

A
Lenten
Devotional
2015



Bethany Presbyterian Church
Sacramento, California



The season of Lent leads up to the most holy of Christian days—Easter Sunday. The 40 days of Lent begin Ash Wednesday and end at dusk the Saturday before Easter, not counting the Sundays in between. The Sundays during Lent, like every Sunday, are considered weekly celebrations of the resurrection. Many denominations encourage disciples to renew and strengthen their faith during Lent. The season of Lent is a time of prayer, fasting and self-examination in preparation for the celebration of the resurrection of the Lord at Easter.

There are other passages of time reflected in the Bible that encompass 40 days: the flood of Genesis, Moses' sojourn at Mount Sinai, Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb, Jonah's call to Ninevah to repent and Jesus' time of testing in the wilderness. According to Rabbi Geoffrey Dennis, author of *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic and Mysticism*, the number 40 represents "a time of radical transition or transformation." Anytime the number 40 appears in a biblical passage, he asserts, it's meant to indicate a liminal time when something extraordinary occurs.

This time of spiritual preparation before Easter has its roots in the historical church. New believers were mentored in the Christian faith weeks before Easter, preparing for their baptisms at the Great Easter Vigil. The idea of giving something up for Lent came out of this tradition, when fasting—abstaining from food as an act of discipline in solidarity with others in the community—was used to raise one's spiritual consciousness and empty oneself before God. Fasting or giving up something for Lent can be a good way to explore a deeper expression of faith, if not adopted as a show of piety, martyrdom, or moral righteousness. Presbyterians may find it meaningful to give something up for Lent, but it is not required. Some may find a more valuable spiritual exercise in taking something on during Lent—a more Christ-like attitude toward others, a humble spirit at work, or a feeling of gratitude in the midst of scarcity.

Whatever spiritual disciplines and preparations are embraced during Lent, they can help us prepare for or renew our baptisms as part of the resurrection celebration at Easter.

Bethany Presbyterian Church
Sacramento, California
Spiritual Formation Commission
Hospitality Commission
Spring 2015

Day 1

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God ... — Psalm 42: 2

Holy is the time and holy is this place
and there are holy things that must be said.

Let us say to one another what our souls whisper ...
O Holy One, cast your tent among us;
come into our ordinary lives and bless the living!

Forty days stretch before us,
forty days of hungering after faithfulness,
forty days of trying to understand the story,
and then, Holy Week ...
O God, if every week were holy ...

These forty days stretch before us,
and those of us who believe
yearn to feel Your presence,
yearn to be Your people;
and yet, the days fill with ordinary things
with no time left
for seeking the holy.

Spiritual contemplation is all right
for those who have the time,
but most of us have to make a living.

Most of us have to live in the real world
where profanity splashes and blots out
anything holy.

Where, O Holy One, can we find You in this unholy mess?

How, O God, can we find the holy in the ordinary?

Ann Weems
"Kneeling in Jerusalem"
Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993



Day 2

Draw near to God and God will draw near to you. —James 4: 8

We either know people or we ourselves have given up chocolate or coffee or even Facebook for Lent. Yet, what will we fill in the void? Will we now spend more time in prayer and reflection on Jesus Christ?

Lent is a season of drawing near to God in prayer, listening, and reflection in the hope and love of Jesus Christ. It is a forty day journey of walking together with Jesus.

We can draw near to God by spending time in reflection and meditation on the word of God. We can reflect and meditate on verses of Scripture on the hope and love of Christ as well as his mercy and grace. We then can hold these words in our hearts and in prayer.

We may have only five minutes, or we may discover more minutes throughout the day and evening to spend with God. Whatever the amount of time we have, we will be blessed by spending time holding Christ in our hearts. These times with God will be sacred places on the Lenten journey as we draw near to God, and God draws near to us.

Janice Kamikawa



Day 3

He calls his sheep by name and leads them. The sheep follow him for they know his voice. —John 10: 3-4

Jesus knows your name. Do you know his voice?
Your pet knows your voice.
The farmer's animals know his voice and come at his call.
Do you know the voice of Jesus?

The wife laments that her husband doesn't hear her.
The father complains that his son doesn't listen.
The teen wants to be heard and understood.
Jesus, too, longs for his voice to be recognized.

When Jesus calls, do you hear?
Spend time alone with Jesus, and eventually you will hear him.
You will begin to hear his voice as you read the Bible and pray.
He will speak to you through devotional books and as you meditate.

The lyrics of the old hymn, "In the Garden," joyfully remind us,
"And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own."
The setting is a garden where Jesus is alone with his follower.

Find a place to be alone with Jesus. Talk with—not to—him,
And listen—spiritually not physically—for his voice.
Rejoice when you feel his response and his presence.
His peace will surround and comfort you.

