

WE INVITE YOU TO ENTER INTO A

Holy Lent



A Daily Devotional for
the 2021 Lenten Season

INTRODUCTION

I INVITE YOU THEREFORE IN THE NAME OF CHURCH TO A HOLY LENT.

In September 2020, members of the Vestry met by Zoom call with many of the ministry groups of our parish. All together, we think the Vestry met with probably 80 to 100 parishioners over a two-week span. In addition to time just to catch up with one another, each ministry group had been asked to think about two questions: 'what are you/we learning in these strange times?', and 'what do you want to do about that?' What people shared with each other was so rich and often very personal. We saw again that so often what we think of as most personal is often something that we all share in common.

After all those conversations, four themes seemed to emerge: the gift of our own humanity, a clearer realization that we live in 'a fallen world', the gift of community, and the hope for a new creation. You could hear these themes as people talked about what they were discovering matters most. You could hear it as we talked about the brokenness in our world and in ourselves that this pandemic has laid bare. You could hear it as people wondered about how we could be different going forward.

By the mercy of God, we will come back together over the course of this current year, 2021. And as we come back together, we have the opportunity to return changed by what this long, long season of absence has taught us.

This booklet is an invitation for this season of Lent to look back and consider what we are learning about ourselves and our world. And it is an invitation to look forward with fresh vision about what kind of a church God is calling us to be at this time and in this place.

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

In this six-week Lenten offering, the people of St. Mary's invite you to reflect on the themes that emerged from the Vestry Zoom call meetings in September 2020. In the first week of Lent, we are setting the stage and preparing ourselves to enter into this holy season. And during the following four weeks, you will be invited to consider, think, journal, reflect, and pray about the gift of our humanity, the reality that we live in 'a fallen world', the gift of community, and the hope for a new creation. The final week will invite you to bring all of this into the context of Holy Week with the hope of Easter coming.

The format of the journal is simple. Each Sunday lays the ground work for that week's theme with a scripture verse, quotes from the Vestry Zoom calls, and a reflection from

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL (CONT.)

David May. Then Monday through Friday, the people of St. Mary's, from children to young people to older folks, share their thoughts and insights on the theme for the week followed by a question with space left open for you to express your personal reflections and prayers through words or images. At the end of the week on Saturday, you are invited to take some time to be still with God and sit with the offered prayer.

What you do with this devotional is entirely up to you because there is no 'right' way to journal. Be as creative as you want to be; try to capture the ideas that are most meaningful to you, the thoughts and insights you'd like to hold onto throughout this Lenten season.

The Brothers of the SSJE (Society of Saint John the Evangelist, an Episcopal monastic order) give us these questions we might ask ourselves as we reflect:

- As I read these words, what thoughts or feelings do I notice in myself? What words or ideas capture my attention? How are my feelings engaged by this text?
- What implications do these words have for the way I see myself, the way I relate to God, or interact with others?
- What response do I want to make to these words? What prayer rises in me when I read or meditate on these reflections? What act of love or service might I be inspired to undertake as my response to this message?

We hope this devotional will open your heart, deepen your faith, and look forward with fresh vision about what kind of church God is calling us to be at this time and in this place.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17

ASH WEDNESDAY

Full Disclosure: I was not raised Episcopalian but I attended an Episcopal church school for 13 years. I was a hybrid, knowing the traditions of the Episcopal church but not having to practice them—which was especially nice during Lent when those around me at school were complaining about what they had to give up for six whole weeks.

Ash Wednesday, then, had no special meaning for me. I was always told that imposing ashes was a “high church” practice, a symbol of piety and righteousness that according to Matthew 6, was not to be demonstrated in public.

David May changed my mind about that. He was the first person to mark my forehead with ashes with the words, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” That was 16 years ago when I was an intern at St. Andrew’s Church. And instead of feeling righteous, that smudge of a cross reminded me more than anything else of the huge power imbalance between God, the creator, and me, the created. It was a Job moment, and I felt no better than a worm.

It’s the same feeling I get when I say the words of the committal in the burial rite: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. No matter how many treasures I have stored up for myself in my life, they are nothing before the God who loved me enough to form me from the earth and ashes in the first place.

Eleanor Wellford



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18

BEGIN: MAKING TIME FOR GOD

"They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged Jesus to lay his hand on him. Jesus took him aside privately, away from the crowd..." - Mark 7:32-33a

When I was in seminary, my liturgics professor pointed out that the forty days of Lent are roughly one-tenth of the year. He said that Lent is a tithe of our time in a year to give to God. I was so struck by that. I still am. It's one thing to give God one-tenth of my money. But a tenth of my time? What does that even look like? In a normal day, I'm afraid, it's a snippet of hurried prayer here and there; a minute or two standing outside looking at the sky and breathing, remembering the miraculous gift of life that God has given us and saying thank you; my brief morning and nighttime prayers. Normally, it feels like I'm just gulping down life (or life's gulping me down!), on the run, and every now and then stopping just to breathe.

The season of Lent is a time to remember that, for our own soul's health, we need a steady diet of time with God. And that is because God would like some time with us too. Does that sound strange? It shouldn't. God has made each of us for himself. God desires you. You. And God desires you however God can have you.

I treasure this brief passage from Mark and how Jesus took aside the man who needed him so that it could be just the two of them. That's where the healing happened for the man on that day. Afterward, he could hear and speak again. I wonder what he had to say afterward about this time apart with Jesus.

God desires time with each of us. With you. And God will take you however God can have you. A simple response to this is to ask God for the grace of time together as we begin the season of Lent. A simple willingness to spend time with God is likely evidence that that grace has already been given to you. Ask for that grace of time together. Ask specifically. Ask clearly. Ask God to show you the way. Ask knowing it will be given. Let God show you how to begin.

David May

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19

BEGIN WHERE YOU ARE

“Immediately the father [of the boy] cried out, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’” - Mark 9:24

This passage comes from a scene that follows immediately after the Transfiguration of Jesus in Mark’s gospel. At the Transfiguration, Jesus’s life and who he is, is revealed to be God’s full, complete statement of salvation. All of God’s eternal purposes are glimpsed in a single shattering moment of clarity by those closest to him. And then Jesus comes down the mountain and immediately finds himself plunged into a scene of arguing, bickering, petty, frightened people doing what we do—turning on each other. Welcome back to the real world!

A man has brought his son to Jesus’s disciples for healing. The boy is afflicted with a spirit that convulses him and throws him onto the ground where he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth. Jesus asks the father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ and the father replies, ‘Since childhood. If you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.’ And Jesus quotes the man’s words back to him, ‘If you are able!’ And then says, ‘All things can be done for the one who believes.’ And the poor father says, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’ The scene concludes with a word and a touch of healing from Jesus, and the boy is restored.

What seems to matter so much in this story is the integrity of the boy’s father. He believes. And he doesn’t. And he says so. And that is no impediment for Jesus to act to deliver this boy from a fearful life and to create a new future for the boy and his father.

I think there is great wisdom for us in an insight from our Christian tradition that I was introduced to years ago. With God, begin where you are. It serves no purpose to imagine that one needs to be all scrubbed clean, hair combed, and in proper clothes (spiritually speaking) before knocking on God’s door. Begin where you are—with all your belief and unbelief.

David May

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20

BEGIN AGAIN

“Jesus said, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ ...When they had heard it, they went away, one by one. ... and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, sir.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way....’”

- John 8:7b, 9-11

One of the questions asked at our Baptism is, “Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?” It was pointed out to me once that it doesn’t say ‘if you fall into sin’, it says, ‘whenever you fall into sin’. Along these same lines, Augustine of Hippo in the early 5th century once calmly remarked in a correspondence, ‘Sin isn’t necessary, but it is inevitable’. Neither the Prayer Book nor Augustine in these words is taking sin lightly. Far from it, the spirituality of the Prayer Book and certainly Augustine understands that the consequences of sin can be and are dire, personally and collectively. Our personal actions and the systemic actions to which we consent can tear down, mutilate, and destroy what and who God loves.

