



# Beauty FOR Ashes

ISAIAH 61:3

*A Lenten Devotional*  
2017

During a recent staff meeting, someone shared how difficult it is to make time for God amid life's demands. Each one of us concurred. Fortunately, certain times of the church year offer us opportunities to start anew and recommit to a regular spiritual discipline of reflection and prayer.

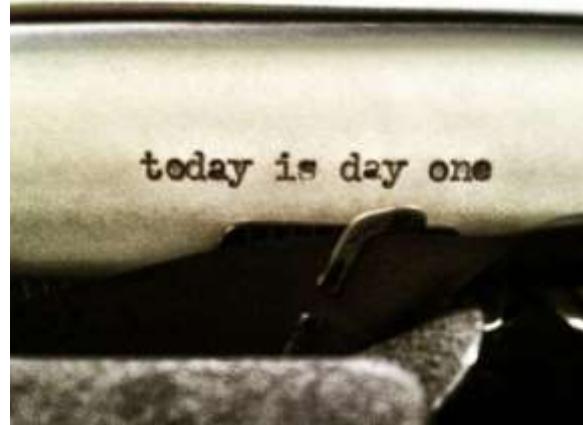
To help facilitate this during Lent, we have put together this devotional, a compilation of the 2016 evotionals (emailed weekly on Tuesdays). Our hope and prayer is that these reflections, images, prayers, and words of scripture will give you a simple way to connect with God each of the next forty-seven days, deepening your sense of God's presence and preparing you to receive the gift of resurrection at Easter. May the knowledge that Christ is risen, and creates beauty from ashes, be a source of strength and peace for you throughout this season of Lent.

~ The Church of the Covenant Staff



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**Day 1: Wednesday, March 1, 2017**



This year.

This day.

This moment.

*There is Nothing Wrong with Starting Again.*

More grace.

More kindness.

More forgiveness.

**There is Nothing Wrong with Starting Again.**

With love.

With strength.

With courage.

**THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH STARTING AGAIN.**

*"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;  
God's mercies never come to an end;  
They are new every morning;  
Great is your faithfulness." - Lamentations 3:22-23*

~ *Mindy Stewart*

The phrase, "There is Nothing Wrong with Starting Again," is borrowed from M.H. Clark.

## **Day 2: Thursday, March 2, 2017**

A friend recently sent me these words by the late Erma Bombeck, who wrote a weekly newspaper column for years. This particular column was titled "What's Saved Is Often Lost," and Bombeck wrote it in response to a question from a reader asking whether she had a stash of ideas she'd saved over the years so that she would always have something to write about. Here's what she wrote:

*"I don't save anything. My pockets are empty at the end of a week. So is my gas tank. So is my file of ideas. I trot out the best I've got, and come the next week, I bargain, I whimper, I make promises... I throw myself on the mercy of the Almighty for just three more columns in exchange for cleaning my oven.*

*"I did not get to this point overnight. I came from a family of savers...throughout the years, I've seen a fair number of my family who died leaving candles that had never been lit, appliances that never got out of the box....*

*"It gets to be a habit, [this holding back]."*

*"But I've learned that silverware tarnishes when it isn't used, perfume turns to alcohol, candles melt in the attic over the summer, and ideas that are saved for a dry week often become dated and useless.*

*"I always had a dream that when I am asked to give an accounting of my life to a higher court, it will be like this: 'So, empty your pockets. What have you got left of your life? Any dreams that were unfilled? Any unused talent that we gave you when you were born that you still have left? Any unsaid compliments or bits of love that you haven't spread around?'*

*"And I will answer, 'I have nothing to return. I spent everything you gave me. I'm as naked as the day I was born.'"*

*"I spent everything you gave me."*

May we find lots of ways, today, tomorrow, and everyday, to trust God enough to live with open hands and open hearts, joyfully spending *everything* we have been given.

*~Amy Starr Redwine*



*The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*

*Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

### **Day 3: Friday, March 3, 2017**



It is the nature of the divine to go above and beyond. It's not for the purpose of gloating, but to bring glory to the Father. Jesus' ministry begins with turning simple, tasteless water into the best wine at a joyous wedding celebration. How often do we neglect the mundane because it's just that - mundane, nothing special? Yet, when we give our lives over to following Jesus, we can live with great hope of seeing the ordinary turn into the extraordinary. Live today as though the simple is part of the divine.

*As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned nor his parents; but it was so the works of God might be displayed in him." ~ John 9:1-3*

~ Mindy Stewart

## **Day 4: Saturday, March 4, 2017**



*Following Jesus Christ is a dangerous act! It is dangerous because you may find yourself digging with a shovel, or reading the Bible, or changing your job, or praying as you have never prayed before. It is indeed dangerous, for if one becomes committed to this way, all life will be different and every sphere of one's existence will be involved in the change.*

*~Elizabeth O'Connor, A Call to Commitment*

There is a good reason that so many stories, both in the Bible and in the history of Christianity, involved people who undergo a radical transformation when they encounter God. Abram and Sarai, Moses, nearly all of the prophets, the disciples, Zaccheus, Mary Magdalene, the apostle Paul, the Ethiopian eunuch. For many of us, the transformation isn't instantaneous, but the life God calls us to is dangerous precisely because God wants us to live what is already true: as if *all* of our life and all of our being to belong to God. Imagine how living this way could change us.

How will the fact that you belong to God change your life today?

*~ Amy Starr Redwine*

*For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than live in the tents of wickedness. ~Psalm 84:10*

## ***Sunday, March 5, 2017***

The season of Lent offers us the opportunity for reflection, for opening up ourselves in a new way, even for voicing our doubts and questions. The simplest things can do it. Notice your breathing. Slow down long enough to feel the warmth of the sun on a cold day or to marvel at the full moon on a winter's night. Take the time to look into the eyes of a stranger when you say "hello" or "thank you." Call someone you love and relish the sound of their voice. In all this and more, the spark of God's love might just flare up within us. And who knows where that spark might take us.

*~Amy Starr Redwine*



### **Staying Power** by Jeanne Murray Walker

Like Gorky, I sometimes follow my doubts  
outside to the yard and question the sky,  
longing to have the fight settled, thinking  
I can't go on like this, and finally I say

all right, it is improbable, all right, there  
is no God. And then as if I'm focusing  
a magnifying glass on dry leaves, God blazes up.  
It's the attention, maybe, to what isn't there

that makes the emptiness flare like a forest fire  
until I have to spend the afternoon dragging  
the hose to put the smoldering thing out.  
Even on an ordinary day when a friend calls,

tells me they've found melanoma,  
complains that the hospital is cold, I say God.  
God, I say as my heart turns inside out.  
Pick up any language by the scruff of its neck,

wipe its face, set it down on the lawn,  
and I bet it will toddle right into the godfire  
again, which-though they say it doesn't  
exist-can send you straight to the burn unit.

Oh, we have only so many words to think with.  
Say God's not fire, say anything, say God's  
a phone, maybe. You know you didn't order a phone,  
but there it is. It rings. You don't know who it could be.

You don't want to talk, so you pull out  
the plug. It rings. You smash it with a hammer  
till it bleeds springs and coils and clobbery  
metal bits. It rings again. You pick it up

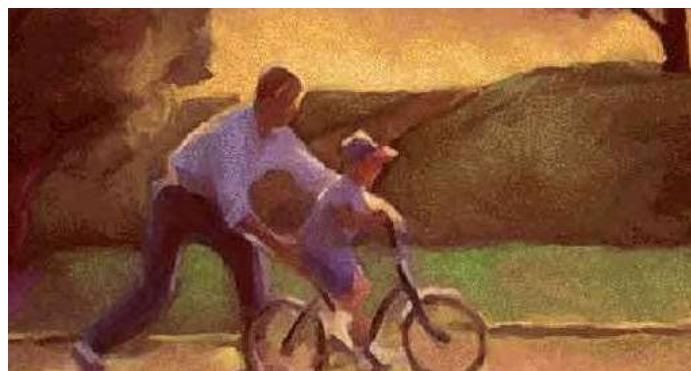
and a voice you love whispers hello.

