; clear our eyes that we can see
all the things that really matter, be at peace and simply be.”*

- Shirley Serena Murray

This hymn has been one of my favorites since I first heard it. Singing these words to the simple tune, I feel the tension melting and a sense of calm and peace begin to grow in my soul.

During this Lent, I will use this blessing in song to draw me to a time of reflection and penitence. I will find a quiet place to visit each day. I will sing this hymn and focus on giving up the busy lifestyle and truly live each experience of the day. I will strive to let go of grudges and all the negative emotions that can clutter my world.

In this “quiet center,” I will strive to let go of the trivia of my life. I will pray to “...see all the things that really matter, be at peace and simply be.”

— Wilda Ferguson, RESIDENT AND FORMER STAFF MEMBER

A CULTURE OF CARING

At the time I came to live at Westminster Canterbury, I knew it was a very nice place to reside, having visited here with old friends. It was a pleasure also to meet new folks, and with them, attend various events and participate in some activities. I was touched as I realized what a special place this was. I saw residents offer all sorts of help to friends and neighbors with a need.

They step up to pick up meals and mail. They visit and are available if someone is lonely. Residents are congenial and share information. They accompany one another to services in the chapel and sanctuary, as well as to hear speakers and enjoy entertainment together.

Strangers become friends as they gather to make lovely crafts to benefit the Foundation. There are a number who regularly visit with those who are unable to get out much. A number of residents assist with projects outside of WCR, such as working on constructing ramps for the disabled. It all creates an atmosphere of caring and helpfulness. We are greatly blessed to live like this. This interest in others extends to our wonderful employees who are so kind with a lot of willingness to help.

So too do our kind helpers at the front desks who do everything for us from answering the phone to answering a million questions, always happily and with a smile.

We are grateful to the Pastoral Care ministers and chaplains who arrange daily services and prayer times. They also conduct memorial services and services for special times. Residents also help with seating and programs.

Outside, we see the results of the landscape staff who take care of our lovely grounds.

We thank the Lord for the many blessings we share. He has been generous to give us this culture of caring and helpfulness.

— Connie Felvey, RESIDENT

MY CREATIVE ARTISTIC SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

When I was invited to write, “My life’s spiritual journey,” I had to change it to “My creative / artistic / spiritual journey,” for this is what has happened to me along the way! It has all happened because of the fine adults who came along in my life.

My parents took my sister and me to our small Episcopal church in Mathews, Virginia, every Sunday! A new priest formed a youth choir, my first participation in church. This priest had a son who went to Roslyn the summer he was 13. His telling me about it had me on my way the next year to the youth camp!

I was asked later to be a counselor. After a couple of years there, we were sent instead to Shrine Mont, in Orkney Springs, Virginia. As a counselor there, I was asked by the bishop to lead the kids’ newly created art camp. As parents came to pick up their budding artists, they saw the art show of their kids’ work. Parents loved it and said, “This looks like so much fun, why can’t we have an art camp?” The next summer, I developed the camp for them and did it several years more on that Holy Hill!

In the midst of all this, my father died, and I went to William and Mary summer school, where I met my husband-to-be. He was a great listener and empathizer. He was so good at this I told him he reminded me of the ministers I had known at Shrine Mont and Roslyn and I thought he would make a great minister! SO... I ended up a minister’s wife for almost 30 years.

We moved my mother in with us for her end of life caretaking. My marriage ended, and mother died. After a number of years, I began to give back the gift of art to others, which had been my life saver! I was chosen president of my artist association, MRAA, and, with this great group, I founded the Uptown Gallery.

A great joy has been to watch my children develop their own love of the arts. Now in my mid-80’s, I still pass on my love of art to residents at Westminster Canterbury! I have greatly enjoyed sharing my spirit of creativity to those who are now in my world!

— Emma Lou Marchant Martin, RESIDENT

THE WORK OF GOD'S FINGERS

*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them? (Psalm 8:3-4)*

Take the outboard off. We're going to row tonight. We don't want oil on the water.

Seems like we could see the stars from your house.

Not the way you'll see them tonight. Guide me toward the center of the bay.

I didn't know it could get this calm out here.

OK, now pull the oars out and put them under the seats.

What's that got to do with looking up at stars?

Sit as still as you can. Let the ripples from the boat die down.

Don't shift about; sit very still.

The stars look much as they do from your yard. Distinct in this darkness. Bright.

Don't look up. Look down. What do you see?

A calm sea, like I expected, since there's no wind.

Don't look at the surface, look beneath the surface.

Wow! There is a whole sky of stars under us as well! I can't believe it.

Don't rock the boat. We need that mirror surface.

The stars are reflected so that they seem as deep under us as they are high above us.

You're sitting in a boat at the center of the universe surrounded by stars.

If I fell out of the boat it feels as if I'd float off into space. This is beautiful and scary, too.

This is where I come to remember I live in a universe.

I've never felt so much a part of it, or so insignificant. How often do you come out here?

When there's no moon, no wind, no waves and I'm still enough to see to God's creativity.

— Harlan McMurray, RESIDENT

OUR GIFT FROM THE SIXTH CENTURY

Several years ago, when I was visiting the Rev. Ray Inscoc, Director of Pastoral Care in his Westminster Canterbury office, he gave me an illustrated card imprinted with a prayer of St. Columba. The prayer on that small card is brief. I love it; it speaks to my days, my thoughts, my Life Journey. I believe it perfect for our Lenten Journey.

But the author of this prayer, St. Columba, was unknown to me. Who, I asked Ray Inscoc, was St. Columba? His answer set me on another journey to learn about this man who lived, learned, taught, and traveled far, nearly fifteen hundred years ago, from his native Ireland to other Celtic worlds of Scotland and Northern England. Columba's purpose in his journeys was to bring Christianity to peoples of the highlands and islands. A tireless missionary, he founded churches and monasteries everywhere he went and left his Celtic mark on the Christianity he brought.

Columba was a learned man and faith-full, who transcribed many books. He wrote hymns, poems and other prayers. Today, Columba is remembered, revered and honored by his name on churches, schools, universities, organizations. Certainly, the most widely known is the Island of Iona of Scotland's Inner Hebrides for which Columba first sailed about 563 A.D. The monastery founded there, we learn, is where Scottish Christianity was born. Seeking pilgrims from around the world visit Columba's Iona every year. Because his spirit lives there on windswept Iona, I think of his praying this special prayer:

My dearest Lord,
be thou a bright flame before me;
be thou a guiding star above me;
be thou a smooth path beneath me;
be thou a kindly shepherd behind me,
today and forever more.