Faye Bundesen Christensen



Day 4

For we live by faith, not by sight. —2 Corinthians 5: 7

For Faith is like the wind as we can not see it. We can feel its effects.
Like a breeze.

We know faith like as in prayer because of its effects; we know its truths because of its miraculous healing power and through intercession we are lifted up. And with the laying on of hands we are given blessings for protection from the dark angel.

We are told the story of Christ's four Gospels to bring disciples to the Lord, as one great truth ... only knowing through the word and with faith what to believe. Through faith we are channelled to the Lord to be told what is right, what is wrong, when and where to act, and what to act upon. Like a little voice; a conscience.

It just takes faith to believe in Christ.

There are souls just longing to hear the word, to know him and believe in him. And even though we have not seen him directly, for this we are greatly blessed: for we believe, with faith like the mustard seed, and our faith is great.

We cannot *perceive* all the beauty, splendour and more
in store
for us in heaven
but I *believe* ... don't you?

Gary Gardner



For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any creature can separate us from the love of God. —Romans 8: 39

Like many “normal” teenagers, I began to question the faith of parents. Yet—unlike many other teenagers—rebellion was not my form. Instead, I devoured the Bible trying to find “stuff” that would tweak my parents’ faith in order to justify my own. I wanted my own “God.” Not theirs.

Growing up in a Christian home with 13 years of Christian schooling, I had studied the Bible thoroughly. In primary school I was taught mostly the Old Testament and the Book of Revelations. In secondary school I studied the four Gospels, Romans, and some of the Epistles. As time went on, scouring the Bible yielded little ammunition.

I became a runner when I was 15. Internally ambivalent and conflicted, I discovered running gave me the tranquillity to dig into myself. I was an eager seeker. This angst was my unwavering companion. I was 18 years old when I met an Australian minister. He was also a runner, as well as the director for the youth conference I was attending. He would wake up and meet me at 5 a.m. every day to run and pray with me. On the last day of the conference, after we prayed, he murmured to me: “May, Romans. Read Romans 8.”

As I sat down to read the above verse contemplatively, it moved me to a quiet, healing cry. I found “my” God. My God’s love is real, constant, deep, everlasting, unconditional, perfect, and I am loved.

May Tuan Tucker



Day 6

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. — Philippians 4: 13

For several of us at Bethany this past year has been difficult to say the least.

But through it all our faith has kept us strong.

As we look forward to the joyous season of Easter let us look forward to

a better year.

Jesus keeps us strong

Jesus dries our tears

Jesus is our guide

Jesus comforts our fears.

May we always remember that no matter how difficult our life may be,

comfort and guidance is in the hands of our Lord Jesus.

Dear Lord, be with us this Lenten season and always. Amen.

Mary Harbison-Sindle



Day 7

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. —Psalm 23

I accepted Christ when I was a senior in high school (1948). I was baptized and a joy and peace came into my heart that never leaves me.

I am very thankful for my years at Bethany. I have had the opportunity to serve as a Deacon and an Elder in ministry to children. I also had the pleasure of helping the ministry to Vietnamese refugees that were the eventual beginning of Grace Presbyterian Church.

My husband, George, was an Elder and taught several adult Bible studies that were well attended. He was also a tenor in the choir. It is a great blessing that our four dear children are all believers.

I want to thank all of you for your love, friendship, and prayers over the years.

I have had happy, sad, and hard times as most people do, but His spirit is always with me. I know that I am loved and forgiven.

Donna Roberts



But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint. —Isaiah 40: 31

While waiting at an especially long red light the other day I got to thinking about why people call them “stop lights.” Technically, they are called traffic lights, and red is only one of the three options they present. There is also yellow (“get ready to stop”) and green (“go”). But we focus on the one annoying aspect—the red light—which makes us stop dead in our tracks when we least want to.

Our modern society has trained us to expect everything quickly. We get our news in sound bites, our food from “fast food” restaurants or in packages at the grocery store that we can just heat and serve. Cell phones ensure that we can communicate with friends instantly no matter where we or they may be at that moment.

A red light can seem like a boring, pointless interruption in our day. We want all green lights, for our day to be constantly go, go, go! Because we can do everything faster, we cram more things onto our lists of things to do in a day. Then we have to rush, rush, rush through the day to get it all accomplished.

The world’s message is hurry! Do more! Do it faster!

But God has a different message. “Be still, and know that I am God,” He tells us. (*Psalm 46: 10*)

Jesus had a busy ministry, with only three years to get out His message. He was always “on duty” as a teacher to his disciples. Everyone He met expected something from Him—healing or words of wisdom. He could rarely go anywhere without being mobbed. But He frequently stopped and took time to be still. The gospels tell us He often went off alone to pray.