## Day 5: Monday, March 6, 2017

### Learning the Bicycle

The older children pedal past  
Stable as little gyros, spinning hard  
To supper, bath, and bed, until at last  
We also quit, silent and tired  
Beside the darkening yard where trees  
Now shadow up instead of down.  
Their predictable lengths can only tease  
Her as, head lowered, she walks her bike alone  
Somewhere between her wanting to ride  
And her certainty she will always fall.  
Tomorrow, though I will run behind,  
Arms out to catch her, she'll tilt then balance wide  
Of my reach, till distance makes her small,  
Smaller, beyond the place I stop and know  
That to teach her I had to follow  
And when she learned I had to let her go.

Wyatt Prunty, *Balance as Belief*. John Hopkins University Press, 1989.



So much of life involves learning to let go, to relinquish not just control, but the very idea that we have control over much of anything. We do what we can to pass on to the next generation what we have learned ourselves through trial and error and, mostly, through failure...but eventually we recognize that the next generation will learn best by making their own mistakes. Today, as we practice again the art of letting go, of relinquishing power and control (that we never really had), may our practice increase our capacity to trust God, the one who walks alongside us, the one who gently nudges us back onto the path, the one who does not always keep us from falling but who is always with us, helping us up and encouraging us to try again.

~Amy Starr Redwine

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. ~Hebrews 12:1-3*

## **Day 6: Tuesday, March 7, 2017**

Last week at the Trent@Montreat conference, I attended a small group led by the Rev. Dr. Tom Tewell. During our time together, Tom shared with us that he has adopted an open-handed posture when he prays. Years ago, he realized he had a tendency to clench his fists tightly when he prayed, and it occurred to him that this posture was neither particularly trusting or vulnerable. When he prays with open hands, he told us, he knows that God might take from his hands something he cherishes, but also that God might place in his hands something he never expected.

During our time together, Tom invited us to try praying with our hands open. This was a little uncomfortable for me at first. For one thing, it requires effort to hold your hands open -- if totally relaxed, our hands naturally close up a bit. But I began to notice that this physical posture influenced my mental and emotional posture -- helping me to hold a little less tightly to the ways I might want God to act in my life and in the world and to instead become more accepting of what is and more open to the things God might do that would never even occur to me to request.

Today, right now in fact, take a moment to close your eyes and open your hands. Take a deep breath and say a prayer. Who knows what God might do.

*~ Amy Starr Redwine*



To you, O Lord, I call;  
my rock, do not refuse to hear me,  
for if you are silent to me,  
I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.  
Hear the voice of my supplication,  
as I cry to you for help,  
as I lift up my hands  
towards your most holy sanctuary...  
Blessed be the Lord,  
for he has heard the sound of my pleadings.  
The Lord is my strength and my shield;  
in him my heart trusts;  
so I am helped, and my heart exults,  
and with my song I give thanks to him.  
~Psalm 28:1-2 & 6-7

## **Day 7: Wednesday, March 8, 2017**

*"The most dangerous stories we make up are the narratives that diminish our inherent worthiness. We must reclaim the truth about our lovability, divinity, and creativity."*

*- Brene Brown*



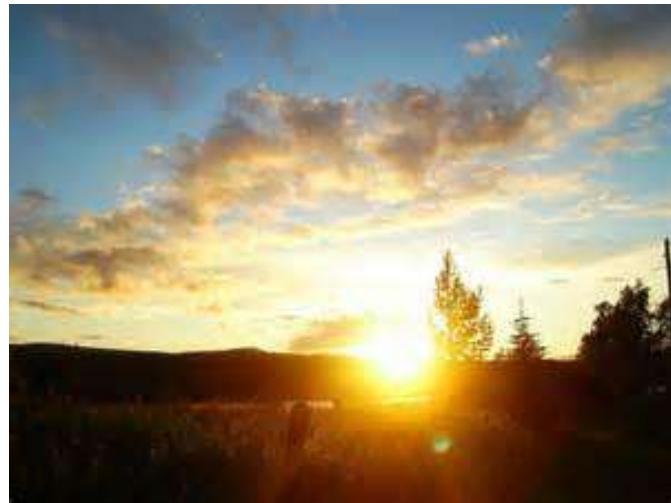
**You. Are. Worth. It...**God's grace, love, joy, acceptance, time, searching, mercy, death, and life. When you believe that to be true about yourself, you find your true identity. When you find your true identity and help others discover theirs, you are in the business of bringing heaven to earth. You are in God's business and each one us is called to do Kingdom work. How are you working as a divine conduit today?

*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

*Matthew 5:14-16*

*~ Mindy Stewart*

***Day 8: Thursday, March 9, 2017***



*I've always liked the time before dawn because there's no one around to remind me who I am supposed to be so it's easier to remember who I am."*

- Brian Andreas, *Trusting Soul*

May the dawn of each new day remind you who you are and return you to your essence. You may be a father, a child, a teacher, a mother, a professional perfectionist, or a professional slacker. You may be a person who has it all together, or a person who has no idea what they are doing. Yet, underneath it all, you are beloved. You are a child of God.

~ *Melanie Marsh Baum*

## **Day 9: Friday, March 10, 2017**

*You cannot earn God. You cannot prove yourself worthy of God. Knowing God's presence is simply a matter of awareness, of enjoying the now, of deepening one's own presence. There are moments when it happens. Then life makes sense. Once I can see the Mystery here, and trust the Mystery even in this piece of clay that I am, then I can also see it in you. I am able to see the divine image in myself, in you, and eventually in all things. Finally the seeing is one. How you see anything is how you will see everything.*

*~Richard Rohr*



“There’s no such thing as a free lunch.” I learned this expression sometime in elementary school. For all of us, it is reinforced on a daily (probably hourly) basis. What we have is what we’ve earned. What radical, disturbing, and astounding news that in God’s economy, love and worth not only are not earned, they **cannot** be earned. They simply are. You are loved. You are worthy of God. What if we actually believed that? What if we lived like that was true?

*~Amy Starr Redwine*

*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*  
(1 Corinthians 13:12-13)

## **Day 10: Saturday, March 11, 2017**

In his letter from the Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote the following: *"Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town...Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds."*

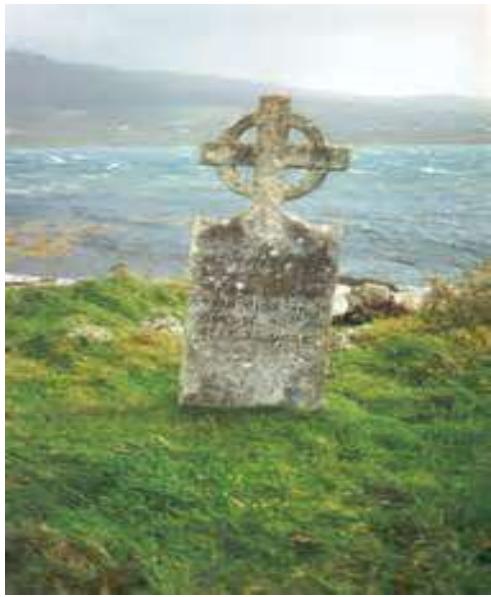


As people of God we are called to carry the gospel of freedom. But carrying a message of freedom for all people is sometimes difficult - even impossible to for us to do. I spent the past week at a conference where I was asked to take a unflinching, and often challenging, look at the ways I have been complicit carrying forward a message of racism and white supremacy, especially within the church. I've learned that it is fear that often stops me from recognizing injustice, or speaking out loud and clear against it. I have been forced to dwell within my own fear and to know the discomfort of that fearful place. But I have also been reminded that God dwells in that place of fear, too. If we can all learn to live in the fearful places - to *not* run or hide, when running and hiding are all we want to do; if we can learn to open our eyes in the midst of fear, we may learn to see God there as well, calling us to courage, calling us out of our fear...

