



GRACE COVENANT
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2023 Lent Devotionals

We often hear that spending a few minutes each day working on a goal can bring about growth. The same can be said about our spiritual lives. Both at Lent and Advent if not at other times during the year, reading and reflection can help with personal growth.

In this Lenten season, these daily devotions are intended to stimulate thought about God's word. They are offered with love and with hope, that by reading them, you will be motivated to think more about God, to pray more to God, and to draw closer to your loved ones. The writings are paired with a piece of visual artwork and a bit of music, most recorded on YouTube.

We hope is that your day will be better for spending a few minutes each day.

Harold Frye
Katie Hearn
Cheryl Johnson
Dave Pack
Cindy Schendel
Nelson Townsend
Stephen Wing



Wednesday, February 22—Ash Wednesday
by Nelson Townsend

Isaiah 58:1-12

For Lent, many people take on a fast of some kind. Some abstain from food, abstain from anger, or begin (or deepen) a spiritual practice, like study or prayer. And Ash Wednesday is when that fast usually begins.

I think that's great! But I do not fast, in the usual sense of abstaining from all food and drink, very often. Almost never. I do not even remove things from my diet, even though I know they are not good for my health.

So, in a way, this passage from Isaiah is "good news" to me! Abstaining from food and acting righteous is not the fast that God demands! But then it's time for the radical kind of fast that Isaiah (speaking God's words) does call us to: feeding the hungry, bringing justice to the oppressed, not gossiping, and caring for our own families. And I stand convicted of "oppressing the workers" as I shop and go about my business on holidays.

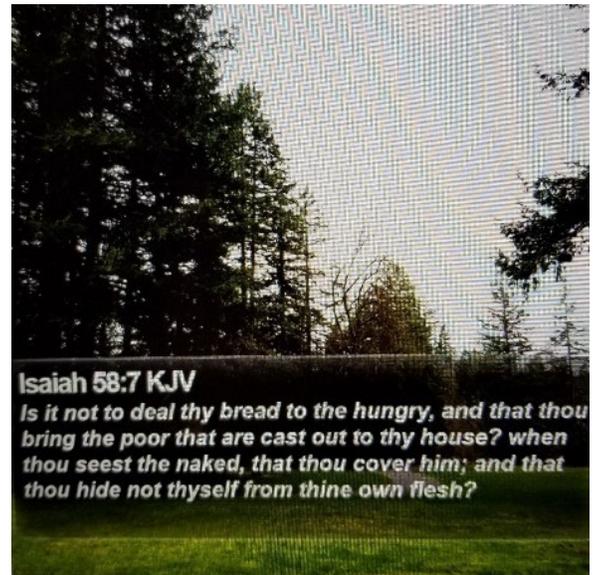
When I have fasted, it is usually because I have gotten so absorbed in something that I've forgotten to eat. (This rarely happens on a workday!) When I am writing or working on genealogy, I can blow right past the lunch hour, absorbed in my thoughts or tracking down lost ancestors.

And that is the kind of fast that Isaiah is calling us to: to be so absorbed in God's work that our need for food is forgotten (for at least a while), or to be so devoted to searching for justice or enlightenment, or to be so upset with the plight of the marginalized that we will dedicate our time, talent, and will to breaking the cords of injustice.

It is not so much a fast from something, but a fast for something.

Prayer: God, guide our fasting, so that we hear Your call and do Your work. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZctNWsWOK8>



Thursday, February 23—2nd Day of Lent
by Stephen Wing

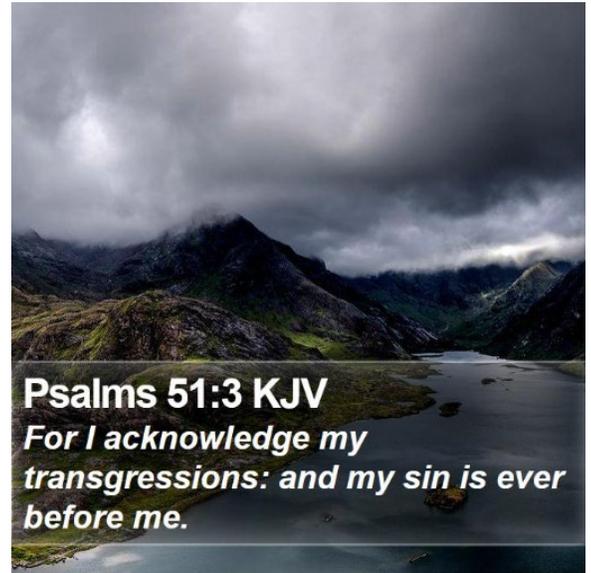
Psalm 51:3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. (KJV)

I used to watch all the Law and Order shows—and there were a lot of them. It was always intriguing how many suspects there were, and how many lies the detectives had to wade through before they got to the truth. Imagine if, when interviewing their first suspect, at the start of the show, the person said, “Yes, I did it; I killed the guy. This is why I did it, and this is how I did it.” Case closed. Show over. Cut to 55 minutes of commercials.

But that doesn’t ever happen—on a TV show or in real life. We have gotten good at hiding or shading the truth about ourselves. That may be what “original sin” was all about: Adam and Eve learned from the serpent how to use words to deceive. They turned right around and tried it out on God, but it didn’t go over very well. We’ve been trying to perfect it ever since.

Most of our lies are to ourselves about ourselves. Facing our truth is too threatening to our fragile egos. In the AA 12 Steps, Step 4 is, “Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.” And Step 5 is, “Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.” That’s what Lenten spirituality is all about, first and foremost: taking an honest look at ourselves and confessing what we and God know to be true.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjsG6IHEUUE>



Friday, February 24—3rd Day of Lent
by Harold Frye

2 Corinthians 5:20 “So we are ambassadors who represent Christ.”

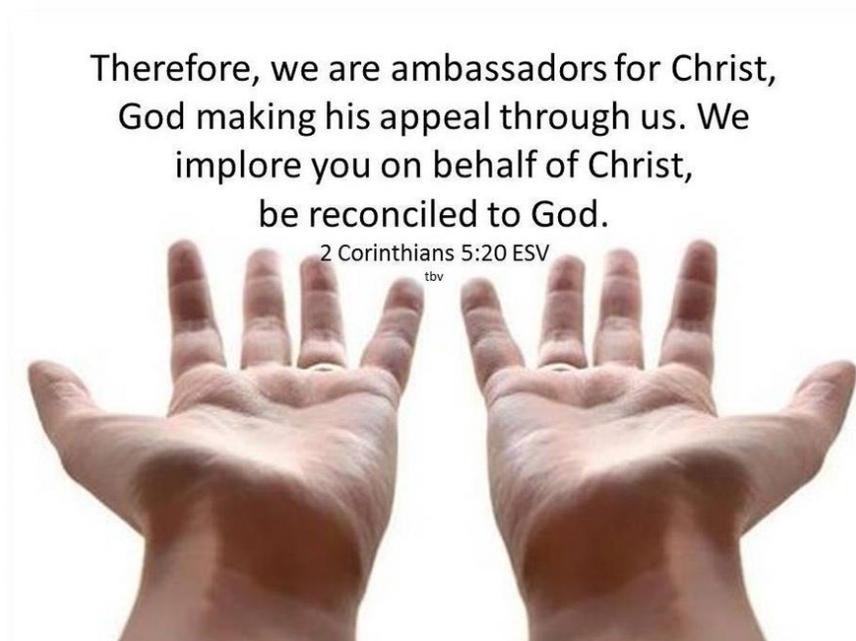
The mention of the word “ambassadors” brings to mind an image of men and women in formal attire, sipping from crystal goblets, chatting with dignitaries from around the world, giving out statements of good will and, most importantly, gaining positive relationships with the countries represented.

In another venue and not long ago, I was asked to bring together a team of “ambassadors” who would help spread the good news about the high adventure program known as Philmont Scout Ranch. Our formal attire in that arena were the adult scouting uniforms we wore.

Ambassadors represent many and varied organizations and causes. In that role, ambassadors tell their stories and work to gain favor from those with whom they are relating. The apostle Paul not only served as Christ’s ambassador, but he also worked to recruit followers in Corinth. Our tasks as Philmont ambassadors were to let other scout leaders know of the opportunities at the training center in northeast New Mexico.

As representatives of Christ, we don’t dress in black tie or scout uniforms. We might, though, wear jewelry such as crosses. Regardless of how we are dressed, our job is to tell the good news and to bring the Word of God to those around us through the acts of kindness we perform.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sm8aRxRR41w>



Saturday, February 25—4th Day of Lent

by Dave Pack

Matthew 6:19-21 Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourself in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (CEB)

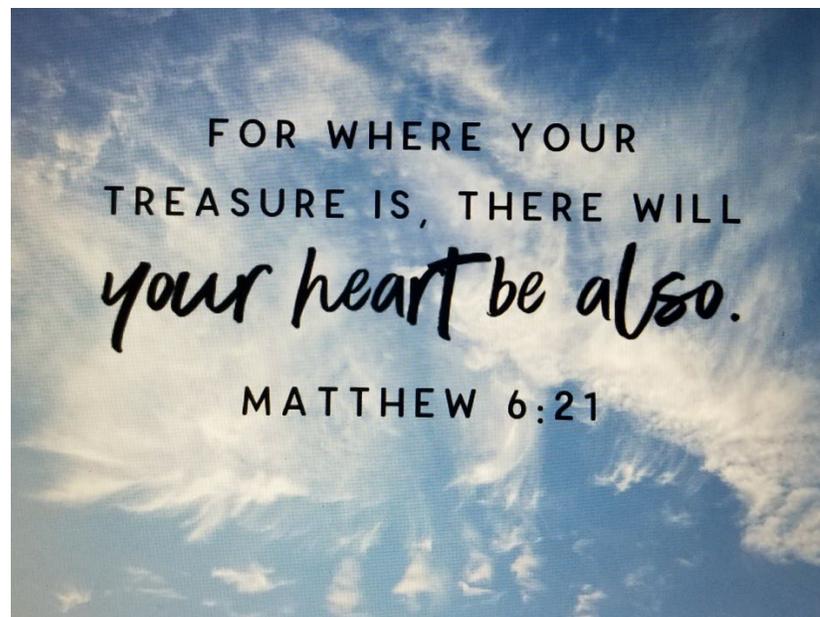
“Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth.” How many places can you find in your Bible that convey this direction to us? They are numerous. There shouldn't be any question about God's desires.

Sadly, our society struggles to live by this direction. We are a country of extreme materialism. It is challenging to follow God's direction in a society that leads you in another direction. I suspect many Americans avoid “church” because they sense the hypocrisy.