From now on, I'm going to see a red light as an opportunity. An opportunity to slow down, to be still, to acknowledge God in my life. Instead of drumming my fingers impatiently on the steering wheel and fuming, I can use that time to offer up some praise for all the good things in my day, or a quick prayer for someone who is on my heart.

Most of all, it will be a reminder that the number one item on my “to do” list should be quiet time with God. Because only with His help can I accomplish anything.

Christine Sackey

Day 9

For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.
—John 3: 16-17

Every day is Easter.

Jesus died for *all* of us
and that should not be forgotten
at *any* time.

Constance Rubio



Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believes in me though he is dead shall live." — John 11: 25

Many of us have lost our parents, maybe a sibling, a husband or even a child. What keeps me in the faith when such losses occur is this verse. My mother died January 30, 1991, at the age of 81. She had been with me for many years. I grew to know her as a woman of faith. She loved her church and brought her daughters up to worship and pray. We learned to set aside offerings regularly and to have faith as life presented challenges. We continued to practice faithful living until problems were resolved and then to give thanks for the resolution.

Mother was a believer, so when she died, this verse came into my mind when someone checking on my welfare—after losing her—asked how I was coping with my loss. I didn't realize this verse was tucked away in my mind. I stated this verse to the person offering sympathy. I said I knew mother was all right and with her Lord. Saying this aloud gave me great comfort in my grieving process. I feel her with me at times. She is resurrected from the grave.

During 2009, the graves of my parents and a sister were desecrated by a funeral company in Chicago. Managers were arrested and sentenced to serve prison time for selling grave sites illegally. I am so happy that I believe my parents were *not* there. They had been *resurrected* due to their faith in Jesus as our Savior. During the trials of those individuals, I prayed with gratitude that my people were not there in those desecrated graves because I knew they each had faith and believed in resurrection through faith in Jesus. He is the resurrection and the life. "He that believes in me though he is dead shall live."

Barbara Greene



The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. —Psalm 23

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 that 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.

*Thomas Merton (Fr. Louis), OCSO (1915–1968)
Thoughts in Solitude, The Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1956 and 1958*



Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. —Romans 12: 2

Fast Food, Junk Food, Diet Food; Today, It's the American Way! Heart Attacks, Dementia and Type 2 Diabetes are the Modern American Way, too!

For quite a while I have had an interest in the way people eat now and the way they used to eat. It seems that every health question I have had leads me back to the food we eat. I look back in the recesses of my mind to a time when my mother made home-cooked meals and the words she taught me. Always a green and yellow vegetable, the way she made baked beans every week, and the wide variety of fresh foods. Always using God's perfect foods. It was a time before TV dinners, trips to McDonald's and man's incessant need to create his own man-made foods became more prominent.

Leg cramps have bothered me for quite awhile, but I did very little about it but complain. We have been eating more fresh foods and less processed foods in an attempt to improve our eating habits, but it wasn't until I received a wake-up call recently that I decided to take the problem seriously. One day, my son came home from school and told me that both of his legs had cramped in the final laps of a swimming relay race. Fortunately, they were only using kickboards to practice leg work and one of his teammates was quick to respond with a tow back to the side.

I spent time praying for guidance and as I sat there I remembered seeing a news report about a diet that had been rated #1 Best Overall Diet by *U.S. News & Review* for the past five years, so to the library I went in order to find any books written about this diet.

Through my reading I found that potassium, magnesium, calcium, and fiber are some of the most important nutrients in our diet and how much we need of these each day.



With this information in hand I went to the USDA website to study the food database and made a list of the foods that were loaded with these nutrients. Lo and behold, we were not getting enough potassium. We had been conforming to the culture around us and needed to find an answer to our problem, a new way of thinking.

Is it time for you to take action on your own problem? Debt, perhaps, time-management, or—like me—a nutritional change? Look into your heart to see where the Lord has given you a direction to find a new way of thinking.

Janice Douglas

Day 13



Ask and respond: "Where did I see God today?"

If you have trouble answering the question, it might help to start by thinking of the people you encountered. How was the light of Christ present in them—or what opportunities did they present for you to be the hands of God? Where did you encounter the natural world today? How is the glory of God revealed in both the beauty and the vulnerability of the creation? Where did you see imagination, creativity, new birth? Where did you see suffering?



What are human beings that You are mindful of them. — Deuteronomy 6:21

Recently scientists discovered Gravitational Waves that led to the rapid “Universe Inflation” that alluded to the beginning of the Big Bang Theory (13.8 billion years ago) that most of us have heard of or with which some of us are familiar. I became intrigued. Our planet is quite trivial. In fact, we are smaller than minuscule.