*"But Moses said to the people, 'Be fearless, stand firm, and see the deliverance that Yahweh will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again.' ~ Exodus 14:13*

~ Melanie Marsh Baum

## ***Sunday, March 12, 2017***



This week, as we prepare for the upcoming feast day of Saint Patrick, our Theology on Tap group will discuss Celtic Spirituality. Celtic Christians draw inspiration from the natural world and the wisdom of pre-Christian Ireland, as well as from art, music, and community life. One spiritual practice that is particularly important to the Celtic Tradition is pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is simply a journey to a sacred place. These places may exist near to us, far away, or even within our own selves. The Celtic Saints called these sacred spaces 'thin places' because there seemed to be only a thin veil between this world and the world of Spirit. As we near the end of our Lenten journey this year, may we cultivate within ourselves a pilgrim's heart.

*We may not be able to travel to faraway places, but there is yet benefit in being a 'heart' pilgrim - i.e. Having that nomadic approach to life that is always open to moving on, not getting stuck in a rut, open to new experiences, new relationships and understandings - open to the ever onward call of God. ~ Grace Clunie*

*~Melanie Marsh Baum*

## **Day 11: Monday, March 13, 2017**

*"Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

~ Joshua 1:9

In a world that at times can feel broken as we here about violent acts of hate in communities across the country; refugees streaming across borders fleeing from war; and a

planet in peril because of the impact we have had on the environment, we can lose hope, become dismayed and become afraid. Yet it is in these times that God calls us to bold leadership. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the story of Joshua starts with the death of Moses and a time of uncertainty for the Israelites, alone in the desert. It is then God calls on Joshua to step up and be that **bold leader** as he would usher the people into the promised land.



Sunday afternoon I had the amazing opportunity to attend the Interfaith Unity Rally sponsored by the LGBTQ Center of Cleveland at Old Stone Church in downtown Cleveland. This rally brought together people of faith from various religious traditions and asked each of us to commit to take **bold leadership** as we continue to work for justice, equity and compassion for all people, regardless of who they are, what they believe, and whom they love. It is a message of hope that breaks through the shadows of fear and violence. A commitment to bold leadership that models the life and work of Jesus. A covenant with God that we will be leaders that in the face of fear, in solidarity with those who need our support, and break out of our silos and have conversations with people who need to hear the message of the Gospel.

**Bold leadership**, because we know that when we feel afraid or dismayed God is with us. God has our back as we work for justice and serve as builders of God's inclusive Kingdom in this time and place.

~ Kevin J. Lowry

## **Day 12: Tuesday, March 14, 2017**

*"I said, 'I will guard my ways  
that I may not sin with my tongue;  
I will keep a muzzle on my mouth  
as long as the wicked are in my presence.'*

*I was silent and still;  
I held my peace to no avail;  
my distress grew worse,  
my heart became hot within me.  
While I mused, the fire burned;  
then I spoke with my tongue:  
- Psalm 39:1-3*

Speak your mind. Speak your heart.

When the world is falling down and you are afraid, when you don't know what to say, speak anyway.

For we are not called to keep silent as we stand face to face with the brutality, violence, and pain of this world.

We are called to speak out, to cry out, to sing out - even to whisper if that is all we can manage.

There are days when the only words that come are "Have mercy, O God," and "What do we do?"

The answer is always the same: Speak from your heart. Cry out of you must. Love one another as God has love you.

As we live in these days in the midst fear, or injustice, or unspeakable pain, may our hearts burn within us, may they urge us to speak and to love.

*~ Melanie Marsh Baum*



## **Day 13: Wednesday, March 15, 2017**



Father Gregory Boyle is one of my heroes. Boyle is a priest who started Homeboy Industries and who has worked with thousands of young men and women who have decided to leave the gang life of inner city Los Angeles. Homeboy provides vocational training, tattoo removal, parenting support, mental health and substance abuse counseling, and high school and college assistance. What makes this organization so remarkable is not just the high success rate - 70% of Homeboy graduates have not been arrested on new charges two years after leaving Homeboy - but the methods they use. As their recently published annual report puts it: "We bring compassion and unconditional love to every interaction. We know that every day offers hope for new beginnings. We demonstrate an irrational commitment to transformation, because that value helps people to realize they have the power to change."

We may not be called to something as dramatic as helping rehabilitate former gang members, but each of us encounters some form of violence and despair nearly every day. And God has given us the capacity to bring compassion and unconditional love to every interaction. To greet each day as a new beginning. To demonstrate an irrational commitment to transformation - our own and others'. Today, as we navigate all the tasks and demands of daily life, may we take a lesson from the Homeboy playbook, which proclaims the gospel truth: *Love is the answer...Tenderness is the method...Kindness is the only strength there is.*

~ Amy Starr Redwine

## **Day 14: Thursday, March 16, 2017**

*"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love." - 1 John 4:18*

As the spring season wanes, I have found myself reflecting on love and fear. So much of my life is a struggle between the power of these two emotions. Each has a way of cancelling out the other when allowed to take hold. I want to know how to love this world, but there is yet so much that causes me to fear.

Today, as we are faced with beauty, tragedy, news that makes us laugh, or want to look away, or question the good of the world. May we allow love to take hold, remembering the perfect love of Christ, and its ability to make all things new.



"Spring" by Mary Oliver

Somewhere a black bear has just risen from sleep  
and is staring down the mountain.

All night in the brisk and shallow restlessness of early spring  
I think of her, her four black fists flicking the gravel,  
her tongue like a red fire touching the grass, the cold water.

There is only one question: how to love this world.

I think of her rising like a black and leafy ledge  
to sharpen her claws against the silence of the trees.

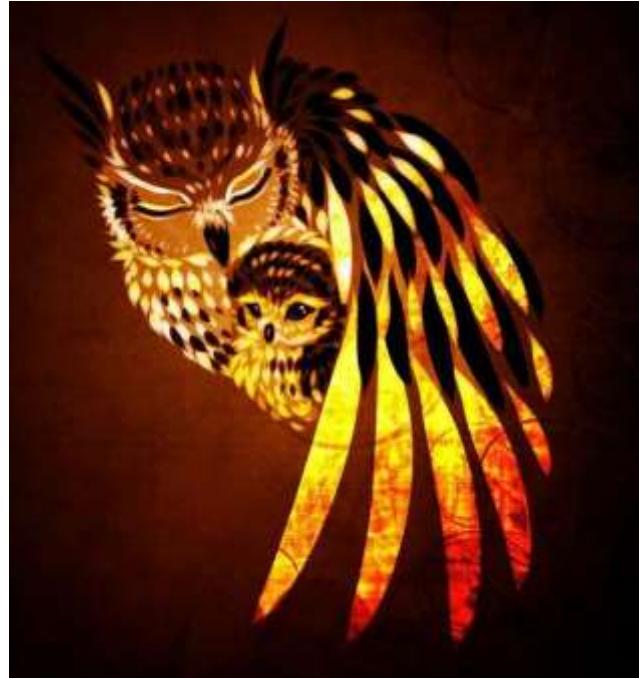
Whatever else my life is with its poems and its music and its glass cities,  
it is also this dazzling darkness coming down the mountain,  
breathing and tasting.