But Christians are a people of the second chance. And third. And fourth. It seems to be true, that we can often and sincerely extend this second and third chance with a generosity of heart to others. But, when it comes to ourselves, it is sometimes a different story. Catastrophizing statements like, “I always get things wrong,” “I always stick my foot in my mouth,” and “I’ll never measure up,” can spring up in us even from the slightest mistake. Why not extend the kind of friendship to your own self that you would gladly give someone else?

Benedict of Nursia was the 6th century founder of what became the Benedictine Order. He established a ‘rule of life’ for those called to live the monastic life. It is a treasure of wisdom that understands we are ‘the apple of God’s eye’ who will also inevitably fall short of the mark. One of Benedict’s simple rules for growing in grace is especially important during the season of Lent. If you have decided to fast from coffee, for example, but one day in Lent you decide you really, really need a cup and have it, it is not the end of the world. There is a simple thing to do. Just begin again with your fast. There is no need to listen to old tapes or assume the worst about yourself. Just begin again.

Today, if I need to, I will begin again.

David May

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT, FEBRUARY 21

‘DO THIS’

“And [Jesus] took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

- Luke 22:19

I remember as I was growing up being told to do things basically because my parents told me to do those things. Sometimes there was an explanation; sometimes not. So, I practiced scales on the piano endlessly, which was pretty dreary. Or I practiced all the ways I was told to be polite by saying ‘yes, ma’am’ and ‘no sir’, or ‘thank you’ or ‘no, thank you’, or holding the door for someone. Or learned multiplication tables on flash cards. Or went to church. Every Sunday. Even when it snowed.

The explanation I was given at the time about why I had to just do these things was that someday I would reap the reward of doing it, which I am pretty sure I didn’t buy as an explanation. Looking back, simply doing something because I was told to was the hard part of learning a discipline. But then one day, after years of practicing scales on the piano, I discovered that I was able to pick out ‘Doctor My Eyes’ by ear and play it just like Jackson Browne. One day I held the door for someone, and it was the exact day that person needed someone to hold the door for them because of the way it made them feel valued and respected. Last year I said ‘thank you’ to a cashier who said, ‘thank you for saying that—sometimes I feel invisible.’

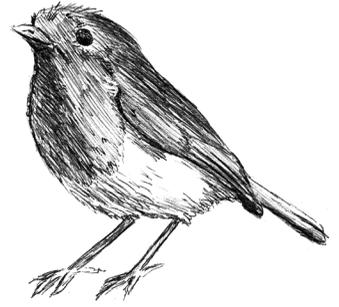
At the last meal Jesus shared with his friends, he said ‘do this’. He didn’t say to think about it or write papers about it or process what this might mean. No. Do this. Take this food from me and eat. Do this. You will discover that I am in you.

During Lent, we can give ourselves permission to take up a spiritual discipline as an act of trusting faith without overthinking it with questions like ‘What difference will it make?’ or ‘What if I’m not very good at it?’. Jesus’ words are a gift for Lent: Do this. Pray with regularity. Practice a fast. Give alms. Give and seek forgiveness. Help feed people who are hungry. Read the Bible each morning. Call someone who is alone. Lift someone up.

Do this.

David May

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22



The “ever circling years¹” are bringing us around to Lent once again.

Each time Lent reappears on the calendar, each time I engage with it, I am challenged to examine who I am this year. Not surprisingly, it’s always a bit different.

The repeating stories, scripture readings, prayers, and practices are touchstones that conjure up fading images of that person who was me a year ago, ten years ago, or even more than 60 years ago.

What was I thinking? What did I do—or not do—to mark the season? Did I give up something small, like sweets or potato chips? Did I try to face myself honestly and repent, change direction? Did I learn something new or try to do something virtuous? Or did I overlook Lent altogether?

All of the above. It depends on who—and where—I was at the time.

But whatever I did or didn’t do, however I changed or resisted change back then, here comes another opportunity. Each step around the circles of the years, or better yet, the curves and whirls of the cosmic labyrinth, is bringing me closer to some mysterious center, even when I feel farthest away.

A deep breath, a heartfelt intention to pay attention this time (!)—and the curtain rises.

Here we go again, thanks be to God.

Kitty Williams

¹ It Came Upon the Midnight Clear (Christmas carol), last verse, third line.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23

Typically during Lent, people describe what they are going to “give up.” For me, distancing myself from things I love is quite difficult. Going days without making music puts a rut in my creativity. Although during these times of COVID, I’ve never had so much time to create! But having more time to be devoted to music has meant having to give up something else: quality time with my community. The inability to gather like we used to in parties and at church is very difficult for many of us, myself included. It has been challenging keeping up with my closest friends and develop deeper relationships, often leaving me frustrated by the limitations of the world.

In order to cope with such feelings, I turn the limitations I can’t control into ones I can. In these times of physical, mental, and emotional distance from others, I attempt to become more physically, mentally, and emotionally connected with myself. My journey of self-discovery hit a new peak last year, and I have no intentions of reaching a destination any time soon. Being forced to give up opportunities to grow closer with others resulted in my growing closer with myself, and in turn, even more fit to be present for my friends and family. Giving up something you love is not just about eliminating one thing from your life; rather, it opens up new possibilities and a chance to grow closer with Christ.

Jack Ireland

Jesus said repeatedly, ‘You have to lose your life to gain it.’ What am I being invited to lose?

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Each year as the Lenten season approaches, I recall the first year I observed Lent. It was a difficult and painful season in my life, but observing Lent gave me the opportunity to slow down and focus on turning toward God. I began a practice of attending Wednesday Eucharist services, read a short passage of Scripture each day, and I made 40 cards – one for each day of the season—and mailed them to people who had cared for and supported me through this tough time in my life.

One thing I've noticed in observing Lent is that I prefer to take something on, rather than give something up. For me, the spiritual practice of trying something new or deepening an existing practice gives more meaning and connection to God. Whether sending cards to people, praying the Daily Office, or collecting pieces of spiritual artwork, I find myself the most called back to God out of my own brokenness through taking (or re-taking!) on a new practice.

Since then, I've observed many Lenten seasons—some with practices that spoke deeply to me, which I followed for the duration of Lent, and other seasons, for which I had the best of intentions, but completely fell short. I think the gift of the Lenten season, however, is that God always invites us back to Godself, no matter how many times we fall short in our spiritual practices or in our commitments to God and one another. It is in turning back to God that we are given new life.

The Rev. Deacon Logan Augustine

How are you turning back to God today?



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25



I have been singing in a church choir since I was ten—long enough to make it difficult to separate the music of Lent from my Lenten journeys. Each year, choral anthems shift into minor keys as joyful Glorias give way to Miserere Mei. The music sets a somber tone for weeks, and the quiet time in church invites contemplation. Choir rehearsals foster a community of shared purpose, culminating in a marathon of Holy Week services. The

combination creates a space that has fed my mind, body, and spirit.

The pandemic closed off that particular space, for now. This year, my path will be more solitary. I've carved out a space at home, just a chair near a window (Mother Nature is part of this deal). From there I'll devote time for reading and reflection, diving into the Book of James, with its emphasis on service, discipline, and faith during times of trial. I will take regular digital fasts, recognizing that I need time offline, though the Internet connects me to my community and the stirring music of Lent. The third leg of my journey will be cultivating gratitude. We are making heroic efforts to demonstrate our commitment to each other despite the separation: choir by Zoom, drive-through dinners and pageants, flower deliveries, online coffees. Our jerry-rigged substitutions are labors of love to tide us over until we can enjoy the exquisite luxury of being together again.