Since my young adult years I have been fascinated with the size and magnitude of God’s creation. Over time we (as a civilization) have discovered our solar system, other solar systems, the Milky Way, the universe and a multi-verse. Scientists stake their claims that it is probable that there might be another universe that would have a similar solar system as ours; and that another earth-like planet can easily exist.

On a personal note, I believe that my God is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. God’s wisdom, power and love have been evident in my life. I am indeed humbled by His care for me and for the entire humanity (on this earth). The verse above is a compelling and poignant statement on God’s mercy and His overwhelming benevolence.

At moments when I have felt that I matter to no one, this verse has reassured me that I indeed matter. God knows the number of hairs on my head. His love reaches the most infinitesimal of all creations. Even me.

May Tuan Tucker



For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. —Mark 12: 31

I believe that God created all that we know of, and that man has repeatedly forgotten or elected to ignore God and focused on himself. I believe that God doesn't give up on his creation and sent us Jesus to remind us of God and His love for us.

It amazing to me that God felt it necessary to go to such an extreme effort to redeem us to himself. Why bother? He must have another million galaxies and planets with some sort of sentient animals on them to relate to. How flawed and stupid can we be to not be grateful to a God that created us?

Anyway, you know the story. We lucked out and he again chose us. What does he require of us but to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him.”

We must focus on loving God with our whole being and to love others like we love ourselves. It certainly would do us well to learn to behave with more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in all that we do. I know I need to be more diligent in this regard.

Maybe we can do it together.

Jim Davis



Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. —1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

Walk Toward The Lord

I look out my window in the morning and I see the sun shine through the trees. What a beautiful day for a walk. With my fleece and hat on I begin my stroll. As I walk down the street I am able to enjoy the neighborhood. The moms with their children; some walking a stroller, one running alongside her son while he is learning to ride his bike. She is there for support, even without holding him, but he feels her support.

I enjoy watching this older man walk down the street. It appears that he is talking to someone. Of course, I'm curious, so I look more closely to see if he might be talking on the phone. What I observe is him having a conversation.

How many times do we watch someone talking out loud while walking down the street? What goes through your mind? Someone, maybe, who might have a few marbles loose upstairs?

I wanted to think it may be something else, like maybe he was talking out loud to himself as a way to work out a problem, rehearse lines, something. As I walked closer I heard him praying and looking up to the heavens: God, grant me the strength to walk toward you and do your will.

Lord, thank you for the reminder.

V. McNamee Owens



Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life.
— *John 5:24*

Jesus presented us with a challenge and also provided reassurance through these words. We are reassured that we have eternal life when we believe that God sent his Son to save us, yet with those same words, we receive a challenge to share this message with others so that they will have eternal life, as well.

When I was a young married woman in my twenties, my husband and I provided Sunday church service once a month at the Youth Guidance Center in San Francisco. After the unlocking and locking of many clanging steel doors by the armed guard who guided us, we would enter a chapel where fifty to seventy-five teen offenders would be seated. Through my husband's spiritual messages and with all of us singing hymns guided by my fingers on the piano, we would share God's love and his plan for redemption. We were spiritually supported by members of our church who prayed for our mission.

We are frequently challenged to share the "Good News" with others, but it is difficult for some of us to accept that challenge because of life's circumstances. However, by praying and by providing financial help through our church's mission projects and through other Christian outreach organizations, we can share God's word with non-Christians.

Faye Bundesen Christensen



For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. —Luke 19: 10

That night the town took up a hue and cry,
Echoed down the crooked byways—
No room! No room! No room!
Innkeeper after innkeeper, house after house,
And even for an unborn king, there was no relenting—
No room! No room! No room!
So the king was born in a stable,
With animals and rude shepherds His court.
In some few hearts there was room,
So the angels could hope — “Peace on Earth!”
That hope is still sent to heaven,
And the king still knocks on hearts’ doors;
But innkeepers still turn Him away—
No room! No room! No room!

Christine Sackey



But Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart. —Luke 2: 19

Pieta

Always the same hills
Crown the horizon,
Remote witnesses
Of the still scene
And in the foreground
The tall Cross,
Sombre, untenanted,
Aches for the Body
That is back in the cradle
of a maid's arms.

R.S. Thomas (1913-2000)

"Pieta"

Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1966



For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven, that person is My brother and sister and mother. — Matthew 12: 50

To interpret and elaborate on this particular verse, one must start reading verses 46-50: While Jesus was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. Someone said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.” But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers!”

The Lord was talking about his mother and his biological brothers since Mary had more children by her husband of human conception. But he also meant that *anyone* saved is his mother, brothers and sisters. In this case it has double meaning because his mother, brothers and sisters *were* saved by Jesus. Note: do not let anybody or church tell you that Mary did not have more children besides Jesus. The scriptures declare in other places that this was true!