All day I think of her - her white teeth, her wordlessness, her perfect love.

~ Melanie Marsh Baum

## **Day 15: Friday, March 17, 2017**

*You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust." For God will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; Yahweh will cover you with pinions, and under God's wings you will find refuge; God's faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. ~ Psalm 91:1-7*



*When I was a young girl, attending a Lutheran elementary school, we often sang a song based on the words of Psalm 91 above. The image of God as a loving parent - a mother bird, sheltering her babies under her wing - has always been one that speaks deeply to me of God's abiding faithfulness and love.*

Biblical scholar Timothy Hessel-Robinson reminds us that "Psalm 91 assures worshipers that God is present in the midst of danger, difficulty, and disappointment. It promises that God acts decisively to protect those who 'live in the shelter of the Most High'."

Though it may seem as though many of us are living a vulnerable, exposed, and uncertain existence, God has not forsaken us. In fact, God calls upon those who are able, who are safe and secure, to speak out, to act, to spread their wings wide and protect the vulnerable and powerless, wherever they may be among us.

*~ Melanie Marsh Baum*

## **Day 16: Saturday, March 18, 2017**

*"Here's the thing about listening- it can be hard. Listening, to anybody, can fill you with an urge to replace their voice with your own, to replace their hurt with more comfortable feelings. To put the burden of listening on anyone else but you. To listen is to accept that you are not the most important person in the room. It's to accept that you have a place in the world that is not at its center. It is to acknowledge and respect the experience of another living soul, and honor them, and cherish them, and understand them. If only for the course of an anecdote."*

~ Lea Grover

Over the last two weeks, I have had the privilege of listening to our youth. I heard 5,000 of them worship our Living God. Several shared stories of grief and loss pointing us to God's presence even in the darkest of times. I listened to laughter and joy exude from the lunch tables, dormitories, lofts, bus and car rides, creative play, times of devotion and moments of service as community was created. I heard hearts crying out for justice and peace in a world full of angst and fear. I heard confusion and concern after receiving news from home of death and attempted suicides. I listened for key words to unlock the mysteries of adolescent minds and souls. Sometimes I heard them, other times their dialogue just confirmed the bizarre development stage of "teendom." Many were new faces to me, but several I have watched mature over the years. Yet, each one reminded me to listen. When we stop to listen and take ourselves out of the center of the universe, there is great value to find in honoring the stories of others and joy to be experienced in the richness of community.



*Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them. ~ Luke 24:13-15*

~ Mindy Stewart

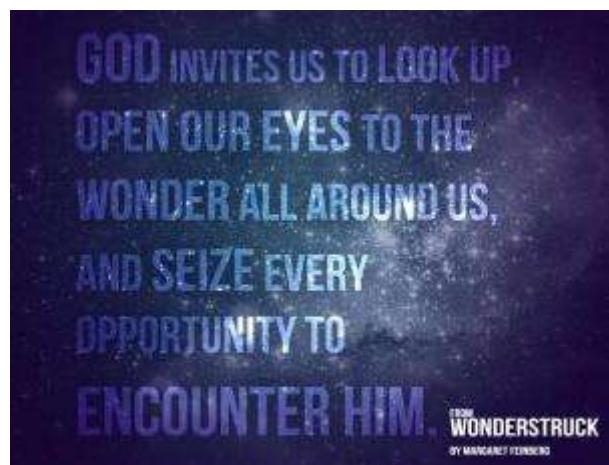
***Sunday, March 19, 2017***

**"The life of Christ** is the central metaphor for the Christian life. And the way that Jesus understood who he was, what he was meant to do, and how he was meant to do it, is a metaphor for the Christian journey to the true self. All of us are called to meditate deeply on our own true selves, to embrace the reality of our vocations, and to let God transform our true selves into sources of new life for others. It's a long route, a lifetime journey, but we are not alone. We have the support of the rest of the community, we have the Holy Spirit inspiring us, we have the love of God the Father, and we have the companionship of the truest self of all, Jesus Christ."

~ from Becoming Who You Are by James Martin, SJ

As Lent is in full swing, consider reflecting over the season with your mind, body, and spirit through wondering, searching, and discovering.

**Wonder about the depth of Christ's love.  
Search for ways to encounter Him.  
Discover the new life He breathes.**



~ *Mindy Stewart*

## **Day 17: Monday, March 20, 2017**



*I think the call - or at least one of the primary calls - of the church today is to become a place where people are so rooted in the promise of God's good pleasure, reminded of their identity as God's beloved children, and affirmed in their inherent self-worth and dignity, that they can, indeed, see all those around them as similarly beloved and deserving of self-worth, dignity, and God's good pleasure. The question for a Christian, you see, isn't finally about some form of self-actualization but rather discovering that as we give ourselves away in relationship and service we find a deeper sense of self than we'd imagined possible. We are born for community and find a sense of self and meaning and purpose as we trust God's promises and give ourselves away in love.*

*~David Lose, President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia*

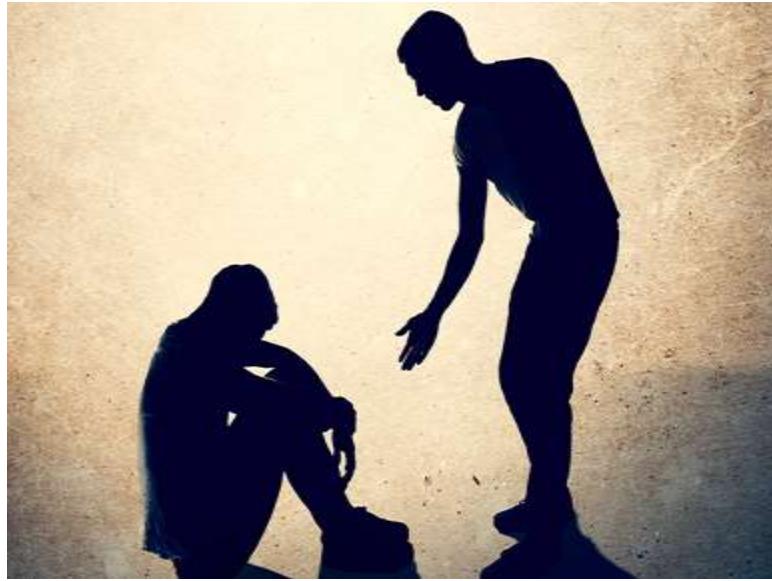
**We are born for community.** In the end, that is what church is all about -- claiming our birthright by coming together as a community rooted in and defined by our identity as God's beloved children. It is this identity that directs our daily lives and helps us find our purpose in the world. How will your true identity as a child of God influence your words and actions today? May you know that you are blessed by God...and may you be a blessing to others.

*~ Amy Starr Redwine*

*Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."*

*~Genesis 12:1-2*

## **Day 18: Tuesday, March 21, 2017**



*“Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.” Desmond Tutu*

There are many times in my life that I wonder how I can make a difference in this world. I wonder how my little bit of good can affect positive change and help us move forward to realize the Beloved Community. It is in these moments that I remember that we are not in this alone and that we are better together.

Each of us can make a difference by doing our part to love and serve this world with kindness. It is when we combine to our little bits of good we overwhelm the world. It is in the simple acts of giving to those who need of our kindness and love the most that we build the kin-dom of God in this place, at this time.

*“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’” - Matthew 25:35-40*

~ Kevin J. Lowry

## **Day 19: Wednesday, March 22, 2017**



Impressions. I received a phone call recently from a hospice co-worker requesting I go do some "memory making" for a family with a terminally ill child. Unfortunately this is not an unusual phone call for me to receive in my other line of work. Most times "memory making" involves creating handprints of a child (and siblings) so the memory of his or her hands and place in the family can live on in the family's minds and hearts forever. Yet there are situations in which the child's foot is easier to manipulate and will make a cleaner print. Just like a hand, each foot is unique and makes its own impression on the earth and all those with whom contact is made. As I stroked the blue-covered paintbrush on the sole of the baby's foot and his five perfectly formed toes, the thought occurred to me that while these precious feet may never hit the ground running, stumble and fall, pedal to a friend's house, or walk down an aisle, he has left an imprint on all those who have crossed his path.