There are other Biblical directions that we struggle to live by. Since the early 1980s, in significant measure because of the Presbyterian Church USA, I have been deeply involved in opposing endless war and excessive military spending. I feel a clear Biblical direction to do that. It has been very frustrating because I find myself in a society that is extremely militaristic.

The U.S. House and Senate recently approved an \$858 billion budget for the Department of Defense. That is more than \$2,500 for each person reading this. It represents an increase of \$80 billion over the previous budget and that increase alone is more than the military spending of all but two other countries in the world. I hear God crying.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBAB8XU30hE>



Monday, February 27—5th Day of Lent
by Harold Frye

Genesis 3:4 “The snake said to the woman, ‘You won’t die! God knows that on the day you eat from it, you will see clearly and you will be like God.’”

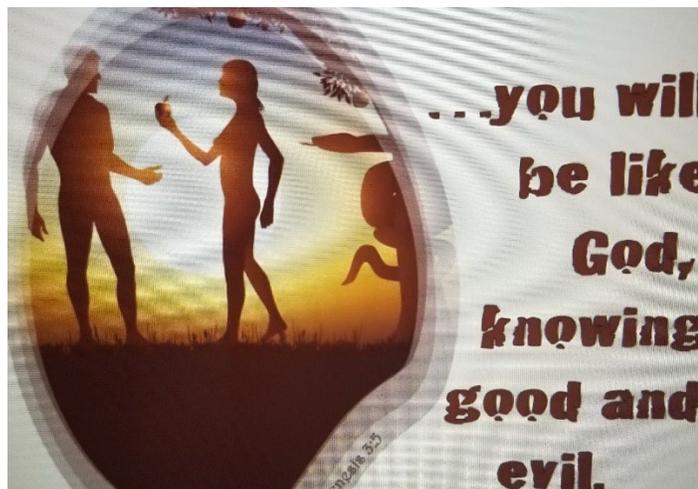
Snakes! Why is it that the reptiles class of animals are so hated? Crocodiles, alligators, lizards? Was it this incident in the Garden of Eden that set humans on a course to despise and fear them?

When working on Reptile Study Merit Badge, one son kept a small garter snake in an aquarium. A construction crew actually stopped working at our house to stand around the aquarium to watch the snake. Fascinated by it, none wanted to handle it, though.

As Lent begins and we attempt to rid ourselves of temptations, it is comforting to know that God’s first woman wasn’t able to deny sin and was taken in by a snake.

What temptations do you face? Are you strong enough to resist?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScL8-Z99Spw>



Tuesday, February 28—6th Day of Lent
by Stephen Wing

Psalm 32:3-5 “When I kept it all inside, my bones turned to powder, my words became daylong groans. The pressure never let up; all the juices of my life dried up. Then I let it all out; I said, “I’ll come clean about my failures to GOD.” (The Message)

There are a couple of people who have hurt me deeply. I just have one wish. I wish they'd look me in the eye some day and say, "I'm sorry." That's all. A heartfelt, "I'm sorry." They have never spoken those two words to me. They've had plenty of years to do so. But so far, nothing.

That's all it would take! I've forgiven each of these individuals. I think. Am I wrong in wanting to hear them say, "I'm sorry"? I think all my memories surrounding these people would become unweighted, and I would feel a long-desired lightness. It may never happen.

Then I wonder if there are people to whom I need to say "I'm sorry."

We do a lot of blaming of God for our mishandled lives, for accidents of life, etc. In other instances, we may blame others. It's my spouses fault for me feeling like my bones have turned to powder. It's my jobs fault for all the groaning I do. It's the economy's fault for all the pressure I'm feeling. It's this darn weather's fault for me feeling like all the juices of my life are drying up.

But all that blaming just creates in us an inability or unwillingness to take responsibility for our fractured lives, and tell others we are sorry. We can't bring ourselves to say we are sorry for how we let our own brokenness brake others, and then fail to say, "I'm sorry" to God for letting our brokenness get out of control.

The only way, says the Psalmist, is to let it all out.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9aq2otRus4>



Wednesday, March 1—7th Day of Lent
by Harold Frye

Romans 5:15 “But the free gift of Christ isn’t like Adam’s failure. If many people died through what one person did wrong, God’s grace is multiplied even more for many people with the gift—of the one person Jesus Christ—that comes through grace.

Have you noticed how different people react when they receive a gift? Some are overwhelmed with gratitude while others hardly seem to show any thanks at all. Perhaps, it is the gift itself. A sweater is the wrong color or the wrong size. A toy doesn’t work. A pie handed to a new neighbor might just as well not have been delivered. On the other hand, have you noticed how different people react when the gift they receive is more than they expected?

God’s gift of Christ Jesus is the greatest gift ever given. When Adam and Eve failed to follow God’s command, sin came into the world. When Jesus was crucified and resurrected, God turned to love not only to cancel out Adam’s mistake, but to exceed the mistake beyond what could be imagined.

When our Easter celebration comes, we exceed all other celebrations, for it is in recognition of God’s gift.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hsSup13yUAg>



Thursday, March 2—8th Day of Lent

by Katie Hearn

Matthew 4:1-11: “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted[a] by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’ Jesus answered, ‘It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.”

In the Bible, the number forty seems to be synonymous with “a long time.” Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness being tempted by the devil; the great flood lasted 40 days and 40 nights; the Jewish people wandered the desert for 40 years.



What sticks out to me in this story is that the temptations occur after Jesus has been fasting for forty days. Forty days is a long time not to have a square meal; maybe it’s because I’m one of those people who has never understood how a person could “forget to eat,” but I can only imagine just how hangry I’d be at this point. Hangry and ready to give into any sort of temptation. Sort of like walking into the teacher’s lounge to find a box of donuts on a morning when I skipped breakfast: Well, don’t mind if I do...

In our family, we often refer to the HALT acronym. If you haven’t heard of it, it’s a way to practice self-care and regulation by checking in with yourself; are you Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired? These four basic physical and emotional needs have to be met before we can be at our best. I have to imagine Jesus was experiencing all four of these feelings after his stint in the wilderness. Hungry? Duh. Angry? Well, he’s speaking to the devil. Lonely? He’s been by himself in the desert for forty days. Tired? I can’t imagine the wilderness offered a space for comfortable rest. Yet Jesus still kept his cool and was able to respond with His truths when faced with temptation.

Three of the four Gospels include this story of Jesus being tested in the wilderness. Matthew’s account is the longest; then there is Luke’s, which is very similar but in a slightly different order; and finally, Mark’s version sums it up in two sentences. John skips this story in favor of the feeding of the 5,000, which according to this Biblical scholar captures the same meaning in a different story.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TvYg9fp53s>

Friday, March 3—9th Day of Lent by Harold Frye

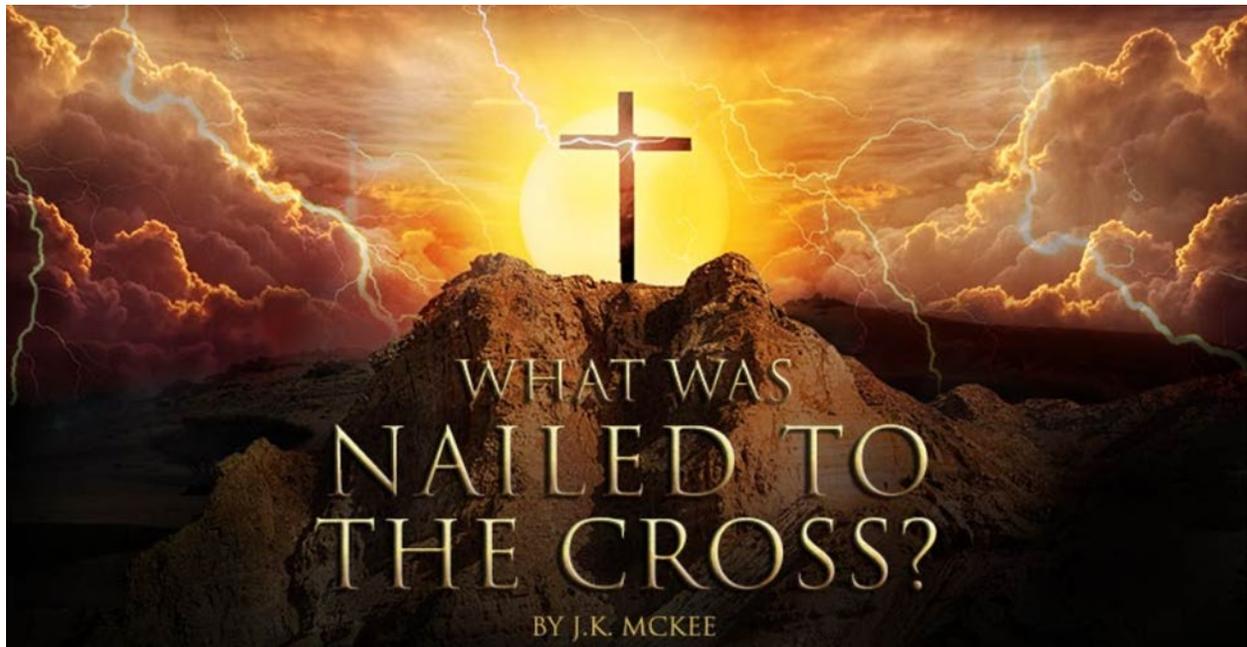
Colossians 2:14 “He cancelled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.”

Crosses are an important part of our Christian beliefs. The symbol serves as a reminder of what Jesus gave for our salvation. When Carol passed away in 2020, a friend who had also lost her spouse gave me a cross. About 3 inches long, the cross is shaped as a freehand artist might have designed it. Now, three years later, I have managed to wear off most of the finish as the cross has become my favorite anti-anxiety comforting piece.

Jesus gave up His life on the cross. As horrid and ghastly it must have been, God’s plan was carried out. That cross was no artistic rendering nor was it a thing of beauty. That cross, though, has lived on for more than 2000 years as an eternal reminder of Jesus’ sacrifice.

Prayer: Bring the peace of the cross to my heart. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JS9P8d2iOc>



Saturday, March 4—10th Day of Lent

by Harold Frye

Luke 1:78 “Because of God’s mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us.”