Saul Rivera



It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. —Galatians 2: 20

When Jesus arrived on the scene 2,000 years ago, lives were changed. We like to think that everyone eagerly embraced his teachings, but our Bible stories tell us otherwise. People at times were skeptical, anxious, angry, frightened, concerned, doubtful. It must have felt to them that their ordinary lives were ripped to shreds by the coming of Jesus ... just as the curtain in their holiest of places, the Jerusalem temple, was torn apart when Jesus eventually (and eventfully) died.

Much was asked of them by Jesus while he was alive.

Much more would be expected of them when he arose from death.

Cathy Sapunor



Do not judge, or you too will be judged. — Matthew 7:1

When he spoke these words during his “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus gave us a guide to enable us to live a life that is pleasing to him. Jesus’ life and teachings reflect his holiness, and he desires that we attempt to emulate him. He knows that we are weak and that we will fail to follow him on numerous occasions, yet he loves us in spite of our weaknesses.

Christians seem to judge each other more critically than we judge non-Christians. We desire certain behaviors from Christians that we don’t expect from non-believers. We forget that Jesus instructed that we not judge others.

It is true that God wants Christians to reflect him in our daily interactions. But we must remember that we are all “Christians in training,” and as humans we will sometimes use poor judgment and make mistakes. We must ask ourselves if we would want God to judge us using the same standards with which we judge others.

As we reflect on the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, let us remember that we are not to judge each other but that we are required to leave the judging to God.

Faye Bundesen Christensen



Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. —2 Corinthians 5:17

A couple of months ago, the landscapers pruned all the rose bushes on the property where I live. Wow, people were so upset. The guys actually cut the bushes down so it looked like they would not survive. Well, now the little stumps have new growth on them. It is slow, and I wonder if they will be big enough by late spring to flower. But they are growing.

That is like the scripture that says the tree will be pruned, the dead cut out, and new grafts and new growth. I see our church like that. At first, what is perceived is death, not growth. But we all know that growth comes after pruning. And now I think we are in the growth beginnings.

Sammi Fernandez



Be still and know that I am God. —Psalm 46: 10

Oh, if we could sit for just one half hour a day doing nothing except taking a simple word from the gospel and putting it in front of us—say, "The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want." Say it three times, and we know it's not true, because we want many things. That's exactly why we're so nervous. But if we keep saying the truth, the real truth—"The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want"—and let that truth descend from our mind into our heart, gradually those words are written on the walls of our inner holy place. That becomes the space in which we can receive our colleagues and our work, our family and our friends, and the people whom we will meet during the day.

The trouble is, as soon as you sit and become quiet, you think, Oh, I forgot this. I should call my friend. Later on I'm going to see him. Your inner life is like a banana tree filled with monkeys jumping up and down.

It's not easy to sit and trust that in solitude God will speak to you—not as a magical voice but that he will let you know something gradually over the years. And in that word from God you will find the inner place from which to live your life.

Solitude is where spiritual ministry begins. That's where Jesus listened to God. That's where we listen to God.

Sometimes I think of life as a big wagon wheel with many spokes. In the middle is the hub. Often in ministry, it looks like we are running around the rim trying to reach everybody. But God says, "Start in the hub; live in the hub. Then you will be connected with all the spokes, and you won't have to run so fast."

Fr. Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)

Insight Paper: "Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry"



I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.
— *Job 19:25*

Resurrection

In the cold, dark stillness of the frozen night,
I wait and listen for the song.
I hear silence and cold and darkness.
The drops freeze in long strips of loneliness
And hang from ragged edges.
I try to see and the coldness of the dark freezes
My vision in pain.
I kneel to pray to the One God to whom we knelt
All those living moments,
And in that kneeling I feel the hand of love.
My heart is grateful:
For in the coldest, darkest night the memory of the promise
Still comes.
And with the rising, the frozen memory
Thawing, moving, living
Singing still.

Judy Davis



In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
— 1 John 4: 9–11

Why did Jesus have to
suffer as he did?
Because grace is more abundant—
and sin more serious—
than we suppose.
However cruelly we may
treat one another,
all sin is primarily against God.

God condemns sin,
yet never judges
apart from grace.

In giving Jesus Christ
to die for us,
God took the burden of our sin
into God's own self
to remove it once and for all.

The cross in all its severity
reveals an abyss of sin
swallowed up by the suffering
of divine love.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Study Catechism



When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "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

Gracious God, giver of all light and vision, by your Word you made the day and night.

Let your wondrous work be revealed in us so that your glory might shine like the sun; through Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Loving God, giver of all light and life,
you sent Jesus Christ into the world not to condemn, but to save.

Help us to lift up the light of Christ
so that the world might believe in him and receive the gift of eternal life; through Christ, the light of the world.