While the image of a foot or hand print assist in the memory of who has been a part of our lives, I doubt you have a collection of actual footprints of all those who have walked in or out of your life. Rather, the imprint made on the soul of a being is of far greater importance and meaning, and it only requires a light tread - no evenly dispersed pressure of blue paint.

Jesus covered a lot of ground with his feet, but he walked into the hearts and souls of multitudes with his words of compassion, healing, forgiveness, peace and love. How can you follow in the footsteps of the Rabbi, and create impressionable hope to those you encounter today?

*"The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." ~ I John 2:6*

~ *Mindy Stewart*

## **Day 20: Thursday, March 23, 2017**

"Woah! We're half way there. Woah! We're livin on a prayer." To quote the 1980's singer, songwriter Jon Bon Jovi, we have hit the halfway point along this Lenten journey. Although he probably was not singing about Lent, lyrics can be thought-provoking no matter the context.

What prayers have we been living on, and what prayers will get us through the second half of this Lenten season? Have our prayers changed from *shame to love*, from *despair to hope*, or from *oppression to inclusion*? Have we become more grateful for that thing we've "given up," or do we send up prayers asking for strength to help us carry whatever we've "taken up?"

During His 40 days in the desert, Jesus was most likely livin on a prayer: the strength found in his daily communication with His heavenly Father. However our prayers have changed, or stayed the same, my prayer for you is that your daily talks with your heavenly Father will provide you with strength, encouragement, love, joy, peace and hope; for these are what the resurrected life of Christ give to us. Don't worry if you're not there yet; we're only halfway there. "Take (God's) hand, and you'll make it I swear."

~ *Mindy Stewart*



## **Day 21: Friday, March 24, 2017**



*"In our age-segregated society, many adults don't have the opportunity to interact with children. We don't have to deal with the baby's cries, but we also don't get to hear her laugh. We miss the child's impatient wiggles, but we also miss his thoughtful questions. When we move the children out of the sanctuary, it's like worshipping blindfolded. It might be easier to concentrate, but it's harder to be distracted by beauty, by joy, by wonder, by heart-wrenching sobs and by soul-tending love."*

~ Karen Ware Jackson

Each week in worship, we find a way to include our children and youth -- our youngest disciples, as we often refer to them. They are lay worship leaders, they shake hands during our celebration of community, they take up the food collection, they come forward for the Time for Young Disciples. They also fidget and ask questions and sometimes they forget to stand up at the right time and use their quiet voices. I appreciate how warmly they are welcomed into worship, for this is their church and their sanctuary as much as it is ours, and it is only by fully participating in the life of the church that it comes to feel like their own. This is also the first step in claiming their faith as their own, in beginning to grasp that truth which is so terribly difficult for all of us to grasp: that God loves us fully and completely just as we are, no matter what.

~ Amy Starr Redwine

*People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16)*

## **Day 22: Saturday, March 25, 2017**

*"The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence. When our mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers.... When you are really there, showing your loving kindness and understanding, the energy of the Holy Spirit is in you."* - Thich Naht Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*



In a week that many of us may have wanted to crawl inside a hole and come out at a later time, for a multitude of reasons, this reminded me that when we show up and are present in the moments of each other's lives, the Holy Spirit is alive in each of us. Made in God's image, our presence in each other's lives invite's God to be present and to walk with us in our joy and our sorrow. Being part of a community means that we are present in each other lives in times of struggle and times of joy, whether we are celebrating a birth, birthday, the legacy of a life well lived, or a national tragedy. This week has given us the opportunity to be present in different ways in each other's lives, whether it was a hug, a shoulder to cry on, or just a warm smile. How wonderful it is to be in each other's presence and the presence of God, right here and right now.

Being present also means that we show up for others outside of our community and extend the hand of God in our neighborhood and beyond. Saturday was a wonderful example of how we are present in the University Circle community at Parade the Circle. We also stand present in the lives of the young adults, who are attending our local universities and colleges, as they walk their journey into adulthood. The most precious gift that we can give to each other and to our world right now is our presence. Let's show up and bring love and compassion to a world that is crying out for this precious gift!!

~ Kevin J. Lowry

## ***Sunday, March 26, 2017***

I recently read that the season of Lent is a kind of tithe. A tithe is the biblical call to give ten per cent of our income to those in need, and in Lent, we set aside forty days, nearly ten per cent of one year, to reflect on our relationship with God, the source of life and love, grace and mercy. During this season, may you take time each day to acknowledge the presence of God in your life and to look and listen for God's presence – which is often found in the most mundane experiences. May the poem below offer you a chance to contemplate what in your life you long for Go to burn away and make new.

~ Amy Starr Redwine

*On my forehead,  
A sign of the cross,  
Smudged in ash from the fire  
That burned down the McMansion of my hubris,  
And, with it,  
The money I should have given away,  
The television I used to numb my senses,  
The carpet I should have been called on,  
The doors I should have opened to others,  
The envelopes I should have used  
To send letters of love,  
The wise books I shelved prominently  
So that others would think I had read them,  
The blank places in my photo albums  
Where my darker moments should have been remembered,  
The calendars where visits with the people who needed me most  
Should have been scheduled,  
The couch of my complacency,  
The lounge-chair of my laziness,  
The shirts I stuffed with my pride,  
The moccasins I should have traded with others  
So we could have walked miles in them.  
On my forehead,  
A sign of the crossroad  
Where I can turn from the way of ruin  
To the way of life.*

*Ash Wednesday* by Jim Burklo



## **Day 23: Monday, March 27, 2017**



We are more than half-way through Lent – the “lengthening of days.” May these added minutes of daylight also bring more light for the journey *inward*. Outwardly, we prepare for Jesus’ leading us to servanthood as he washes feet, shares of himself in the Lord’s Supper, endures his agony and his execution. We, unlike his disciples, are carried by the hope of his resurrection that *we know* will follow. Let us not lose our Lenten time left for the pathway **inward**. We can clear away the brambles of fear that we are not enough, taunting voices saying God awaits in ambush for our failings. The cleared path opens to a God that calls us as a people ‘til we have sufficient strength to accept God’s love for each **one** of us, a love so strong that we cannot help but share it by choosing peace over contentiousness, truth over coercion, generosity over self-protection. May this time of true “giving up for Lent” help us clear our path to a living relationship with the One who loves without measure and will never let us go.

“For God so loved the world. . .” “Dear God, make your presence known to us when hope and despair meet on the veranda of our lives, and reassure us of your care, that so comforted, we may comfort others; that so blessed, we may likewise bless.” (Adapted from John H. Boyle, Fourth Presbyterian, Chicago)

~Eileen Vizcaino

## **Day 24: Tuesday, March 28, 2017**



*He also told them a parable: 'No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wine skins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wine skins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, "The old is good." - Luke 5:36-39*

**"Out with the old, in with the new"**

This morning, as we waited at the airport to board our flight to Charlotte, I filled my half empty bottle of water at the water fountain. Not remembering that the water in the bottle was at least a few days old, I poured the new water right on top. It was only after I took the first sip that I was reminded of the wisdom in that parable from Jesus about old wine and new wine.

When seeking transformation in our lives, we are often tempted to hold on to a little of our old selves, our former way of life. It's a comfort to us as we face what might be a long and difficult process. But as Christians reminds us, we must cast off, pour out, let go of the old in order to welcome the new.