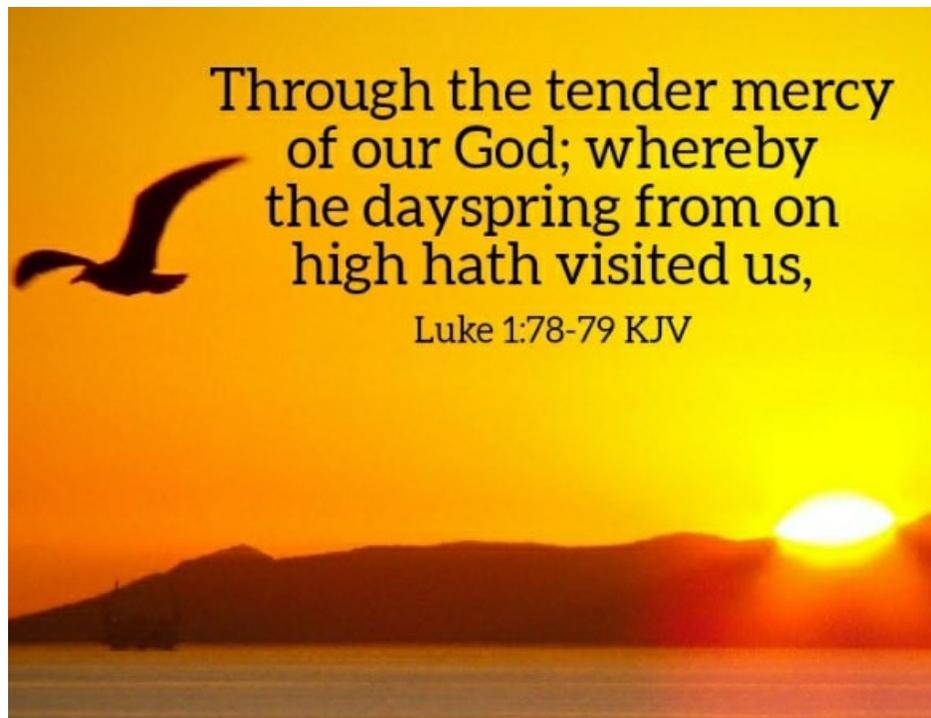
Author and researcher Peter Senge describes that mental models shape our attitudes and our beliefs through the images, assumptions, and stories we carry in our minds about ourselves, other people, institutions, and every aspect in the world. When the word “shoe” is spoken, one person may see a loafer, another a running shoe, and yet another a hiking boot. Senge notes that this is why two people observing the same event can report entirely different details.

When you read the name “Jesus,” what comes to mind? Perhaps, you see in your mind’s eye that blond, Caucasian young male whose picture adorns many walls. On the other hand, you may see a rugged man of Arab bloodlines. Maybe you see His body hanging from the cross, crowned with thorns and bleeding. Yet again, if you are familiar with writer(s) of this passage from Luke, your mental model of Jesus may not be a human figure at all, but instead, a shaft of light radiating above the horizon as a new day breaks, suggesting that Jesus is the light of the world.

The Bible is filled with analogies and metaphors. A mental model of the morning light is a powerful image of our Savior.

Prayer: Let the light of heaven bring a new day. Amen

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMNxwSZ_C6w



Monday, March 6—11th Day of Lent
by Harold Frye

Genesis 12:1 “The Lord said to Abram, ‘Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you.’”

Many of us have come to that day when we sent our child off to college or to the military. For most, it is a bittersweet time we knew as parents would eventually arrive. This child into whom we have poured our love, our resources, our care is about to embark on a new journey. A friend recently related that his daughter had come home for Christmas vacation after the first semester of her freshman year. As his oldest, he hadn’t expected the differences in her that had occurred. She had, he thought, experienced so much while still living in his home. Nothing, though, prepared him for what she had become in only a few short months. After only a few days of vacation, he was ready for her to return to school.

Abram and Sarai are sent by God into a journey that leaves behind an old life and looks forward to a future. The season of Lent is a season that helps us to let go of old commitments and burdens and sets us free to journey into new territories, new promises, new hopes, and new lives.

The changes in my friend’s daughter weren’t the only changes that had taken place. He had changed, too. As Abram had learned, some changes were good while others were a greater challenge.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzOfeJgZm0g>



Tuesday, March 7—12th Day of Lent
by Stephen Wing

Psalm 121:1-2 “I look up to the mountains; does my strength come from mountains? No, my strength comes from GOD, who made heaven, and earth, and mountains. (The Message)

Albert Einstein once said:

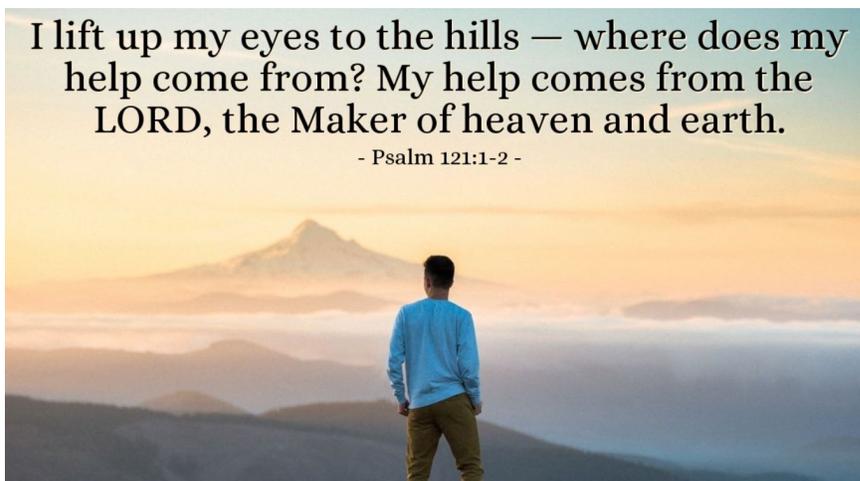
“If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes to determine the proper question to ask; for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes.”

The psalmist is struggling with the proper question in the opening of his psalm. The clue is in the first two verses. The first question he asks is, "From where does my help come?" He asks the question as he is eyeing the hills around Jerusalem. Those huge, strong mountains. These mountains symbolized strength and permanence. But even that kind of durability and constancy can't provide the "help" that the psalmist needs. The psalmist realized the right question was not where, but who. Once he got the question right, the right answer fell into place instantly.

When I was in college, a long, long time ago, I was sitting in the cafeteria with a small group of friends. One of the girls was telling us all the wonders about astrology, and how the zodiac has helped her life. I asked, “So you think the stars, and their position in the Milky Way Galaxy has the answers for your life?” She said, “Yeah! Don’t you?” I said, “That would be elevating the creation over the Creator. Doing that doesn’t make sense to me. Why not just go to the Creator for life guidance?”

She was asking the wrong question at the very start, and stuck with that question. As opposed to the Psalmist, who started out asking the wrong question, but quickly got to the right one: It’s not about getting strength from a “where” but from a “Who.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzJkCO-CSng>



Wednesday, March 8—13th Day of Lent

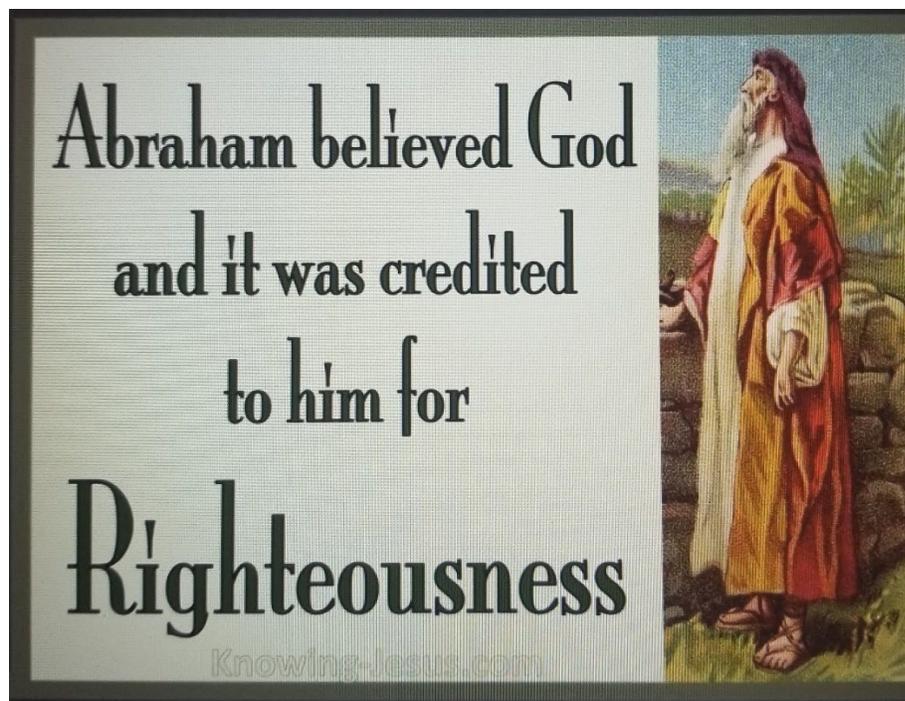
by Harold Frye

Romans 4:3 “What does the scripture say? Abraham had faith in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

In my almost 20 years as a school district administrator, one of the tasks that often was assigned was the drafting of a policy or regulation which the Board of Education would consider. I don't recall a single draft that came about because someone was anxious to add another page to the already enormous binder that contained all the approved policies. All came about because of a problem that needed to be prevented or solved. Think about it...isn't that the derivation of laws? And with all those policies, it became the task of someone to adjudicate any who violated them.

Paul's argument, though, took a different direction. Abraham placed his faith in God and God saw in Abraham his morality, his virtues, his sense of justice, his decency. God declared that Abraham was a righteous man. Through his faith, Abraham would lead generations who followed without the need for binders filled with policies or files filled with laws. His faith in God was enough. Praise God!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrTger4l21A>



Thursday, March 9—14th Day of Lent

by Harold Frye

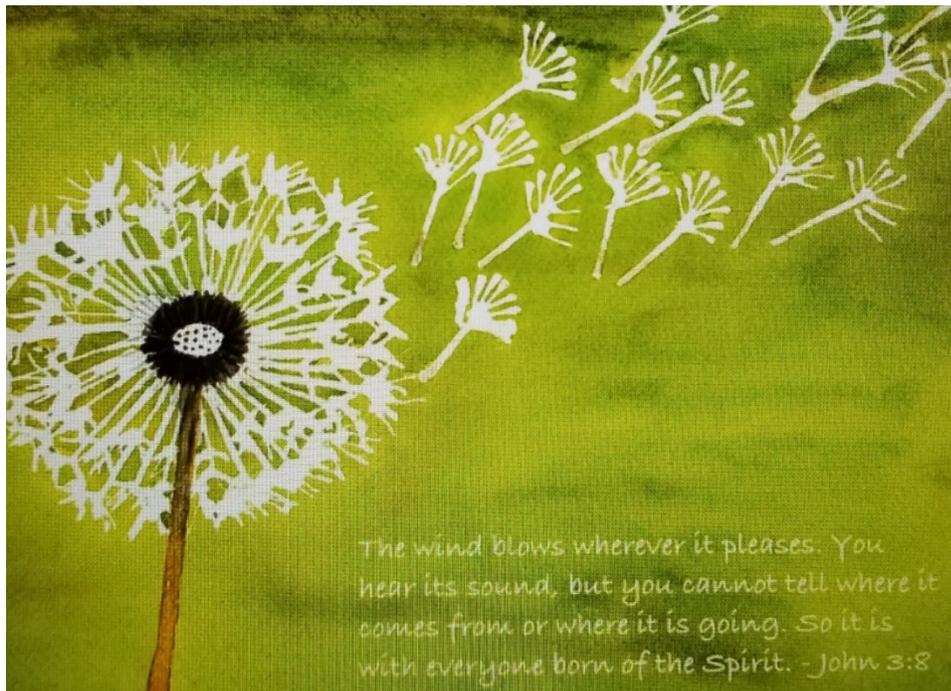
John 3:8 “God’s Spirit blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. It’s the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Over the years, sailing has come and gone in my life. As a young adult scout leader, the troop owned a small sailboat that required only one person to manage. Being foolish and ignorant, I took the boat out and almost immediately tipped it over, losing my sunglasses and a class ring to the bottom of the Pomona Reservoir. Later, when my brother owned a much larger sailboat and we were under better management, I was tossed overboard when the wind changed and I wasn’t prepared for the boom to swing about. Several tacks were required to get back to me in the water. For those who have sailed, there are likely several motivators. The boat gliding through the water almost effortlessly, the challenge of matching skill against the wind.