God of the lost, the least,
and all who long for home,
when we wander from your ways
and waste the gifts you have given us,
welcome us back, we pray,
so that we may celebrate and rejoice
in your presence forever;
through Jesus Christ your beloved Son.
Amen.

*Presbyterian Church USA
Office of Theology and Worship*



Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" —Isaiah 6: 8

In this crazy world, there's an enormous distinction between good times and bad, between sorrow and joy. But in the eyes of God, they're never separated. Where there is pain, there is healing. Where there is mourning, there is dancing. Where there is poverty, there is the kingdom.

Jesus says, "Cry over your pains, and you will discover that I'm right there in your tears, and you will be grateful for my presence in your weakness." Ministry means to help people become grateful for life even with pain. That gratitude can send into the world precisely to the places where people are in pain. The minister, the disciple of Jesus, goes where there is pain not because he is a masochist or she is a sadist, but because God is hidden in the pain.

"Blessed are the poor." Jesus doesn't say, "Blessed are those who care for the poor;" he says, "Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the mourning. Blessed are those who have pain. There I am." To minister, you have to be where the pain is. Sometimes that pain is hidden in a person who from the outside might look painless or successful.

Compassion means to suffer with, to live with those who suffer. When Jesus saw the woman of Nain he realized, This is a widow who has lost her only son, and he was moved by compassion. He felt the pain of that woman in his guts. He felt her pain so deeply in his spirit that out of compassion he called the son to life so he could give that son back to his mother.

We are sent to wherever there is poverty, loneliness, and suffering to have the courage to be with people. Trust that by throwing yourself into that place of pain you will find the joy of Jesus. All ministries in history are built on that vision. A new world grows out of compassion.

Fr. Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)
Insight Paper: "Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry"





Write your own diamante (diamond-shaped) devotional poem or prayer. See the end of this booklet for examples.

Start Line 1 with a word that captures the essence of God and/or Jesus for you (Spirit, Creator, Savior, etc.)

1 _____

2 _____, _____

3 _____, _____, _____

4 _____, _____, _____,

5 _____, _____, _____

6 _____, _____

7 _____

- Line 1: Noun (person, place or thing)
- Line 2: Two adjectives (describing words)
- Line 3: Three action verbs that end in “-ing”
- Line 4: Four nouns (person, place or thing)
- Line 5: Three action verbs that end in “-ing”
- Line 6: Two adjectives (describing words)
- Line 7: Noun (person, place or thing)



I remember you always in my prayers. —Romans 1: 19b

I was born and raised in Hong Kong. I grew up without my grandparents because they were still in China. Every night my parents would gather us for our evening prayer and the words of the above verse were uttered. They named and prayed for every relative. There were times that I would literally fall asleep in the middle of the prayer.

My oldest brother left for the USA in 1969 to go to university. I adored him. His absence made me sad. That's when I started saying this prayer out loud myself. Then Daddy and the other brother left Hong Kong in 1974. My heart was broken. As you see, my dad and I were inseparable. I am Daddy's girl. This verse became personal and intimate. I missed Dad terribly.

In 1975 I left Hong Kong and Mom was alone still in Hong Kong. I went to a university that was far away from all of my family. As a matter of fact, all five of us were in five different locales. This prayer became the link we shared every night.

My dad passed away in 2005. My Mom is in an elder care home in Daly City, CA. One brother is in Pittsburgh, PA, and the other Fort Collins, CO. I live in Sacramento. My son Preston is in university in Berea, KY. We are all apart from one another, geographically. The patterns remains and so does this prayer.

That verse in the scriptures still applies today. "I remember you always in my prayers" is my family's lifeline of keeping us close and sustaining our love.

May Tuan Tucker



We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. —1 John: 1

What Happened Before the Street Lights Came On

As usual he was turning the rules upside down. Some in the neighborhood called him “The Magician,” always up to his tricks.

This time, he told us, we would all seek and he’d be the only one to be hidden away.

Then suddenly he was gone, and we hoped that we’d be able somehow to find him.

The crazy thing that day was that, shortly after his departure, we had all disappeared, knowing that others—not in our gang, unfriendlies—would be out looking for us. Better not let them catch us.

Later, when it was safe to come back out, we thought we knew where to find him, but when we got to that hiding place, he wasn’t there.

It seemed, at that point, that the game was finally over. Then—just when we had reluctantly agreed among ourselves that it was time to give up the search and go home, that he must have given us the ultimate slip, had left town, had ditched us all and gone away for good—we heard him shout, laughing, “All-ee, all-ee oxen free, free, free!”

You could hear it for blocks. People came out of their houses to see what the yelling was all about.

He came around the corner. “Ta-da! I’m back! Bet you thought you’d never see me again.”

“We thought you were a goner,” I said.

“No way! Nothing can stop The Magician!”

Tommy said, “God, man, you’re unbelievable.”