*~ Melanie Marsh Baum*

## **Day 25: Wednesday, March 29, 2017**



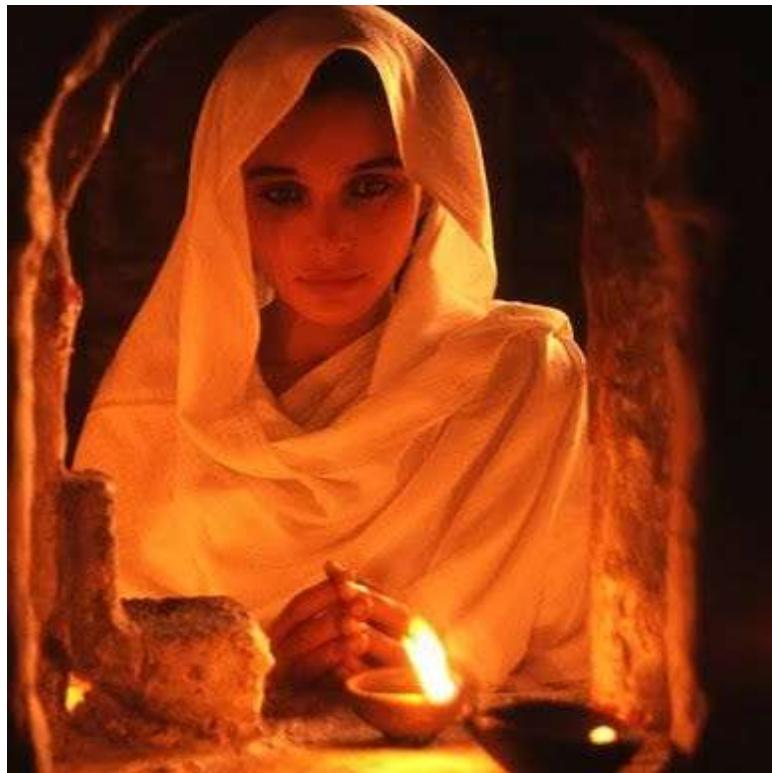
*One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. Psalm 27:4*

My recent trip to play with the Boston Pops sparked an interesting conversation with a member of the orchestra. While waiting back stage before a performance, I heard a gentlemen speaking with another colleague about church music in early America. At one point he looked over at me and remarked, "You're an organist, you must know something about this!" My reply led to a nice conversation that included a description of my occupation and home in Cleveland. Of course, wouldn't you know that this member of one of the world's top orchestras came to Cleveland years ago to study at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and on a cold winter's day, he had time to fill before a lesson, saw the Church of the Covenant, and felt compelled to walk inside. He still remembers how he just sat and took in the beauty of the sanctuary.

When was the last time you just sat and let a beautiful place fill you with unspeakable awe - "the beauty of holiness." Try it sometime. Listen to what beauty has to tell you.

~ *Jonathan Moyer*

**Day 26: Thursday, March 30, 2017**



*"Wisdom has a quiet mind. She knows how to look at things inside and out. Questions of time, depth, and balance interest her. She is not looking for answers."*

- J. Ruth Gendler, *The Book of Qualities*

In my desire for certainty, I feel I often overlook the value of wisdom. Wisdom comes to us slowly, and cannot be rushed. But its value is immeasurable. Maybe it's learning how to sit with both sides of an issue and be at peace until the right decision, or the right outcome, makes itself clear. Perhaps it is finding a way to let go of that which is not truly meant for us. However she comes to us, may we delight in Wisdom and give thanks for her presence.

~ *Melanie Marsh Baum*

## **Day 27: Friday, March 31, 2017**



Inspiration can come to us through the most unlikely sources, at the most inopportune times, or at the eleventh hour - God works in mysterious ways. Engaged in meaningful conversation with friends, with baseball on in the background, and half-heartedly paying attention to a television commercial for Miller Lite, a phrase caught my attention:

*"There are some mysteries you don't have to figure out; you just get to enjoy them."*

Faith holds mystery. Faith in an all-loving, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent God, the forgiveness and healing power of Jesus Christ, and the comfort and compassion of the Holy Spirit, holds *mystery* and (hopefully) *enjoyment* for all those who believe. Many attributes of the trinity, and even the trinity itself, have been topics of research and debate over centuries in order to solve some of the most mind-boggling teachings and experiences of the Christian tradition. While there has proven to be great value to the individual and communal study of the biblical texts and historical happenings of Jesus' life here on earth, I wonder if there's value and power in coming to terms with the fact that Holy Spirit-filled-journeys are full of mysteries we won't ever fully figure out (on this side of eternity), but as believers in Christ Jesus we sure do get to enjoy them.

*That their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is Christ Himself.*

- Colossians 2:2

~ Mindy Stewart

## ***Day 28: Saturday, April 1, 2017***

*"For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands." ~  
2 Timothy 1:6*

Pentecost may seem like a lifetime ago, as we wade through the heat and humidity of August. We may have forgotten those burning tongues of fire, as we have slipped into days of Ordinary Time, yet even as another summer draws to a close, the flame of the Holy Spirit is burning within each one of us, urging us toward new horizons, new people in need of God's love, new communities in need of our attention and care.

Let us remember our baptism and our calling during these ordinary days of summer. Let the Spirit move us with its breath of fire, and may we ever seek new ways to keep that flame alive within us.

*~ Melanie Marsh Baum*



***Sunday, April 2, 2017***



*The Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. ~ Mark 1:12–13*

Our community Lenten devotional, *A Clearing Season*, begins with this text from Mark on Jesus' trial in the wilderness. In her weekly reflection, author Sarah Parsons writes:

*This is the first Gospel story the Sunday Lenten lectionary would have us contemplate. From it we learn several things. First, we learn where we should begin. We discover that even against our better judgment, we must begin these forty days by going alone to a wild place – in ourselves or in our lives. If we are fiercely honest with ourselves as we begin a Lenten journey toward greater openness, we must start by seeing things we would rather not see.*

There are so many things we would rather not see. Yet, encounter with the wild places in ourselves or in our lives is valuable to us. Learning to sit with discomfort, with anger, with shame, with broken relationships, is the first step toward transforming those things and beginning to heal. Get to know the wild beasts, befriend the wilderness – even if the wild thing you fear the most is your very own soul. Give it time. You may find angels waiting there as well.

*~ Melanie Marsh Baum*

## **Day 29: Monday, April 3, 2017**

*"Into this world, this demented inn,  
where there is absolutely no room for him at all,  
Christ comes, uninvited."  
~Thomas Merton*



My friend and colleague Mark Ramsey likes to say that God gives us two gifts at Christmas. One is the gift of the familiar Christmas story, with its vivid images and memorable characters. The other is the gift of an assignment: having heard this story again we are called to notice where it is unfolding anew in all the places in this broken world where Christ comes, invited or not: by a hospital bed where a loved one is suffering...under a bridge where the homeless huddle together to stay warm...in homes where poverty and hunger create a crucible for anger and desperation...in refugee camps where temporary shelters become permanent dwellings...in the rubble and pain of Aleppo. Our world is in desperate need of the hope, peace, joy, and love we proclaim at Christmas, and so, as we turn to the task of moving on from the holidays, may we remember that the story is not over. God calls us to keep telling it, to keep living it, by abandoning fear and despair, by practicing peace and forgiveness, by clinging tightly to love and hope.