Thank you, everyone, and thank God for the new journey.

Beth Stephens

How does your Lent look different this year? What is your 'jerry-rigged substitution' that is your labor of love?

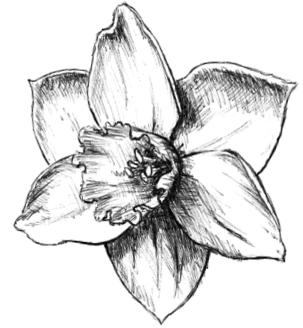
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26

My earliest memories of Lent are mite boxes and Lenten suppers. As I got older my Lenten practice was giving up something, normally some type of food. I tried to give up my favorite food, but I often backed down because it seemed too hard. One year, as I considered who Jesus is and all he sacrificed for me, I gave up chocolate for forty days! My decision felt like a breakthrough. Nonetheless, I struggled more than I care to admit.

More recently, my Lenten practice became adding a spiritual practice. For several years I attended Lenten retreats at local churches given by the brothers of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist. These retreats helped me to slow down and focus on God. One practice they shared that was particularly helpful is a gratitude journal.

A few years ago, David suggested we read *A Season for the Spirit: Readings for the Days of Lent* by Martin Smith. I enjoyed this book but if I missed a day's reading I felt guilty. Eventually, I realized I was being silly and let go of the guilt.

Our Lenten experiences help us figure out who we are, and who we are not, just like Jesus's wilderness journey. The good news is that Jesus knows who he is and he encourages each of us to remember that our identity is linked with his. So, start your Lenten journey knowing that you are a beloved child of God with whom He is well pleased.



Cabell Jones

Cabell invites us to 'figure out who we are and who we are not.' What do you think about this?

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always ,though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death,
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Take some time to be still with God today.



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THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT, FEBRUARY 28

THE GIFT OF OUR HUMANITY

“Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.’” - Genesis 2:23

“I cried like a baby at Gersain’s send-off drive-thru! What was that?!”

– A St. Mary’s parishioner in a Zoom call meeting.

The Hebrew word that is translated ‘man’ in this verse from the book of Genesis is *adamah* and means ‘creature made from the earth’ or simply ‘earthling’. At this point, that’s all this creature is, a creature of the earth made alive by the breath that God blew into its nostrils. ‘Man’ implies gender. But at this point in God’s story of our first beginnings, there is no gender, only a creature of the earth—‘an undifferentiated human’ as my Old Testament professor Becky Wright described it.

But then God created a second ‘earthling’ out of the body of the first. And when the first earthling saw the second earthling, it cried out, ‘Oh! It’s a creature like me! Now I know who I am. I am *ish* (the Hebrew for a male creature) and this is *isha* (a female creature)! I know who I am because of her.

In this primordial story of God’s creation, we only (finally!) know who we are in the presence of another. The other calls forth our self.

What we are given to think and pray about with God in this sacred text is that we do not become an ‘I’ without a ‘You’. I am not me without you. We do not and probably cannot know fully who we are as humans without another human. Because of the way God has made us, we cannot be human without each other.

Who in your life has shown you more fully who you are? How did that happen?

David May

MONDAY, MARCH 1

Once upon a time when people would gather or meet, they would welcome each other with a kind word, like “good to meet you” or “how are you doing?”. Today, now that wearing masks and social distancing are the norm, those greetings are made from six feet away or not at all. But something strange has happened. I have found myself looking more closely at others, from the nose up, focusing on the eyes. Whether I am in the grocery store or out for a walk, I have been using my eyes to connect with others. I was always taught to look people in the eyes when you are talking to them but took that for granted until now. It’s hard to hide your feelings through your baby blues. Until now, I would have never believed that you could actually see someone smiling through their eyes, but I can now. It’s easy to hide behind our masks, but now more than ever, we all are yearning for that small connection to each other. Luckily, just by taking a moment to look someone in the eyes, we can remind one another that this too shall pass and just smile.

Sean O’Hara

Today I want to really remember to see who’s there in my life.



TUESDAY, MARCH 2

Over the past year, “isolation” and “quarantine” have become regular vocabulary. I think of all the things we previously took for granted—meals with friends, fellowship, regular church services, and more. It feels like 2020 was an extended season of Lent, and we all gave up physical interaction.

Because of the starvation of interaction, I have realized a new appreciation for all the workings of my daily life. First, for my partner. Not only does he share the responsibility of providing for and raising our children, but he is also my home place, my comfort, and for that I am truly blessed.

Second are the grocery store workers. They never missed a beat. They were not provided proper PPE, don't have extensive medical knowledge, were working regular or extended hours, and were probably making minimum wage. They have had increased exposure to COVID-19 by the sheer number of people they serve. I remember saying “thank you for your hard work” to one of the produce workers, and judging by his reaction, you would have thought I'd handed him a large amount of cash. Seeing his appreciation really made my day. Watching people work through the uncertainty of a global pandemic is remarkable.

Though my husband and grocery store workers are at different levels of importance in my life, they are both God's “helpers” that help me get through my days. I could list hundreds of people who stand out to me as helpers and partners that are walking with me in this life.

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper to be his partner.’” (Genesis 2:18) We are never alone; even during isolation God has given us helpers. Let them know how much they mean to you.

Caroline Moomaw

Who have you discovered is ‘essential’ in your life?

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3

When the news broke that school would be closed for two weeks due to COVID-19, my only thought was, “I have two extra weeks of spring break!” I never imagined the virus would be the source of a pandemic still raging. Although the several month lockdown was tedious, it gave me time to learn about myself and about the gift of humanity.

To start, I learned how much I love exercising, particularly playing basketball. I planned out workouts and shot hoops for hours at a time. While I really missed playing sports with others, I felt fortunate that I could practice in my backyard. Also, I really missed hanging out with my friends. So, we went virtual—we spent a lot of time playing video games together in our separate houses. And then, when we could start to get together, we met up to fish six feet apart, or to hang out in backyards.

Spending several months in isolation with just my family helped me to appreciate what I used to consider typical daily human interaction. I am now able to cherish every moment I can spend with my friends, family, and all the people around me. As Genesis 2:18 says, “It is not that good that man should be alone.” Now that I can see my friends again, I treasure our time together, as I know how quickly it could be taken away. Connecting with other people is truly a gift.

John Wootton

What can I do today to connect with someone who might really need it?



THURSDAY, MARCH 4

Last March, I was forced to press “pause” on my frantic schedule. I was suddenly free from many of the obligations taking up space on my calendar and in my life. It was like walking from a busy, noisy city street into the quiet calm of a library. Thoughts I’d been too busy to fully develop and emotions I’d been too distracted to deeply experience rushed into this unfamiliar quiet. It’s all been rather unsettling! I’ve been left speechless with emotion after experiencing the commonplace things that connect us to each other, such as gathering for outdoor worship, seeing my kids’ smiles, and listening to music. I’ve become even more urgently and painfully aware of poverty, neglect, and systemic racism. In “Life Before COVID,” I was empathetic, but admittedly somewhat detached, to these injustices. In the stillness of quarantine, there was nothing to buffer me from them.

Our emotions are not only what make us human, they are gifts from God that drive us to action. They sharpen our focus and provide urgency in our fight against hunger, poverty, and injustice. They stir in us a desire to be together and to develop caring and nurturing relationships. I will therefore give thanks for the unexpected tears and moments of deep contemplation I’ve experienced in the last year. With God’s help, I will channel those emotions into the good work of bringing God’s kingdom a little bit closer to earth.