“I doubt that, Tom, ‘cuz here I be! I just temporarily vanished. You know me: Now you see me, now you don’t.”

Tim Sapunor



Day 32

... just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. —Romans 6: 4

Easter is a time of
rebirth and renewing.

The flowers, new babies
new births in the animal world
the warmth and everything growing
after the rain.

Just as we are new creatures in
Christ because of his sacrifice
on the Cross.

Easter is Life and
new beginning
after the Cross.

Sylvia Alamillo



While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" — Matthew 17: 5

Solitude is being with God and God alone.

Is there any space for that in your life?

Why is it so important that you are with God and God alone on the mountain top? It's important because it's the place in which you can listen to the voice of the One who calls you the beloved. To pray is to listen to the One who calls you "my beloved daughter," "my beloved son," "my beloved child." To pray is to let that voice speak to the center of your being, to your guts, and let that voice resound in your whole being.

Who am I? I am the beloved. That's the voice Jesus heard when he came out of the Jordan River: "You are my beloved; on you my favor rests." And Jesus says to you and to me that we are loved as he is loved. That same voice is there for you. When you are not claiming that voice, you cannot walk freely in this world.

Jesus listened to that voice all the time, and he was able to walk right through life. People were applauding him, laughing at him; praising him and rejecting him; calling "Hosanna!" and calling "Crucify!" But in the midst of that, Jesus knew one thing—I am the beloved; I am God's favorite one. He clung to that voice.

Fr. Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)

Insight Paper: "Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry"



For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. —Jeremiah 29: 11-13

"When I was 38, my best friend, Pammy, died, and we went shopping about two weeks before she died, and she was in a wig and a wheelchair. I was buying a dress for this boyfriend I was trying to impress, and I bought a tighter, shorter dress than I was used to. And I said to her, 'Do you think this makes my hips look big?' and she said to me, so calmly, 'Anne, you don't have that kind of time.'

"And I think Easter has been about the resonance of that simple statement; and that when I stop, when I go into contemplation and meditation, when I breathe again and do the sacred action of plopping and hanging my head and being done with my own agenda, I hear that, 'You don't have that kind of time,' you have time only to cultivate presence and authenticity and service, praying against all odds to get your sense of humor back.

"That's how it has changed for me," Lamott continues. "That was the day my life changed, when she said that to me."

*Anne Lamott interview on "All Things Considered"
National Public Radio
April 18, 2011*



Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. —Proverbs 3: 5-6

"Go and build my church," he said to his disciples—folks who had already given up their homes, jobs, ambitions and families in order to follow him. They'd imagined Jesus would be their leader for years; they'd imagined they would be part of a structured, secure "new kingdom" on earth with Jesus making the tough decisions.

Suddenly, with Jesus leaving the scene and ascending into heaven, they realized: they'd gotten that long-awaited new kingdom—but with no one physically "in charge."

It's an all-new world he has left for them to sort out, to "make it up as they go along."

He has taught them, nurtured them, lectured them, mentored them.

Now it is up them to do God's work.

I imagine them asking—as I do many times each week—"What would Jesus have me do, at this very moment, in this very place?" And listening for an answer. Then responding.

Cathy Sapunor



I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. —John 11: 25

What is Easter about?

Bunnies

Baskets

Candy

Egg hunt

Family

Feasts

Holiday

What is the reason for Easter? Some would say that Easter is all about the fun and celebration. That would end the conversation. Christians say there is more to Easter.

Jesus

Sacrifice

Crucifixion

Pain

Forgiveness

Resurrection

Salvation

Joyfulness

Remembrance

This Easter season, and all during the year, we are thankful that Jesus sacrificed his life that we might live with him in eternity. We praise God for having mercy on us and for forgiving our sins. We celebrate Jesus' resurrection and welcome him into our hearts and our lives. Through Jesus, we are filled with peace and our lives have meaning and purpose.

Let's invite Christ to our Easter celebration and to all of our celebrations this year.

Faye Bundesen Christensen



*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?
—1 Corinthians 15: 55*

God of great love,
you alone can take away the sting of sin
and remove the venom of death.
Show us a sign of your saving power in Jesus Christ, so that we may
believe in him
and receive the gift of eternal life;
through Christ, our healer and redeemer.

Eternal God, holy and faithful,
what can we give in return for our life?
Teach us to take up the cross of Christ with grateful hearts and
humble spirits, offering all for the sake of the gospel, so that we may
receive life in fullness; through Christ, who is coming in glory.

Lord our God, blessed is the one who comes in your name!
Gather us in your gentle presence as a hen shelters her brood beneath
her wings.

Finish the work you have begun in us
so that we may show your glory;
through Jesus Christ our peace.
Amen.