Amen

— Lucy Boswell Negus, RESIDENT AND RETIRED STAFF MEMBER

Saturday First Week of Lent

GENESIS 41:1-13

PSALM 55

MARK 2:23-3:6

AN INVITATION

The mood of Lent can be somber. We are told to deny ourselves during these forty days; to pray and to fast. But I see this season of the church year as an invitation. In Mary Oliver's poem, "More Beautiful than the Honey Locust Tree Are the Words of the Lord," she speaks of desiring to be close to Christ and praying to him that she could be "something useful and unpretentious."

So this year, I ask not what I should give up for Lent but what I can be to others. During these months of COVID-19 I learned that community is a living entity. Even when we could not be together there was a sense of oneness. Staff, residents and family focused on the well-being of all. Prayers were offered up for strength, perseverance, hope and healing. Helping others seemed to lead many of the employees to go way beyond what would normally be expected of them. They set a beautiful example.

As we follow Christ's journey to Easter, I feel pulled to be there for others. With each new day I am given, there is that invitation; to offer a shoulder to lean on for comfort, a voice for the weak, a presence for the lonely. The gift of another day is the chance for me to bring joy into someone's life in this community we live in. Christ's life is a reminder to us all to serve one another in love. Don't throw this invitation away. We can all be something "useful and unpretentious" to others.

— Kay Remick, RESIDENT

Second Sunday in Lent

GENESIS 41:14-45

PSALM 24

JOHN 5:19-24

WALK IN THE LIGHT

As I walked through my dark house the other night trying to not wake my family by turning on any lights, I caught the little toe of my foot on the leg of a chair. It is amazing how much pain such a little toe can produce! If I had just turned the light on, I would have been saved much agony and unneeded pain. As I reflect on my simple experience, I was reminded of the times I have walked in spiritual darkness failing to remember that God's light in Christ is always available to lead me. As a result, I have had some unnecessary bumps and bruises along life's way.

Today, March 13, 2022, is the beginning of Daylight Savings Time. I always look forward to days filled with longer periods of daylight and warmth! Light is good for the body and the soul! As we continue our Lenten journey may we be reminded that it is a journey from darkness to light, from sin to forgiveness, from death to life. We are not meant to walk in darkness, may we instead walk in "the light of the world" each and every day.

"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 New International Version)

— Jennifer Turner, PASTORAL CARE

Monday Second Week of Lent

GENESIS 41:46-57

PSALM 56

MARK 3:7-19A

RELAX?

I agreed to submit a devotion for this upcoming *Lenten Journey* [RELAX] two months ago. It seemed reasonable that I could do this. I've done it before and it wasn't a long, painful exercise, nor did it seem so at the time.

[RELAX]

Now, reminder also states I am to write it and send to Pastoral Care office in two weeks. I can certainly do that can't I? I have sat here in my chair wracking my brain – [RELAX] What to write about. What do I need to share with others? Do I have ANY wisdom that others would enjoy reading and thinking about?

Pause – next day –

Here is my Pearl.

God is not so complicated as one sometimes tries to make it appear. He would be happy if we would try to [RELAX] – be around positive people, ask for direction in our lives – don't tell God everything – sometimes just listen to his gentle, still, small voice. There is comfort in asking God to forgive me – a relief of pain and tension. Don't make your life so hard! RELAX!

– Pat Culp, RESIDENT

HE (JESUS) SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES,
“WHY ARE YOU SO AFRAID?”

Mark 4:40

Why are we so afraid? We live in a time of division; racial division, political factions, the turmoil of the world. What can we do? We can pray.

To quote Henri Nouwen: “Praying is no easy matter. You allow someone other than yourself to enter into the very center of your space.”

Nouwen asks us to remember what the angels said to Zachariah, to Mary, to the shepherds and the women at the tomb. Be not afraid. Don’t be afraid of the one who wants to enter your most intimate space and invites you to let go of what you are clinging to so anxiously. Sometimes we close our minds as we do our fists, and clinch them shut. What if we unclinch them and begin a journey of trust. We pray with a new freedom. We pray with a spontaneous reaction to the world in which we live. In prayer, we encounter God – whether it is in a time of loneliness, the death of a loved one, or enjoying a lovely sunset or a beautiful piece of music. We can pray with a feeling of trust and love.

The following prayer is from Henri Nouwen’s book, “With Open Hands.”

“Dear God, I am so afraid to open my clinched fists! Who will I be when I have nothing left to hold onto? Who will I be when I stand before you with empty hands? Please help me to gradually open my hands and to discover that I am not what I own, but what you give to me. What you want to give me is love – unconditional, everlasting love.”

As I try to keep my hands open, I trust that you will put your hands in mine and bring me home. Thank you God, for your love. Amen

– Sally Maynard, RESIDENT

THE MASTER CARPENTER

Choosing a career in architecture was natural for this daughter of a builder. As an architectural historian, I studied hundreds of plans conceived by builders and architects of the 17th through the 20th centuries. The results of this research guided the restoration of old buildings deemed worthy of rescue. A favorite part of the job was working with master craftspeople such as carpenters, masons, decorative painters and stained glass artisans. These professionals saw the potential in a building and transformed it to the designer's original plan.

Holy Scripture holds numerous verses on architecture. I am drawn particularly to those relating to Christ. In Mark we learn that Jesus was a carpenter for most of his life (Mark 6:1-6); He did all things well (Mark 7:37). His parable of the wise and foolish builders instructs us to forge our lives on the strong foundation of his words (Matthew 7:24-25). Jesus said: "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). He was crucified on a wooden cross with carpenter's tools, a hammer and nails (1 Peter 2:24). Though rejected, Christ is now the cornerstone (Psalm 118:22-23; Matthew 21: 42; Acts 4:11).

I like to imagine Jesus's earthly persona as similar to that of my father and former colleagues, who were highly skilled, methodical, precise, consistent, energetic, patient and humble. Moreover, they delighted in fixing anything that was broken.