Allison Dunaway

Allison reminds us that our emotions are gifts from God. Why do you think God has given us our emotions? How are they gifts?



FRIDAY, MARCH 5

When March of 2020 struck, I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know that a year from then, I would still be wearing masks, doing virtual school, and most importantly, missing out on my prime teenage years.

I'm a junior in high school at Trinity Episcopal School. This year is supposed to be the most difficult year of my high school career, and the circumstances that the past year has placed on me have only made it worse. My junior year has been filled with so much work that I can't catch a break. I absolutely love school and understand how essential it is, but this year has taken social interaction away from me and other teenagers all around the world.

I don't mean to sound negative, but I don't get to experience what my previous upperclassmen friends experienced during their high school careers: big sporting events, like football and basketball games, and lively dances, like homecoming and prom. These social events brought the entire student body together, but this year, I have felt alone.

As I reflect on the gift of humanity, I have realized that I am not alone, even if it feels like it. I know that I am a gift to this earth that I call home, and God is always with me, especially during this tough year. As Marilyn Ferguson once said, "Sometimes things have to get worse before they get better."

Perrin Gilman

Today I will remember that I am not alone.

SATURDAY, MARCH 6

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper to be his partner.’” (Genesis 2:18)

The last eleven months have presented us with so many unprecedented challenges. Whenever I find myself needing a reminder to revel in the good that is happening amidst the bad, I look to our family dog, Molly.

No matter who the partner is that God has paired you with during this challenging time, approach each day with them with an over-exuberance of love like Molly does.

Daily she teaches us by example to find joy in the everyday: wag your tail (or dance!), eat as many treats as you can, snuggle on the couch for hours on end, and enjoy long walks often. She reminds us to take advantage of this unprecedented “non-busy” time, which is rare during this season of my life (kids, work, sports, etc). It may very well be a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Andy Howlett

Where are you finding joy in the every day?

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 7

WE LIVE IN A FALLEN WORLD

“I can will what is right but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.”

- Romans 7:19

“When will it all end—all this demonizing of people!”

- A St. Mary's parishioner in a Zoom call meeting.

Years ago, I drove Godfrey Mdimi Mhogolo, Diocesan Bishop of the Diocese of Central Tanganyika in Tanzania to the airport in Richmond from the Northern Neck. When Bishop Mdimi died in 2014, the Church and the world lost one of our great shining souls - at least in this world. I had met him about six years before in Tanzania and the example of his holy life still lights my way.

As we drove through the night, we talked about the conflict of the Church in Africa, principally over issues of human sexuality. Bishop Mdimi was a progressive on this issue, at least compared with other Anglican bishops in Africa. At one point he said frankly, 'a lot of this posturing by we African bishops—all trying to get further to the right of the next guy—is about money from you for us. The American conservatives are quite conservative with their money—demanding we go further and further to the right. The liberals are very liberal with their money for us just as they find us!' He loved the word play he made with the word 'liberal' and he threw his head back and laughed and laughed. I said, 'Wait a minute, are you telling me this is about money?!' He said, 'Yes, of course, what do you expect—we live in a fallen world!' He said, 'You don't understand. How can you? You have everything. I have the care of 200,000 communicants in my diocese plus so many children. They struggle every day to survive. They are my people in my care. It's my responsibility. Here in this country, you have the luxury to argue about this and that, and you are fine. My people die every day. Of course, I take your money.'

Bishop Mdimi was a saintly man. A realistic man. He was right theologically and practically. This side of the Kingdom we do need to be—as Jesus urged—'wise as serpents and innocent as doves'. But how?

For starters we should be honest: we are not realistic enough about the reality that we live in fallen world. Roman Catholic theologian Hans Kung once said that, "Sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Church—just look around you!" We have to look no further than this past year and the agony our whole world has been in. In particular, the degree to which people have turned on one another should be all the proof we need of our poor world's fallen-ness. The nearly universal moral outrage over the killing of George Floyd dissolved with astonishing speed into multiple enemy camps vying for money and power. Increasingly who we are seems to be defined only by who we are against. And so it goes.

One St. Mary's parishioner at a Zoom call meeting asked, "What is fear doing to us?" There was a long pause as the weight of that question hung in the air. What do we do?

Begin again.

“Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?” I will with God's help.

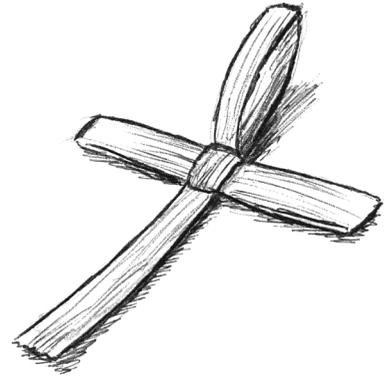
We live in a fallen world. How can you work to make it better?

David May

We Live in a Fallen World | 21

MONDAY, MARCH 8

Last summer, David asked the members of the Vestry to write a collect on racial equality and social justice. At the same time, I was enjoying a series of conversations with David Harris, Arthur Ashe's nephew, who was involved in the renaming of the Boulevard to Arthur Ashe Boulevard. How ironic that these two things happened in my life at the same time.



So, I found myself looking for God in my research on Arthur Ashe. It wasn't hard. Ashe wrote to his daughter as he was dying from HIV:

"....Read the Bible. Read the *psalms* and the Sermon on the Mount, and everything else in that timeless book. You will find inscribed there the meaning of life, and the way you should live. Find that sense of yourself, as created by God, for a purpose. And, be ruled by that rule called Golden: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

Associating Ashe's legacy with the naming of Arthur Ashe Boulevard was illuminating for me. Prior to my research, I was a spectator to the Boulevard's renaming. Now, I realize that I am called to participate in the pursuit of racial equality in our community. Arthur Ashe's Boulevard helps point the way.

Harris shared with me a letter he wrote to Arthur Ashe (posthumously) about his experience in the renaming of the Boulevard. Let me offer an excerpt -

"....I often receive e-mails, or am tagged on social media, by people who want me to know that seeing the new street name has inspired them about Richmond's ability to become a city that embraces—and cares about—all of its citizens."

I feel blessed to have experienced the convergence of David May's charge to write a collect, and my time with David Harris about Arthur Ashe Boulevard. I pray for God's light in our pursuit of racial equality -

Lord, may your kingdom come, and may your will be done—in our lives—on Earth as it is in heaven.

Wayne Dementi

Where is God calling me into hard conversations?

TUESDAY, MARCH 9

As one who works in an agency focused on getting kids adopted from foster care, I see our fallen world every day. As you may have heard me say, kids don't end up in foster care for nothin'. All too often there is a horrific story of abuse and neglect that caused the child to be removed from their parents. All too often this history of chronic trauma results in significant mental and physiological problems that can take a lifetime to heal, if they can heal at all. So, the question is not whether we live in a fallen world—we do. The question is what are we going to do about it?

At our agency, we work hard to place the hardest-to-place children in permanent homes. Science and experience both tell us that the best way to heal from chronic trauma that has resulted in feelings of isolation and abandonment is to experience the love and permanency of family. That love and security is the first step toward overcoming experiences that result from our fallen world. And I believe that, in some ways, is the overarching message of how we heal from a broken world. Thankfully, it is also what I believe to be the primary message of the Episcopal Church. The salve that will be the balm to overcome our fallen world is love.

Bruin Richardson

How can you show love to someone in need this week?



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10

I used to believe I was somewhat in control of the trajectory of my life. At least, I thought that if I followed the Golden Rule and worked hard, I would have some control concerning the direction of my future.