*Presbyterian Church USA
Office of Theology and Worship*



Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Romans 6: 3-11

We watch. We wait. We long. When the stone is rolled away, we will emerge into the light of Easter. Then let us step carefully out of this time of waiting. Let us carry with us the yearnings that we have experienced here in the tomb. Let us be a people who remain in the between time, willing to live with the tension of what has been and what will be. Let us be a Christian community that embraces the heart of nonviolence and risks bringing forth the Reign of God for all people.

Fr. Joe Nangle, OFM

Essay: "Following Jesus on the Way to Calvary: Lent 1997"



*God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.
—1 Corinthians 6: 14*

What do we love most about comic books? The ones we remember most are the stories of superheroes—people who do amazing things to make the world a better place. These stories about superheroes are a fun read and you can usually find something for everyone.

But there is a book with stories about the most amazing of all superheroes. These are stories about Jesus. Do you know why Jesus is the most amazing of all the superheroes? Because... He rose.

Of all the superheroes you know, He rose. And because He rose, everything he said is true.

When we believe that He rose, we believe Jesus was the true son of God, coming to us to share God's message of peace and love.

When Jesus said "Love your neighbor," we know it was true. Because He rose.

When Jesus said "Be kind to everyone," we know that is what we should do, because He rose.

And when Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me," we know that his message of love and peace and of a better world for all of us is true. We know this because He rose.

Who is the greatest of all the superheroes? Jesus the Christ. Because on Easter, we celebrate that He Rose.

Jim Guida
www.shortsermonsforchildren.com



According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. —1 Peter 1: 3

Every Day

We wake up one morning and find
Christ has risen
when we really didn't even know
He had been crucified
just the other day
while we were drinking coffee
to try and wake up.
And the joy of the Resurrection
was ours to share
with all those who had felt
the life and death
in a million little ways
every day
with their hearts already
broken by too much view
of poverty and pain.

Christ rises for us all
once again
and again
and again,
while we keep trying to wake up
in time to help carry
a growing world-class cross.

Judy Davis



Resources



Examples of diamante prayer/poems:

Creator
My Only
Loving, forgiving, saving
Me—you—your son—our world
Carrying, praying, seeking
Lost lonely
Souls



God
powerful, wise
seeing • knowing • understanding
spring summer winter fall
ending • beginning • unceasing
beautiful young
garden

Practice writing devotionals. Select a verse or passage from the Bible. Ask yourself, “What does this verse make me think of?” “How does this verse make me feel?” “Does my behavior as a Christian need to be adjusted?” “How can I use this verse to help me in my life today?” Begin to write and let it flow. Here is an example:

For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. —Ecclesiastes 40: 10

A famous ABC “Wide World of Sports” video captured the story of a P.E. major who—for a college senior project—competed in the 1982 Hawaii Ironman—a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike race, and 26.2-mile run. She hadn’t trained hard (and had no expectation of being a top finisher) yet found herself in the lead. She thought, “I could win this!” As she neared the finish line, though, her body began to fail. With fewer than 20 yards to go, she stumbled and could not get up. Volunteers helped her to her feet; she fell again, and again. Everyone yelled, “Keep going!” A voice inside her said firmly, “Don’t stop.” She continued on hands and knees, even when passed by the next runner. She felt the energy, the support of the crowd. She embraced the sense of courage they—and the mysterious, unseen speaker—instilled in her, and crossed the finish line, amazing herself but affirming the crowd’s belief in her. When *I* am tempted to surrender, to say something is too hard, I think of Julie Moss—who came in second, but finished the race ... supported by everyone around her, and by the non-visible, yet ever-present speaker of encouraging words. —*Cathy Sapunor*



Having difficulty recording your thoughts? Try these. (1) Make a list of all of your concerns and use it as you pray. As you receive answers, or situations resolve, cross them off your list. Don’t erase! You want to be reminded of answered prayers. (2) On the first page of a blank notebook, write a letter to God. Tell him of a trouble or a joy. Next day, pick up where you left off. And the next day ... and the next. Why is it so important keep track of inspirations and observations? ***Give praise to the Lord, O my soul; let not all his blessings go from your memory. —Psalm 103: 2***



Many thanks to the members and friends of Bethany who contributed to our 2015 Lenten devotional. Please read, contemplate and pray your way through the season of Lent by using these writings as your inspiration.

Sylvia Alamillo
Faye Bundesen-Christensen
Jim Davis
Judy Davis
Janice Douglas
Sammi Fernandez
Gary Gardner
Barbara Greene
Jim Guida
Mary Harbison-Sindle

Janice Kamikawa
Vickie McNamee Owens
Saul Rivera
Donna Roberts
Constance Rubio
Christine Sackey
Cathy Sapunor
Tim Sapunor
May Tuan Tucker

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