Sometimes we are broken. There is a friend who longs to mend that which was whole but at some point became worn and shattered. Jesus specializes in repairing the tired and unusable remnants of our beings and bonding them together to fit his plan for our lives. During Lent, may we seek the restorative power of the master carpenter and at Easter celebrate our newness in him.

— Susie Frazer, RESIDENT

HOME

It would be difficult to find in the English language a word richer in meaning than the word, “home.” Etymologically it means a dwelling place, a place of rest, a house, a region, a city, a country. Just think of all the expressions we use with the word home: “home, sweet home,” “home is where the heart is,” “hometown,” “homesick,” and “homeless.”

In fact the word, “home,” because of its multiple meanings is practically impossible to translate into another language. We just have to find something close. This word also carries entirely different meanings during the various stages of our lives. And we know that every human being needs a home and either finds it or continually searches for it.

In the Old Testament, we also find numerous references to the word, “home.” For instance, in the very familiar 23rd Psalm, we read this verse: “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.” And in John: “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” You may ask, “What has this got to do with the Lenten season and with me?” During Lent we are reminded of the suffering and agony of a homeless man. Then we hear that Jesus, in his last days, told his disciples that he was going home, his Father’s home.

What about us? Where and when do we find our terrestrial home and our everlasting home? Most of us will say that our terrestrial home is the place where we live with our family. For some, with a sense of loss or confusion, it is the memory of that home and the reality of their living now in their last home.

The answer to this question came to me once. On Maundy Thursday, at the end of the service, our pastor called us to the communion table to share the bread and wine. He then said these powerful words: “Come, this is your home!” These simple words have resonated throughout my life, through sharing communion in different parts of the world with different people, and have taught me the true sense of the word “home.”

Just think, we shall never be homeless.

— Christiane Rimbault, RESIDENT

OUR RESPONSIBILITY
TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

“Those who are older should speak, for wisdom comes with age.” (Job 12:12)

“The glory of the young is their strength; the gray hair of experience is the splendor of the old.” (Proverbs 20:29)

It is the responsibility of our older generations to contribute to future generations all that we have experienced and, hopefully, have learned. We should encourage those future generations to set more positive and peaceful standards by which to live and aim for those higher goals.

If we live one hundred years, it will not be enough time to do all that is needed to make humankind understand what their role should be in this wonderful world. There is still so much to be done. We should never use age as an excuse to stop being involved and doing nothing. “Nothing will come of nothing.” (William Shakespeare, King Lear)

— Dolores Berry, RESIDENT

Saturday Second Week of Lent

GENESIS 43:16-34

PSALM 75

MARK 5:1-20

LORD, I DIDN'T KNOW WHO YOU WERE

In the Gospel of Luke 22:56-62, Jesus is taken into the High Priest's house and later "followed afar off."

When I read, "and the Lord turned and looked at Peter," my heart froze. Never before had I internalized that phrase. It continued, "then Peter remembered ... and he went out and wept bitterly."

In October 2021, I had a chance to act as Christ to my fellow grocery shoppers.

Scenario One: Only one checkout line open. I approach with frozen foods in my cart finding many in line. Waiting less than a frantic minute, I noticed a young man with two items catching the eye of a staff member who motioned him to a new register. He moved over; I swiftly followed with a quick glance at the former aisle. No sounds!

Scenario Two: Swiftly moving cart to car, purchaser feels increasing dis-ease at decision. Car rolls away – frozen food and cash safe!

I recognized myself as a miserable hypocrite, making my priority myself. I was a denier of Jesus's instruction that we love our neighbors as ourselves. Those watching had no thought of seeing a "Christian" follower of the way.

Scenario Three: Maundy Thursday, Jesus kneels and washes the soiled, dusty feet of his disciples. The next day he was arrested.

Understanding solace is offered by hymnist Isaac Watts (1674-1748): "*Were the whole world of nature mine, that were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all.*" (1982 Episcopal Hymnal, #474)

It is never too late!

– Glenna Bailey, RESIDENT

Third Sunday in Lent

GENESIS 44:1-17

PSALM 93

JOHN 5:25-29

THE WISDOM OF CHILDREN

I often learn as much from preschoolers as I do from theologians. A teacher took her class of four year-olds to the library to read a book. Two little girls rushed to get the one “Pinkalicious” book. One got there first, and the other was so upset that she started to cry. Upon seeing her classmate’s tears, the first little girl offered to share the book. The tears dried, and the book was happily shared. At the end of the class period, the tearful little girl touched her classmate’s arm and gratefully said, “God bless you!” During this Lenten season, what difference would it make in the lives of others who help us if we are more aware of their situations and not only say “thank you,” but ask God to bless them for their kindness? I think I will try to do so without feeling awkward. Will you?

— Jan Orgain, RESIDENT

WHEN FAITH IS DEEPENED

My faith in God started at the age of 10. I knew I needed him. I knew nothing I could do of myself could remedy my sin problem and make me right with God. I eagerly asked Jesus to lead my life and take over. In daily living, I am at peace knowing he is in control, and he cares about each detail of my life. I know, with assurance, I will be in heaven one day with him forever.

Four years ago, God strengthened my faith in a way I could never describe. My five-year-old daughter quickly fell seriously ill with a leg infection. I stood by her hospital bed for days asking God to heal her. The circumstances were not looking good as the infection spread throughout her body. God's word alone gave us comfort and peace. Friends would text us the same scripture we had just read that morning. These "coincidences" of scripture were evidence to me that God was at work and he was with us. Six days into our stay at the hospital, my daughter started turning around. Doctors and nurses couldn't explain her improvement. I remember one doctor telling his medical students the day before our discharge, "I don't want you to walk into this room, see this little girl, who has been in here eleven days, and think this is a normal recovery from an infection such as this." The doctor reiterated to his students, "She has no heart damage, no lung damage, no brain damage, no amputations. This child will return to a normal life and this is nothing short of a miracle."

In those difficult days, God held us close and showed me nothing is too small for him. My daughter has become a runner. Seeing her run is a daily reminder of how good God has been to answer our cries. He is indeed our healer and protector.

These verses from Isaiah brought us such comfort. I pray they will comfort you too. (41:10) "So do not fear for I am with you, do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (41:3) "For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand. I say to you fear not, I am the one who helps you."