Like the wind, the Spirit is invisible. Only its effects can be seen and heard. Dust flying in the air...trees bending against its force...brushing against the face. So it is with the Spirit in the work of revival and restoration. And, too, so it is that the Spirit, like the wind, is free, free of will and power.

During Lent, watch for the effects of the Spirit in your life.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ux_2FoXKtVM



Friday, March 10—15th Day of Lent

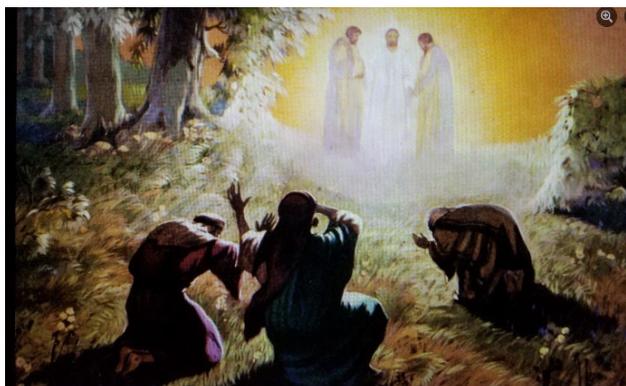
by Katie Hearn

Matthew 17:1-9: “After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!’ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. ‘Get up,’ he said. ‘Don’t be afraid. When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, ‘Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’”

Brandon and I love to climb mountains. We love the quiet of nature (hey, we have three kids), and the feeling of your breath catching in your chest as the air gets thinner. If a hike requires a bit of hand-over-hand scrambling, even better. Nothing makes me feel closer to God than summiting a mountain, looking out at the magnificent view, and basking in the overwhelming miracle of God’s creation. How do you fully appreciate something so beautiful? We always snap a few photos, knowing they won’t come close to capturing the real-life view. When we hiked with Miriam (Todd) Mauritzen in Yellowstone two summers ago, she brought a kite to fly on top of the mountain. (Those of you who know Miriam, former GCPC youth director, won’t be surprised by this.) Inevitably, when you return to flat land, it’s impossible to explain the phenomenon to those who weren’t there. Witnessing God’s glory in such a profound way creates a special bond.

I imagine this is how Peter, James, and John felt that day on the mountaintop. First of all, Peter doesn’t know how to respond to what he is seeing; “let me build a shelter and let’s stay here forever!” He’s interrupted by a bright cloud enshrouding them and a thundering voice that probably sounded a bit like Morgan Freeman. All three disciples are overcome by the magnitude of the experience. On the descent, Jesus says to them, “Don’t tell anyone.” How could they possibly? Telling the story would be like showing a photograph of a mountaintop summit -- it wouldn’t begin to portray the real event. Peter, James, and John experienced something together that no one else would ever fully understand. The experience was life-changing and cemented their belief in something real, something spectacular.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkz3DMvA7zA>



Saturday, March 11—16th Day of Lent

by Harold Frye

1 Peter 4:6 “That is why the Good News was preached to those that are now dead—so although they were destined to die like all people, they now live forever with God in the Spirit.”

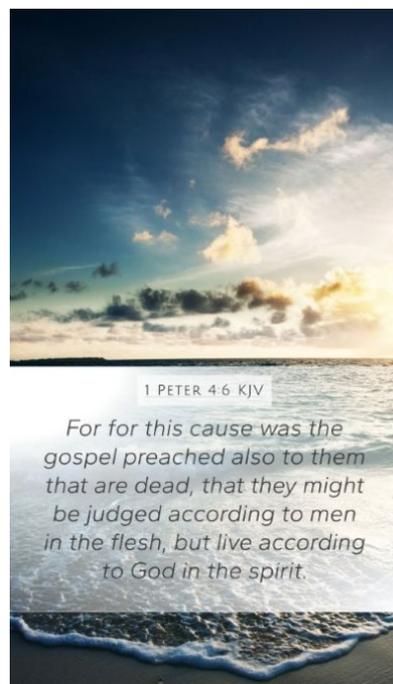
(This was written in 2011 as part of the Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church’s corporate Lenten booklet. It has always been a favorite of mine.)

I knew it was there in the Confirmation syllabus—death. What a tough topic for anyone, especially 8th graders with few times in their lives personally experiencing the pain of losing a loved one. For me, approaching the death topic opened up wounds still too fresh. But whether by Divine intervention or just plain luck, I thought of the many songs in which the message was about God’s love for us and for His Son, Jesus. I recalled *“Trading My Sorrows”* and, in particular that last line, *“Though the sorrow may last for the night, His joy comes in the morning.”* With the 8th graders seemingly giving rapt attention, we listened twice to the song, taking pause to emphasize that last line. We then watched a YouTube interview of author Don Piper’s explanations of his experiences that led to his book, *“90 Minutes in Heaven.”* The Confirmation group was pensive and unusually quiet.

The hope of our own resurrection comes from the Easter story. Jesus asks that we believe in Him. Our reward? Resurrection in heaven for eternity. Nothing can be better.

Prayer: Dear Lord, my hope is in You, my life is in You. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1cv1tzzgbk>



Monday, March 13—17th Day of Lent
by Cheryl Johnson

Exodus 17:1-7: “From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?’ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses and said, ‘Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?’” (NRSVU)

Several years ago, the Thursday morning Bible study group studied the book of Exodus. At one point, I remember almost laughing at all the complaining the Israelites do. They’re thirsty, they’re hungry, they’re scared, maybe they should have remained in Egypt as slaves. If I were Moses, I might have been tempted to throw down that magic stick and say, “You guys are on your own. I’ve had it up to here with all the complaining!”

I’m sure I couldn’t have resisted reminding the Israelites that God had parted the Red Sea so they could safely cross. And, oh yeah, those soldiers Pharaoh sent to capture the Israelites and return them to lives in captivity? They were drowned. And, what about that manna they’ve been feasting on every day? How about saying thank you?

Instead, their response was something more like “Yeah, so what have you done for us lately?” Why is it that when we want something, that’s all we can focus on? We forget to be grateful for what we already have. Now, I know that water is critical to survival, and I am hardly ever without my water bottle. But, I think the lesson in this passage is that we should remind ourselves that God provides what we need. Instead of complaining, we need to focus on being grateful and putting our trust in God.

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes to the blessings we receive daily from you. Help us to rest in the knowledge that you care for us. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTrPFfWPzXc>



Tuesday, March 14—18th Day of Lent
by Stephen Wing

Psalm 95:7-8 “Drop everything and listen, listen as God speaks: Don't turn a deaf ear... “(The Message)

Listening is something you do with your body, not just your ears. You can't listen if your hands are busy. You can't listen if your body is turned away. You can't listen if your face is looking down.

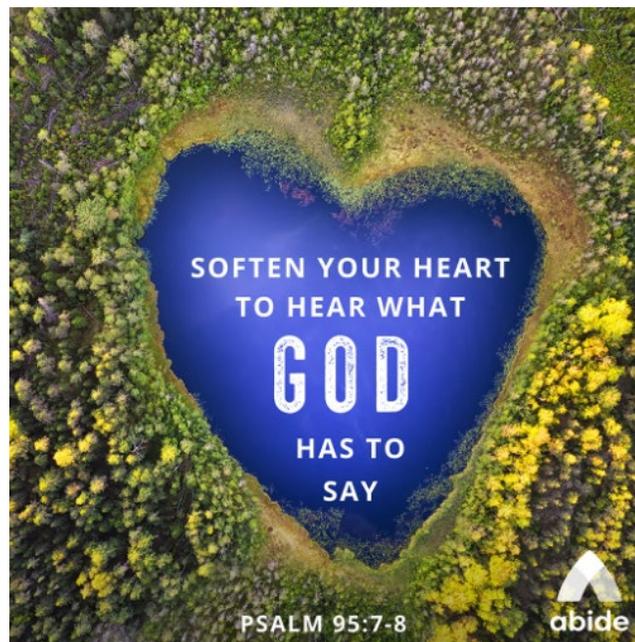
You can hear while your body is doing all those things. You can say, "Yes, I heard you," and you'd be accurate. But you can't say, "Yes, I was listening to you," and be telling the truth.

Listening isn't about speaking. Listening is about giving your full attention while saying nothing. That's what many don't understand about prayer. Many are uncomfortable about praying because they don't know how to talk to God. They think they have to say stuff to God, or ask God for things. They think prayer is just a way to fill up the awkward silence with God with a lot of blah, blah, blah.

But prayer is primarily about listening. About a posture before God. About giving God full attention in silence, and listening. Prayer is about paying attention.

When Jesus went off by himself to pray, it wasn't as much to say things to God, as it was a time to just sit, undistracted, before God and listen. To put his whole body in a posture of prayer, and saying nothing but, "Speak, Lord; I am listening."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGD03snQemU>



Wednesday, March 15—19th Day of Lent

by Dave Pack

Romans 5:1-4 Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand through him, and we boast in the hope of God’s glory. But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. (CEB)

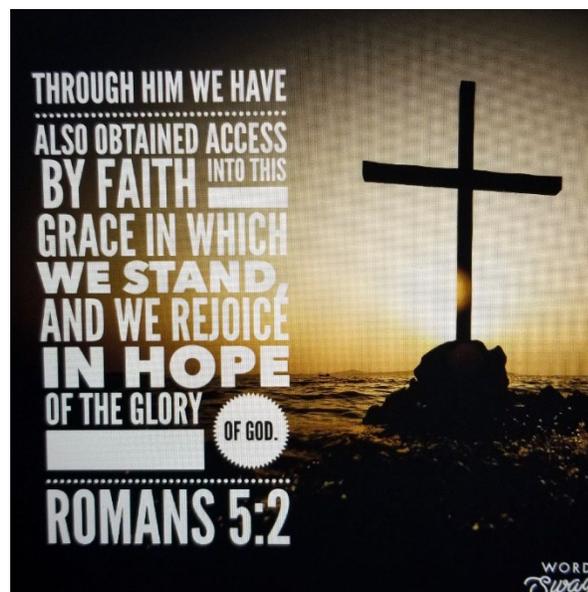
Read the last sentence of the Biblical text above. Wow! That doesn’t sound like me. Does it sound like you? This text gives us something to think about.