Then my first daughter was born, and parenthood taught me that perhaps I'd been misguided. After my second daughter was born—a perfectly beautiful gift who also has significant special needs—it was clear, I wasn't merely misguided; my earlier ideas about control were flat wrong. My daughters taught me that we're never fully in control of our lives, or anyone else's. Accepting this means acknowledging that the world may be painful or scary, either for ourselves or those we love.

The pandemic and the fractious state of our nation are enough to overwhelm us. Add to that the numerous daily disappointments and frustrations, and we feel that we have lost control of our lives.

Rather than sink into despair over the chaos and uncertainty that defines this moment in life, I propose we focus on the small daily rituals and tasks that appease the part of our minds that crave control and that ultimately bring us the peace we desire.

Anne Lamott says, "Even now we aren't in charge of much, and it is exhausting to believe or pretend that we are. The best we can do is to help the poor, get some rest, help the pets at mealtime, observe the rules of health and safety during the virus. Watching the ways we try to be in charge can help us to get our sense of humor back, and laughter is a holy and subversive battery."

Loving one another, helping others, taking care of ourselves, and plenty of laughter might be enough to sustain us for a little longer.

Kate Hershey

Giving up control is hard, but so much is ultimately out of our control. What should I "let go and let God" today?

THURSDAY, MARCH 11

My experience with COVID was difficult but I also learned from my challenges. The pandemic did not reveal any flaws of human nature. However, the domestic breakdown in our social order and political discourse did seem to expose the darker side of humanity.

Almost one year ago, my wife was infected with the virus. We narrowly avoided hospitalization and it took four weeks of my care for her to recover. I was scared, which was my first mental obstacle to overcome. Courage is the answer, but I define courage as “fear that has said its prayers.” The outcome was not in my control, so I “let go and let God.” That gave me the serenity to handle the situation. It was also helpful to remember gratitude and how many blessings we have had in our life. Many in this world have far less than our family. This experience also strengthened the love and partnership with Betsy. Finally, a better understanding of what is important in life emerged.

In contrast to COVID, which tends to bring us together, the political instability during this period has divided our community and families. Due to great division in political parties, these conflicts will remain for some time. Therefore, the question is: how do I react given my strong political beliefs? Anger is not appropriate. I have no control over how an individual expresses their views, but I can control my response and emotions. We can engage with reason, logic, understanding, and listen patiently. When no calm discussion can occur, detachment with love is appropriate. To confess, I am a work in progress on these responses.

During the Lenten season, I will be spending time meditating on our Lord’s guidance for me on this topic as well as on repentance. When all is said and done, nothing can be accomplished without God’s help.

Jim Jollay

Name people in your life with different opinions than you who you also love.



FRIDAY, MARCH 12

More than a decade has passed since I began meeting with the majority of my clients in the jail, separated by a thin glass window. I have represented many troubled people charged with varying degrees of criminal offenses... the epitome of our fallen world—or just humans? People who cry real tears, have real fears, are broken, addicted, lost. Most are people like us who need help and hope. I have found the majority to be appreciative of a listening ear, an offer to help, and a glimmer of hope. But often they are told that they must wait... things will get better.

While we all have our experiences with living in a fallen world, this is my daily reminder. It provides me an overwhelming awareness of the darkness, disparity, suffering, addiction, hatred, and division in our world today. It is all relative, but I see it around me, and I recognize it in me. I deal with it by having hope.

In the past year, the Pandemic and deep political and racial divisions have emphasized the depth of our fallen world. Things are far from perfect, downright depressing. Many are isolated and lonely. Others are filled with hatred and anger over current events. The reality is that we have all sinned, and we continue to struggle with sin daily. We are fallen.

Like inmates in jail, we must also wait. We must take comfort in the hope that God so graciously offers us through his son, Jesus. We will be free from our fallen world, free from our fallen minds and bodies. We eagerly await restoration, our glorious freedom. Don't miss God's final invitation to ALL fallen people: "Come!" (Revelation 22:17)

Owen Conway

Today, I will wait with hope.

SATURDAY, MARCH 13

Good Shepherd, whose voice I want to hear—I do!
But I don't. Or at least it doesn't seem like it.
Show me my own heart, but please, if I could just ask one thing,
 show me my own heart as you see it.
Show me my secret delight when someone else falls.
Show me my secret envy when someone else is raised up above me.
Show me how I stay silent when I should shout "No!"
 to the ways your children are crushed by powerful hate.

Show me all these things, Good Shepherd,
 but as you see them,
 that your love will puncture my heart too,
 and I can stop fighting.
Because I am so tired of fighting.

Show me all these things, Good Shepherd,
 and let me hear your voice calling. Amen.

What are you fighting?

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 14

THE GIFT OF COMMUNITY

“Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body.”

- I Corinthians 12:14-16

“I need the church to tell me about God. I’m not so good at this on my own.”

- A St. Mary’s parishioner in a Zoom call meeting.

In the spring and summer of 2003, I went on a four-month sabbatical. I wrote a proposal for what I wanted to work on, and the Lilly Foundation (God bless them!) agreed to fund my time away and my work. What I wanted to do was ‘to listen to what the world was saying about itself’. I wanted to try to answer that question by listening for where life was in peril or perishing, where human flourishing was being denied. I wrote and wrote, and prayed and prayed, and read and read. I listened. I looked. I paid attention on trips across the country and in time spent studying in Europe. And here’s the great learning I arrived at: the world is desperate for community, and without it we aren’t going to make it.

I had wished for an answer that seemed a little less commonplace. But that’s what I heard over and over again. People are desperate to experience that fundamental sense of belonging to one another, even with all of our differences. And what makes it worse is that we’re not very good at doing that. That was 2003. I think that sense of desperation has only grown. And our ability to actually live in community with one another seems to have only declined precipitously.

But “it shall not be so among you,” Jesus said in speaking of what a community of his followers looks like. Jesus’s ministry was always directed to gathering together a community to share a common life of service and love. So many of his words and deeds were directed toward finding a place at his table for people who were otherwise left out. Over and over again, he challenged his followers’ assumption of who belongs and who doesn’t. We’re having a similar conversation these days as we realize with fresh eyes the people who ‘are essential’ in all of our lives.

The Apostle Paul stated bluntly, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) His great image of the Body of Christ means that not only does a foot belong as much as an ear, but we cannot be whole without all of the parts of the body.

Who has shown you that you belong? Who needs you to show them that they belong?

David May

MONDAY, MARCH 15



Admittedly, many of us have taken our gift of community for granted. It was all around, both spiritually and physically—touchable, reachable, readily available. The freedom to give to, take from, and participate within our community became expected, causing us not to be mindful of these privileges. The

pandemic of 2020 bestowed a sharp reminder to us all, and once the veil of our ignorance lifted, it revealed a year laced with lessons of love, circling around this gift of community.

As we approach this season of Lent, we reflect on the sacrifices given for us by Christ, and regain perspective on our own sacrifices, as well as the sacrifices of those in our community. Some of us have struggled to sense our gift of community over the past year. It seemed distant, at times weak, or even broken, prompting feelings of isolation, fear, and even disappointment; however, as the months marched on, as the veil of ignorance lifted and we started listening more closely to those lessons of love, we recognized our ability to alter and recreate, turning to our families and ourselves to revitalize the gift of community. Regardless of the ever-changing world, our community remains resilient as the foundational cornerstone to humanity. We must remember to speak of it, appreciate it, and empower it, for we need it as much as it needs us.

Bonnie Beth Bedell

Today, I will remember that I belong. How can you connect with your community this week?

TUESDAY, MARCH 16

This year was crazy for me. School was online, and while I couldn't go inside my friend's homes for a while, we tried our best to stay in touch. So many doors closed this year, but new ones opened. For instance, when school was virtual, I worried about not seeing people, especially my friends. That's when I joined the Leaders Club at the YMCA, and I found a way to see people and help out the community. For Halloween and Christmas, we set up stations for kids to visit and have fun. Working with the kids in a fun positive way was an emotionally fulfilling experience for all of us in the Leaders Club. We were able to create a sense of normalcy, if only for a brief time. I believe if we come together as a community, we can get through this and we will get through this.