BORN ANEW

“We look with uncertainty, beyond the old choices for clear-cut answers, to a softer, more permeable aliveness, which is every moment at the brink of death; for something new is being born in us if we but let it. We stand at a new doorway, awaiting that which comes...daring to be human creatures. Vulnerable to the beauty of existence. Learning to love.” Anne Hillman, writer

The Lenten season reminds me of our frailty and brokenness. It's a time to acknowledge our sin and separation from God, but I believe it's also an invitation to transformation. It's a time to self-reflect: How do I separate myself from God's love? How can I show loving kindness to myself and to my neighbor? What practices or habits have I grown into that lead me farther away from the Source, and how do they keep me from growing in my love and knowledge of God? How do those unhelpful or unhealthy habits prevent me from sharing the love of God with others?

I find it meaningful to reflect prayerfully on these questions. Anne Hillman writes that, “Something new is being born in us if we but let it.” As we move through the liturgical calendar, I wonder if this season is a time in which God invites us to be broken open: to let go of old ways of doing things, to unlearn unhelpful habits, to examine our own biases, to look at our rough edges, to see Christ in the face of a person with whom we deeply disagree.

We are indeed a broken people, yet loved by God, and also called to grow and change. As I've learned recently, giving birth does not come without great pain, and often fear and anxiety. But, if we allow ourselves to lean into the pain and uncertainty of birth, something so much greater and more wonderful awaits us, and we are changed for the better.

— Logan Augustine, PASTORAL CARE

Wednesday Third Week of Lent

GENESIS 50:15-26
PSALM 101
MARK 8:11-26

THANKFULNESS

What a beautiful night to sit on the beach. Moon shining bright. Stars out and ocean waves lapping along the shore.

We look forward to the morning and a relaxing day. The pelicans flying over in perfect formation, the little seagulls enjoying the sand and then maybe a dolphin or two putting on a show in the ocean just for us! Life is Good!

Thank you, God, for being in our lives and for the many blessings you have given us.

— Jerry and Mary Owen, RESIDENTS

GOD'S BLESSINGS ARE EVERLASTING

Psalm 118:24

Psalm 46:10

Romans 8:31-39

I can't remember a time when the church was not an important part of my life. That was due to my very special mother. Her belief in God was very much a part of who she was. The way she lived her life was an inspiration to me.

One of my early childhood memories was learning the Lord's Prayer, which I recited every night kneeling by my bed. Growing up I loved the many youth activities at my wonderful church. Classes in religion and chapel services while in college at Hollins followed. Psalm 121, a favorite of mine, is the Hollins Motto: "I lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." I will always be grateful to the wonderful teachers who led me to a lifetime of bible study. As I grew, so did my faith.

It was this faith that prepared me for one of the hardest times in my life. I was 32 years old when my first husband suddenly died. Feeling God's presence was my salvation. Later, my two sons and I were greatly blessed when Ralph became my second husband.

Lent brings spring and glorious sunrises – God's gift to us and to the world he loves. My morning prayer of thanksgiving begins my day. In my quiet time during Lent, I often choose a familiar scripture to study. As I think of Holy Week and watch the cheering crowds give way to Good Friday, my heart aches for God as he watches his only son suffer on the cross and die. And yet death is not the end. With the resurrection comes the joy of Easter and the promise of eternal life. Jesus Christ is Risen Today! What a gift! Hallelujah!

"We who were no people are named anew, God's people,
For he who was no more is forever." – Ann Weems

– Robin Davison, RESIDENT

LOOKING FOR THE MIRACLES AROUND US

It was 1992, and I was strolling among the long tables set up for the annual August used book sale at Westminster Canterbury. There were thousands of books piled on the floor, on chairs, on tables, on any available surface. These were just the remains; it was four o'clock in the afternoon. The sale had been going on all day long. So many books had changed hands that day.

I started talking to a woman who was looking in the religion section. She told me that when she was a young girl she was given a book that was precious to her. It had a special inscription in it from her beloved relative who gave her the book. She lent the book to a friend and fully expected the book to be returned. It was not, and this woman had been sick over these many years over her loss. The book had been out of print for a long time so she couldn't even find a copy to read.

We parted ways, and I continued looking for something special. And I found it, a copy of the book she had not been able to find for years. I excitedly handed it over to her. She checked the fly leaf immediately and found it was the very same book she loaned to her friend those many decades ago. She was ecstatic, and I was thrilled to be the conduit of such pleasure and satisfaction for her. We parted ways, each grateful for the grace bestowed on us.

Grace, I believe is everywhere. We only need look for it.

— Susan Albert, RESIDENT

Saturday Third Week of Lent

GENESIS 47:27-48:7

PSALM 87

MARK 7:1-23

LENTEN MUSIC

Nothing is more uplifting than the herald of the trumpet on Easter morning. However, it is also the music of Lent that speaks to my heart—a gift given one Lenten season years ago.

Our rector stood firm in his belief that a robust, engaging Lent was necessary for experiencing the joy of Easter. A new choir director, rumored to have roots in musical theater, did not disappoint. He challenged our small but willing choir of eight with a varied body of Lenten music.

Yes, there was the classic, “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded,” with a solemnity and sadness that pierces the soul. “Create in Me a Clean Heart” brought life to the 51st Psalm. An assertive modern Kyrie Eleison enlivened several somber services. Above all, it is another hymn introduced to me this season that has stayed with me through the years, “A Hymn to God the Father,” a poem by John Donne set to the music of Bach. The last stanza is as follows:

*“I have a sin of fear, that when I’ve spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by thy self, that at my death thy Son;
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And having done that, thou hast done
I fear no more.”*

— Camilla Davis, RESIDENT

HUMBLE ADORATION

The definition of humble is: Having or showing a modest or low estimate of one's importance. "Not I, but he;" If your desire is to be humble you must look to Christ. It is in the worship of Christ that I believe humility is born. For it is when we look to Christ that we see a completely selfless man (Philippians 2:3-8). A man who, I believe, had all the power to do or be anything he wanted and yet chose to be a servant. Chose to die for our sins so that we could have forgiveness (Galatians 3:13).

Many would say, why would someone want to be humble? What is the opposite of humble? Proud. I ask, why would someone want to be prideful? I think it is impossible to be prideful and have a relationship with Christ.

The definition of adoration is: deep love and respect. I was surprised to find there are almost no references to adoration in God's word.