~ Amy Starr Redwine

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son  
and wrapped him in bands of cloth,  
and laid him in a manger,  
because there was no place for them in the inn.  
Luke 2:7*

## **Day 30: Tuesday, April 4, 2017**

*"Martin Luther King Jr. once said, 'Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.' To love the hell out of the world is to drive out hate with love. It is to create salvation - not in some other world, but in this one, right now; to work to create the beloved community, where the inherent worth and dignity of each person is respected and where all have access to peace and justice."*

*~ Reverend Dawn Cooley*



As people of faith, we are called to LOVE THE HELL OUT OF THIS WORLD. The Gospel proclaims that we are to love one another, to love justice, and to love God in an active and radical way.

### ***How do we put this commandment into action in our daily lives?***

As the DisGrace Conference gets underway at Montreat Conference Center in North Carolina, the idea of loving the hell out of this world is on my mind. Taking time out of the normal craziness of life to understand how we, together, can build more inclusive and life-giving faith communities that dismantle the structural racism that exists. We can build communities that go into the streets of our neighborhoods to build the Beloved Community, where the inherent worth and dignity of all of God's children is celebrated and where we can proclaim that everyone has a place at God's table.

### ***How can we put our faith into action to bring about God's inclusive Kin-dom right now?***

LOVING THE HELL OUT OF THIS WORLD is radical work, and at times it can be slow, hard, and divisive. It is the work that Jesus started in the places that he traveled, and it is the mantel that he ask us, as disciples, to take on as we continue his ministry in the world. In a divided and broken world, we are called to come together as one voice and many hands to LOVE THE HELL OUT OF THIS WORLD.

### ***How can we do this in our daily lives?***

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

*~ John 13:34-35*

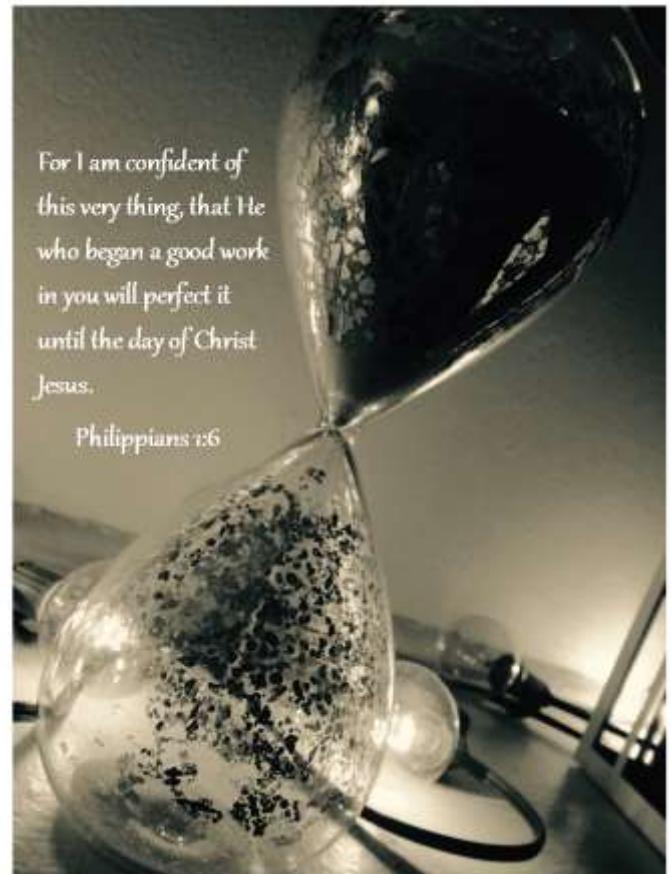
*~ Kevin J. Lowry*

## **Day 31: Wednesday, April 5, 2017**

An hourglass sits on my mantle at home. It was a birthday gift from one of my dearest friends. It seemed like an odd gift until I read the eloquent explanation she gave reminding me that life with God is all about the journey and the process of transformation. As the sand funnels through the center opening, emptying itself from one ball so as to fill the other, it's the funneling that captivates. Once the sand stops flowing, it's just a stagnant pile - nothing too entralling. The draining of the sand is a process though, requiring patience. Tapping the glass doesn't speed up the flow. Shaking it up and down further disrupts the steady stream, and placing the instrument in a horizontal position stops the movement all together. Allowing the transforming journey to unfold in its own timing, the final product ultimately comes to completion producing a new settling, a peace, and a fullness that is ready to be emptied again.

More often than not it seems as though once we think our hour is up, God flips us over and patiently walks us through the transformation of being emptied of ourselves so as to be filled again by the Spirit.

*~ Mindy Stewart*



***Day 32: Thursday, April 6, 2017***



On a morning walk, December 26, I spot at the curb, a Christmas tree, bits of tinsel still clinging. Why would the owners be in such haste to discard it? Could they not wait at least for the 12 days to pass? The scene filled me with a sense of the forlorn, what it feels like to be discarded. But judging is not ours to claim. The timing of symbols is not as important as what they help us to mark. Some mount Christmas trees in July – the only time the soldier daughter could be home. What will feed our spirits is not making space for a tree in our home, but making space in our lives for Something New, for hope, making ourselves willing to see with the eyes of a child, the friendly smile of a neighbor, hear the magic of a song. Yes, the seasons move on, torn gift wrap recycled, ornaments stored behind a closet door. But let us not close the door on Wonder. It is the life-long Season that never passes, that feeds the spirit and makes All Things New. “Merry Every Day.”

~ *Eileen Vizcaino*

## **Day 33: Friday, April 7, 2017**



*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." ~ Joshua 1:9*

As I start my journey here at Covenant I am strengthened by all the moments of love and support that I have received from this community. Through the Spirit, God is guiding this journey. Even in the unknown we can find strength and courage to co-create this ministry together. We are reminded that God has called us to live boldly; to be strong and courageous in the face of the unknown. We are reminded that we are never truly alone and always walking our journey with God, guiding and protecting us as we travel through life.

In this scripture we also find how we are to be holy in the eyes of God; devoting our lives to God, God's priorities and the people of God. As people of faith, we are called to live a life of strength and bravery as we work to restore harmony to the world around us. As builders of the kin-dom of God, we boldly face oppression and injustice in our communities. We are called to show strength as we put our faith into action throughout the week, as we live out what it means to be followers of Jesus. We are called to be courageous as we proclaim the Gospel, to love one another, and to steward God's creation. Even through the arc of justice and the healing of our broken world may be long, we do not travel this journey alone because, through the Spirit, God dwells in each of us.

*~ Kevin J. Lowry*

## **Day 34: Saturday, April 8, 2017**



A couple together many years are on an auto trip:

Passenger: *When we were dating, you used to put your arm around me in the car.*

Driver: *Well, I haven't moved.*

What "comes between" here are what come between God and us. No, not gear shifts and cup racks. More like fear, old hurts we can't let go, thinking we know all there is to know about our partner - the Infinite. And we don't want to be vulnerable. Yet that's the divine spark for Community - being open to Mystery, the unknown. That's the excitement of true adventure. When we come together as "church," if we can put aside our anxiety, our need to control, our personal agenda, our self-doubts, our shame at being "less than," we open to Community, where we can Be. That's the lesson we learn from our university students, who have left behind everything familiar, and open to each other, and us, each Sunday. And that's what we all can offer each other. Our strength is in Community. God lives in community; we call it Trinity.

(This will be my last evotional with you. May you open to the power and joy of the God of love. . .and surprises.)

~ *Eileen Vizcaino*

***Sunday, April 9, 2017***



*Suffering is the most effective way whereby humans learn to trust, allow, and give up control to Another Source. I wish there were a different answer, but Jesus reveals on the cross both the path and the price of full transformation into the divine.*

*~Richard Rohr*

For me, the extraordinarily complex field of theology comes down to this: after doing everything God could possibly do for God's children -- creating them, showering them with the wonders of creation, giving them responsibilities, giving them what they asked for, withholding what they asked for, threatening, cajoling, scolding, pleading, adoring, forgiving -- God did one more thing: God gave up control and came to be with us as one of us, to experience human life and the depths of human suffering. Then God showed us that suffering and death do not and will not ever have the last word. The incarnation and the resurrection changed very little about the human experience. We still suffer, at our own hands and at the hands of others. We lose beloved people and things we don't think we can possibly live without and yet we go on living and loving. This Holy Week may you know that, whatever suffering you face, God is with you, bringing new growth and transformation in the most unlikely of places.