Mary Lou Holmes

What have I learned about the gift of community?



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17

A community is a group united by similar location, interests and ideas, or experiences. We at St Mary's identify ourselves as a "Community of Faith". From this group of similar-minded beings we [receive-enjoy] the affirmation of our faith with and often through other members. We were created to be social beings; that is, we thrive in the company of others. Yes, John Donne, "...No man is an island..."

That big empty building on River Road is just an empty shelter unless it is filled with people. Our Community of Faith gathers here to practice our Faith. Our interaction makes it a church. From these participants we give and receive, i.e., share

The warmth of fellowship

The joy of music

The inspiration of preaching

The comfort of prayer

And support during loss.

A constant, fluid giving and receiving, make us a church. Together. We participate in the gathering of the community, and each is needed to make the whole.

The community includes each and every one. And what a joy it is to be together!!!!

What a gift is Community!

And HE will be in the midst of them.

Jane Fawley

What will it be like when we can come back together at church?



THURSDAY, MARCH 18

Last January and February, I thought 2020 was “my year.” I was finally settled into my first adult apartment, was making new friends, and enjoyed my job. I was excited to be a young twenty-something in Richmond. However, Covid-19 forced me to work remotely, alone in my apartment. The closest thing to an adventure was visiting family or my covid bubble. Isolation is hard for an extrovert who thrives on activity. I felt lost and disconnected from the community of family and friends I had built. I, like everyone, was learning to live in our new socially distanced world.

Within months, each of my “communities” had evolved. My friends and I moved happy hours and dinners to facetime. Work challenged me to be creative and take different approaches to projects. My St. Mary’s community was replaced with Zoom choir, socially distanced youth group, and prerecorded Sunday services. Passion, creativity, and love drove each community together in unique ways.

It turns out 2020 wasn’t all bad. I spent more time with family, my friend group was smaller but stronger and I explored new interests. Since I couldn’t rely on proximity to stay in touch with friends, I was intentional with my time and relationships. Like these relationships, we need to be mindful in how we build our bond with God. We are as dependent on God as we are our earthly communities. As we accept him into our lives, we need to be as intentional with him as we are with those in our individual communities.

Meriwether Roberts

What do you want to ask God for today?

FRIDAY, MARCH 19

"Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body." - I Corinthians 12:14-16

No question that 2020 has been a year that none of us will ever forget. How did we get through it? Our communities. What are communities? They can be families, friends, schools, neighborhoods, etc. They can also be institutions, like St. Mary's.

2020 at St. Mary's was a year like no other, and it reflects how thankful we should all be as members of this St. Mary's community. We saw the light in the engagement and leadership of our Vestry, the love and support from our entire staff 24/7/365, and the parishioners who were not scared by a lot of changes to our past practices.

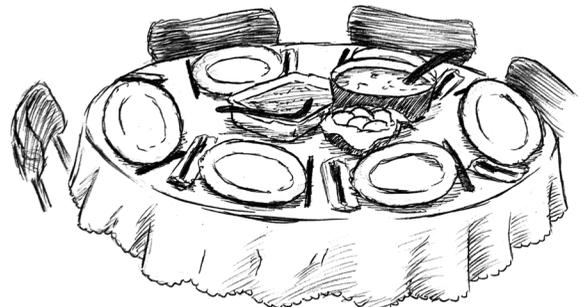
As a result, there were live services in the east parking lot last year in addition to other remote services on Sunday mornings. There were even baptisms, including our newest grandchild, and there was great fellowship from all involved.

Why did this happen? As referenced in the scripture above, we all came together in challenging times to work as a body with many members.

We enter 2021 as a stronger community, and as the chains around our ability to congregate loosen and finally fall off, WE will come together to learn and grow in meeting and exceeding the expectations of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Sandy McDonald

How can our church make sure there is room for one more?



SATURDAY, MARCH 20

They say, my Lord and my God,
That we should always have an extra chair at the table
In case Elijah should come to announce
that the Holy One is near.

We would want to have a seat for him if he should come
and food
and drink

And a listening ear for whatever he has to say
so with that,
even a prophet would know he is welcomed with us.

But isn't this your way for everyone, most Merciful God – not just Elijah.
Shouldn't we always have a chair ready
For someone we already love
or will love
or may love
or could love

And who needs food and drink
And a listening ear?
And a chair ready for them too
because the Holy One is near. Amen.

Take some time to be still with God today.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 21

THE HOPE FOR NEW CREATION

“Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.”

-I John 3:2

“In times of big change, what is God trying to get us to see?”

“We will get through this. But we won’t be the same.”

“The theme of ‘the new normal’ gives us an opportunity to redefine who we are and how we respond.”

“I can complain about things that don’t matter. This has taken my head off and put it back on again.”

– All quotes from St. Mary’s parishioners at Zoom call meetings.

Believe it or not, this booklet that you have been given is meant to be a means for us to cooperate with the work of the Spirit in you and in our church. We want to envision together the hope that God will lead us and make us a New Creation out of this long time apart. How can God use this time to change us? Nothing, now, is written in stone. No decisions have been made. Maybe nothing will need to be written in stone. Maybe the decisions that need to be made will be the work of the Spirit in each of our own hearts to change us.

The New Creation dawned on that first Easter morning when the deathless love of God raised Jesus from the dead. God’s holy love and faithfulness punched a whole into this world with Jesus’s risen life to siphon the abundance of the coming Kingdom into this world. Even in this fallen world, the risen Christ brings peace and mercy and justice and compassion and forgiveness through his people that the gates of hell cannot stand against.

Yet, what we will be ‘has not yet been revealed’. We will have to wait for that grace to be given. The worldwide pandemic means we are all waiting. The whole world is waiting together for new life together to come. We can fight that and blame others and curse the heavens. Who hasn’t? I have. And we are still waiting.

And our waiting always includes hope. When the waiting is over, and the Lord is revealed, ‘we will be like him, for we will see him as he is’.

How do you hope this time will change you?

How do you hope this time will change St. Mary’s Church that we may—more and more—‘be like him’ who died and rose for us?

David May

MONDAY, MARCH 22

It goes without saying that the last year has been unlike any we've experienced in our lifetime—filled with enormous challenges, sadness, and grief, but also providing new experiences, friendships, and moments of gratitude. Often, we forget how small and fragile the world really is. We have grown accustomed to seeing strife and hardship in faraway countries, and assuming that we are untouchable. This past year has been a stark reminder that events occurring halfway around the world can ultimately have a profound impact on our lives and our community. It has forced me to re-evaluate what is important in the world and more specifically in my own life. It has allowed me personally to take a step back and reflect on life from a different perspective.

We all struggle with the day-to-day grind and this year has been no exception. This experience has, however, reminded me that family, friends, and health are paramount but often taken for granted. The fragility of life is to be respected, but its uncertainty can be used as a catalyst to live every day to the fullest and cherish the relationships created with those around us. I like to think we have been put through the ultimate test of wills and personal endurance, and we will come out on the other side stronger and with a newfound appreciation for those things that are most important to us.

John Sentz

What am I learning in this time that is most important to me?

TUESDAY, MARCH 23

Having celebrated Christmas this past year and rapidly approaching Lent and Easter, our focus is heavily upon Jesus. At Christmas, he took upon himself to be born of a mortal young woman and to live fully human among us. During his 40 days of Lent, he quarantined himself, asked himself the hardest of questions, and was tempted by the Devil. In Holy Week, Jesus suffered and died a brutal death, but on Easter he rose from the dead to give us eternal life.