I began this study because the more I know God, the more I experience humble adoration for him. I am humbled by the fact that God allowed his son, Jesus, to come to this earth specifically to be crucified on the cross so that I could be forgiven for my sins and spend eternity in heaven.

I am humbled and have a deep respect (adoration) for God who willingly gave his son for me, a sinner who has no ability to repay him (Roman 5:8, John 1:29, and 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Does anyone recognize these lyrics?:

"And when I think that God, his Son not sparing . . . Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in . . . That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing . . . he bled and died to take away my sin.

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation . . . And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart . . . Then I shall bow, in humble adoration . . . And then proclaim, my God, how great thou art."

- Carl Boberg (1885)

GOD IS SO GOOD!

— Dawn Taylor, COURTESY SERVICES

IS IT LUCK, JUST A COINCIDENCE OR GOD?

We see evidence of God all around us every day, because we know that, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth and everything in it.” But I also believe that we see God daily on a very personal basis. Not just an answer to prayers concerning a big issue like getting a good report back from the doctor, but maybe in everyday events that some people just call luck. I believe getting all green lights going to work on a day that you are running late or having your car break down in the best possible place or bumping into someone who may become a meaningful person in your life are all God’s blessings, not luck or just a coincidence. God orchestrated these moments for me and similar ones for you. He has a plan.

When I look back on my life, I find many seemingly disconnected moments or paths that now seem to fit together perfectly to bring me to where I am today, and I know these were not just coincidences but God’s plan for me. I am exactly where He knew I would be. Look back over your life, and I bet you can see where God has orchestrated your life too.

Even though He has a plan for us and blesses us, He does not promise that our lives will be full of total happiness. There will be trials and tribulations, but we will have Him to lean on or to carry us through. It is our job to trust Him and to thank Him for the special blessings that He has given us. Look out for them. They are everywhere once you start looking. Some in your past may have led you to where you are today.

Of course, God’s biggest blessing of all, is the promise of heaven. By asking for His forgiveness and by believing that Jesus’ death and resurrection were the ultimate sacrifice, we are able to be heaven-bound for eternity.

— Ginger Kossoff, GALLERIA

THE REAL

Without conversation, face-to-face interaction or the slightest formal introduction, people will swear they know the real you.

It takes years to really know a person and even after that, you won't know it all, you'll only know what you have been shown.

Don't make the mistake of believing everybody is the same just because you've always dealt with the same type.

Not everybody chooses to change or grow, but it takes the mature to recognize maturity, most people can't progress, because they feel pressed.

A closed mind blocks happiness, and a cold heart hinders love.

— James Clayton, MATERIALS MANAGEMENT

LENT AND SELF-DENIAL

Lenten prayer and self-denial are good for us. Right?

Well, surely, prayer is always a good thing; but isn't forty days of self-denial a little harsh? Let's have a look.

First, let's avoid trivializing self-denial. It is *not* about giving up treats. (That makes a mockery of Christ's head-on acceptance of death on the cross.) On the other hand, trying to match his spurning of an offer of world dominion instead of humiliation and death seems off the charts for common folk. But isn't there some realistic option between trivial "give ups" and sacrificial suicide?

There is, as Presiding Bishop Michael Curry showed in his recent lecture here. Love is the key to it; and is two steps away from the unenlightened self-interest Hobbes called the "state of nature" – a life of unfettered and immediate greed that is consequently, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

"Enlightened self interest" is better than that, because it checks greed with a rein of *quids pro quo*. This is the first "step away" from wanton trampling on others. Instead, it urges treating them well so that they will curtail trampling on us. That's *better*, but it is still solely motivated by self-concern.

Love – the essence of Christ's self-denial and of every real self-denial by ordinary folk – is the second "step away," and a whole new game.

Love is the proactive self-denial that creates space in our lives for the needs of others, and motivates us to meet those needs for *those others' sakes*, not *ours*. When that is our motivation, then we will do what it takes to meet the needs of those we love as God loves them (i.e. the host of *all* God's children, not just the ones who look, talk, love, and worship like us, and live nearby). And *that's* the self-denial that Lent is all about.

– James H. Hall, RESIDENT

TIME

A recent Peanuts cartoon mentioned that when you, “get over the hill,” you begin to pick up speed!

So what are we doing with our fast passing time? We are an impatient people. Often, we are in such a hurry that we bypass God. This God who created whirlwinds, snails, and us, each for some special purpose. Don’t let us get lost in the dust we stir up.

Sometimes we are forced to live alone, not by choice; but there are times we need to be alone to get in touch with who we really are and where we need to go.

We all need ALONE TIME WITH GOD.

HE often visits us but, we are not always at home. We must give Him some time to reach us.

Remember when praying you don’t do all the talking. Prayer has been called “talking WITH God” not “talking TO” God.

We have two ears and one mouth. He will accept any way we do it but, years ago someone offered me this guide: ACTS in capital letters.

A for Adoration...Holy is your name.

C for Confession...we need to address our own sins.

T for Thanksgiving...Awareness of our many blessings.

S for Supplication...remembering the needs of others and ourselves.

You might try this formula next time you pray. Prayerfully may we see the way “over the hill” to a more joyful existence.

Prayer: Holy is Your Name, Dear Lord. Thank you for your forgiveness when we squander our time and choices. Thank you for being being available to us even when we are not always there for You. Help us to remember our lives are brief and guide us to use our time wisely. AMEN

Thanks be to God!

— Linda Doggett, RESIDENT

BLESSINGS

Lord, “Broaden my Horizons.” Just like Joab in the Bible. With each change in my life, I have carried that thought in my daily prayers. Moving to Westminster Canterbury has brought me where I can indeed broaden my horizons. New friends; new ways to meet people who love God. New ways to serve him.

Keep me strong Lord, and continue to give me new opportunities to, “Broaden My Horizons,” and use each day that I might be a blessing to someone.

In the words of Longfellow “Let us then be up and doing, with a heart for any fate.” Prepare me each day Lord to share the love you have for all of your children. My thanks to God are never ending.

It’s a beautiful world we live in. Let us remember each day to thank the one who placed us here to share God’s love and to thank him for all of our blessings.

— Mary Bevan, RESIDENT

TRUST

I have difficulty remembering that every person I encounter bears the image of God. Perhaps I have difficulty remembering because I have difficulty believing the doctrine.