A fortunate reality for me has been my relatively problem-free life. I had two great parents who gave me everything I could need and lived long relatively healthy lives. My children were not a source of any significant problems and have become competent and caring adults. No relatives died or were injured in significant accidents. I am very thankful for God’s grace.

I did have a significant problem when I contracted COVID in November 2022 and was hospitalized in ICU for a week. I do feel that my broader experience with COVID starting in March 2022 was “trouble” that produced endurance and some added character. I can certainly deal with isolation and cabin fever much better now than I did before COVID.

Of course, COVID was (is?) a problem for our broad society, not just individuals like me. I can’t say that the way our society dealt with it gave me much hope. God’s clear command to prioritize broad society over individual “freedom” was frequently ignored.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiTG8T2E2ss>



Thursday, March 16—20th Day of Lent
by Cindy Schendel

John 4:5-42

The story of the woman at the well is a familiar one. She is a Samaritan woman married 5 times, which would have been considered immoral in her own community. Perhaps that's why she was drawing water in the mid-day heat instead of with others later in the afternoon. Jesus is a Jew, taught that he would become unclean if he drank from the cup of a Samaritan. The two groups disagreed intensely about the proper place to worship, a mountain in Samaria or Jerusalem. Yet Jesus reaches across all these differences to engage the woman and show her the path to salvation.

Jesus asks her for water. The woman asks why he would make this request of an "unclean" Samaritan? He tells her about the living water he can offer that quenches thirst forever. She takes him literally and asks to receive this water. He tells her to bring her husband, and, when she says she has none, he tells her she is living with a man out of wedlock. This convinces her he is a prophet, but she immediately brings up the "where is the right place to worship God" question. Is she pushing Jesus away? Does she think that, as a prophet, he can settle the question? He tells her that "the time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." Finally, she sees that He is the Messiah and goes to spread the good news.

Jesus used every barrier between them to teach her the truth. "You can't take water from me!" Let me tell you about my living water. "I have no husband." I know. I still offer you salvation. "You believe we should worship somewhere different than we do." It doesn't matter where we worship God, what is necessary is to worship God in Spirit and truth.

What barriers are there between you and God? How might Jesus be reaching out to you to draw you near and show you the truth? He is moving towards Golgotha, let us worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnLgNUbU8c>



Friday, March 17—21st Day of Lent

by Harold Frye

Ephesians 5:8 “For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light!”

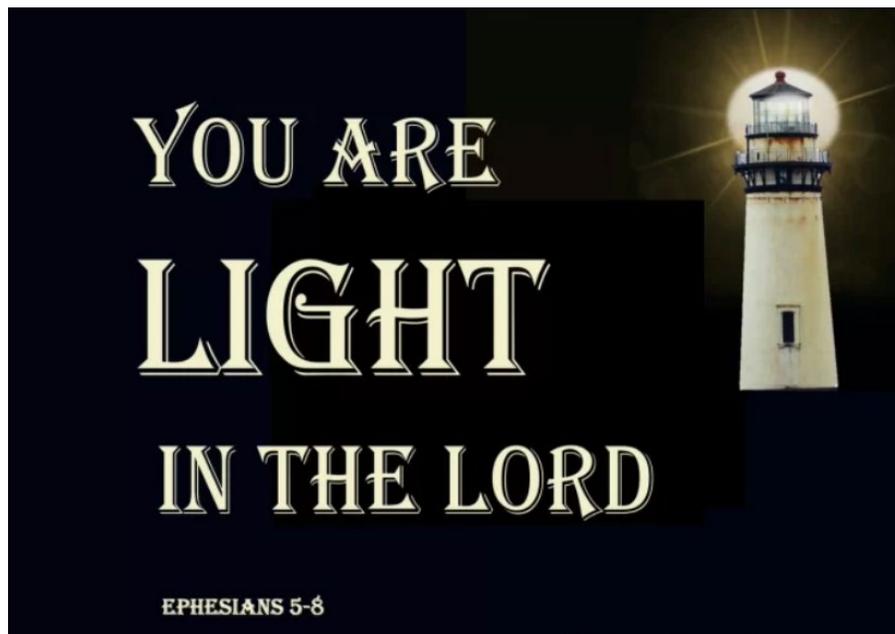
A doctoral student of mine serves as community outreach director for the Kansas School for the Blind in Kansas City, Kansas. Recently, she organized an event to which I was invited along with several others. I jumped at the chance to visit the school once again. In our earlier days of marriage before our children arrived, I accompanied Carol to the school several times as she worked her volunteer hours with the Junior League. It was easy for me to fall into a routine, reading go-to-bed stories to the young children. Their spirits were high and their enthusiasm not dampened by their blindness. I marveled at this as I wondered what it was like in their darkened world.

Accepting Jesus as a personal Savior brings light. Paul urged followers at Ephesus to live, not as they may have before in lives of sin, but as those to whom Jesus brought salvation.

One need not see to be saved in the light.

Prayer: Oh, Lord, my Your light shine in my heart. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Yv40GU-5hc>



Saturday, March 18—22nd Day of Lent
by Harold Frye

Genesis 3:7 “So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.”

I’ve always been puzzled by the presence of this passage from the creation story during Lent. What is the connection? As a young boy, I recall a few times when an opportunity to “skinny dip” became available. Once was on a scout campout where a pond was nearby. A half dozen or so of us decided to test the waters. All I really remember was sinking down into the mud and muck. I guess the thrill of baring it all in the outdoors was foremost in our minds.

God created the Garden of Eden as the perfect place. Adam and Eve were in full communion with God and, as His children, were without shame. But once their sin was committed and they became aware of their nakedness, they tried to hide themselves. How could they think that they were not still fully visible to God? He created them as He created each one of us. We only fool ourselves to think we can hide from Him.

Now at Lent, it is time to prepare ourselves for the remembrance of the Resurrection. It is time to open our hearts to God, to bare our souls to Jesus our Savior. It is a time to recommit to His loving salvation.

Prayer: Dear God, let my complete visibility to You guide me to do what is right. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Scl8-Z99Spw> (Repeated from February 27...Enjoy!)



Monday, March 20—23rd Day of Lent
by Harold Frye

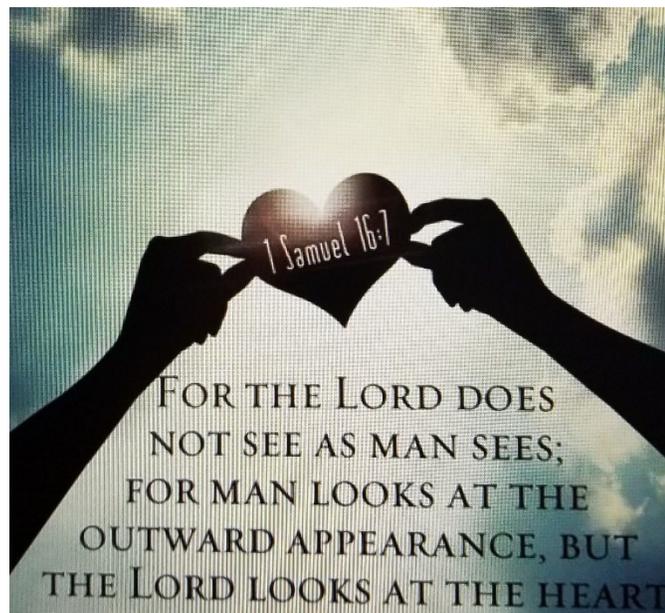
1 Samuel 16:7 “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven’t selected him. God doesn’t look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the Lord sees into the heart.’”

Those of us who live in Johnson County, Kansas, know all too well that we live in the most affluent county in the state and, perhaps, one of the wealthiest counties in the Midwest and beyond. We have big homes, nice cars, the latest fashions, and are leaders in many organizations. We are eager to send our children to the best schools and assure they have everything they want. Yet we aren’t satisfied.

When God sent Samuel to anoint a new king to replace Saul, Samuel’s choices of Jesse’s sons were rejected by God until Samuel arrived at David. This was God’s choice...a young boy whose heart was dedicated to God. David was imperfect, but God knew that David was faithful.

God can see into our hearts. Imperfect as we are, our faithfulness to God is all He requires. Lent is a wonderful time to commit.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Np4XnVnwVg8>



Tuesday, March 21—24th Day of Lent
by Stephen Wing

Psalm 23:1 “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” (KJV)

There seems to be a law—and I think it's a spiritual law—that the more you grasp or grab, the more you lose (or stand to lose). But, the more you are willing to receive, the more you gain.

Psalm 23 is about that law. In order to understand that law, in light of this psalm, do some imagining with me for a moment. Imagine King David, the author of this psalm, as an old man. He is looking back over his life, remembering, reviewing the high and low points. He is making a mental ledger sheet of sorts, dividing up what he assesses to be the things he has been able to keep and the things he has lost. He ponders why he was able to keep the things he has kept, and lost the things he lost.

As you watch David in your mind's eye, and hear his thoughts, it suddenly becomes clear to you that what he lost are the things he grabbed for. But the things he kept were the things he received as gifts from the LORD.

And then you watch, as this old man David, who, through his memories, has come to realize that truth: The more you grasp, the more you lose, or stand to lose. The more you receive the gifts from God, the more you find satisfaction, contentment, peace, well-being, roundedness, and at-homeness; in other words, the more you gain.

The philosopher, W.P. Montague, suggested that the question we start each day with should be, "How can I keep from letting the things that matter most from being at the mercy of the things that matter least?" I would add and amend that question to be, "How can I keep myself from grasping and grabbing at the things that matter least and recognize and receive from God the things that matter most?"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAa2PloCidY>



Wednesday, March 22—25th Day of Lent
by Katie Hearn

Ephesians 5:8-14: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: ‘Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’

Darkness equals bad and light equals good. This is probably one of the easiest to understand and most oft-used metaphors. “Live as children of light,” or as practitioners of all that is good, right, and true. Also easy enough to understand. But what about the next part, where Paul (or more likely a disciple of Paul’s who is believed to have written this book) implores us to expose the fruitless deeds of darkness? Sheesh. When I read that I picture sneaking around into dark corners, shining a flashlight on the “disobedient” and “exposing” them like some righteous member of the paparazzi. But is this really the intended message? Are we to call out those who are displeasing the Lord and publicly expose their wrongdoings?