Frederick Buechner shared in his reflection on Lent, that this is a time to ask ourselves tough questions: who we are, what would we like the most to undo in our life, and when were we the proudest in our life. Finally, what would we be willing to die for?

These are uncomfortable questions, but worthy of heart rendering reflection. We have been through a lot recently, and we will continue to get through all of it if we can remember to live and love in Christ, follow his teachings, and his example. We've been given a chance to reflect, learn, and change. During this Lent, I will strive to have a soul-searching reflection of my life and to walk closer with Jesus. I want whatever new world emerges from this past year to be guided by Christ's life and example.

Harry Baldwin

Today, I will take the opportunity to wonder at what is being asked of me.



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24

Charles Swindoll said, “Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.” This quote has always been meaningful in my life, but it has become immensely more so during the COVID era.

Over the past 11 months, much has happened and much has not happened. A need to recalibrate and reassess has transpired. This is hope for new creation. This is the 90%.

With light at the end of the tunnel, I have had time to reflect on “recalibrated life.” It has afforded me the opportunity to spend a great deal of time with my wife, Elizabeth, and our two young children, that I would not have otherwise had. It has enabled me to form a bond with our two-year-old son, Carter, that is eternally unbreakable. It has allowed me to begin forming that same bond with our one-year-old daughter, Blair. I have been forced to slow down, be present, and enjoy every moment. It has further opened my eyes to what is important, and it has helped me to realize just how truly fortunate I am. It has been an incredible blessing.

My only wish is that I could somehow erase some of the pain that others have experienced during this time. I pray that even those that have experienced significant hardship are able to realize a silver lining, a betterment of their former lives and former selves, a new creation of their own.

Kyle Gregory

What can hardship sometimes reveal that nothing else will?

THURSDAY, MARCH 25

Recently, I've heard people say, "things will never go back to normal." At first, my heart ached hearing that. But lately, I have found peace and joy in the idea of a new normal. I've realized that our daily lives will eventually go back to normal. But, our outlook will change on those seemingly insignificant moments. In our new normal, we'll notice God's presence in the small moments—blowing out birthday candles in a crowded room full of friends and family, hugging your grandparents at Christmas, holding hands with your church community while saying the Lord's Prayer, seeing the smiles of strangers walking on the street. These moments of our old normal will carry a new sense that God is ever-present. It's as if He has given us the chance to see the good times as they happen instead of after they're gone.

We've heard the saying, "enjoy it while it lasts"—whether that's the innocence of running outside with friends as a kid, the independence of being a college student, or the joy of new parenthood. Until 2020, it was hard for many of us to fully understand what that phrase meant. But now? We understand it. We have the unique opportunity now to pause in the moment, reminding us that God walks with us through every phase of life. And when we go back to "normal," what a sweet, beautiful day that will be. God has given us grace and wisdom to understand what it means to be present and enjoy the moment; to understand what He meant when He said Be still and know that I am God. The chaos and pain of the last year have been undeniably hard, but have helped us make room in our hearts for more peace and contentment. And what a beautiful gift that is.

Claire Hahn

Today, I will look for the 'small moments' where God is present.



FRIDAY, MARCH 26



It is very common to hear people asking when life will get back to normal. Some people think that we may never get back to normal: that we will have to create a “new normal” for the greater good of society. This year, I will look at the new normal

with hope: the hope of a new creation. 2020 offered us the opportunity to think about others rather than ourselves in completely new ways. When rebuilding our fallen world, putting others before ourselves is the perfect example of what 2020 taught us. The arrival of a new year provides a perfect opportunity to rebuild our world after a difficult year.

When I think of points of focus to reshape our world, I think of patience, perspective, and prayer. Nearly one year later, COVID-19 is still with us, and patience should dictate what we say and do until we find a solution to the virus. Next, perspective helps us put ourselves into the positions of others and realize what they are going through. It is possible that the virus has not affected us on a personal level, but letting ourselves think about those who have been affected personally helps us put others before ourselves. Lastly, thinking of others and retaining the virtue of patience is what our Christian community is built upon. If we use the concept of prayer to help us perform these first two actions, getting through these turbulent times will go by more quickly than we think.

Macon Moring

Today, I will try to offer patience, give space for perspective, and pray.

SATURDAY, MARCH 27



John (or someone we call John)
O God, on Patmos saw something.
Revelation!

It was you, I think.
And how you will change all things eventually
By shaking off the old world
Like my dog shaking off the rain this morning.
You saw John seeing this, I guess:
A new world coming
like a bridegroom coming to his beloved
at last.

Which isn't strange—like some left behind books tell us it is
but lovely.

I wonder how much you gave John to see,
This New Creation,
That he couldn't hold onto with words alone.
But that's all we have of what he saw
Words
That can at least direct our eyes in the right direction.

Without knowing fully
Can you help me hold open a place
(that doesn't have my fingerprints all over it already)
That only you can fill
That only you can fill
That only you will fill

With loveliness
Like a lamb lying down with a lion
And a baby playing peek-a-boo with a viper in his dark bottomless hole.

Turn me in the right direction, O Lord God,
After the shaking is over
To see you coming with healing in your wings
Like the cry of a newborn baby at her birth
To fill the place you keep open for us
With your own loveliness beyond words.

How can our church keep a place open for God?

PALM SUNDAY, MARCH 28

THE JOURNEY OF HOLY WEEK

“Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’” - Luke 23:34

“How do we fix this?!” – A St. Mary’s parishioner in a Zoom call meeting.

I think we all have experiences in our lives that stay alive for us. They are memories. But they are something more than that as well. Some experiences stay with us, stay alive in us, I believe, because what we are remembering is a time when God drew near. So near that we were changed.

Years ago in seminary, we were experiencing conflict in our class. Which is normal. At least that’s what our great sisters and brothers of the Mennonite tradition tell us. Conflict is a normal part of life, they tell us. And the energy that emerges in conflict can provide us the means for getting everything on the table we need to look at together. And as long as everyone can stay around the table and look at it, there is the chance that our lives can be transformed by the love of Christ.

The conflict in my seminary class was really garden variety, ordinary human stuff. One day in Church History class, it began leaking out ostensibly as innocent questions to Don Armentrout our brilliant professor about some aspect of what we were studying. But, those innocent-sounding questions were a ruse, a passive-aggressive way of going at each other.

Don was a Lutheran pastor, brilliant scholar, and even more brilliant human being. I’m sure that Don had seen it all and heard it all before with seminarians. So, after a third or fourth or fifth passive-aggressive question about some historic trend that was actually a dagger aimed at a fellow classmate, Don just stopped and stared at us. For a long time. I thought at first he might start cussing. It had happened before. We certainly deserved it.

But he didn’t. He just let the silence grow and grow and grow. And with it a sense of being convicted settled on me more and more. A good kind of conviction.

Finally, he spoke. He said, “I want to say something. And I want you to listen to me. What is it in you, each of you, in me, that needs to be nailed to the cross and crucified? So God, and only God, can give resurrection?”

His question is still alive in me.

As we walk together to the Cross in this Holy Week, what is it in you that needs to be nailed to the cross and crucified, so God can give resurrection?

David May

MONDAY, MARCH 29

Unknown and unnamed she broke into the dinner, disruptive, intruding, uninvited.

Love is like that.

Reclining at table, the pose of the wealthy who have tables laden with roasted lamb and olives, a mountain of bread, figs, and wine.

A feast fit for a king in the house of the leper.

She moves toward him, and can feel their greedy eyes upon her.

Her heart skips a beat, but she knows what she has come to do, and understands why.

She breaks off the neck on the alabaster jar, the thin neck meant to mete out the precious ointment drop by drop, over months and years.