The term “image of God” refers to our capacity for relationship, especially with God but also with others. Perhaps belief that all of us bear the image of God and are in relationship with God would be easier if we were all more alike, sharing the same values and expressing these values in the same ways. In other words, belief would be easier for me if everyone shared my values and expressed them as I do.

I have found myself pulled up short, however, by the writings of Catherine of Siena (1347-1380). Catherine lived in a time when bitter political divisions within the Church mirrored and intensified political divisions in Western Europe. Moreover, the scourge of the Black Plague generated fear. She repeatedly warned against judging others, who were themselves struggling.

In a letter she observed:

“To want to make all God’s servants walk in our own way (which is impossible) is no different from laying down laws and rules for the Holy Spirit . . . Let us love God’s servants and not judge them.*”

In prayer she expressed herself more fully:

“You want us to serve you in your way, eternal Father, and you guide your servants in different ways along different paths. . . .

[T]he soul is happy when in your light she sees the light of the endlessly different ways and paths she finds in these servants of yours.*”

Catherine bypasses my struggle with a difficult doctrine. She points to the Spirit’s work of instilling trust in God. Trust, I am discovering, makes possible love, which can open the heart to belief.

— Rebecca Weaver, RESIDENT

**Passion for the Truth, Compassion for Humanity*

GARGLING AND DIGESTING

It is commonplace to regret the common popular focus on what one “can’t” do during Lent. Properly, meditations and homilies call upon us to focus on the opportunity for reflection the season provides. However, with my prosaic bent and lingering memories of childhood practices, I cannot wholly detach Lent from some dietary practices – what one eats right before, or doesn’t eat in the midst, or eats thereafter.

Perhaps this is not wholly inappropriate, since one of the events most centrally celebrated in the Christian tradition is a meal. As I thought about the approaching Lent, two engaging theological metaphors drawing upon the image of food and drink struck me.

During the reign of Charles I, John Buckeridge, Bishop of Ely, wrote, “True religion is in no way a *gargalisme* only, to wash the tongue and mouth.” What a delightful word! You don’t need the Oxford English Dictionary to get the point of this metaphor.

The other engaging metaphor lies in the title of “Inwardly Digest: The Prayer Book as Guide to a Spiritual Life,” by the lay theologian Derek Olsen. That metaphor, “inwardly digest,” comes from a collect written by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer for the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. The entire phrase runs: “Grant us that we may in such wise hear [the Holy Scriptures], read, mark, learn, and *inwardly digest* them.”

Taken together, we have elements of a metaphorical “meal.” Even though one metaphor immediately references “True religion,” and the other the Holy Scriptures, they intertwine and complement each other. Buckeridge’s entire phrase nicely ties together the two metaphors: “True religion is in no way a *gargalisme* only, to wash the tongue and mouth, to speake good words; it must root in the heart, and then fructifie it in the hand; else it will not cleanse.”

Don’t just gargle, take in and digest.

— Steven L. Dalle Mura, RESIDENT

PERSEVERING

Permanent sensory deprivation, especially the loss of hearing or sight, is a profound affliction. When such loss affects a musician, the effect can be devastating. Two musicians, composer Ludwig van Beethoven and hymnist Frances van Alstyne, used their afflictions as means to elevate their creativity.

Beethoven's genius became more intense and his music more profound as his deafness progressed. Later, still struggling with life's challenges, he chose to write, as his valedictory work, a choral symphony, celebrating joy and the brotherhood of man.

Frances van Alstyne, better known by her maiden name, Fanny Crosby, has been listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the "world's most prolific hymnist," having composed over 8,000 hymn lyrics in her lifetime. Blinded as a toddler, she learned to memorize whole sections of the Bible as it was read to her. She wrote poetry and learned piano as a girl, and ultimately combined her talents to create some of our most engaging evangelical hymns, noted for their rousing choruses:

*"This is my story; this is my song.
Praising my Savior all the day long,"*

and

*"Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord,
to the cross where Thou hast died,
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer blessed Lord,
To Thy precious bleeding side,"*

and

*In the cross, in the cross be my glory ever,
'til my raptured soul shall find rest beyond the river.*

Fanny Crosby's love of God and trust in Jesus were hallmarks of her life. Beethoven, on the other hand, wrestled with God and God's existence throughout his life. His ultimate conclusion is sung at the profound climax of his final symphony:

"Above the firmament, there must dwell a loving Father."

Both musicians' art was made stronger by their afflictions. The same can be said of their faith.

HOPE

Every October, my parish offers an annual community Blessing of the Animals service. Members of the congregation and neighbors from Church Hill attend and bring their pets. There are dogs, cats, perhaps a bunny or two, and the occasional fowl. The scene can best be described as “controlled chaos.”

This past October, a woman brought her little pug with her. She arrived a little late, as we were ending the service. She told me, “I’m here to have him blessed. It may be his last year.”

And, so, we sat, and she told me about her dog. It was not a long conversation, but she told me about him and his health problems. She started tearing up. I gave her a hug and offered a blessing over her dog. And, with tears in my eyes, I looked up at her and simply said, “Bring him back next year. I’ll bless him again.”

Sometimes, hope is the strongest blessing of all.

— David Curtis, PASTORAL CARE

EASTER LILIES

It has been the custom in our church for families to purchase an Easter lily plant in memory or in honor of a loved one. The lilies are placed in the sanctuary to adorn the Easter service. Their trumpet-shaped petals seem to ring out the Alleluia Chorus.

Since moving to Westminster Canterbury, I have brought the plant home after the service and placed it in my dining room, where it sits for the week after Easter as a reminder of our Christian faith. At the end of the week I place the plant on the patio, along with lilies from previous years. The plants stay there throughout the winter.

In June of 2020, right in the middle of the pandemic, all five plants bloomed. I thought, “They are blooming in June, and they are Easter lilies! They should be blooming in March or April.” After thinking about it for a while, it occurred to me that it doesn’t matter when they bloom. They are called Easter lilies and we are Easter people. Every day is Easter.

Pope John Paul II said, “Do not abandon yourselves to despair. We are the Easter people and Alleluia is our song.”

— Gail Miller, RESIDENT

NO ATHEISTS IN FOXHOLES

World War II journalist Ernie Pyle, who understood war and fear, wrote: “There are no atheists in foxholes.”

The Psalmist also knew something about both. “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.” You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.” (Psalm 91: 1, 2, 5, 7 and 11).