It’s possible that we are the light. When we find out what pleases the Lord and live as children of light, we lead by example. The last verse uses the imagery of resurrection to signify personal transformation. “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead” reminds us to walk the walk. Others will see the light of Christ shining through our goodness. And when our light shines on those who are living in darkness, we help to transform them.

It reminds me of the quote that floats around social media and even found its way into Sue’s recent sermon: an Amish man was asked “Are you a Christian?” and his reply was “You’ll have to ask my neighbor.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNZdzmslgbs>



Thursday, March 23—26th Day of Lent
by Cheryl Johnson

John 9:1-41: “The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight.” (NRSVU)

It seems like the title of this passage could be No One Wants to Believe in Miracles. Apparently, despite the fact that many people recognized the formerly blind man and despite his parents’ assurances that this was their son who had been born blind, no one wanted to believe that a miracle occurred. Instead of rejoicing that this man was able to see, the Pharisees focused on the fact that the healing occurred on the Sabbath. It was a sin to do any work on the Sabbath so when Jesus made mud to put on the blind man’s eyes, he was doing work and he was a sinner. The circular logic displayed in this passage is sort of amusing with the Pharisees declaring that Jesus was a sinner because he worked on the Sabbath and sinners would not have been able to heal someone’s sight. So, because Jesus couldn’t have healed the man’s sight because he was a sinner, they had to find some way to prove the man who had been healed had never been blind to begin with.

John’s Gospel is full of symbolism. The formerly blind man is the one who recognizes Jesus as God’s son, and the Pharisees who are supposed to be experts on God are blinded because they cannot “see” past all the rules they want to see obeyed.

What kind of “rules” do we judge people by today? Do these rules get in the way of seeing what God is doing or wants us to do?

Prayer: Lord, open our hearts to see your face in those around us. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDdvReNKKuk>



Friday, March 24—27th Day of Lent

by Harold Frye

Hebrews 4:16 “There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.”

School principals are expected to be many things—instructional leaders, evaluators, disciplinarians, counselors.... I enjoyed my 13 years as both an elementary principal and as a middle school principal. The one job I disliked the most was that of disciplinarian. When a teacher escorted a miscreant to my office or sent them with a note, the next period of time was often filled with pain. If the student was immediately remorseful, I usually responded with kindness. If the student was still defiant, I usually responded with sternness. I knew that, regardless of whatever I did, whether it was punishment or only a warning, the referring teacher usually wasn't happy with my decision. Later in my career, I spent 7 years as judge, jury, and executioner as a district's long term suspension hearing officer. Most of the students who came before me were either middle school or high school ages and I knew, without a doubt, that not only was there one teacher who would be unhappy, but several as teachers tend to back one another. Mercy. Likely it was an urge to show mercy that drove me to my discomfort.

As the crucifixion approaches, where is the mercy of God for His son, Jesus? Why do we receive God's grace when He didn't extend it to His own son? That wasn't part of the plan. Jesus was sent to fulfill the prophecy so that God's people would become the benefactors of mercy and grace.

Prayer: Thank you, my Father, for your mercy. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5dQQ57_v90



Saturday, March 25—28th Day of Lent

by Harold Frye

II Corinthians 6:10 “Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything.”

A recent commercial playing on TV begins with a young girl lamenting that her family’s kitchen is where everything happens, from a place for homework to a... It’s likely that what the girl relates is similar to what many of us experience. Why is it, then, that we have several rooms in our homes dedicated to activities—the family room, the rec room, the den, the dining room, the sunroom, and so on? When I was a youngster, our family kitchen was the center of our family’s life, too.

We work to gain all the things in life we want and think we need when Jesus taught us that the most important tasks in life are to attend to the needs of others, especially the poor. I’ve wondered if I should offer room and board to a college student struggling to make ends meet. Would it be helpful to open my home to a family struggling to put food on their table? What can be done to help someone today?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Midu8M670Zs>



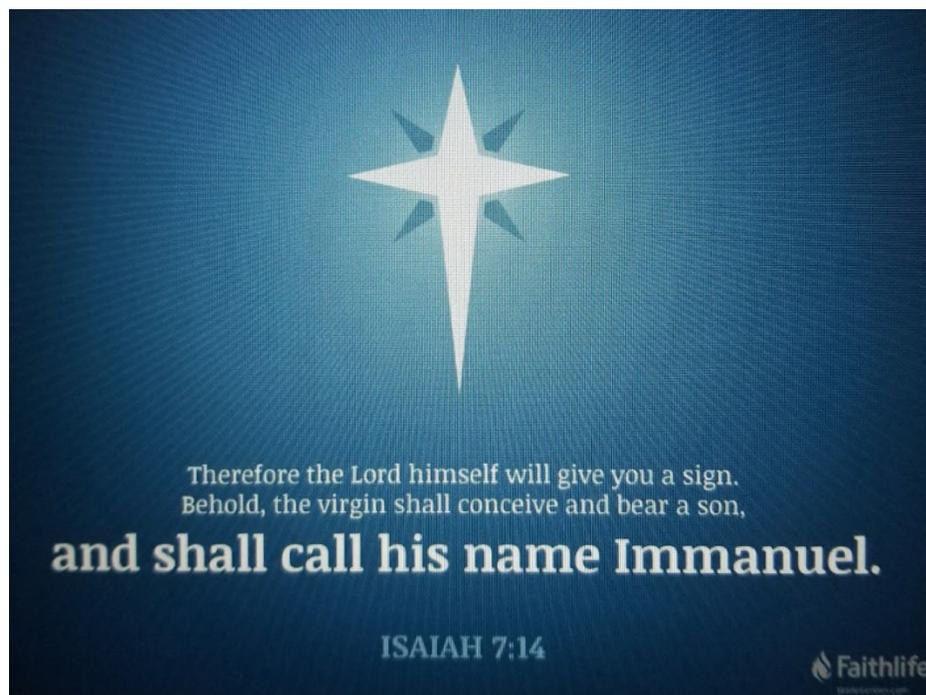
Monday, March 27—29th Day of Lent
by Harold Frye

Isaiah 7:14 “...and she will name Him Immanuel.”

In the early '60s, I worked my way through college at a local funeral home. My job was to cut the grass, tend the rose garden, wash the cars, deliver flowers, obtain death certificate signatures from doctors, and anything else that needed to be done. The routine for a funeral service was that as soon as the funeral ended and the family and others were making their way to cars for the procession to the cemetery, I would load the flowers into the flower car and dash to the gravesite to spread flowers around the grave, then get out of the way before the procession arrived. I was perplexed at times when I would see signs at a few cemetery entrances proclaiming “perpetual care.” It seemed like a somewhat maudlin statement since some of the cemeteries had fallen into less than pristine conditions.

The prophet Isaiah foretold that the virgin Mary would bear a son and name him Immanuel, not Jesus. Immanuel—God with us. Jesus as God in the flesh was born not for a short life that lasted until His death on the cross, but in perpetuity. God is with us then and He is now and as He will always be. Through His Son, salvation came to life and lives without end.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JF_bP6DwoXw



Tuesday, March 28—30th Day of Lent
by Stephen Wing

Psalm 45:3-4 “Strap your sword to your side, warrior! Accept praise! Accept due honor! Ride majestically! Ride triumphantly! Ride on the side of truth! Ride for the righteous meek! (The Message)”

Along the way, during Lent you have to come to some understanding of who Jesus is. Lent is not just a time of introspection and soul-searching. It is a time to come to grips with just who this Jesus is, and what he means to you. What he means for you.

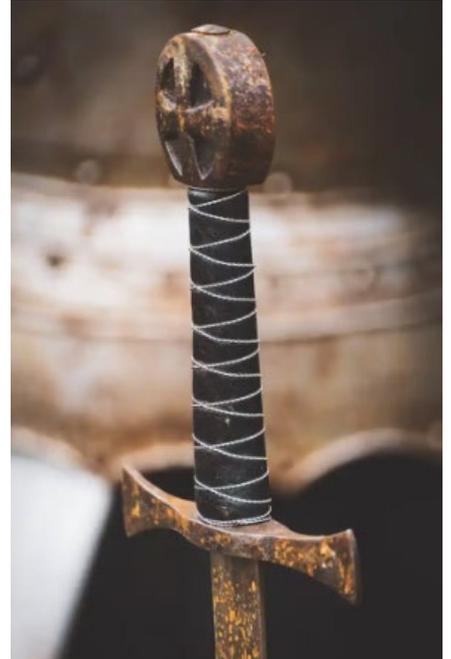
Psalm 45 gives us an inkling into what that relationship with the Lord can be. You may think this Psalm to be an odd choice for that glimpse, because it is actually a love song for the king. It is the longing and swooning cries of the young maidens, shouted out along the way as the king either goes out to battle or is coming home from victory.

In such a scene we get that glimpse into the person and work of Jesus. Not some king who hangs back in the castle, sending others out to fight his battles, Jesus is one who leads into that battle.

Jesus is the one who leaves the castle and faces what we “warriors” face in the everyday battles we wage.

If there ever was a time when we needed the King to ride for truth, it is now. If there ever was a time when we need the King to “ride for the righteous meek” (the immigrants and refugees, the abused women and children, the disenfranchised), it is now. There is our glimpse of King Jesus that we must ponder this Lent—and begin to discover where we fit in with such a King.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pAvBlsgPal>



Wednesday, March 29—31st Day of Lent
by Stephen Wing

Psalm 40:6-7 “Doing something for you, bringing something to you—that’s not what you’re after. Being religious, acting pious—that’s not what you’re asking for. You’ve opened my ears so I can listen. So I answered, ‘I’m coming.’” (The Message)

Lent is a good time to ask, “What does God expect from me, anyway?” What does God want with me? What does God want me to do?

Would you be surprised if the answer was, nothing. God doesn’t need you to do anything God can’t already get done without you. It isn’t as much that God wants you to do something. It’s more that God wants you to be something.

Usually, what happens is we concentrate on what we want or need God to do for us. In mildly crass terms, we need God much more than God needs us. But God does need us. That’s what we miss. God needs our companionship. God needs us to listen—hopes we will listen—just because we want to. God needs our love just as much as we need God’s love. God wants to walk with us “in the cool of the evening,” even if nothing is said.