*~Amy Starr Redwine*

*Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ~John 12:24*

## **Day 35: Monday, April 10, 2017**



### **The Welcome Table**

Some of my most wonderful, profound and life-shifting moments occurred around a table. It is no wonder that Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday, because it is a time that we come together to share our stories, reconnect with people in our lives, and give thanks for all that we have in our lives, all centered around a table. The table allows us to pause from our busy lives and share in fellowship with one another. Throughout history, the table has played an important role that has transcended time, space, religions, and cultures.

The table connects us to something larger than ourselves. Often times, I wonder if the table is actually the manifestation of God's Kin-dom and presence in our lives. How would that change dinner? Throughout the Bible, the table plays an important role. It is used many times as a metaphor for Christ's compassion. When we create a welcome table in our lives and communities we are living out our call to ministry rooted in the story of the last supper as we received the greatest commandment - to love one another. Christ calls us to welcome those who have been forgotten, outcast and neglected. I think that the table is a perfect metaphor for how we can express God's inclusive love in our communities.

How do we make space at our tables for the forgotten, outcast and disregarded people in our lives and our communities? How is our table a manifestation of God's inclusive love in our lives?

*"So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him."*  
~ Luke 22:13-14

*~ Kevin J. Lowry*

**Day 36: Tuesday, April 11, 2017**



It's a season of miracles. To be honest, every season holds miracles. From the glow of the sunshine by day captured in the moonlight at night, each new day points to the Creator. From the first wailing of new life to the silence held in death, every life holds a supernatural wonder. Miracles occur whether we're watching and waiting, or whether we deny any relationship at all. It shouldn't have been a huge surprise to the disciples when they heard Jesus was no longer in the tomb, for He told them what was going to happen. Yet, their fear, doubt, and unbelief withheld them from rejoicing in the resurrection - the miracle of miracles. Fear has the power to keep us from believing , but death can't keep it from happening.

- Take a deep breath.
- Look around you.
- Enjoy the connection of laughter.
- Take off the fear-colored glasses.
- Give yourself permission to believe.
- It will change you. God promises.

*~ Mindy Stewart*

## **Day 37: Wednesday, April 12, 2017**



*Oh, we give thanks for this precious day,  
For all gathered here, and those far away;  
For this time we share with love and care,  
Oh, we give thanks for this precious day.*

~ "We Give Thanks" by Wendy Luella Perkins

Oh, we give thanks for this precious day. Thanksgiving is a simple, beautiful, and sacred holiday. Thanksgiving celebrates our shared humanity and invites everyone to come to the table. This holiday reminds us that we are connected to one another and to all of God's creation, whether we are near or far, kin or stranger. As we celebrate this precious day, we come to share a meal, tell our stories, and to be in community. Thanksgiving allows us to pause from our busy and noisy lives, and to show gratitude for the all gifts that we have been given. As we come together this Thanksgiving, may we give thanks for this time we share together.

*"Give thanks for Yhwh's Goodness; God's love endures forever!  
Cry out, "Save us, God our Savior, and gather us from among the nations,  
that we may give thanks to your holy Name and glory in your praise!"  
Blessed be Yhwh, the God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting!  
Let all the people say "Amen! Alleluia!"*

~ 1 Chronicles 16: 34-36

~ Kevin Lowry

## **Day 38: Thursday, April 13, 2017**

*Out of the darkness and the cold, the light and the hope return. ~ Solstice Blessing*

Tomorrow is the Winter Solstice, the longest night. In ancient times, our northern ancestors believed the world was coming to an end this time each year, as the darkness crept closer and all of creation grew cold and still. On the night of the Solstice they would keep watch with fires through the night, waiting, hoping for the light to return.

We too are waiting. Each year, as the season of Advent returns, we begin with darkness and only the promise of the light that is to come. As Advent draws to a close we reflect on how we have kept watch and waited for the Light of God - The Light of the World. Like our ancient ancestors, it may seem as though the night is endless, and the light may never return. But keep watch through the darkest hours of this season, the darkest moments of the night. Watch and wait. Look for the light. For as sure as the rising of the winter sun, the light of Christ breaks forth again, in a glorious, wondrous dawn.

~ *Melanie Marsh Baum*

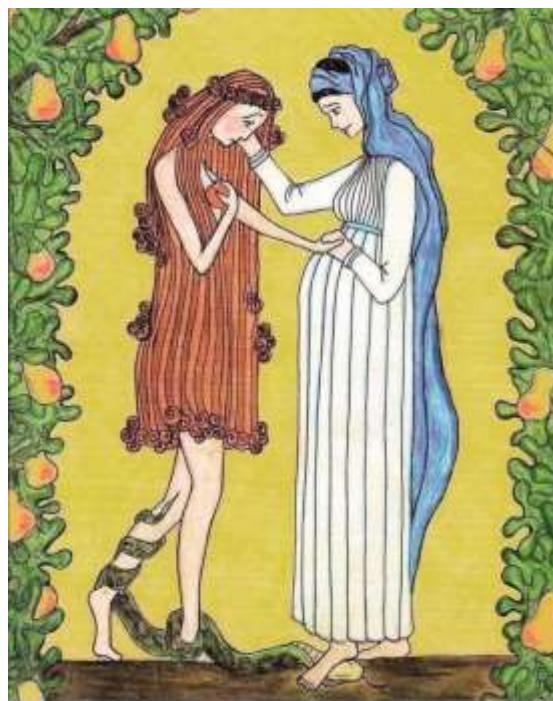


## **Day 39: Friday, April 14, 2017**

*My mother, my daughter, Life-giving Eve,  
Do not be ashamed, do not grieve,  
The former things have passed away,  
God has brought us to a New Day.  
See, I am with Child,  
Through whom all will be reconciled.  
O Eve, my sister, my friend,  
We will rejoice together  
Forever  
Life without end.*

Text by the Sisters of Mississippi Abbey 2004

As we approach the thick of this holiday season with cookies and carols, shopping and serving, decorations and dining, do not lose sight of the One who has come to bring salvation. While we wait in lines or for the package to arrive, do not forget we are awaiting the birth of the Reconciler. When night falls early on the day and bleak whether stays, we must remember God's love remains.



God to the serpent:

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
And between her seed and your seed;

He shall crush you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."

~ Genesis 3:15

~ Mindy Stewart

**Day 40: Saturday, April 15, 2017**



As Easter comes around each year, I am drawn to these beautiful words by the English poet George Herbert (1593-1633). They were later set to music by Ralph Vaughan Williams in his *Five Mystical Songs*.

May they bring new moments of resurrection in your life today.

***Easter***

*Rise heart; thy Lord is risen.*

*Sing his praise without delays,*

*Who takes thee by the hand,  
that thou likewise with him may'st rise;*

*That, as his death calcined thee to dust,*

*His life may make thee gold, and much more, just.*

*Awake, my lute, and struggle for thy part with all thy art.*

*The crosse taught all wood to resound his name, who bore the same.*

*His stretched sinews taught all strings, what key*

*Is the best to celebrate this most high day.*

*Consort both heart and lute, and twist a song pleasant and long;*

*Or since all musick is but three parts vied and multiplied.*

*O let thy blessed Spirit bear a part,*

*And make up our defects with his sweet art.*

~Jonathan Moyer