As one who served in combat and experienced fear, my prayers were situational, brief, and self-serving: “Dear God, don’t let me die today.” They beg the questions: Did such entreaties count as prayers? Were they heard? Answered?

I hoped then, and taking comfort from the psalmist’s words, believe now those prayers counted, were heard and answered. Thanks be to God.

— Jack Frazer, RESIDENT

GRACIOUSNESS

Each year on Epiphany Sunday, my church has the tradition of handing out “Star Words.” Each person is randomly given a paper star with a word on it, and each year we are asked to reflect on that word, and to wait and see how that word may be revealed to us in the upcoming year. This year, I was given the word graciousness.

As I began my exploration and journey with the word graciousness, I first pondered its meaning--words such as kindness, graceful and courteous came to mind. Pretty basic principles, really. But if I am honest, these basic principles can be challenging at times.

Graciousness is also a reminder to ourselves that it is hard, and that we need to be patient and grace-filled with ourselves and with each other when it comes to getting along – being kind and compassionate. Graciousness is the wisdom to recognize that this work of community is hard.

Perhaps that is why the writer of Ephesians chose to remind us in Ephesians 4:32: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

So, for now, as I begin my journey with the word graciousness, I will remember a quote by Henri Nouwen.

“Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone’s face? Did I say words of healing?

Did I let go of my anger and resentment? Did I forgive?

Did I love? These are the real questions.”

— Jessica Corbitt, CULTURAL ARTS

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

COVID. As we face into COVID's third year and continuing uncertainly, fear, and disruption, I find myself wondering: What does it mean to love my neighbor? Family and friends are suffering. The country I love is full of dissension. The world is churning with change. Nothing will be the same when this plague finally subsides.

Where can I find the energy to care for those beyond myself and my family and friends? And perhaps even to care for my family and friends?

Love thy neighbor. What does that commandment mean? And who is my neighbor? Must I love the whole world? My best answer is as follows:

First of all, it means to SEE my neighbor, to take the time to stop, to look and to listen. This effort is immediate, particular, disruptive. Whatever I thought I was doing stops. I change course. I care even when it is hard do so. I respond to the inconvenient.

Second, it means to serve. Once I have seen, it means to do the best I can to help. Sometimes I need to dig deep, often to go beyond what I think can be provided from superfluous energy and resources. I act.

And finally, it means to love myself enough to acknowledge my limitations. It is enough to do what I can and to know that I am forgiven for not doing more. It is God's world, not mine.

The Good Samaritan stopped. He noticed. He acted. He was present in the moment. And then he went on his way trusting others to provide the more that was needed.

— Lee Switz, RESIDENT

LENTEN HYMNS

As a child growing up in our Presbyterian church, I learned the many familiar hymns and carols of the church year. I loved the Christmas and Easter songs with their joyful and hopeful words and uplifting tunes. But not so much the hymns of the Lenten season. So much sorrow and darkness. As I grew older, I learned about Jesus preparing his disciples for what was to come in his life. The hymns of Lent are somber and often written in a minor key. Can one have a “favorite” hymn for this season? The one which has always spoken to me most deeply over many years is “O Sacred Head Now Wounded.” It was written in the early 12th century and attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux, the seventh in a series of poems. The tune was later added by Hans Leo Hassler in 1601. In 1729 the harmony was beautifully written by that great church musician, Johann Sebastian Bach. It has remained so since then. I invite you to sing along or just read the text below.

*“O sacred head now wounded, with grief and shame
weighed down;
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, thine only crown;
O sacred head, what glory, what bliss till now was thine!
Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call thee mine.*

*What thou, my Lord, has suffered, was all for sinners' gain:
Mine, mine was the transgression, But thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve thy place;
Look on me with thy favor, vouchsafe to me thy grace.*

*What language shall I borrow, to thank thee dearest friend,
For this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?
O make me thine forever; and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to thee.”*

— Marian Badgett, RESIDENT

AN OPENING

I was sitting in the noisy waiting room at Dulles Airport hoping for help. I'd been asking for help regularly since my Joe died. For nothing or to no one in particular, more like a condition.

I noticed a woman and child on a facing row of seats. The toddler took a few steps out and back to the safety of mom's knees. Then the child turned and looked at me. Really looked. I slid off my seat to kneel. She staggered over to me with her arms out wide and into a hug! Then she was back to mom, who exclaimed, "She never does that!" I settled into my seat, full of sweetness and wonder.

That and other similar experiences convince me that I am an inseparable part of all that is. This entire existence is a whole. When I can open to that reality, I sense that I am an integral part of that whole, instead of an individual angling to be seen by others and myself as worthy of inclusion. Spirit and the physical world are one. My grief opened me.

Experiencing myself as part of the spirit-infused world rises above the dualism of me/you, good/evil, and prompts me to respond with kindness and non-violence. For what I do to you I do to myself. The golden rule is not only a moral injunction, but to me, a statement of reality.

— Phoebe Antrim, RESIDENT

SIMPLE GIFTS

One of the enduring lessons from Agnes DeMille's 1946 ballet, "Fall River Legend," is the spiritual significance of "Simple Gifts." Gifts of the spirit often come to us unexpectedly.

One past summer's day, I expressed my gratitude and admiration to Kathleen Pender, Westminster Canterbury's horticulturist, for her co-workers' endless efforts that so beautify our campus. I expected a banal or perfunctory acknowledgement, but I was surprised by the response: "That makes me so happy!" I marveled that my brief but sincere encomium was returned at once as a gift of appreciation, and I was reminded that a freely bestowed compliment frequently is reflected in joy to the donor.

Often in the past, as I admired residents' garden plots, I confessed my feelings of guilt for the pleasure I consequently received from the labor of others. Invariably the gardener's response was, "We do it for the pleasure of others." That is, an expression of gratitude is therapeutic for both the donor and the recipient. And both perceive the "sermons in stones and the books in babbling brooks." Dorothy Francis Gurney has written, "The kiss of the sun for pardon, a song of a bird for mirth; one is nearer God's heart in a garden, than anywhere else on earth."