It’s just knowing we are together because that’s all that matters. For God and us to say to each other, “I’m here for you.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8W8IcZJwFXA>



Thursday, March 30—32nd Day of Lent
by Cheryl Johnson

Hebrews 10:4-6: “But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, He said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.’” (NRSVU)

Through the years, choir members sing hundreds of anthems. Consequently, when listening to or reading Scripture, there is often a tune running through our minds at certain phrases. As soon as I saw the phrase “burnt offerings,” I thought about one of my favorite anthems, Offertory by John Ness Beck, based on my favorite Bible passage, Micah 6:6-8. (Look it up on YouTube, it’s lovely.) Some of the lyrics are:

“With what shall I come before the Lord? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?”

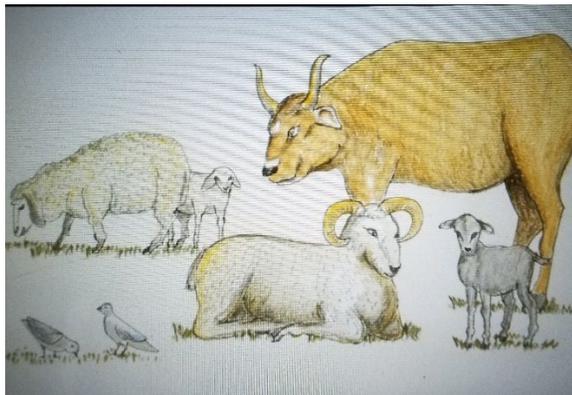
In Old Testament times, there were laws about specific sacrifices depending on whether it was to repay for a specific sin or just sin in general. Some sacrifices were offered daily and others on specific days or as the need/sin arose. Depending on the sinner’s wealth, different animals from bulls to goats to turtle doves were killed. Can you imagine how gory the temple courtyard must have been?

Aren’t we glad God doesn’t want those kinds of sacrifices? Jesus said that’s not what God wants, that what God wants is for us to do God’s will.

As the anthem (and the Micah passage) ends, “And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Prayer: Lord, help me to do your will today. Make my thoughts, words and actions acceptable in your sight. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBokATODsTI>



Friday, March 31—33rd Day of Lent

by Katie Hearn

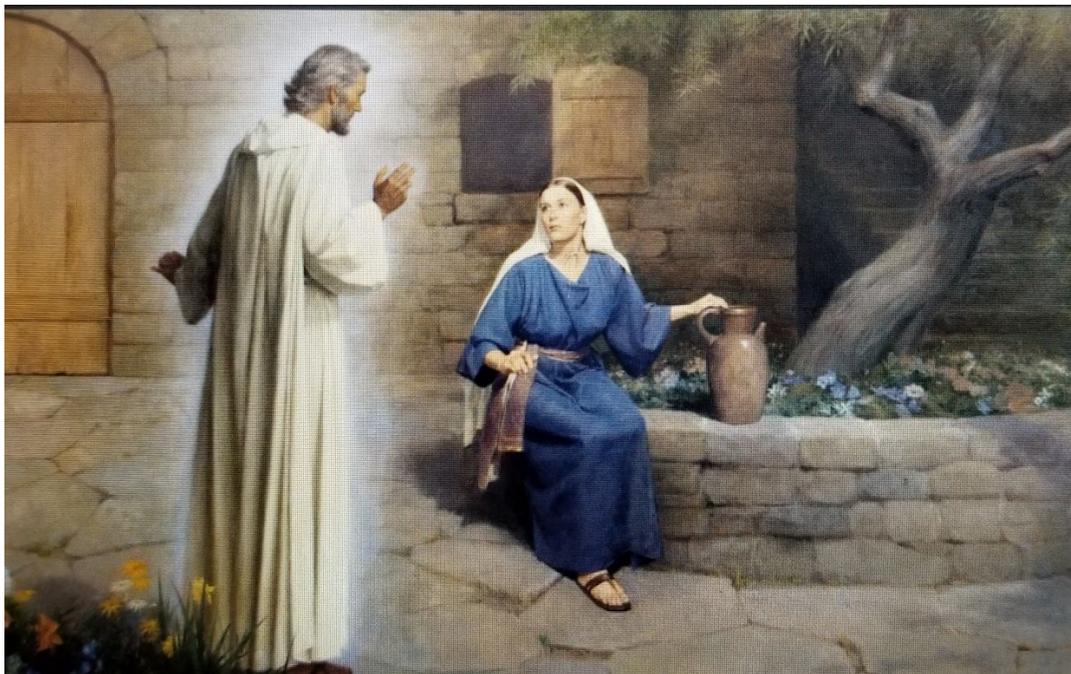
Luke 1:26-38: “In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’”

In the prologue of Rachel Held Evans’s posthumously-published book *Wholehearted Faith*, she discusses the impact women have had on her faith. Not surprisingly, she spends quite a bit of time on Mary and the Incarnation.

Why did God choose to put down roots in the town of Nazareth? Evans points out the community was filled with “ordinary people who held to bad theology, who gossiped too much, who let political disagreements become wedges between them, and who suffered from the first-century version of taking an ancient promise out of context and slapping it on every yearbook photo and Instagram post.” Surely God could find a better clientele.

But even God was born into a “dysfunctional family of faith,” Evans reminds us. Instead of waiting around for the ideal conditions, God became vulnerable, humbling God’s self in the humanity of a young girl. God is with “plain old ordinary us.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDGvnnvG8JnU>



Saturday, April 1—34th Day of Lent

by Harold Frye

Matthew 21:10-11 “And when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. ‘Who is this?’ they asked. The crowds answered, ‘It’s the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’”

I stood at the airline’s exit gate waiting for a woman who I had hired to conduct training in the school district. I hadn’t met her before although I had studied her writings and knew of her reputation. In my mind, I imagined a well-dressed, middle-aged woman who exuded the confidence any expert in her field would possess. Instead of a placard to hold up with her name, I held aloft one of her books which I was certain she would recognize. As the passengers filed through the door, along she came, rather disheveled and looking worn out. She had been subjected to two cancelled flights, extended airport layovers, and she was tired. I suggested she might like to come to my home for the afternoon rather than go directly to her hotel, knowing that she would probably reject my offer. Instead, she agreed and spent the next five hours in my back yard with my young sons as we built a clubhouse. She was delighted to be with my family and was just a regular old soul.

Tomorrow, Sunday, April 2, is Palm Sunday in the Christian faith. The day is celebrated in remembrance of Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem and the joyful greeting He received from the crowds. Not many, though, expected His appearance on a donkey; rather, they expected a strong and powerful prophet come to establish Himself on the throne. He came to suffer, to die, and to be raised so that all could come to the Father through Him.

Jesus, the Savior, was different.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZdfpOlzx9o>



Monday, April 3—35th Day of Lent
by Cheryl Johnson

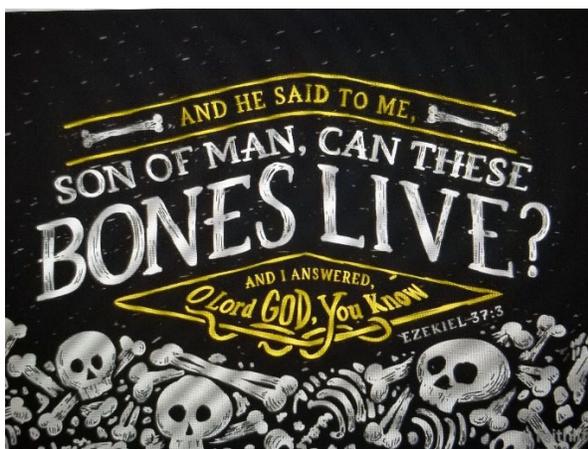
Ezekiel 37:1-14: “The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. 3 He said to me, ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord GOD, you know.’ 4 Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath[a] to enter you, and you shall live. 6 I will lay sinews on you and will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin and put breath[b] in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.’ (NRSVU)

So, is it just me or were your toes tapping out the rhythm to “toe bone connected to the foot bone” when you read this? Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones all coming together and growing muscles and skin, and turning into living beings again is visually powerful. And, when Ezekiel related it to the Jews while they were in exile, it must have filled them with hope.

Before the Babylonians captured Jerusalem, Ezekiel’s messages to the Jews were full of warnings about what would happen if they didn’t turn from their evil ways. Anyone who’s spent time reading the Old Testament could predict what happens, right? They continue to sin and, eventually, Jerusalem falls to the Babylonians. But, even worse than seeing their temple – the one they’d worked to build and paid heavy taxes so Solomon could afford it – destroyed, the Jews were taken into exile. Their communities were pulled apart and people were marched to a foreign land where they tried to build a new life. Ezekiel was in exile with them and it’s interesting that at this point, his messages changed to ones of encouragement and hope. It’s understandable the Jews would have been disheartened. They would have had no more hope of building their country again than that a valley of dry bones would have been able to be given life again. Ezekiel’s vision must have given them hope that all was not lost, that God was still with them and that Israel would come back to life.

Prayer: Lord, when we’re tempted to lose hope, help us remember that you are with us. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcZelAR9rsw>



Tuesday, April 4—36th Day of Lent
by Stephen Wing

Psalm 130:2 “Hear me when I’m crying, O Lord.”

Hear me when I'm crying, O Lord. Or, literally, "Hear my tears, O Lord." What is the sound of tears flowing down from our eyes, cascading down our faces? What is the sound of that salty water pooling in our eyes? What is the sound of tears making their streaks and trails upon our cheeks? What is that sound? Whatever that sound is, God hears it.

In all of our stages of life there is pain and struggle and failure. There are tears. But it used to be we shared those tears, we privileged others, with our tears. Crying was a communal thing—people cried with their families, with their friends, with community. Crying wasn't considered a sign of weakness or shame by women or by men.

Now crying has become an entirely private matter. Tears are shed in the shower, or in the shop, or on a long drive. It's a deeply human emoting that is hidden away in the closet. You don't want anyone to see you or hear you. But yet, but yet, you deeply wish someone heard, someone was paying attention. You deeply yearn for someone to hold you while you cried. "Hear my cry, O Lord. Don't leave me alone in my tears..."

Isn't that a deep, deep secret yearning of us all? Even though you probably cry alone, is not your deep, deep hope that through all your stages and ways of life, your tears will not go unheard or unnoticed?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thVWVP_Z9fQ



Wednesday, April 5—37th Day of Lent
by Cindy Schendel

Romans 8:6-11: “The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God, it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.”

Having two different cancers in 4 years definitely brought me up against my mind being governed by the flesh. Even though neither was yet life threatening I was hyper focused on what treatment I would have to go through, potential side effects and disfigurements, and risk of recurrence. Throughout both ordeals I was surrounded by love, prayers and support and that brought me much comfort, but I had to wrestle with the truth of “even though your body is subject to death because of sin” on my own. I struggled to turn my mind to the Spirit of Christ in me. That Spirit held me up even when I couldn’t tune in.