This jar and its contents only have one purpose.

He looks up at her, meets her eyes only for a moment. Yes. It is right. Do what you have come to do.

She pours out the perfumed oil onto his head. He sighs.

His eyes are closed. He feels it begin to trickle down his cheeks, like tears.

The fragrance fills the room, fills the house, fills all of Bethany, Jerusalem, the whole country, the world.

And then the room explodes with angry voices—the extravagance! The waste!

Someone has already calculated the cost. Three hundred denarii! A year's wages. The perfume could have been sold and that money given to the poor. Outrageous!

His voice sharp, breaks through their indignation, "leave her alone!"

She is the prophet who has anointed the king, the mourner who has done the work that women have always done; she has prepared the body for burial. She has understood what his closest followers have not; he must die in order that they might live. That we might live.

Her heart broken open and poured out, every last drop. Love is like that.

Remember her.

Denise Bennett

TUESDAY, MARCH 30

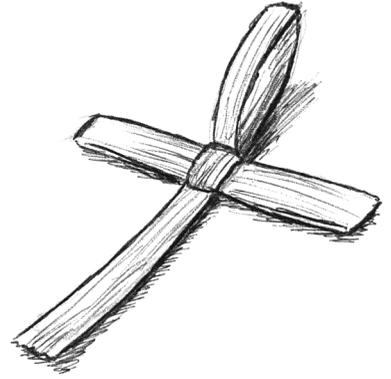
I am prone to some righteous indignation. Well, actually most of the time it's more self-righteous temper fits. I'm working on those. However, sometimes my anger is directed correctly. It flares when I see that people are being hurt or taken advantage of. It rears up when I see someone in authority belittle or dismiss someone. This passage from the text of Holy Week is a reminder that Jesus did not walk around in a good mood all the time. Jesus got mad too. And here He is getting mad at the folks who have misused the sacred space set aside for God, making it a place of trading and money making, not prayer and sacrifice. He is angry because there were people using the name of God to abuse the people of God. That is certainly reason for some righteous indignation and table flipping. Presiding Bishop Curry often says, "If it's not about Love, it's not about God." I think this is the best measure for me to think about when my outrage is actually right-sized. Of course, Jesus didn't stay in a place of anger; he put that riled-up love into action with his life, not just his words. That too is a good reminder for me as I approach Friday and the foot of the cross.

Amelia McDaniel

For you, when is anger healthy?



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31



John wrote that Jesus was “at supper with his friends” which sounds like the beginning of an enjoyable evening—except that it wasn’t. John was quick to alert us to the fact that Jesus was “troubled in spirit”. I don’t imagine that it meant that Jesus was simply bothered by something. There was more to it than that. He was deeply troubled. He knew that what was about to take place would be the beginning of the end for him. And he knew that it would involve betrayal by someone whom he considered a dear friend.

We know how compassionate Jesus was. Do you think it was possible, then, that Jesus was not only troubled for himself, but troubled for Judas, too? After all, Judas was one of his disciples and Jesus loved him as much as anyone.

I’ve never had any compassion for Judas; but if Satan entered Judas as John wrote, then did Judas have any control over what he did or said? Was he Satan’s pawn in an inevitable sequence of events that brought Jesus to the cross? Matthew, Mark, and Luke indicated that what Judas did was premeditated and motivated by money. It’s hard to have compassion for that.

For now, though, I think I’ll give Judas the benefit of the doubt. I like to think that Jesus was troubled in spirit not only for his own fate but for the fate of his friend and disciple, Judas, whose light was temporarily extinguished by the darkness of night.

Eleanor Wellford

Who do I keep loving no matter what?

THURSDAY, APRIL 1

MAUNDY THURSDAY

I'll admit that as a child, I didn't understand the significance of Maundy Thursday. In fact, I thought it was "Monday Thursday," which was incredibly confusing. But now, in our broken, divided world, Maundy Thursday serves as such an important reminder.

Jesus knew that Judas had betrayed him, yet he washed Judas's feet. Jesus knew that Peter would deny him—not once, not twice, but three times—and still, he washed his feet. Jesus knew. But he forgave them. Loved them anyway. Washed their feet.

Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? I think all of us probably have, to some degree or another. We're human, and sometimes we mess up. Can you imagine knowing that some of your best friends were about to betray you in the worst possible way—knowing that you were going to die—and still sitting down and washing their feet? Or helping them with anything? Serving them in any way?

I imagine that, had it been me, I would have yelled. Screamed. Cried. Run. Cursed. But not Jesus. He loved them anyway.

Today, Maundy Thursday, we are reminded that we should try to live as Jesus did—loving others unconditionally, even when they mess up. And serving others unconditionally, no matter what their circumstance. Thank you, God, for loving us even when we fall short.

Elizabeth Starling

"So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example that you also should do, as I have done to you." - John 13:14-15

Today, I will remember I am called to 'love anyway.'

FRIDAY, APRIL 2

GOOD FRIDAY

During this past year, I have witnessed hurt in our community, and our nation. We need to start recognizing our own pain during these times, and we need to take time to reflect on everything that's happened to us and to others. All too often, I see judgement being passed, or hate from one to another, over issues such as race, culture, sexual orientation, religion, or political beliefs. Sometimes I'll even find myself getting caught in judgement over something as small as someone not agreeing with me, rather than just listening and trying to understand where they're coming from—putting myself in their shoes. I try to remind myself that God wants us to love and not hate, he wants us to find joy and not anger or judgement on somebody else's heart.

At one of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s civil rights speeches, he said "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." His profound message has such an impact on everything going on in our world today. We need to remind ourselves to respect the dignity of every human being, instead of trying to be right all the time. This reminds me of Reverend May's sermon for Good Friday in 2019. He talked about how if we could take away everything we see ourselves as—straight or gay, American or Asian, white or black, conservative or liberal—if we could take that all away, what we'd find is "that you are the one for whom the Lamb of God, Jesus, laid down his life, for love. For love." If we could do that, maybe we wouldn't be so divided.

Rainey Trice

SATURDAY, APRIL 3

HOLY SATURDAY

When Prayer Book revisions happened in the mid-1970s, I didn't like one small change. In today's Prayer Book, a phrase in the Apostle's Creed reads: "he descended to the dead." The former version reads: "he descended into hell." It feels crucial to me to confess Jesus's descent into hell. This phrase means that there isn't any place, however dark, however God-forsaken, where Jesus is not.

We think of Holy Saturday—if we even think of it—as a pause between Jesus's death on Good Friday and resurrection on Easter. When Good Friday is over, we immediately prepare the church with lilies and white altar hangings; organists practice 'Welcome Happy Morning'. We move on quickly.

But deep in the tradition of Christ's Church, is a strange story told on this day, meant to tell us something true about the breadth of Jesus's saving death. It is the story of Christ's descent into hell. On Holy Saturday, Martin Smith offers a gorgeous insight on what it means:

"...Christ through his death joins the dead, but as the herald of their liberation....the new reconciled community is meant to include them too. Orthodox icons of the resurrection show Christ....trampling on the unhinged and broken doors of Hades. With one hand he pulls Adam from the nether darkness, and with the other Eve. [These icons] express something that western pictures of a solitary Christ ascending from his own grave do not. Gazing on these icons, we are irradiated with the truth that we have been, are being, and only will be, saved together with one another. 'As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive...that God may be everything to every one.' (I Cor. 15:22-28)"

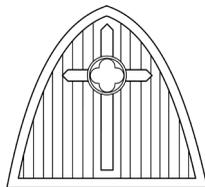
From, *Seasons of the Spirit*, p. 160

David May

Find a picture of an icon depicting 'the Harrowing of Hell' and spend some time contemplating what you see.



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