Lent coincides with the Celtic season of renaissance and renewal: of the earth and of the human spirit:

For the winter is past
The rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth,
And the time of the singing bird has come.
(Song of Solomon 2:11-12)

Our salvation is a gift we cannot earn but rather is a freely-imparted endowment. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

— Stan Higgins, RESIDENT

HIS TRUTH/MY HOPE AND MY JOY

Now that the Easter Season is upon us, my prayer is that I use this time to contemplate where I truly am spiritually. Have I grown closer to the Lord, or have I become complacent? Jesus speaks some challenging words in Revelation 2:4 where he says, He is “against those who have abandoned their first love,” and also in Revelation 3:16, “Because you have become lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth.”

I ask myself, “Have I become lukewarm, more willing to compromise?” Trying to please man rather than my Lord? Compromise is a dangerous thing! It can lead to complacency which can lead to stagnation which eventually leads to rot!

Despite the challenges of this past year, let’s re-ignite our thinking by reminding ourselves of all that Jesus has offered us by suffering and dying for our sins and offering us his joy and the glorious hope of life eternal!

Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 4:8-10: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”

That excites me. I hope it does you! Happy Easter.

— Cooka Shaw, RESIDENT

CONVERSATION WITH GOD

Me: God, what were you thinking when this virus began upsetting our world?

God: I don't think. People think.

Me: Well, we do need your help with forgiveness, patience and understanding.

God: Let's take forgiveness. You must forgive yourself and then those who have maligned you.

Me: How about patience? I pray for that every day.

God: Patience is not achieved by prayer. It takes more work than that.

Me: What about the Bible? About faith?

God: Think beyond everyday platitudes. Don't get stuck in quick answers.

Me: And love and understanding, God?

God: Each of the things you ask about takes a lifetime of listening, of respect and a search for the slippery truth. Do not be afraid. Live your life with courage and love.

— Frances W. Burch, RESIDENT

SCAR

My childhood African playmate, Kabue, was my age and of the same boyhood interests and curiosities. Among our joys, were climbing trees and swinging from their branches. The one tree we were not allowed to climb was the palm tree because of its sharp thorns. Forbidden fruit still tempts and we began climbing to cut some nuts for roasting. My arm caught on a thorn and began bleeding.

My mother asked, "How did you cut your arm?" In my haste to respond, I blurted out that Kabue had accidentally cut me with a knife. My mother's expression indicated my reply bore serious consequences. When my father came home from teaching his students, he also showed alarm that my friend had injured me. When word got around the community all accusing fingers pointed at Kabue and sympathy flowed toward me.

One night, I was lying in bed sobbing when my mother came to sit by my bed. She sat quietly until I could release the truth. At breakfast, my father made it clear how damaging my lie had been to Kabue but also to the community who had believed it. I was to ask Kabue for forgiveness that day. Our community trust could only be healed by my confession before the elders of the church.

My father walked by my side in silence from our house to the church. The pastor called me to stand before the session. My father stood at my side as I made my confession through tears.

Then I realized, many of these elders had been students of my father's. I sensed the deep shame I brought on my father. Yet there he stood, beside me. My father walked home with me, his hand on my shoulder, in silence.

My arm bears no mark of injury from the thorn; Kabue and I resumed our boyhood explorations. But my soul is scarred forever with the shame I brought on to my father.

— Harlan McMurray, RESIDENT

OFFER YOUR LAMENT TO GOD

Holy Saturday is an invitation for us to grieve the death of Jesus and imagine the disciples' tears on the morning after he was crucified. It's difficult to imagine the depth of sadness and disappointment that his followers may have felt. After all, we know of God's resurrection power on Easter. But imagine that we are among the first disciples of Jesus grieving his crucifixion and not knowing how this situation can possibly be redeemed. Imagine that we are asking God and each other how our beloved teacher, friend, and messiah has just been killed.

Lament psalms exemplify our freedom to ask on the worst of days, "O Lord, why do you cast me off? Why do you hide your face from me? (Psalm 88:14)." Offering prayers even from the depth of disappointment is hard. We may have learned that God deserves our trust and praise only. We might want to just, "keep on the sunny side," as the old song says. But the experience of prayer in times of loss and disappointment can be like a balm on the wounds of our grief and despair. Prayers of lament are honest and open, exposing the fullness of our experience to include even tragic loss, death, disappointment and grief. In loving relationship with us, God invites all of it.

In Christ we find the wisdom to lament as Jesus did from the cross (see Matthew 27:46 and Psalm 22). Psalms of lament invite us to turn to God with complaints and with questions, exposing the wounds that we feel too deeply to ignore. In the Psalms, prayers of lament have a typical structure:

Address to God

Complaint

Confession of trust

Petition

Words of assurance

Vow to praise

What might you be lamenting in your life today? Feel free to compose your own lament and offer it to God.

TODAY COUNTS FOREVER

When you get a diagnosis of cancer, as I did, it grabs your attention. It had me looking at things in a new perspective and evaluating my priorities. One of these was “time.” The notion of “Daylight Savings Time” notwithstanding, time is one commodity that cannot be saved! So I asked myself how I was spending my time and on what activities, I asked myself how many of these activities matter v.s. “trivial pursuits?” (Not that we don’t need some of that, too.) My first tendency was overreaction, anxious as to how I did use the time allotted to me, whatever that might be. Then I called to mind Psalm 31:15: “My times are in your hands,” and I struck more of a balance.

There was someone else to whom time was precious. He was, in fact, dying and the evidence shows (Luke 23:41) that up until that point, he had not used his time well. He was the thief on the cross on Calvary next to Jesus. Had he seen Jesus during his ministry, or at least known about him? We don’t know. But at some point, he grasped the fact that this man on the center cross was more than just a man. “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). He expressed a faith that Jesus was able to redeem his life from what it was and give him something far better. He realized that there was more to his existence than defined by earthly time. May God grant us the ability to do as well! Easter is a great time to evaluate our own “times.”

— Barton Campbell, RESIDENT

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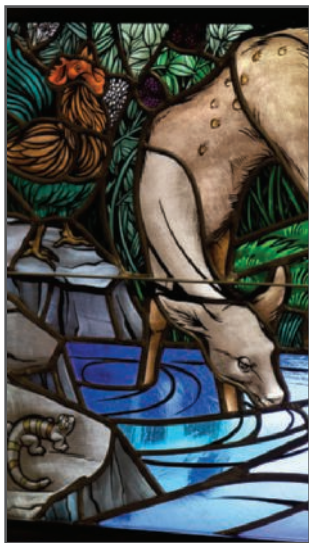
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