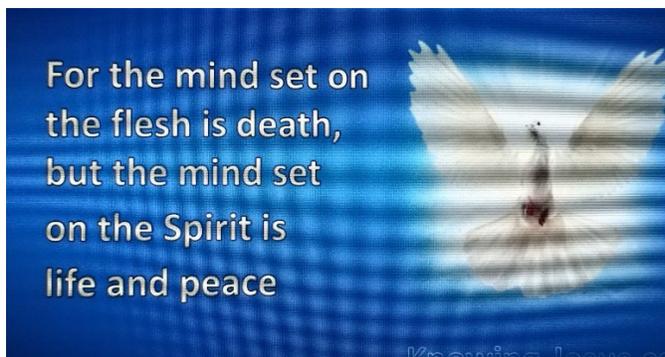
This writing by St. Francis De Sales (1567-1622), found in my mother’s papers when she passed and carried in my calendar ever since, helped me remember to Whom I belong:

“Do not look forward in fear to the changes in life; rather, look to them with full hope that as they arise, God, whose very own you are, will lead you safely through all things; and when you cannot stand it, God will carry you in His arms. Do not fear what may happen tomorrow, the same understanding Father who cares for you today will take care of you then and every day. He will either shield you from suffering or will give you unfailing strength to bear it.”

Be at peace and put aside all anxious thought and imaginations.

Thank you, God, for holding us in our human frailty.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIBRrcMezAI>



Thursday, April 6—38th Day of Lent

by Dave Pack

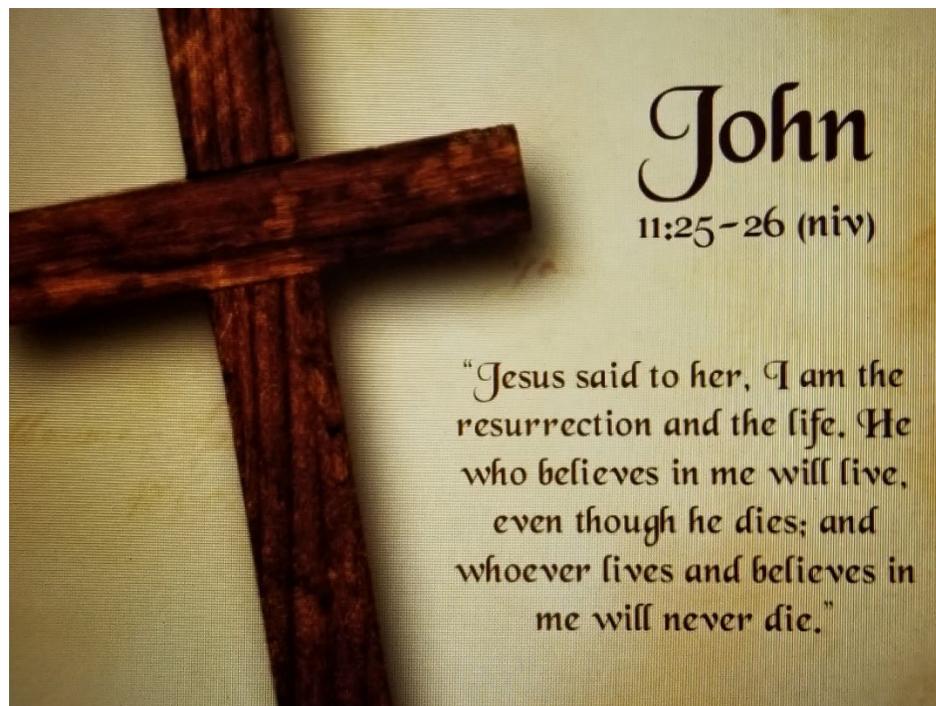
John 11: 25-26 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”
(CEB)

I have never felt a strong connection to Maundy Thursday and its place in Christian theology. While I was raised in the Presbyterian Church, I honestly never felt I was “religious” until sometime after my marriage in 1977. I can’t remember ever hearing any sermon or Sunday school lesson about this strange word “Maundy,” though I probably did at some point. Maundy Thursday just tends to take a distant third place to Easter and Good Friday as we experience Holy Week.

Looking into Maundy Thursday, one description you will find is “commemoration of the Last Supper,” when Jesus gathered with his disciples for the last time and washed their feet as he exemplified serving others. Jesus also expressed a commandment to his disciples to “love one another as I have loved you.”

In Latin, the word for commandment is “mandatum.” In some manner, this became “Maundy” in English. Thus, the word “Maundy” really connects us to Christ’s commandment to love one another as I have loved you. That is a good thing for us to be aware of and a good thing to ponder.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7N0rDTsSseI>



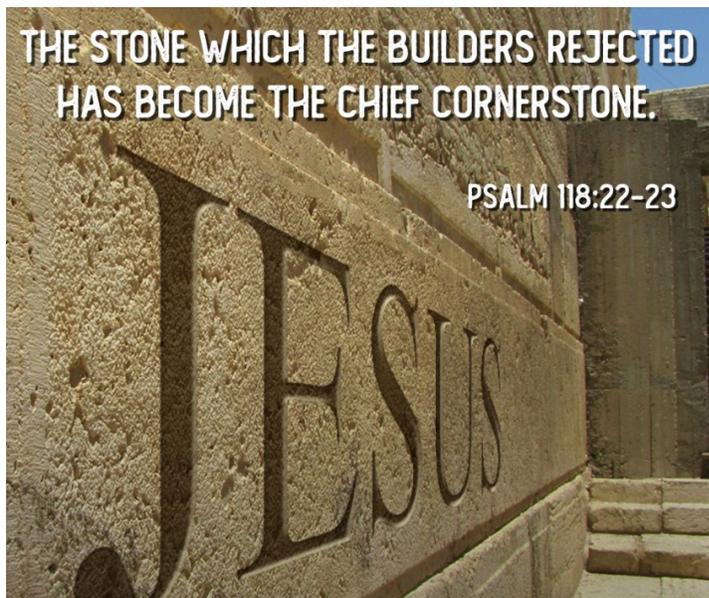
Good Friday, April 7—39th Day of Lent
by Stephen Wing

Psalm 118:22-23 “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. (KJV)

There's a lot of things you can do with a Christmas gift. Once the gift-giver has given the gift, the rest is up to you. The giver has given control of the gift over to you. You can excitedly unwrap it, and be overwhelmed (“marveled”) by the gift (and the giver). You can leave it wrapped, and set it back underneath the tree. You can keep it unwrapped, and then put it up on a closet shelf to just sit, for who knows how long. You can take the gift back to a store because you think you can get something better with the trade-in. You can wrap it back up and “re-gift” it. Or, you can adamantly refuse the gift (opened or unopened), and tell the giver to just keep it. You can say, “Thank you”—or not.

What you do with the Gift—and the Giver—is now in your hands.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2ENQvpTh88>



Saturday, April 8—40th Day of Lent
by Stephen Wing

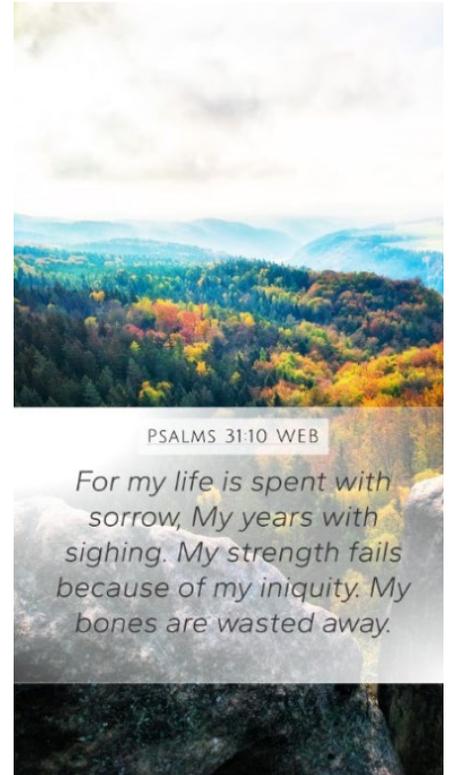
Psalm 31:10-12 “To my enemies I’m a monster; I’m ridiculed by the neighbors. My friends are horrified; they cross the street to avoid me. They want to blot me from memory, forget me like a corpse in a grave, discard me like a broken dish in the trash. (The Message)”

Marilyn Monroe once said, “Sometimes I feel like my whole life has been one big rejection.” A shocking statement coming from someone who has been so idolized as an icon of stardom. One biographer wrote that because all the people around Marilyn Monroe thought she was so popular, that she was being asked to parties and galas all the time—so they didn’t invite her to theirs because they thought she was too busy, and would refuse. So it was, that Marilyn Monroe sat at home alone, wondering why, and feeling rejected.

In a recent book, titled *The Invisible Life of Addie Larue*, by V.E. Schwab, the title character makes a deal with the devil. For her own reasons, she wants to live forever. The devil agrees—with one condition: she will never be remembered by anyone (even by people she has just met); nor will anything she does be remembered, for as long as she lives. It will be as if she became invisible to all of history.

That is maybe the worst kind of rejection: being totally forgotten, and seemingly having no effect on anyone’s life. To never have anything of your story be told by those who come after you. To wonder, as you closed your eyes in death, if you mattered at all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTIPRjK7Wpo>



Easter—April 9
by Nelson Townsend

Isaiah 50:4-9

**“The Sovereign One has given me an [obedient] tongue, [I know the words] that sustain the weary.
The Sovereign One wakens me each morning, wakens my ear to listen like a [good student.]
The Sovereign One has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious; I have not turned away.
I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those [who struck me];
I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.
Because the Sovereign One helps me, I will not be disgraced.
Therefore, I have set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.
The One who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Show your face to me!
Who is my accuser? Let my oppressor confront me!
It is the Sovereign One who helps me. Who will condemn me? [No one.] [end]**

What are the words that sustain you?

Many of the words and thoughts that sustain me are woven through or evoked by this passage from Isaiah. As I write this, I am looking forward to the Easter morning when I will awaken to the “good news” that Jesus has been resurrected and he is loose in the world!

I am reminded that I cannot be beaten or mocked by anyone justly. Only Jesus is in a position to condemn me, and Jesus loves me, no matter what. Paul says it again in Romans 8:34, “Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us.” And because I am loved, I can love others as well.



I am reminded that we are blessed when we are able to mourn, because we will be comforted. We are blessed when we hunger and thirst for righteousness, because we will be satisfied. When we walk in darkness, we carry a light within us.

These are the words that sustain me. What are the words that sustain you?

Prayer: Sovereign One, open our ears to hear the good news and the words that will sustain us. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJbxGRV62nY>

